



BOOK REVIEW

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TITLE: *Great Lent*

AUTHOR: V. Rev. Alexander Schmemmann

In recent centuries, the Lenten observance had become the strict fulfillment of legalistic requirements such as fasting from certain foods or annual sacramental participation. In *Great Lent*, Father Schmemmann draws a vivid map of the Lenten season as a journey of repentance, humility, and love. This journey begins with the acknowledgment of how much our lives fall short of the glory of God. Throughout the book (including the notes), he traces the development of the Lenten season from the catechumens' period of preparation for baptism, through the disappearance of the catechuminate and adult baptism, to the development of the Lenten Triodion (liturgical book) used by the Orthodox Church today. On this foundation, Father Schmemmann builds his argument that a true Lenten observance cannot be reduced to "juridical 'obligation' and a set of dietary laws", but must entail an inner transformation and the "application of Christian principles to daily existence". Father Schmemmann demonstrates these profound themes by discussing the rich liturgical observances, hymnography, and Scripture readings of the Lenten season, including the pre-Lenten period, the Great Canon, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, Saturday memorial services, and Sunday liturgies. Thus, fasting and spiritual struggle are placed within the proper context of the Christian's call to renewal and repentance. In the final analysis, he stresses that the glory of the Risen Lord both sustains our Lenten journey and is the goal of our ascetic struggle.

The appendix contains an essay titled "Holy Things for the Holy". The essay explores factors that led to infrequent participation in the mysteries of Communion and Confession and the subsequent negative impact on the Church's spiritual life. This is one of Father Schmemmann's many writings that helped to bring about the liturgical renewal of North American Orthodoxy. Moreover, it is complementary to the main text discussed above and helpful for the Lenten journey.

Reviewed by Mark Vassilakis

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