



St. Alexis of Wilkes-Barre Orthodox Church

Address: PO Box 134, 108 E Main St, Clinton, CT 06413-0134

Phone: 860-664-9434

Web: <http://www.stalexischurch.org>

Email: stalexis@ dneoca.org

Fr Steven Hosking

Rector

Phone: 860-866-5802 (Message)

Email: frsteve@stalexischurch.org

Dn Timothy Skuby

Attached

Phone: (808) 341-1813

Email: dntimothy@stalexischurch.org

Services Schedule

Please see our [online calendar](#) for dates and times of Feast Day services.

Bulletin for Sunday, February 25, 2024

Welcome



Jesus Christ taught us to love and serve all people, regardless of their ethnicity or nationality. To understand that, we need to look no further than to the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Every

time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, it is offered "on behalf of all, and for all." As Orthodox Christians we stand against

racism and bigotry. All human beings share one common identity as children of God. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatian 3:28)

Members of our Parish Council are:

Greg Jankura - Vice President

Susan Davis- President

Sharon Hanson - Member at Large

Luba Martins - Member at Large

Susan Egan - Treasurer

Dn Timothy Skuby - Secretary

Pastoral Care - General Information

Emergency Sick Calls can be made at any

time. Please call Fr Steven at (860) 866-5802, when a family member is admitted to the hospital.

Anointing in Sickness: The Sacrament of Unction is available in Church, the hospital, or your home, for anyone who is sick and suffering, however severe.

Marriages and Baptisms require early planning, scheduling and selections of sponsors (crown bearers or godparents). See Father before booking dates and reception halls!

Funerals are celebrated for practicing Orthodox Christians. Please see Father for details. The Church opposes cremation; we cannot celebrate funerals for cremations.

Announcements

Please remember that on Tuesday, the 27th at 7p we will begin our bookstudy.

Prayers, Intercessions and Commemorations



Many Years! to Nadia PenkoffLedbeck and Conner Kuziak on the occasion of their birthdays.

Memory Eternal to Lillian (Valery's Grandmother)

Please pray for Sarah, Aaron, Evelyn, Victor and Valerie (John

and Joan's granddaughter) who are in need of God's mercy and healing.

- Pray for: All those confined to hospitals, nursing homes, and their own homes due to illness; for all those who serve in the armed forces; widows, orphans, prisoners, victims of violence, and refugees;
- All those suffering chronic illness, financial hardship, loneliness, addictions, abuse, abandonment and despair; those who are homeless, those who are institutionalize, those who have no one to pray for them;
- All Orthodox seminarians & families; all Orthodox monks and nuns, and all those considering monastic life; all Orthodox missionaries and their families.
- All those who have perished due to hatred, intolerance and pestilence; all those departed this life in the hope of the Resurrection.

Please let Fr. Steven know via email if you have more names for which to pray.

- Departed: Fr Anthony, Kenneth
- Clergy and their families: Mat. Ann, Fr Sergei, and Mat Nancy
- Catechumen: Robert, Abbie, Matthew, Joseph, Mary, Kevin and Lynn
- Individuals and Families: Susan, Luba, Suzanne, Gail Galina, Evelyn, Rosemary, John, Lucille, Karen, Oleg, Lucia, Victor, Melissa, Christine, Sebastian, Olga, Daniel & Dayna, Branislava, Alton, Richard, Kristen, Subdeacon Paul, Leonore
- Birthdays and Name's Days this

- Month: Nadia PenkoffLedbeck, Connor Kuziak
- Anniversaries this Month: Stasia and Glenn PenkoffLedbeck
- Expecting and Newborn: Anastasia and her unborn child
- Traveling:
- Sick and those in distress: Maria, Brian, Katy, Lauren

SUNDAY OF THE PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE — Tone 5. Beginning of the Lenten Triodion. St. Tarasius, Archbishop of Constantinople (806).

Again we pray for those who have lost their lives because of the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East: that the Lord our God may look upon them with mercy, and give them rest where there is neither sickness, or sorrow, but life everlasting.

Again we pray for mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, for those who are suffering, wounded, grieving, or displaced because of the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East. Again we pray for a cessation of the hostilities against Ukraine and the Middle East, and that reconciliation and peace will flourish there, we pray thee, hearken and have mercy.

Parish Calendar

Schedule of Services and Events

February 25 to March 4, 2024

Sunday, February 25

Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee:
Triodion Begins Today
9:30AM Divine Liturgy

Monday, February 26

Porphyrius, Bishop of Gaza

Tuesday, February 27

Bishop Raphael Hawaweeny of Brooklyn
Procopius the Confessor of Decapolis
8:00AM Akathist to St Raphael of Brooklyn
8:30AM Daily Matins
7:00PM Book Study

Wednesday, February 28

Basil the Confessor
4:30PM Open Doors

Thursday, February 29

Righteous John Cassian the Confessor
8:30AM Daily Matins

Friday, March 1

The Holy Righteous Martyr Eudocia the Samaritan
3:30PM [CT Deanery] Deanery Meeting follow-ups

Saturday, March 2

Hesychius the Martyr
5:30PM Great Vespers
6:00PM General Confession

Sunday, March 3

Sunday of the Prodigal Son
Michael and Zachary Neiss

Monday, March 4

Gerasimus the Righteous of Jordan

Saints and Feasts

February 25

Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee: Triodion Begins Today

The Pharisees were an ancient and outstanding sect among the Jews known for their diligent observance of the outward matters of the Law. Although, according to the word of our Lord, they "did all their works to be seen of men" (Matt. 23:5), and were hypocrites (ibid. 23: 13, 14, 15, etc.), because of the apparent holiness of their lives they were thought by all to be righteous, and separate from others, which is what the name Pharisee means. On the other hand, Publicans, collectors of the royal taxes, committed many injustices and extortions for filthy lucre's sake, and all held them to be sinners and unjust. It was therefore according to common opinion that the Lord Jesus in His parable signified a virtuous person by a Pharisee, and a sinner by a Publican, to teach His disciples the harm of pride and the profit of humble-mindedness.

Since the chief weapon for virtue is humility, and the greatest hindrance to it is pride, the divine Fathers have set these three weeks before the Forty-day Fast as a preparation for the spiritual struggles of virtue. This present week they have called Harbinger, since it declares that the Fast is approaching; and they set humility as the foundation for all our spiritual labors by appointing that the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee be read today, even before the Fast begins, to teach, through the vaunting of the Pharisee, that the foul smoke of self-esteem and the stench of boasting drives away the grace of the Spirit, strips man of all his virtue, and casts

him into the pits of Hades; and, through the repentance and contrite prayer of the Publican, that humility confers upon the sinner forgiveness of all his wicked deeds and raises him up to the greatest heights.

All foods are allowed the week that follows this Sunday.

February 26

Photini the Samaritan Woman & her martyred sisters: Anatole, Phota, Photis, Praskevi, & Kyriaki

Saint Photini lived in 1st century Palestine and was the woman that Christ met at Jacob's Well in Samaria as recorded in the Gospel according to John (4:4-26). After her encounter with Christ, she and her whole family were baptized by the Apostles and became evangelists of the early Church. Photini and her children eventually were summoned before the emperor Nero and instructed to renounce their faith in Christ. They refused to do so, accepting rather to suffer various tortures. After many efforts to force her to surrender to idolatry, the emperor ordered that she be thrown down a well. Photini gave up her life in the year 66.

St. Photini is commemorated on three occasions during the year: February 26 (Greek tradition), March 20 (Slavic tradition), and the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman on the 5th Sunday of Pascha.

February 27

Raphael of Brooklyn

Saint Raphael Hawaweeny was born on November 8th, 1860 A.D., in Damascus, Syria, to pious Christian parents. He studied Arabic grammar and mathematics at the Antiochian Patriarchate parochial school where he was tonsured a reader in 1874. His strong academics served him well throughout his life, providing for him numerous opportunities to succeed and grow. He accepted a position in 1877 as an assistant teacher of Arabic and Turkish, which became full time in 1879. In 1879 he was tonsured a monk while working with Patriarch Hierotheos at the patriarchate, traveling with him on pastoral visits and serving as his personal assistant.

Longing to continue his theological studies, Raphael petitioned the Patriarch for permission to study at Halki Theological School, which was the only option for students of the Antiochian Patriarchate as the Balamand Seminary in Lebanon had been closed since 1840. After much persistence, Raphael received the blessing of the Patriarch and enrolled in Halki Seminary where he was ordained a deacon in 1885. After completing his degree at Halki, the young Deacon Raphael studied at the Kiev Theological Academy, working as a liaison between the Moscow and Antiochian patriarchates. Deacon Raphael was ordained to the holy priesthood in 1889 while in Kiev, continuing to serve that community for many years.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 led to the subsequent collapse of the silk industry in the Middle East, causing many

Syrians and others to immigrate to the United States. These new citizens desired to have their religion present in their new homeland and sent letters to their mother churches for pastoral help. A few priests were sent, but none lasted, and so the people asked for Father Raphael Hawaweeny to come to America and serve. Both the Antiochian and Moscow Patriarchs agreed to this idea, and Father Raphael left for America where the people greeted him with great love. Father Raphael then spent many years serving the Syrians in Brooklyn, New York, but he desired to scan the continent for Syrians and other Orthodox Christians who were without spiritual leadership. He traveled by train and carriage across the nation, finding Orthodox Christians, recording their location, and performing liturgies, baptisms, and weddings. Upon his return to Brooklyn, Father Raphael worked to find clergy to send to these dispersed communities, giving them a full time pastor to minister to their needs.

In 1909, by the hands of Bishops Tikhon and Innocent of the Moscow Patriarchate, he was the first bishop consecrated in the New World. The now Bishop Raphael continued his ministry to the Christians throughout America. Bishop Raphael worked tirelessly in Brooklyn to mediate disputes between the Orthodox Christians from Syria and Maronite Catholic Christians who often fought violently with one another. Despite numerous outbursts and setbacks, Bishop Raphael continued his ministry serving the Orthodox throughout his vast diocese. One such incident was when an influential leader of the Maronite group was killed

and many people accused Bishop Raphael of ordering his murder. This led to many people attempting to harm the bishop, but he endured it all willingly. He was arrested under attempted murder charges, but was eventually cleared and let go after much time and money was spent in his defense.

Throughout his time in North America, Bishop Raphael founded 36 parishes to bring the Church to the faithful who were without a priest to guide them. Bishop Raphael truly lived out Gospel in all aspects of his life, striving tirelessly for the people in his care, even to the point of sacrificing his own physical health in order to maintain the spiritual health of his people. Bishop Raphael died on February 27th, 1915, at his home in Brooklyn. His funeral was attended by hundreds of people, including clergy from all ethnic backgrounds, illustrating his love for all of the people of God regardless of where they came from. The sacred relics of Saint Raphael, “the good shepherd of the lost sheep in North America,” were first interred in a crypt beneath the holy table at his Saint Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn on March 7th, 1915, before being moved to the Syrian section of Mount Olivet Cemetery in Brooklyn on April 2nd, 1922. They were finally translated to the Holy Resurrection Cemetery at the Antiochian Village near Ligonier, Pennsylvania, on August 15th, 1988. His sanctity was officially proclaimed by the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America on March 29th, 2000, and his glorification was celebrated on May 29th of that year at the Monastery of Saint Tikhon in Pennsylvania.

February 28

Righteous John Cassian the Confessor

Note: If it is not a leap year the hymns of Saint John are transferred to the 28th.

This Saint was born about the year 350, and was, according to some, from Rome, according to others, from Dacia Pontica (Dobrogea in present-day Romania). He was a learned man who had first served in the military. Later, he forsook this life and became a monk in Bethlehem with his friend and fellow-ascetic, Germanus of Dacia Pontica, whose memory is also celebrated today. Hearing the fame of the great Fathers of Scete, they went to Egypt about the year 390; their meetings with the famous monks of Scete are recorded in Saint John's *Conferences*. In the year 403 they went to Constantinople, where Cassian was ordained deacon by Saint John Chrysostom; after the exile of Saint Chrysostom, Saints Cassian and Germanus went to Rome with letters to Pope Innocent I in defence of the exiled Archbishop of Constantinople. There Saint Cassian was ordained priest, after which he went to Marseilles, where he established the famous monastery of Saint Victor. He reposed in peace about the year 433.

The last of his writings was *On the Incarnation of the Lord, Against Nestorius*, written in 430 at the request of Leo, the Archdeacon of Pope Celestine. In this work he was the first to show the spiritual kinship between Pelagianism, which taught that Christ was a mere man who without the help of God had avoided sin, and that it was

possible for man to overcome sin by his own efforts; and Nestorianism, which taught that Christ was a mere man used as an instrument by the Son of God, but was not God become man; and indeed, when Nestorius first became Patriarch of Constantinople in 428, he made much show of persecuting the heretics, with the exception only of the Pelagians, whom he received into communion and interceded for them to the Emperor and to Pope Celestine.

The error opposed to Pelagianism but equally ruinous was Augustine's teaching that after the fall, man was so corrupt that he could do nothing for his own salvation, and that God simply predestined some men to salvation and others to damnation. Saint John Cassian refuted this blasphemy in the thirteenth of his *Conferences*, with Abbot Chairemon, which eloquently sets forth, at length and with many citations from the Holy Scriptures, the Orthodox teaching of the balance between the grace of God on one hand, and man's efforts on the other, necessary for our salvation.

Saint Benedict of Nursia, in Chapter 73 of his Rule, ranks Saint Cassian's *Institutes* and *Conferences* first among the writings of the monastic fathers, and commands that they be read in his monasteries; indeed, the Rule of Saint Benedict is greatly indebted to the *Institutes* of Saint John Cassian. Saint John Climacus also praises him highly in section 105 of Step 4 of the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, on Obedience.

Gospel and Epistle Readings

Epistle Reading

Prokeimenon. 5th Tone. Psalm 11.7,1.

You, O Lord, shall keep us and preserve us.
Verse: Save me, O Lord, for the godly man has failed.

The reading is from St. Paul's Second Letter to Timothy 3:10-15.

TIMOTHY, my son, you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, my sufferings, what befell me at Antioch, at Iconion, and at Lystra, what persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Gospel Reading

**Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee:
Triodion Begins Today
The Reading is from Luke 18:10-14**

The Lord said this parable, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men,

extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Wisdom of the Fathers

If there is a moral quality almost completely disregarded and even denied today, it is indeed humility. The culture in which we live constantly instills in us the sense of pride, of self-glorification, and of self-righteousness ... Even our churches - are they not imbued with that same spirit of the Pharisee? Do we not want our every contribution, every 'good deed,' all the we do 'for the Church' to be acknowledged, praised, publicized? ... How does one become humble? The answer, for a Christian, is simple: by contemplating Christ..."

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

Great Lent, pp. 19-20., 20th Century

It is possible for those who have come back again after repentance to shine with much lustre, and oftentimes more than those who have never fallen at all, I have demonstrated from the divine writings.

Thus at least both the publicans and the harlots inherit the kingdom of Heaven, thus many of the last are placed before the first.

St. John Chrysostom

AN EXHORTATION TO THEODORE AFTER HIS FALL, 4th Century

The Faith We Hold



Our preparation for Lent has begun, drawing near the moment in our lives when we must answer the call to follow in Christ's footsteps to Golgotha throughout the Great Lent and bear witness to His victory over death. These upcoming weeks set the tone for a deeper and richer spiritual life. Lent, and indeed our entire lives, serve as our preparation for the Resurrection.

Our aim is to overcome our old selves, rise above the world, and defeat the sin that has turned humanity into the walking dead. The words we hear at the Church, and all the spiritual nourishment we receive, should guide us towards a life that differs from the norms of this world, where people oppress, torment, maim, and kill one another. Could God have created such a life? Certainly not! It is sheer madness and the doors of hell

where people refuse to see beyond their self-interest.

Let us take a moment to question how we view others, even within the Church. When someone walks in wearing an expensive dress, we may assume they have something to donate and treat them with extra care and attention. However, when a disheveled, homeless person arrives with an off-putting smell, we may view them with disdain, assuming they are only there to ask for money. This kind of thinking reeks of hypocrisy and falsehood, creating an ugly discordant note to which, unfortunately, we become accustomed all too easily.

We must all live differently, and we should start making changes now. Instead of continually claiming that we are not ready and need more time to think and gather ourselves, we should take action. We often resolve to find time to pray, contemplate, and repent, but only after we have cleared the most urgent matters from our way and are no longer in a rush. However, this is all nonsense! It is a lie and a deception of the world. By being lenient on ourselves, we are squandering precious time.

We should engage in a constant battle with our old selves, our limited reasoning, and our simplistic view of what is happening to us and around us. Today, the Holy Church is teaching us a lesson in life as we read today's Gospel passage.

Two people entered the temple. One was a zealous follower of the law, doing everything right. But where did that lead him? Filled with pride and self-admiration, he said: "I am better than this sinner

who came here for who knows what reason; this place isn't for him. It's for people like me, good, spiritual, decent people..." However, the tax collector felt his guilt before God and uttered words repeated by humanity for thousands of years: "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (cf. Luke 18:13). Of course, he left the temple justified by God because these words encapsulated his whole life.

Any person coming from the world will keenly be aware of their sin. Some residents of our farm estates have served decades of prison time. Their whole lives have been anything but normal. But how can someone like you and I begin to live our lives obeying the law like the Pharisee, but also repenting as deeply as the Tax Collector? Now there's a formidable challenge!

How can we learn to do all that, but not consider it our own? That would be genuine art, the art of spiritual life. Today, we do not have a fraction of the Pharisee's obedience, but are as proud as a dozen of these Pharisees. We are keen to judge and condemn. We claim to know it all. If someone reasons or corrects us, we protest with vehemence and argue our case with all our might. So we have a major task ahead: to prepare ourselves for the life to come, the resurrection from the dead, and do so in the remaining few months of Lent. We must travel the vast distance from living to the letter, to living in the spirit, and our every experience during this time should bring us ever closer to this goal.

No pleasures of the secular world could ever match the joy that descends upon the people who come to church on the Paschal

night. No one in the world could give it to us; it simply is not there. Despite all the hustle, senselessness, and chaos of the world, we must learn to see God and rejoice, without recoiling from doing what we must. We must remain living people.

For example, I am concerned (and maybe you are, too) that after taking Communion, the holy gift of life, we forget about it soon after leaving the church, engaging in empty conversations and entertaining idle thoughts. But does it mean that we should lock ourselves inside the Church and stay there? No, it means that we should bring the church to our homes and our hearts. "You are the temple of the Holy Spirit," says the apostle Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19). We should live as Orthodox, seeing God in every person, glorifying Him, and thanking Him for all He sends. This should be the foundation upon which to build our future lives, and the upcoming fast is the time to lay it.

During Lent, some will engage in what one might call "Orthodox yoga." They will puff themselves up like balloons and declare, "I am an ascetic. I am not like this glutton or that other sinner, or some other worthless man." But deep in their hearts, they will feel a deep void. Today, the Pharisee from the Gospel said something similar. He said it with a sense of self-worth, and that is the saddest part. And the Tax Collector? Who could feel more worthless? An extortionist, a bribe-taker!

We should not judge; we understand that these were people of their time, and they were also imperfect. But this man, a sinner, somehow found his way to the temple,

and that was no accident or play of chance. His soul was so contrite that he could not bring himself to raise his eyes. He felt shame; his conscience had come to life. He came to the Holy Temple, and he realized his unworthiness. He venerated a relic, and he felt guilt. He realized how many people he had hurt, how many he had deceived, and how normal it had become for him!..

He was going on with his life, without giving the slightest thought about the pain he was causing others by robbing them of their possessions. He was intent on getting rich, he was living for himself, like everybody else in his circle. All of a sudden, he understood that he was not living, but was tormenting himself and others. He was bringing great suffering upon his soul, because the wealth in his coffers was not giving him any contentment. What could he buy with all that money? Could he buy love, loyalty, friendship? He had lost it all, he had traded it for the petty trinkets of this world. The man prayed - and this prayer is still one of our favourites - "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (cf. Luke 18:13). He beat his chest and asked God for forgiveness, admitting his sin and repenting it in all sincerity. And the Lord accepted his prayer. It was short, a cry of his anguished soul. He did not read canons, an akathist, or Psalter. He simply realized the state he was in, and knew that he could not continue business as usual. Now was his chance to change, right here in this temple.

Surely his life transformed, as he walked home justified. And that man, the Pharisee who was doing everything right, may never have understood that his prayer had not

been accepted. God's love is not something to be earned. The same universal law is at work everywhere and at all times: the more of God's love we witness in our lives, the more we get to realize our unworthiness.

The gift of God's grace makes the soul sore and causes it pain to the extent that our past lives become untenable. That way, the soul dies to the sin that rests within it. But who would want to receive this kind of love? Who wants Golgotha? Who wants to be crucified tomorrow, and let their old self die? Nobody! Everybody wants to be pitied, sympathized with, and understood instead. That's what the human condition is like nowadays.

Tragically, the Lord has told us all we need, but we pretend that we do not understand. Turn your other cheek? What do you mean? You get hit — so hit back even harder; you get offended — so take back yours and retaliate.

In plain terms, the message from the Lord that we are trying so hard to decline is utterly clear: we should live in love, even towards our enemies, and humbly recognize our own faults while maintaining faith in God. This is the essence of our "spiritual arithmetic." Yet so many of us are still refusing to make sense of the simple equation: me + God + other.

https://obitel-minsk.org/en/to-obey-like-the-pharisee-and-repent-like-the-publican?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&pharisee-and-repent

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