



HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CHURCH

Parish RESTON Newsletter

March 2014

LIVING "TODAY" WITH A EYE ONE "TOMORROW"

MARCH—DAY 12 HOURS, NIGHT 12

2 Sun^{III} **GOSPEL: FORGIVENESS—LETTING GO** (Mat. 6.14+)

10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy—**Coffee Hour: Krisa**
5:00 p.m. Penitential Vespers at St. Luke's Serbian,
followed by *Bliny* and all the fixings.

THE WEEKS OF MARK

■ Η ΜΕΓΑΛΗ ΤΕΣΣΑΡΑΚΟΣΤΗ ΒΕΛΙΚΑΔ ΤΕΤΥΡΕΔΕΣΑΤΗΝΝΙΑ ■

3 Mon *Day 1—Begin THE GREAT FORTY DAYS.*

6 Thu 7:00 p.m. PreSanctified Liturgy (at St. Luke's Serbian)

9 Sun **SUNDAY I: CHRIST, MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN** (John 1.43–51)

9:45 a.m. Communal Confession Rite—*first of two*
10:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy—**Coffee Hour: Lepnew**
5:00 p.m. Penitential Vespers at St. Luke's Serbian

13 Thu 7:00 p.m. PreSanctified Liturgy (at St. Luke's Serbian)

15 Sat *Food Pantry 10:00 a.m. to 1:p.m.*

16 Sun **SUNDAY II: CHRIST, SOURCE OF FORGIVENESS AND PEACE** (Mark 2.1–12)

9:45 a.m. Communal Confession Rite—*second of two*
10:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy—**Coffee Hour: Lynch**
5:00 p.m. Penitential Vespers at St. Luke's Serbian

20 Thu 7:00 p.m. PreSanctified Liturgy (at St. Luke's Serbian)

23 Sun **SUNDAY III: CROSS OF CHRIST, COMPASSIONATE HIGH PRIEST** (Mark 8.34–9.1)

10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy—**Coffee Hour: Matyuf**
5:00 p.m. Penitential Vespers at St. Luke's Serbian

27 Thu 7:00 p.m. PreSanctified Liturgy (at St. Luke's Serbian)

30 Sun **SUNDAY IV: CHRIST, WITH THE FATHER, OUR SURE HOPE** (Mark 9.17–31)

10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy—**Coffee Hour: Morrow**
5:00 p.m. Penitential Vespers at St. Luke's Serbian

APRIL—DAY 13 HOURS, NIGHT 11

4 Thu 7:00 p.m. PreSanctified Liturgy (at St. Luke's Serbian)

6 Sun **SUNDAY V: CHRIST, SACRIFICE SEALING A NEW COVENANT** (Mark 10.32–45)

10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy—**Coffee Hour: Warden**
5:00 p.m. Penitential Vespers at St. Luke's Serbian

10 Thu 7:00 p.m. PreSanctified Liturgy (at St. Luke's Serbian)

11 Fri *Day 40—End the Great Forty Days.*

12 Sat *Saturday of Lazarus—ancient day for reintegrating penitents bound with a penance (as the Gospel will say: "Unbind him and let him go...")*

O Lord, examine me and know me yourself. You know when I sit still and when I move about; you read my mind even from afar. You observe me when I leave and when I return; you are familiar with all my comings and goings. A word is barely on my lips, and already you know it completely, O Lord.

—Psalm 138

Father Alexander Schmemmann:
"The penitential seasons of the Church... are the proper times and the proper seasons for sacramental Penance."

Father Alexander wasn't cooking up something new when he wrote that. But since the Church sometimes "forgets" he penned a gentle reminder.

At the beginning of the Modern Period—in December of 1646 to be exact—the famous Archbishop of Kiev and Moldovan by birth, Kyr Peter Movila, wrote: "A parish priest should spare no effort urging his parishioners to cleanse their conscience through the Mystery of Holy Repentance frequently by confessing their sins in the four holy fasts during the course of the year," which has long been our guideline here. (The custom of coming to Confession specifically during the Great Fast is buried in Christian antiquity.)

Metropolitan Movila goes on: "Frequently let [a parish priest] instruct all the people in church... to humble themselves before God and cleanse their sins through holy Confession, and not just the head of the household and his wife, but his children too."

"To this end, he should teach each of them to search and examine his conscience well" and "recall his sins," which is an important goal of the Common Confession Rite.

The Common Confession Rite speaks to additional concerns of such a teacher: a sense of humility, which is nothing more than knowledge of

Daylight Saving Time begins Sunday, March 9.

the truth about oneself, a sense of contrition, which is sorrow for sin precisely as affront to the Father's love, and purposeful resolve to do better—in word and deed and thought—in future.

As to what Father Alexander calls the confession proper in his document on this subject, “*i.e.*, the enumeration by the priest of all acts, thoughts and desires with which we offend the holiness of God, the sanctity of our neighbor, and the sanctity of our own soul...” the Common Confession Rite realizes his important criterion: “This enumeration will not be a formal one, but sincere, and will be done in a ‘contrite and humbled’ heart [Ps. 50.19], will be done on behalf of *us*, rather than aimed at *you*, and in this enumeration each one will acknowledge his confession, and truly repent.”

As we have been doing, we will hold two communal confession rites on two consecutive Sundays: March 9 and 16.

The Pasch is coming (April 18–20) and the Church would prepare herself to celebrate the Death and Resurrection of the Lord by committing herself anew to the Baptism by which she is united to him. From time immemorial, through the reading of the Gospel, the Church has been calling her sons and daughters to renew themselves through confession and a season of penitence so that, come the Great and Holy Week, all come together with one heart and one mind in baptismal renewal with the same song on their lips.

So pick a Sunday. When we come together we evangelize one another. Come on time. Come in the right frame of mind. Bear witness to our younger members. Let us open our hearts to the word of Christ.

2 March 2014

To the Very Reverend Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke's account of the parable of Prodigal Son, we hear the following words of the son to the father: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.” While all of us have received the spirit of sonship (Romans 8.15), like the Prodigal Son, we have squandered that gift and have rejected the pledge of future inheritance.

And yet today, we are given that opportunity to come before our Heavenly Father as repentant children, crying, “Abba, Father, turn not Thy face from Thy servant, for I am afflicted; hear me speedily, draw near unto my soul, and deliver it!” (Psalm 68(69).17–18). The present season of repentance allows us to assess what we are doing with our lives, discerning what has caused us to turn away from sonship and striving to regain the spirit of sonship through the acquisition of love.

Through the examples of Moses's forty days and nights without food or drink [?] on Mount Sinai, and the forty days and forty nights that our Lord fasted in the desert, we are reminded of Saint Simeon of Thessalonica's words: “Fasting is the work of God.” And it is this work that takes place in the arena of repentance—Great Lent.

While our battle takes place within this world, we know from the words of the Apostle that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Corinthians 10.4). Rather, the weapon given to us by our Lord is His commandment to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 13.34). This commandment is the basis on which we will be judged by the Son of Man at His awesome second coming. When we saw the least one hungry, did we love him? When we saw the least one imprisoned, did we love him? When we saw the least one homeless and a stranger, did we love him? If we do any of these tasks, if we give of all that we possess but do not do it in response to Christ's commandment, we have gained nothing (1 Corinthians 13.3).

We are given this time of the Great Fast to grow closer to God and His Holy Church. But, before we can even begin to take steps toward a closer relationship with our Lord and Savior, we must learn to love, for “whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4.8).

Brothers and sisters: I too have sinned before heaven and before you, and thus I beg your forgiveness for my failings, and I ask for your prayers as I assure you of mine.

As we enter together into the season of Great Lent, let us “cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, that having sailed across the great sea of the Fast, we may reach the third-day Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of our souls” (Aposticha at Vespers, Sunday of Forgiveness).

With love in Christ,

+Tikhon

Archbishop of Washington

Metropolitan of All America and Canada

Fasting: The Rules and the Individual from Fr. Ted Bobosh's blog, 2 March 2014.

While today many Orthodox assume there is only one way to keep the Great Fast, we know from the writings of the saints that they did not insist on a one-size-fits-all approach to fasting. St. John Cassian (+435AD) was a disciple of St. John Chrysostom and one of the great spiritual writers of his time who helped spread Christian ascetical spirituality throughout the Roman Empire in the 5th Century. He is an early witness to an ancient Orthodox tradition that recognizes a monastic rule cannot artificially imposed on everyone, not even on all monks. He did not

have a monolithic view of all monks or Christians, nor did he teach that all Christians could walk in lockstep with absolute obedience to one fasting rule. St. John Cassian writes:

“And so a uniform rule concerning the manner of fasting cannot easily be kept because not all bodies have the same strength, nor is it, like the other virtues, achieved by firmness of mind alone. And therefore, since it does not consist in strength of mind alone, inasmuch as it depends on what the body is capable of, we have accepted the following understanding of it that was passed onto us: There are different times, manners, and qualities with respect to eating that are in accordance with the varied conditions, ages, and sexes of bodies, but there is one rule of discipline for everyone with regard to an abstinent and virtuous mind. For not everyone is able to prolong a fast for weeks, or to put off eating food for three or even two days. Many people who are worn out by sickness and especially old age cannot endure a fast even until sunset without considerable hardship.

A starveling meal of moistened beans does not suit everyone, nor is the frugality of plain vegetables adequate for all, nor is an austere diet of dry bread appropriate for all. One person does not feel full with two pounds, while another is surfeited with a meal of one pound or six ounces. Nonetheless there is one end of abstinence in all these instances—that no one, according to the measure of his own capacity, be burdened by voracious satiety. For it is not only the quality of food but also its quantity that dulls the heart’s keenness, and when both the mind and the flesh have been sated the glowing kindling of the wicked vices is set ablaze.” (*The Institutes*, pgs.119–120)

St. John Cassian’s rule which he claims is *the* tradition which he received (“we have accepted the following understanding of it that was passed onto us”) is simply not to eat to the point of satiety. Leave the table feeling some hunger—how much each person eats or what they eat is less important than that they learn self control: one says ‘no’ to oneself at the table even when still a bit hungry. In some ways, for a culture such as ours which is used to consuming everything to the point of satiety and beyond, this is a harder rule to learn and follow. It is a fasting rule not focusing on food types (substituting soy for beef, or vegetables for cheese) but considering quantity as well. We can eat to satiety as vegetarians and vegans just as easily as our more carnivorous fellow humans. St. John offers us a different way to approach fasting—a way that is part of the Patristic Tradition—that we approach our meals with a conscious desire to eat less, to not satisfy our wants, to experience hunger spiritually not just physically.

For St. John the real goal here is “an abstinent and virtuous mind.” We are trying to discipline ourselves to

learn an attitude or an approach not just to food but to life in the world. It is much more a matter of the heart than of the stomach, or perhaps of helping the heart rule the stomach. Like the apostles on the road to Emmaus, we want our meals to reveal Christ to us.

We are not meant to spend more time during the Forty Days focusing on food, but less than we normally do so that we can focus on spiritual issues: issues of the heart, the soul and the mind by saying “no” to the body whose voracious appetite (including lusts, cravings, hungers and passions) often drives us through life, causing us to veer off of the the way to the Kingdom of Heaven.

We are not endeavoring to starve ourselves for 40–50 days and then to gorge ourselves at Pascha. We are supposed to be teaching ourselves an approach to life in the world of the fall which will not distract us from the Kingdom of God but will keep us ever moving toward living in love for God and love for our neighbor.

Encourage one another daily while it is still “**today**,” so that no one grows hardened by the lure of sin.

—Hebrews 3.13

We should not absent ourselves from the [Eucharistic] assembly as some are in the habit of doing, but [we should] encourage one another, and this all the more as you see **the Day** [=the *Morrow*] drawing near.

—Hebrews 10.25

Regarding the Eucharistic fast for the PreSanctifieds and related matters.

As we have been doing these many years, there will be potluck meals following the PreSanctifieds at St. Luke’s. Bring what you can, *if* you can. But come. There is always plenty of food.

Regarding the fast (these are the guidelines put forward so many years ago by Bishop Basil Rodzianko) keep the Eucharistic fast as best you can. If not from morning, at least from lunchtime. (In point of fact, fasting for the entire day is not all that difficult, though some may disagree—*Ed.*) As for older children: let them have a small snack when they come home from school. (Fasting is not for younger children, the ill, or the elderly.) Common sense applies.

Keep it simple.

Here’s what a modern *Priest’s Service Book* (Church of Greece, Athens, 1962, pg. 211) has to say:

“The Divine Liturgy of the PreSanctified, realized for the sanctification of the faithful, is served every Wednesday and Friday of the Great Forty Days, ... Thursday of the Great Canon, [and] Great Monday, Great Tuesday, and Great Wednesday....

“The Divine Liturgy of the PreSanctified is served always after the [Ninth] Hour, at Vespers, **because of the all-day fast**. It is done usually by a single priest, alone, without a deacon....

“While the Ninth Hour is being read, priestly ministers take leave and enter the sanctuary and put on simple **black** vestments, but **no** [pectoral] **crosses** or priestly awards....”

Apostrophe on the word *fast*.

Fast is a Germanic word. Primarily it means abstaining from food; secondarily it means eating sparingly or abstaining from some foods. It comes into the Slavic languages as *post*. The Greek word is *nēsteía* and it means the same thing: not eating, and, secondarily, not eating some foods.

Everyone knows the basic meaning of the word *fast*. The doctor tells you he wants you to come in for a blood test *fasting*, you know he means that you should eat nothing when you get up on the morning and that you will have nothing to eat until after the test. Fasting is *not eating*. And, fasting is *from the morning*.

From antiquity Christians would keep a fast by not eating all day and then taking a meal in the evening. It's the original idea behind the Wednesday/Friday fast. This is biblical stuff.

One can imagine that whatever spiritual benefits derive from fasting would come to a person regardless of how he broke his fast, in other words, regardless of what he ate.

One can fast for a day. One can fast for a period of time. The Great Forty Days for example.

One may fast—not eat all day, then eat—Monday through Friday. One may not fast—not eat all day, then eat—on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day. The Church nixes Saturdays and Sundays. Not at first, but very early in her history. It's why the Liturgy is served Sunday *mornings*—to minimize and confine the Eucharistic fast. The first ecumenical council (Nikaia, 325 A.D.) makes an exception for the Holy and Great Sabbath which, a thousand years ago, was a day of fasting that concluded in the evening with Vespers with the Divine Liturgy during which neophytes were baptized and the Resurrection celebrated—everyone took holy Communion. (One can appreciate that the fast on this Saturday—like the eves of the Nativity and Theophany—was a *Eucharistic* fast leading into the feast.)

So. One fasts—one does not eat all day, then eats—Monday through Friday. Additionally, at the same time, one abstains from certain foods—*e.g.*, meat, dairy, *etc.* This is the only aspect of a fast period that continues over Saturday and Sunday. To use more precise language for our situation today: one *fasts*—one does not eat, then eats—and one *abstains*—one does not eat certain foods. Together they make up the Orthodox Christian notion of keeping a fast. Interestingly enough, these terms turn up in the hymnography we sing during the time of the Great Fast.

Abstinence

For most of us today what “fasting” we do is better termed *abstinence*. Abstaining from meat. Abstaining from dairy. Unfortunately this has led to label reading as an exercise in seasonal piety. Furgedaboutit.

Fr. Meyendorff came down heavily on label reading. He called label reading phariseeism. “Do what you can,” he would say. Want to do more? Do more of what the Church's tradition urges us to do. Enter more deeply into what the Church around the world is doing. Prayer. Fasting. Almsgiving. Eschew silly notions. Like “Giving up Coke.” Or “Giving up chocolate.” Or some such. Pious solipsism. What value can there be in that? Better, think of fasting as training for the race, for the Christian life. Think of it as the nourishment for a sovereign spirit (remember? Psalm 50?): for self-control, for prudence, and perseverance

We are a community of dependent creatures. No food and we're done for. Fasting and abstinence have worthwhile spiritual and moral goals. The Orthodox world is full of SOBs who fast by the book. And they are still SOBs. Let us do everything and anything to avoid that.

One last word. Illness brings its own asceticism.

3 March 2014

Divorce debate poses dilemma for Vatican

The Vatican is actively discussing the reforms of the Roman Catholic Church, including the attitude of the Holy See towards divorce, which is banned by the Catholic Church. Divorce Reform is only part of an extensive programme of reforms which Pope Francis—the new Pope who was elected by the Papal Conclave in Spring last year—promised to carry out during his reign. Strange as it may seem but the Orthodox scheme for divorce—in exclusive cases though, is also figuring among the options on the offer list.

The first sovereign of the Vatican from the New World (Pope Francis hails from Argentina and the first Jesuit Pope has already ordered that questionnaires including 39 questions be sent to all Catholic parishes of the world. Among other things, respondents are due to voice their attitude towards the reform of the financial system, social equality, sex, gays, unisex marriages, and divorce. Their answers will be systematized by a college consisting of 9 cardinals to be able to propose reform options at the Synod of Catholic Hierarchs set for this October.

What is meant here is a kind of the “mild reform” process, which Pope Francis plans to carry out, a theologian and expert on the Vatican, Robert Mickens, an observer with the international Catholic news weekly “The Tablet” says.

“The polemics around such issues as the family, marriage and related issues is heating up now. The main problem now is that the number of Orthodox believers is going down. Hence, it is necessary to start searching for answers to a large variety of questions relating to the Family and Marriage field, where certain problems are currently emerging. The Vatican's questionnaire is expect-

ed to help the Holy See learn more about the Catholics' attitude towards the above-mentioned problem".

As is known, the attitude of the Orthodox Church towards religious matter as well as towards the necessity to bring religious laws into conformity with modern times has always been far more flexible than that of the Catholic Church. And one of such examples is its attitude towards divorce.

The Russian Orthodox Church encourages neither divorce nor remarrying. And still, in exclusive cases divorce is permissible. Meaning, among other things, adultery, change of beliefs, and perverted vices. AIDS, chronic alcohol use, and drug addiction have been added to this list in recent years. And one more thing here. The divorce procedure is permissible if a woman decides to have an abortion without her husband's consent. Approximately, 24 motives altogether. And remarrying is permissible only after repentance. Thus, in many cases the Orthodox Church is far more flexible than the Vatican.

It is very hard to say at the moment what recommendations the Catholic Church hierarchs will work out by the Vatican Summit, which is set for this October but it is absolutely clear now that the Vatican is in dire need of reforms. The Vatican is losing the flock. It's high time that it modernize its dogmas. Of course, it does not mean that it should give them all up, Chester Gillis, Professor in the Department of Theology at Georgetown University (USA) says. It should also be taken into account that quite a number of Catholics in Latin America and Europe have changed their beliefs and converted to Protestantism or Social Evangelism in recent years. The number of Catholics is falling in Europe, Chester Gillis says, adding that Europe is gradually losing its interest in religion as such."

Judging by the heated discussions which are currently underway, one can say that the upcoming reforms have excited Catholic Libertarians. The Episcopate of the city of Freiburg in the south-west of Germany has already prepared a new admonition for involving clerics' marriages. It says that the divorced and remarried will be allowed to receive the sacraments and divine graces only in exclusive cases. To cool them down, Vatican Spokesman Federico Lombardi made a statement, asking them not to "pass ahead of" Pope Francis because no decision on relevant issues has not yet been made.

http://voiceofrussia.com/news/2014_03_03/Divorce-debate-poses-dilemma-for-Vatican-2703/

A Greek Take on the Time: Clean Monday, Everything You Need to Know

by Konstantinos Menzel — 2 March 2014

Kathári Dévtera, Greek for Clean Monday, is considered to be one of the most important feasts all over Greece, each year commencing the 40-day period of the Great Lent for the Eastern Greek Orthodox Church, which is called

"Sarakosti." The feast begins on the first day of the 7th week before the Orthodox Easter Sunday.

Liturgically though, Clean Monday and thus Lent itself begins on the preceding Sunday night, at a special service, in which all present will bow down before one another and ask for forgiveness. In this way, the faithful begin the Great Lent with a clean conscience, forgiveness and renewed Christian love.

Clean Monday also puts an end to the preceding Carnival [=Bye-bye meat — Ed.] celebrations, inviting all Orthodox Christians to leave behind the sinful attitudes associated with Carnival festivities and non-fasting foods, which were largely consumed during the three weeks of the Carnival.

As a result, the feast, which is a public holiday in Greece and Cyprus, is celebrated with outdoor excursions, the consumption of shellfish and other fasting foods, as well as the widespread custom of building and flying kites.

Culinary Delights of Clean Monday

Eating meat, eggs and dairy products is traditionally forbidden to Orthodox Christians throughout Lent, with fish being eaten only on major feast days. The consumption of shellfish and mollusks though, is permitted in Greek Orthodox Churches, thus creating the tradition of eating elaborate dishes based on seafood, like cuttlefish, octopus and different shellfish, like shrimp and mussels. A traditional dip made of the salted and cured roe from carp or cod, mixed with olive oil, lemon juice and bread crumbs, called "taramosalata," is also part of the products consumed on Clean Monday.

Taramosalata is ideal for spreading on the "lagana," a special kind of unleavened flatbread, baked only on that day. The history behind this bread dates from the Old Testament and to the help offered by God to the Israeli people while guiding them from Egypt to their promise land. Since then, Israelis have baked the lagana throughout the Easter period, hence introducing the tradition to the Orthodox Church.

Accompanying these delights are also black-eyed beans or just common baked beans, grape-leaf wrapped rice balls called "dolma" and of course some Greek wine or tsipouro.

As for dessert, an alteration to the familiar Arab "halva" is served, which is made of tahini, a sesame paste, and sugar, often combined by nuts or chocolate and baked in a square or cylindrical shape.

Traditions of Clean Monday

Clean Monday, however, is not only associated with eating fasting products, but features also many traditions being held all over Greece. Traditionally, as Clean Monday is considered to mark the beginning of the spring season, kite flying is also part of the tradition. Young people and adults organize excursions to open areas, so as to fill the skies with their kites. Many traditional workshops are

involved in making kites for over 70 years now. Although the wooden kites have been replaced by plastic ones, the kite-making handcraft still has its own secrets. A light wooden frame on a paper body, cords on the balances and a single cord on the tail make up for the perfect kite, ready to carry children and grown-ups off their feet.

Apart from kite flying, many areas in Greece maintain their own regional customs. In Thebes, an old custom dating from 1830, called the “Vlach Wedding,”—in reference to the matchmaking of the time—is revived each year, with all participants joining the festivities with satirical songs and lots of dancing.

Meanwhile, in the village Mesta on the Greek island of Chios, according to another Clean Monday custom, which bears its roots from the period of Ottoman Greece, the village is invaded by an Ottoman military officer along with his troops, who after gathering all residents to the central square, makes them pay a fine for the charges brought against them. The collected money is then given as tribute to the cultural association of the village.

The feast of Clean Monday and all associated traditions and celebrations are in the hearts of the Greek people, as they provide an opportunity for leisure and escaping from the daily routine, while coming in contact with nature and the country’s cultural heritage.

<http://greece.greekreporter.com/2014/03/02/http://greece.greekreporter.com/2014/03/02/>

1 March 2014

Syrian [Peace-loving—Ed.] Islamists to Christians: Pay Up Or Be Killed.

Persecutions of Christians by radical Islamists in Syria have acquired new forms. In the city of Ar-Raqqah in Syria’s north, members of the group “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” have stated that they would “grant their protection” to Christians only if the latter regularly pay render to Islamists and perform fewer Christian church services. Russia’s authorities are qualifying this as violation of basic human rights.

After they have seized control over Ar-Raqqah, Islamists introduced there a policy that has already been practiced by Muslim authorities in captured areas with non-Muslim population centuries ago. They ordered Christians to pay a “tax” for their right of keeping to their faith—otherwise, Islamists do not guarantee that they wouldn’t kill them. The amount of the “tax” is from 1 to 4 dinars.

Christians are not allowed to pray in churches, to build new churches or repair old ones, to wear crosses and other symbols of Christian faith, to drink wine, to eat pork and to keep weapons at home. Christian women are ordered to wear traditional eastern costumes, including headscarfs. In fact, Christians in Ar-Raqqah now have

to choose between converting to Islam and being killed.

Christians in Ar-Raqqah make less than 1 percent of the city’s population.

The heads of various Christian denominations have been saying for already a long time that Syrian Islamists are leading a deliberate policy of repressions against Christians in their country. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill for already three years has been calling on the world community to stand against killings of Christians only for being Christians. In 2013 alone, more than 70,000 Christians were killed in Syria, the Patriarch says.

“The Orthodox Church and the entire world are shocked by the horrors of the civil war in Syria,” Kirill says. “All over Syria, Christians—both archbishops and rank-and-file priests, monks and nuns—are being killed or kidnapped. We cannot remain indifferent to the fate of our brothers and sisters in Christ.”

Last year, the Russian Orthodox Church sent several dozens of tons of humanitarian aid to Syria. Besides, more than 40 mln rubles were collected in Russian parishes to help Syrian Christians.

The Russian Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, which organizes pilgrimages of Russian believers to Palestine and which is, by the way, the oldest Russian nongovernmental organization, is doing much to help Christians in Syria. Together with the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations, the Russian Palestine Society has sent 9 planes with humanitarian aid to Syria, including baby food, school utilities for children, canned food, water and warm clothes.

In an interview with the Voice of Russia, Deputy Chairperson of the Russian Imperial Palestine Society Elena Agapova said:

"Last March, our society announced that it was collecting humanitarian aid. In April, when Syria celebrates Independence Day, we sent the first lot of aid to Syria. Later, we sent a lot of advanced medical equipment to a hospital in Damascus. Recently, a group of Russian MPs visited Syria. Three members of this delegation were representatives of our society."

In late February, the Chairman of the Russian Palestinian Society met with the head of the Roman Catholic Church Pope Francis. The Pope and other representatives of the Catholic Church from various parts of the world have also called many times on the warring sides in Syria to conclude a truce and not to kill civilians, and on the world community – to try its best to stop the bloody conflict in Syria and not to let it spread into other countries of the Middle East.

Here is Elena Agapova again:

"The position of Pope Francis towards the current

events in Syria is clearly-cut: what is taking place there is a tragedy for all Christians in the world. At present, the entire Syria has turned into a battlefield where terrorists are killing innocent people, destroying Christian churches and desecrating Christian shrines. Terrorists are cynically killing or kidnaping Christians, both priests, nuns and lay people, although Christianity is a religion of love and friendship. The Russian Palestinian Society is maintaining a close dialogue with the Holy See of the Roman Catholic Church in trying to solve the Syrian conflict. When the Chairman of our Society met with the Pope, they spoke mainly about the situation in Syria."

However, unfortunately, the calls of religious leaders are not always supported by some politicians. Thus, recently, Syrian Archbishop Jacques Behnan Hindo openly said that Europe and the US are deliberately ignoring the facts of repressions against Christians in Syria.

http://voiceofrussia.com/2014_03_01/Syrian-Islamists-to-Christians-pay-off-or-be-killed-7005/

Romanian PM offers Pope Francis an Orthodox icon and T-shirt autographed by Hagi.

An Orthodox icon and a T-shirt signed by Romanian footballer Gheorghe Hagi, this is what Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta offered Pope Francis during his recent visit to the Vatican. In exchange, he received a medal, and an icon for his son's upcoming birthday. The Orthodox icon given to the Pope was sent by Romania's Patriarch.

Pope Francis received Ponta at Apostolic Palace in the Vatican, in the private library. The Romanian Prime Minister was accompanied in his Vatican visit by his wife Daciana, who is also a Member of the European Parliament, by Foreign Affairs Minister Titus Corlăţean, Environment Minister Rovana Plumb and another MEP, Corina Cretu, vice-president of the Socialist group in the European Parliament.

Among topics discussed during the meeting between the Romanian PM and Pope Francis were the collaboration between Romania and the Holy See, supporting human rights, religious freedom and fighting discrimination of Christians across the world. The Romanian PM thanked the Pope for allowing representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church serving the country's communities in Italy to use local churches for divine services and religious events.

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Keeping up. — All PreSanctifieds will be on a Thursday, no exceptions.

Sometime during the Forty Days Father Paul plans to watch *Babette's Feast*. If you'd like to join him, give him a call. We can figure out a day and a time.

Any chance of a few people giving reading and discussing Father Meyendorff's book, *The Orthodox Church*, a second try? We'd need a place to gather. And a time.