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Diocese of the West  
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**IMPORTANT  
DATES**

**March 1**  
Sunday of Orthodoxy

**March 23**  
Great Canon & Life of  
St. Mary of Egypt

**March 24-25**  
Annunciation

**LENTEN RETREAT**  
**Saturday, March 21**  
Holy Trinity Cathedral  
in San Francisco



*The desert*

# ST. NICHOLAS NEWS

## *March 2026*

### **After Pure Week: Holding the Line**

Pure Week has a certain intensity. The services are longer. Our attention is sharper. Our resolve feels strong.

But Lent is not measured by one week.

Now the real test begins.

Great Lent is not a spiritual project. It is a reordering of life. The commitments we made must now become steady habits. Families especially should make clear why we fast, pray, and simplify—not as punishment, not as mere tradition, but as training for the heart.

Life does not slow down because it is Lent. Work continues. School continues. Deadlines and fatigue continue. The challenge is not escaping daily life, but living it differently—remaining “in the world but not of the world.”

Christ gives us a pattern that has endured for centuries: **prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.** If one weakens, the others quietly collapse.

### **The Three Pillars of Lent**



#### **1. Prayer**

“Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God” (St. John Damascene).

Lent begins and ends here. Without prayer, fasting becomes dieting and almsgiving becomes philanthropy.

Make every effort to attend weekday Lenten services, especially the Presanctified Liturgies. The Church’s Lenten tone—its “bright sadness,” the Prayer of St. Ephraim with prostrations—cannot be experienced on Sunday morning. It belongs to the weekdays.

When attendance is not possible, read the daily Scriptures and Psalms. Do not let a day pass without turning your attention consciously toward God. Add spiritual reading. During weekday services we are reading *Way of the Ascetics* by Tito Colliander. I also recommend *Great Lent* by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann and *The Lenten Spring* by Fr. Thomas Hopko. Ask if you need guidance.



## 2. Fasting

We fast from certain foods. But if that is all we fast from, Lent remains shallow.

We fast from irritation.  
From needless noise.  
From endless scrolling.  
From careless speech.

Simplify meals. Reduce distractions. Guard the tongue. Refuse the reflex to complain.

The point is not strictness. The point is mastery. Either we train our desires, or they will train us.



## 3. Almsgiving

The Fathers warn us: fasting without almsgiving becomes barren.

What we save through simplicity should be given away. Make it visible. Make it intentional.

Almsgiving is not only money. It is time, attention, inconvenience, patience. Visit someone. Drive someone. Help quietly.

Lent turns us outward or it turns into self-absorption.

## Our Daily Duty

At the end of our life, we will answer for how we used our time.

Are morning and evening prayers consistent—or optional? Is Confession deliberate—or postponed? If we are not at vigil on Saturday evening (for a reason worthy of a blessing), what fills that space instead?

Lent does not fail because it is too demanding. It fails because we drift.

Pure Week is over. The intensity has passed. The novelty has worn off.

Now we find out whether we were serious.

Hold the line.



## During the Daytime before Presanctified

*by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann*

In the light of the approaching encounter with Christ (in the Holy Eucharist,) how serious and how grave becomes the day I have to spend in the usual occupations; how the most trivial and insignificant things, which fill my daily existence and to which I am so accustomed that I pay no attention to them, acquire a new significance. Every word I say, every act I perform, every thought passing through my mind becomes important, unique, irreversible, and either each is “in line” with my expectation of Christ or in opposition to it.

During those special days, time itself, which we usually “waste” so easily, is revealed in its true meaning as the time of either salvation or damnation. Our whole life becomes that which it was made by Christ’s coming into this world – ascension to Him, or running away from Him into darkness and destruction.

Nowhere indeed is the true meaning of fasting and Lent revealed better or fuller than on the days of the evening Communion – the meaning not only of Lent but of the Church and of Christian life in their totality. In Christ, all of life, all of time, history, the cosmos itself have become expectation, preparation, hope, ascension. Christ has come; the Kingdom is yet to come!

In “this world” we can only anticipate the glory and joy of the Kingdom, yet as Church we leave this world in spirit and meet at the Lord’s table where in the secret of our heart we contemplate His uncreated light and splendor.

## Lent and Confession

We know that Lent is not just an atmosphere.  
It is not liturgical décor. It is not a change of menu.  
It is repentance.

And repentance has a sacramental form in the life of the Church: **Holy Confession**.

If Lent passes without confession, something essential has been avoided. The Church teaches plainly:  
Those who have committed grave sins, or who have neglected proper spiritual preparation, must be reconciled through sacramental penance before receiving Holy Communion.

Confession is not optional self-improvement.  
It is the restoration of communion.

### The Three Essential Elements of Penance

- 1. Sincere sorrow** - Not vague regret — but real grief over sin and the rupture of communion with God.
- 2. Open and honest confession** - Spoken aloud before the priest, who stands not as a private counselor, but as witness on behalf of Christ and the whole Church.
- 3. The Prayer of Absolution** - Through this prayer, forgiveness is not merely hoped for — it is sacramentally bestowed.

Confession is not a conversation.  
It is not just therapy.  
It is not just spiritual housekeeping.  
It is judgment faced now — so that the Last Judgment may be joy.

### Practical Arrangements

Fr. Stephan will hear confessions before or after week-day Lenten services, or at other times by appointment. Sunday morning confessions at 9:00 a.m. are reserved **only** for the elderly, the sick, or those who live a significant distance from the parish.

If you absolutely must come Sunday morning, Father must be notified by Saturday evening so that Proskomedie can be completed and Liturgy not delayed.  
After Palm Sunday, confession times are reserved for:

- Shut-ins
- Those who have traveled to join us for Holy Week
- Catechumens
- Genuine emergencies

### Procrastination is not an emergency.

Lent is short. Delay is easy.  
Repentance requires intention.  
The door is open —but it does not remain open indefinitely.

## Charitable Works

### Global, Local, and Parish

*St. Leo the Great*

“There is no more profitable practice as a companion to holy and spiritual fasting than that of almsgiving. This embraces under the single name of mercy many excellent works of devotion, so that the good intentions of the faithful may be of equal value, even where their means are not. The love that we owe both God and our neighbor is always free from any obstacle that would prevent us from having a good intention. The angels sang: Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth. The person who shows love and compassion to those in any kind of affliction is blessed, not only with the virtue of good will, but also with the gift of peace ... Those who are unequal in their capacity to give can be equal in the love within their hearts.”

### Sunday Special Collections

- March 1** - (Sunday of Orthodoxy) - IOCC  
**March 8** - St. Nicholas Paschal Flowers  
**March 15** - Ukraine & Middle East War Relief  
**March 22** - The Africa Fund  
**March 29** - Holy Assumption Monastery  
**April 5** - Raffle for Church Camp Scholarships

### Presanctified Liturgy Collections

- Wednesday, March 4** - St. Vincent de Paul of San Rafael  
**Wednesday, March 11** - Postpartum Support Center  
**Wednesday, March 18** - The Street Chaplaincy  
**Wednesday, March 25** - Marin Pregnancy Clinic  
**Wednesday, April 1** - Homeward Bound

*Please make checks payable to the designated charity*

The sun shines equally on the rich and the poor, and they both breathe the same air. Why is it, then, that these necessary things, which sustain life, are created by God for common use, while money is not common? The reason is twofold: to safeguard life and to open the path to virtue. On the one hand if the necessities of life were not common, the rich, with their usual greediness, would take them away from the poor ... On the other hand, if money were common and available to all, there would be no opportunity for generosity on the part of the rich and gratitude on the part of the poor.

*St. John Chrysostom*