

Date: February 5, 2025

Subject: BURL-Choir New-martyrs and Publican and Pharisee Weekend NOTICE

Dorogiye!

This Saturday/Sunday the Church commemorates the New-martyrs and Confessors of Russia (Novomucheniki i Ispovedniki) - all those Orthodox Christians who suffered for Christ at the hands of the godless during the years of Soviet persecution. These include the royal Passion Bearers Tsar Nicholas II and his family. Countless thousands of martyrs, both clergy and laity also suffered, some of whose names are known, as well as many simple believers whose names have been lost to history. Their only "crime" was their unshakable faith in God.

This Saturday/Sunday is also the first preparatory Sunday before Great Lent, termed the "Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee."

The attached Tropar / Kondak text sheet contains the special prayers that will be sung.

Brief summaries about the preparatory Sundays before Great Lent, adapted from "Zakon Bozhiy" (Law of God) by Prot. (Archpriest) Seraphim Slobodskoy, are provided below.

(Note: unless otherwise indicated, all dates are "old style".)

**** FIRST PREPARATORY SUNDAY BEFORE GREAT LENT

The first preparatory Sunday of Great Lent is termed the "Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee." This Sunday's Gospel parable of the Publican and the Pharisee is read in order to demonstrate that only prayer with heartfelt tears and humility, like those of the publican, and not with a recounting of one's virtues like the pharisee, can call down upon us the mercy of God. Starting with this Sunday and continuing until the fifth Sunday of Great Lent, following the reading of the Gospel, during the All Night Vigil, the contrite prayer is chanted, "The doors of repentance do Thou open to me, O Giver of Life..."

**** SECOND PREPARATORY SUNDAY BEFORE GREAT LENT

The second preparatory Sunday of Great Lent is termed the "Sunday of the Prodigal Son." In the touching parable of the Prodigal Son read during Liturgy, the Holy Church teaches us to rely on the mercy of God, provided we have sincerely repented of our sins. On this Sunday and the succeeding two Sundays, during the Polyeleos at the All Night Vigil, Psalm 136 is chanted: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and we wept when we remembered Sion..." This psalm describes the suffering of the Jews during the Babylonian captivity and their longing for their fatherland. The words of this psalm teach us about our spiritual captivity, the captivity to sin, and that we should aspire towards our spiritual fatherland, the Heavenly Kingdom.

The final words of this psalm scandalize many with reference to "Blessed shall be he who shall seize and dash thine infants (those of the Babylonians) against the rock!" Of course, the literal meaning of these words is brutal and unacceptable for the Christian, for the Lord Himself taught us to love and bless our enemies and to worship God in spirit and truth. These words gain a pure and lofty significance with a Christian and spiritual nature, for they mean, "Blessed is he who has a firm resolve to break, on the rock

of faith, the newly forming evil thoughts and desires (as it were in their infant state) before they mature into evil deeds and habits."

**** THIRD PREPARATORY SUNDAY BEFORE GREAT LENT

The third preparatory Sunday before Great Lent is called "Meatfare Sunday," because after this Sunday, of non-fasting foods, one is allowed to eat cheese, milk, butter, and eggs, but no meat or poultry. This Sunday is also termed the "The Sunday of the Last Judgment," as the Gospel passage concerning the Dread Judgment is read, describing the final reward or punishment awaiting us, and thereby awakening the sinner to repentance. In the hymns on Cheese-fare Sunday, the fall into sin of Adam and Eve is recalled, which resulted from lack of self-control and fasting.

**** LAST SUNDAY BEFORE GREAT LENT

The last Sunday before Great Lent is termed "Cheese-fare Sunday," because it is the last day on which one can eat cheese, butter and eggs. During the Liturgy we hear the Gospel reading (Matt. 6:14-21) concerning the forgiveness of our fellow man for his offenses against us, without which we cannot receive the forgiveness of our sins from the Heavenly Father. In accordance with this Gospel reading, Christians have the pious custom on this day of forgiving each other their sins, both known and unknown, and those who have a quarrel with someone undertake every effort to be reconciled. Therefore, this Sunday is also termed "Forgiveness Sunday."