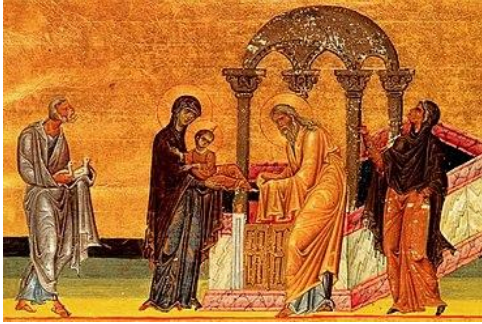




Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church

Southbridge, Massachusetts
www.stmichaelorthodox.com

February 2024



LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

Saturday

9:00am Divine Liturgy

5:00 pm Vespers

Sunday

9:00am Matins

10:00am Divine Liturgy

**For the feast days and other
services see the February calendar
at page 13**

FEAST DAYS

Feb. 1st – Tryphon the Martyr

Feb. 2nd – Presentation of Our Lord
in the Temple

Feb. 3rd – Synaxis of Righteous
Symeon and Anna the Prophetess

Feb. 6th – St. Photios the Great

Feb. 8th – Great Martyr Theodore the
Commander

Feb. 10th – Hieromartyr Haralambos

Feb. 17th – Great Martyr Theodore
the Tyro

Feb. 24th – First and Second Finding
of the Head of St. John the Baptist

Feb. 25th – Sunday of the Publican
and the Pharisee – Triodion Begins

Feb. 27th – St. Raphael of Brooklyn

Triodion

TRIODION – (Greek: three odes or modes). A Liturgical book containing the hymns, prayers and services of the movable feast before Easter, and a Liturgical period beginning ten weeks before Easter with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, until Easter Sunday. This includes the four weeks preceding Great Lent, Great Lent, and Holy (Passion) Week.

Every act of physical hardship requires preparation.

The Orthodox Church takes the idea of preparation to a whole new level. The Triodion period, a three-week season of readying ourselves for the 40 days of Great Lent, followed by the seven days of Holy Week.

The Church understands human nature and our need to reorient ourselves for the ascetic work that we are about to undergo. *Ascesis* is Greek for “exercise,” and the Church’s Triodion warm-up gives us the time we need to stretch hearts and minds that have become stiff and neglected throughout the year.

Presentation of Christ to the Temple.

On the 2nd of February, our Holy Church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation of Christ to the Temple. The Church also refers to this Feast as the Synaxis (or meeting) of our Lord in the temple. In accordance with the Mosaic law, 40 days after the birth of a male child the mother is required to present the child in the tabernacle and offer as a sacrifice either a lamb or a pair of doves or pigeons for her purification. The presentation of a first-born son also signified redemption or buying back, for all first-born creatures (both humans and animals) were considered to belong to God.

The Holy Mother and St. Joseph obeyed this precept of the law. They brought Jesus to the Temple where he was met and blessed by a very old Holy man. On that day in the Temple, both St. Simeon and a woman by the name of Anna, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recognized the infant Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of the world. Simeon had been promised by God that he would live to witness the coming of the Messiah to the world. (Luke 2:22- 40) The Church today calls each one of us to make our Soul a Temple of God, where the Holy Virgin can bring her Divine Child.

Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church
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2022 Parish Council

President: Luke Yanka
Vice President: Spiro Thomo
Secretary: Debby Thomo
Treasurer: Paul Yanka

2022 Ladies Society Committee

President: Genevieve Boilard
Vice President: Katie Mironidis
Secretary: Susan Silva
Treasurer: Debbie Thomo

Clergy

Fr. John Downie fr.john_downie71@yahoo.com

Parish News & Events

Happy Birthday!! God Grant You Many More Years!!

February 1st – Richard Silva
February 6th – Gloria Giavara
February 11th – Sandra Nasto
February 15th – Vasilios Nahn
February 16th – Jennifer Silva
February 24th – Jordan Goulas
February 26th – Mary Dowling
February 29th – Spiro Thomo

Happy Name Day

Feb. 3rd – Righteous Symeon and Anna the Prophetess – Symeon Downie & Anna Tanka

Feb. 8th & 17th – Great Martyrs Theodore the Commander and Theodore the Tyro – Theodore Yanka, Theodore Rapsomanikis, Theodor Vasilescu

Feb. 10th – Hieromartyr Haralambos – Harris Pitsillides

Please keep in your prayers our beloved sister in Christ Vasiliga Tanko, who moved to God on January 23rd, 2024.

May her memory be eternal!



Please Pray for:

Henrietta
Sandra
Mary
Carol
+ Vasiliga
+ Louise



~ Movie & Book Corner ~

Movie: The 25th Hour



The 25th Hour is a 1967 anti-war drama film directed by Henri Verneuil and produced by Carlo Ponti, starring Anthony Quinn and Virna Lisi. The film is based on the bestselling novel by Fr. Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, and follows the troubles experienced by a Romanian peasant couple caught up in World War II.

Plot - In a small Transylvanian village, a local police constable frames Johann Moritz on charges of being Jewish because Moritz's wife Suzanna has refused the constable's advances. Moritz is sent to a Romanian concentration camp as a Jew, where he is known as Jacob Moritz. He escapes to Hungary with some Jewish prisoners, but the Hungarians imprison them for being citizens of Romania, an enemy country. The Hungarian authorities eventually send them to Germany to fill German requests for foreign laborers. Moritz is spotted by an SS officer who designates him as an Aryan German-Romanian, freeing him from the labor camp and forcing him to join the Waffen-SS. After the war, Moritz is brutally beaten by the Soviets for having been a member of the Waffen-SS. He is then arrested and prosecuted as a war criminal by the Americans. Eventually he is released and reunited with his wife and sons in occupied Germany.

Book: The Love by Octavian Blaga (Romanian edition)

Octavian Blaga is a Romanian Orthodox Archpriest who lives and works in Canada, Quebec, as a priest and a full time spiritual counselor for patients in palliative cares.



The Love is a wonderful book that brings forth to the readers the author's experience as a priest in Romania witnessing many miracles, and his amazing experience as a spiritual counselor who assisted 3,000 people on their death beds (young and old, rich and poor, famous or simple people). *The Love* is a window of life from the perspective of those in love with the *Love Being* (God). The 73 short stories and meditations present the path of the soul to the state of love, to the dance between man and God, when man calls Him from the depths of his heart and at the same time from beyond the world.

The book is available only in Romanian on Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

The English Edition is under construction, and it will be available in August 2024.

Women retreat – March 29th – 31st, 2024

Abness (Gerontissa) Gabriella (Ursache)

Please save the date!!!



Women Retreat

Friday, March 29th

5:00 pm - 5:30 pm - Registration

5:30 pm - 6:15 pm - Dinner

6:15 pm - 7:15 pm - *The image of the Mother of God in the Church and family*

7:15 pm - 7:30 pm - Break

7:30 pm - 8:30 pm - Q&A Session

Open Retreat

Saturday, March 30th

8:30 am - 9:30 am - Divine Liturgy

9:30 am - 10:30 am - Breakfast

10:30 am - 11:30 am - 1st Conference: *"Home as church - Prayer as the door to Joy"*

Break: 15 minutes

11:45 am - 12:30 pm - Q&A Session

12:30 pm - 1:30 pm - Lunch

1:30 pm - 2:30 pm - 2nd Conference: *"Climbing the Ladder of the Virtues"*

Break: 15 minutes

2:45 pm - 3:45 pm - Q&A Session

5:00 pm - Vespers

Open Retreat

Sunday, March 31st

8:30 am - 9:30 am - Divine Liturgy (Mother Gabriella will be present during Liturgy)

ABOUT THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENT BEFORE DEATH FROM BOOK LOVE BY FR. OCTAVIAN BLAGA

In the last days of life, the faithful man feels the presence of Love by his side in sickness and suffering. Some feel Her presence as a light, others as a visit from people close to them already deceased, others see angels consoling them, others the Virgin Mary or even Jesus. Others simply feel a love that surrounds them. Dying people feel that the boundaries between our dimension and the dimension they will go to are intertwining.

But, after these consolations, follows the most important moment of our life, which the vast majority of us will experience right before death: it is the moment of abandonment, of abandonment. It usually appears between one and three days before death. Sometimes even a few hours before. If patients lose consciousness, the moment of abandonment can occur, although less often, even a few hours before entering a coma. Most of the time it is short, but sometimes it can last for a day.

At this point, man is left alone, free from any spirit influence. It is the state of freedom in singleness. Freedom and retreat from God is offered to man so that he can choose for the last time what he really wants: selfishness or Love. The moment of abandonment and loneliness ends immediately after the freely assumed choice of the soul.

People live it in their privacy, suffering without speaking and always being surprised by what happens to them. They rarely express what they are experiencing because they do not want to undermine the faith of their family members, nor do they want to tire the hospital staff with these very delicate feelings. But when they feel that they have before them a representative of the Lord, who is inclined to listen to them, sometimes they let go and express what they feel, in a deaf cry for help.

Because it is probably one of the most important experiences in our life, I thought I would make it known for our inner preparation.

No matter how much faith one has, even when one has great faith, we will all encounter this crucial moment of abandonment. The more attached you are to the Lord, the deeper the feeling. It is an experience similar to that experienced by Christ on the cross. Feeling the abandonment, suffering terribly because of it, he cries out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is not an apparent abandonment. It is a removal of the Spirit of Love. It is a final letting go so that, in lonely freedom, our soul can make the ultimate choice. To express what he really wants. In the case of Christ, the choice was: "Into Your arms I commit My spirit."

In that moment of total freedom, the ideal would be for any kind of misunderstanding we still have with the Lord to be resolved, so that the soul does not turn away from Love because of reproaches or wounds. That is why it is vital that reconciliation and peace are already achieved before this moment. If peace has not yet been reached, I have seen souls reproaching Love for one or another of the sufferings experienced. Then they realize only with great difficulty that it is not Love that is the cause of their suffering, but man's own choice (theirs or others around them).

At that moment we have the choice of being one of the three crucified on Golgotha. Either Christ or one of the two robbers. We are Christ, if we love Him with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our heart. In other words, if we are madly in love with Him. If we have not reached such a love, we can be one of the two robbers. One admitted that because of his thoughts, his choices, and his deeds, he was suffering on the cross, and he wanted the Being of Love to at least bear him in his thoughts when he returned to His dimensions. This choice moved him from fear and remorse straight into love, setting him free. The second robber was in a reactive attitude towards the Love Being, blaming her for his impotence and was unable to connect with Her soul. Hardened in his selfishness and suffering he remained a prisoner of

his own pride. This ending is undesirable.

Better to come to terms with Him sooner. In fact it is good to reconcile ourselves through forgiveness and reconciliation, because He wants us, loving us with an infinite love. But it is even better if we reach that moment to be touched by His love and to be in love with Him with all our soul. A lover, even if he no longer sees the one he loves next to him, looks for him with great desire and lives until his last breath for his love, reproaching nothing to his beloved and orienting himself in what he thinks and makes for the reunion with him.

I suppose it helps to know what to expect and what the meaning of that experience is, to avoid it being a double whammy of abandonment and meaninglessness. No one can boast that it will be easier for him, because I have noticed from experience that, regardless of the situation, that condition is extremely oppressive for everyone. But knowing what that experience entails, we can overcome it faster by making the choice that we consider suitable for us.

This moment has some common characteristics. The first is the state of abandonment and loneliness (even if we are accompanied by family illness). The second is the feeling of emptiness and void of love. The third is a state of heaviness and sinking into darkness. After everyone decides in their heart what they want to be in the

next dimension, most states disappear and the soul implicitly knows that the time to leave has arrived. After a short state of recovery, we leave in the decision we made.

No one knows for sure what will be in the next life, but it seems that there we will live in the shadow of the last choice. We can make assumptions that in those dimensions change is no longer possible. Transformation, change, maturation are characteristics of the three-dimensional world. To what extent they are still possible in the higher dimensions of existence remains to be ascertained.

But we know that there can be even infinite growth in the direction of our choice. This is revealed to us by the avatars of Light and even by Light Himself. The choice made in that decisive moment, on the cross, of which we speak now is a choice in infinity and infinitely important.

This choice can also take place, in exceptional cases, even after death, but before entering the Kingdom of Light. I had a patient who had an accident. Being on the operating table he experienced the Light and entering it he was greeted by two beings full of understanding and love who asked him two questions. The first was: "How did you love in life?" and the second: "Where do you want to go now? Back to earth or do you want to come with us?" The patient chose the earth and felt it fall back into the body. This experience and many others related by those who

experienced the Light speak of a possibility of making choices as long as the body is not yet dead.

But we have no accounts of the possibility or not of choosing once the connection between soul and body is broken.

I wanted to mention this observation because most of us do not know it and when we are put in the position to experience it, either through our relatives, or near our friends, or ourselves, it can become a great pain for the soul, if we abandon ourselves to the fear. It never hurts to be prepared for that moment. I think it helps us to know that it is not a total abandonment, but only a temporary removal, which helps us to make our choice firm. It helps, I think, not to despair when we feel that oppressive void of meaning, but to know that at that moment the menu of the next life is placed in our hands and the waiter awaits our choice.

I have noticed that many people, not knowing that it is the moment of choice, in a flutter of their heart naturally choose what their heart loves. Some people then talk about deceased relatives they want to see again or other people to whom they feel spiritually connected. The heart naturally clings to what it loves. Others remain tied to the sources of their happiness in this life, having no one to bond with in the next life. Lovers flutter into the longed-for arms of the Love of their hearts.

Probably at that moment it would help us to ask ourselves the question: "Who do I want to spend eternity with?" That *who* is the bridge that leads us into heaven and defines our eternity. The love of our heart is the oar over the abyss of death. She leads us to what she wants.

But I think this defining moment in our lives is far too vast to be even partially clarified here. All I wanted, however, was to mention its existence in order not to take us by surprise at the right time and not to fall out of love:

"Love is the divine harbor. Faith places us in the ship of return and takes us over the sea of life covered with salty vapors (tears), guiding us to the One towards whom all those who toil and are burdened by the effort of return are striving. For when we reach love, we have reached God and our journey has ended, and we have crossed to the island that is beyond the world, where the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are."¹

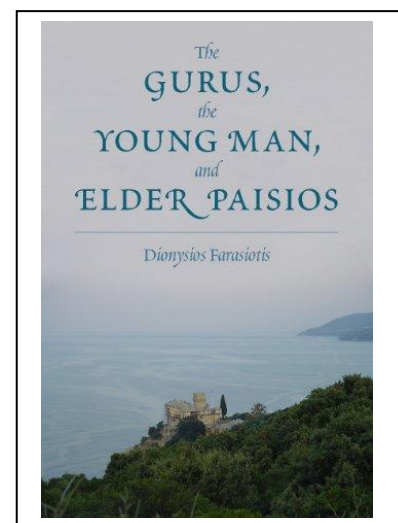
¹ Patriarch Callistus, *Philokalia Română*, Vol. VIII, p.208

DINNER & MOVIE NIGHT & BOOK CLUB

**The dates for February will
be announced in the weekly
Bulletin**

DINNER & MOVIE NIGHT
Dinner at 6:00pm; Movie –
***The 25th Hour* movie at**
6:30pm

BOOK CLUB – *The Gurus,*
The Young Man and Elder
***Paisios* – Chapter four to the**
end.



From the book *Life of Elder Cleopa of Sihastria* (+1998)

Concerning a Christian Woman Who had the Gift of Divine Prayer

Father Cleopa told us about another mystical miracle that also happened in the Sihastria Monastery Church:

“In the winter of 1971, it was my turn to be in the Holy Altar. I came to the church at 4 o’clock in the morning and I did my Holy Communion prayers in front of the Holy Altar Table. Not long afterwards a woman came in to pray, who had come to the monastery the previous evening. She prayed quietly before all the icons and did prostrations continually. She did not know there was someone else in the church, since it was dark, being winter. Noticing that she was praying so earnestly, I looked out through the Holy Doors to see who was praying with such faith. The Woman stayed on her knees in the middle of the church with her hands raised up and was saying with all her heart, “Lord, do not leave me! Lord, do not leave me!”

Then I saw a bluish light around her head and I was frightened. The woman fell face first to the floor and prayed silently. The ray of light over her head became increasingly large and lifted up over her head. After a little while the light slowly went out

and the woman got up and left the church. It was a peasant woman.

So, see here who has the gift of prayer! Look, laymen surpass us monastics! I was doing the Proskomedia and because of so much emotion I began to weep with the spear in my hand. Only God knows how many chosen ones are in this world!”

Elder Cleopa in the wilderness

He was going through the woods once, in the late fall, and got caught in a cold rain and got soaked to the skin. Since he was very far from the sod cabin, he had to go for a good part of the way with drenched clothes. On the path, since it was cold out and a chill wind blowing, he nearly became paralyzed and fell down not too far from the sod cabin, unable to move.

Father thought to himself, “Now I will die and I don’t have Holy Communion with me.” He prayed deeply and slowly, slowly he crawled back to the shelter. With difficulty he made a fire, sat next to it and dried out and so, little by little he recuperated.

But Father Cleopa had other kinds of temptations, too, as he used to say,

“It was one o’clock at night in the sod hut once. I had done the Midnight service and I was at Matins, when suddenly I heard, boom, boom, boom...! The ground shook. I went outside to see what I heard, and when I opened the hut’s door I saw a great light outside, and in the light there was a huge brass car with many wheels.

A tall man with large, half-white, half-black eyes came down from it who only said seething, “What are you looking for here?” I was reminded then about what the Holy Fathers say. If you have Holy Communion, you have the living Christ! I had the Holy Mysteries in a pine hollow in the hut. And when I saw that, I quickly entered inside, I hugged the branch with the Holy Mysteries in my arms and all I said was, “Lord Jesus don’t leave me!”

You should see how prayer is when the devil is at your door! And when I looked outside again, I saw how he was stepping back, cast off by the power of Christ. Near the sod cabin there was a deep ravine which the unclean spirit fell into. But how did he fall? When he got to the ravine, the car rolled over three times with him in it and finally fell and made such a loud crash that my ears rang until one o’clock the next day.”

Another time, while he was in the sod cabin, he heard a sound again. And when he went outside, it seemed that

a real war had started. He saw tanks coming towards him, armed soldiers running and it seemed to him that an entire army was trying to catch him. He began the Jesus prayer and the whole deception disappeared.

Father Arsenie mentioned something that happened to him in the wilderness while with Father Cleopa. “A great rain caught us once in a forest that wasn’t so high, it was as tall as a house. Father Cleopa was in one spot and I in another. I looked for thick bushes to take shelter in. Hiding under branches, Father insisted for me to come to him. He was about 30 meters away. I said my place was better, but he was saying his was. Then I thought, “No, wait, boy! I should listen to Father Cleopa!” I ran from there and a lightning bolt immediately struck the spot where I had just been. It impacted me! See what obedience means!

In the year 1953, there was a very difficult winter. Father Cleopa was received in the houses of the faithful in the village Răzleți. Sometimes in the evening Father would give a word of encouragement to those in the household. After a while the host would say, “Father I have a little nephew, could he come, too?” “Yea, let him come!” then after a little while again they would say, “Father I have a niece. Can she come to listen to your talk?” “Let her come, too!” But when the Elder saw that too many people

were gathering, he left for another room where he would leave a little written note on the table, “I have left. Forgive me!” And he would take refuge in the forest.

While he was with one of the faithful, he had a different temptation. The evil one took the form of a squirrel, and sat on top of the icon in the room where he was staying. Getting aggravated, Father threw something at it. But immediately afterward he began to weep, because in fact he should have only used prayer to battle the devil.

Father Cleopa and Arsenie lived ascetically in the Stânișoara Mountains until the summer of 1954, when Patriarch Justinian obtained approval for the two ascetics to return to either the monastery or the Patriarchate.

When they came to get Father Cleopa from the wilderness and bring him to the Patriarchate, he was afraid that it might somehow be a trap. But he began to pray to God to show him if he should go or not. Then the word of Saint John Climacus came to mind, “If obedience calls for death, a pastor who fears death should be ashamed!” So, Father said to himself, “Who is calling me? The Patriarch of the Church is calling me! If he sends me to death, I’ll go to die!”

In this manner, after more than two years of ascetic living in the wilderness, Fathers Cleopa and Arsenie left for Bucharest

accompanied by Hieromonk Daniil Tudor.

Patriarch Justinian received them there with great love, and he consulted with them spiritually every evening. Then they were sent to many surrounding monasteries in order to confess and guide the monks and nuns.

Father Cleopa and Arsenie then withdrew to the Slatina Monastery, to the joy of the monastics and faithful of the local area.

**St. Siluan Young Adults Retreat –
Spring Edition
May 31st – June 1st**

Please saved the date!!!

The full program is dedicated to ages 17-39 but for the **Quest speaker** event **all ages are welcomed.**

Our special guest speaker: Fr. Turbo Qualls, St. Mary of Egypt Serbian Orthodox Church, Kansas City, Missouri.

We already had him two times on zoom conferences in 2022 and 2023. However, we will send you his biography, the full YAR schedule, and other event details in March Bulletin.

PARENTS' CORNER

From *Life of Elder Cleopa* Book

Father Cleopa was a skillful Spiritual Father for both monastics and the faithful. Primarily he strove to awaken zeal and longing for God in the soul. After this, that soul would grow spiritually and it would be renewed.

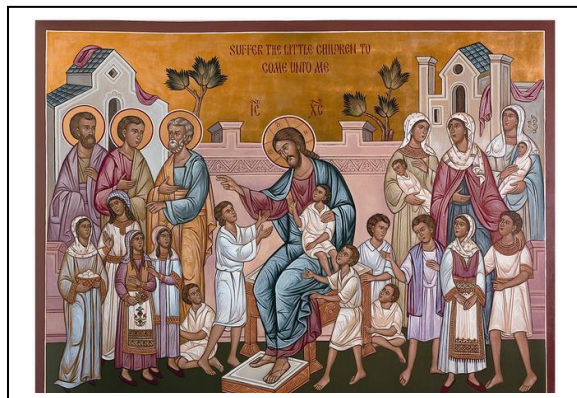
He generally recommended his spiritual children to respect the following advice: Children should be raised from infancy in the fear of God. They should learn prayers by heart and be confessed and receive Holy Communion monthly; they should be brought regularly to the Holy Church and listen to their parents, do prayers and prostrations for their father and mother, for their brothers and relatives, to learn religion in school and to keep the holy fasts and not to steal.

The young people were to each have their own Spiritual Father. They were to confess once a month and receive Holy Communion with great devotion, when they would be deemed worthy of the Lord's Body and Blood, following their Spiritual Father's guidance. They were to obey their parents in all things, to avoid all scandals and the ugly sins of our times; to read holy books, and those that had a vocation for it, were to study in the Theological Seminaries or enter into the monastic life. Those that had weighty offences against Christian morality were to confess to aged Spiritual Fathers and to follow the canon that they were given.

Those who wanted to get married were to be canonically examined by their priests to make sure they were not distantly related or getting married against their parents' will. Then they were to respect the commandments of God for those married, that is, not to murder their children, to listen to their parents, to be good Christians, to give alms and to carry out the advice of their Spiritual Father with a pure mind.

Those who were married were to make their house a true church. To give birth to and raise children in the fear of God, to pray a lot, to help the poor and the widows, to confess at least four times a year, and if permitted to, receive Holy Communion. They were not to receive sects or people of other religions into their houses,¹ to live in peace with each other, with holiness to take care of their parents and the elderly of their family and to be obedient in all things to their spiritual pastors.

Note 1: Elder Cleopa is referring here to the people of other religions who tried to convert the Orthodox people to their faith.



February 2024

Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church
 Southbridge, Massachusetts
www.stmichaelorthodox.com

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 St. Tryphon the Martyr 6:00pm Vespers, Litia, Presentation of Christ in the Temple	2 Presentation of Christ in the Temple 4:00am Divine Liturgy	3 Synaxis of the Righteous Symeon and Prophetess Anna Divine Liturgy 9:00am Vespers 5:00pm
4 Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am	5	6 St. Photios the Great	7 6:00pm Paraklesis	8 Great Martyr Theodore the Commander	9	10 Hieromartyr Haralmabos Divine Liturgy 9:00am Vespers 5:00pm
11 Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am	12	13	14 Paraklesis 6:00 pm	15	16	17 Great Martyr Theodore the Tyro Divine Liturgy 9:00am Vespers 5:00pm
18 Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am	19	20	21 Paraklesis 6:00 pm	22	23 St. Policarp	24 First and Second Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist Divine Liturgy 9:00am Vespers 5:00pm
25 Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee - Triodion Begins Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am	26	27 St. Raphael of Brooklyn	28 Non fasting day	29		