



The Stream

A monthly publication of the Diocese of South-West America

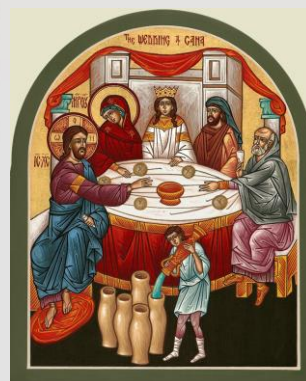
February 2014

February 2014
Vol. 3 Issue 2

"When the fast makes its appearance, like a kind of spiritual summer, let us as soldiers burnish our weapons, and as harvesters sharpen our sickles, and as sailors order our thoughts against the waves of extravagant desires, and as travelers set out on the journey toward heaven. Lay hold of the pathway which leads towards heaven, rugged and narrow as it is. Lay hold of it, and journey on..."

- St. John Chrysostom -

GREAT LENT 2014



'Kothine' Sunday

March 2

*Beginning of the
Great Lent*



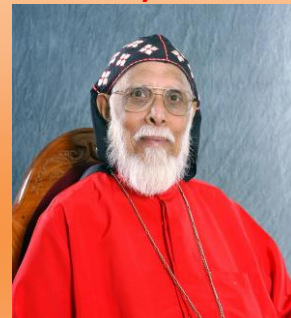
St. Dionysius
Vattasseril



Feb 23



Memory Eternal



*H.G. Dr. Thomas
Mar Makarios
Metropolitan
(Feb 23)*



MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!!

**DIOCESAN CLERGY RETREAT
AND DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY**

May 15 - May 17, 2014

"Urshlem"

Indian Orthodox Christian Center
3101 Hopkins Road, Beasley, TX 77417

What's News this Month

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Do you have articles or news you would like to share in 'The Stream' newsletter? Would you like to share 'The Stream' with your family and friends? Please e-mail us at thestreamdswa@gmail.com

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Metropolitan's Column

Metropolitan's Column

Dearly Beloved,

The season of Great Lent is the most important period in the liturgical year of every Orthodox Church in the world. Fasting, prayers, prostrations and almsgiving are important tools to be used by the faithful during this season. Through the practice of these rituals, we can discipline our body, mind and soul in order to gain strength and victory in the constant spiritual battles we encounter in the world. Jesus Christ Himself is the perfect role model of fasting and intense prayer. Meditating on the forty days of fasting of Moses, Elijah and our Lord will help prepare us to embrace the Risen Lord.

Repentance is an important theme during the Great Lent. The word repentance means a change of mind, a change of heart. A critical aspect of repentance is introspection. By looking into ourselves we can get rid of many of the shortcomings from our earlier life. Let us use this Lent to make an inventory of all the things we may have thought or said or done that resulted in God being disappointed in us, using self-reflection to help us repent of all our sins.

By putting into practice the various tools and rituals of Lent, combined with a genuine attempt at repentance through introspection, this season of Great Lent should lead all of us to take the decision to lead a holy life by witnessing and experiencing the passion and resurrection of Christ. Throughout our journey during this Great Lent, may the prayers of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, departed clergy and all the faithful departed be a stronghold for us.

**Your shepherd in Christ,
Alexios Mar Eusebius**

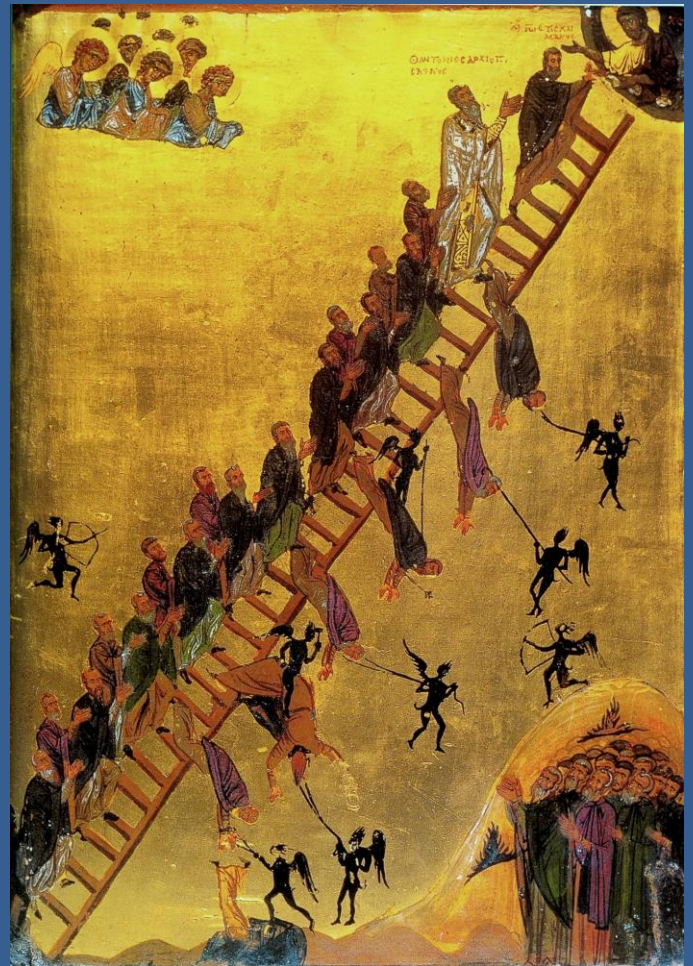
Faith Study

Approaching the Gates of Great Lent - Rev. Fr. James Cheriyan, Detroit

Why would I call the Great Lent 'a gate'? Very often we fall into a pit of spiritual deception when we begin to define the fullness of our lent in its mere exterior abstinences. All abstinences, lents, fasts, prostrations and other forms of spiritual labor are mere gates. They are only means to an end. The end being a life in Christ - sanctified, illumined and deified/transformed. Of course, if we begin to take the means to our end casually, then the journey towards our destination becomes even more difficult. Hence the experience of fasting, abstinence (both internal and external), prostrations, prayers, charity etc. should become our pointers to Christ our ultimate destination.

Great Lent is not just about taking a break from hamburgers, chicken/beef/fish curry, or other food items that are pleasing to our tastes, but it is about breaking the yokes of gossip, pride, envy, anger, lust, hopelessness, addictions and all internal passions that rage within us. Lent invites us to leave the world aside and to enter into the Presence of the Living God. Moses had to climb up from the foot of Mount Sinai to its top. Spiritual ascent is never easy. On the contrary, it is something that begins to seem impossible and irrelevant when we are not focused on such an ambition at all. We have alienated God from us for the cares of this passing world. Lent calls us for a struggle, a spiritual warfare against the darkness found within us and thereby re-igniting the fire of the Holy Spirit, which was given to us at baptism. Become a combat soldier against the principalities of darkness, and see how great is the power God grants those who seek Him and His precepts.

The true and only vocation of our lives is to become like God. If you think this is something that has not been on your list of priorities, now is a perfect time to knock on the Door of Mercy through confession, fervent resolutions, immense prayer, fasting and tears of repentance. We live in times where prayer and tears of repentance have become so immensely necessary and yet so scarce. Let us turn to the greatest need of our lives so that we may truly become living icons of Christ, the true image and likeness of our Creator.



The 12th century Ladder of Divine Ascent icon (St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai Peninsula, Egypt) showing monks led by St. John Climacus ascending the ladder to Jesus at the top right.



Sooboro
Wednesday Prayer

Let us unite to pray for others!

Tele-Prayer Meeting in Malayalam
 From 10:20am to 11:30am (CST) every Wednesday.
 Bible reading, hymns, devotional message,
 intercessory prayer for the needy & the sick.
 Please send prayer requests to: sooboro@ds-wa.org
 Phone #: (218) 632-0187
 Access code: 3703#



A Pilgrimage to Kerala

A Pilgrimage to the Holy Shrines of the Indian Orthodox Church in Kerala - Jose & Gloria Alvarado

The state of Kerala and the town of Mezhuveli are two places in India that until recently were unknown to me or my husband. Our knowledge about India was limited to what was learned in our USA classrooms, from movies such as Gandhi, and occasional news items that we hear from that part of the world. We have been married for twenty five years. Professionally, we are both Registered Nurses in Kaiser, San Francisco. We are both youth ministers in our local Pentecostal, Evangelical Church. Jose is nearing completion of a Bachelor's Degree in Christian Religion and Theology.

We met Fr. Mathew Alakot of the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church a few years ago. With great patience, he has enhanced our knowledge about Indian Orthodox Christianity. As Evangelical Christians, the last piece of knowledge we have about the Apostle St. Thomas is when he made his act of faith in the risen Jesus: "My Lord, and my God". Under Fr. Mathew's guidance we learnt about the two thousand year relationship that the Apostle Thomas has had with Indian Orthodox Christians. He is credited with bringing the Good News to India, beginning in Kerala. After a few delightful and informative conversations with Fr. Mathew about the religious practices and belief system of the Orthodox Church, we had the privilege of attending a *Holy Qurbana* in Freemont, CA and in Watsonville, CA. Both Eucharistic celebrations were officiated by him. This was an invaluable experience not just for our knowledge but also for our spiritual growth. Although the language of celebration was Malayalam we felt a strong connection with the congregation present. Shortly afterward we had the idea of accompanying Fr. Mathew to India on his yearly visit to see his family and to be part of the Alakot family reunion. At the same time, taking advantage of our medical knowledge, he also extended to us an invitation to teach first aid skills in Mezhuveli. We were delighted to accept his invitation.

We arrived at Cochin International Airport at 3:00 AM on May 9, and were met by Moni, Fr. Mathew's cousin. On arrival, we had difficulty in adjusting to the local summer time temperature and humidity which were in direct contrast to the foggy and cold summer climate of San Francisco. In the chaotic traffic Moni proved to be an expert driver. While searching for his friend's home we travelled through the narrow and gloomy streets of Cochin. That same morning we set out for our first destination which was the Catholic church at Malayattoor. It

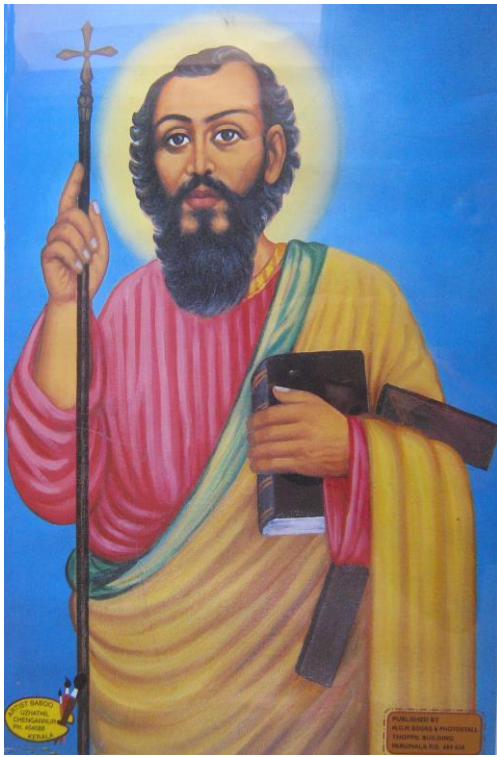


was no easy task getting there, climbing the Kurisumala (Hill of the Cross) on foot was treacherous. The abundant greenery provided protection from the sun. We were deeply affected at the sight of the old and the lame trying to make it with up the hill with little help and no shoes, while others were running up and then down the hill with items on their heads continuously chanting "O Patriarch of the Golden Cross! Climb we shall, this golden hill!" The

-cont'd on next page



A Pilgrimage to Kerala - cont'd



crosses found at the summit are massive; all of them had been carried by people of different churches. At the summit there is the ancient church, a life size statue of Saint Thomas, a set of his footprints, the fountain from which he drank water and which now is believed to have healing power. We had a magnificent view of the fields below. This special place seemed to be unkempt and uncared for but this does not deter from the supernatural feeling of being close to the footsteps of one of the twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus.

We were honored to have stayed at Fr. Mathew's home with his mother and sister. While there, we met some neighbors and most of the Alakot family while they gathered for their family reunion. We were received with great friendship and were made part of the celebration. We were among the participants at a *Rasa*, one of the *Holy Innocent's Church* processions, in remembrance of St. George. Frs. Mathew and Jacob headed the procession. It was a two and a half mile walk, holding candles, singing at the beat of drums, and enjoying some sweets that were given to us by people when the procession passed in front of their homes and the humble shrines that they had erected.

On Sunday, May 12, we attended the Holy Qurbana at the *Holy Innocent's Church*. Then it was down to business. We were given the opportunity to teach First Aid that afternoon to 40 people, men and women, young and old, who wanted to learn how to care for those needing medical assistance. They were very receptive and eager to learn in a grueling six hour class during the hottest hours of the day. We admired the efforts they made to learn new healing skills in a foreign language. It was their love for others that inspired them to do so.

During the days that followed, we visited other places of spiritual and historical importance to the Orthodox Church. The most memorable is *Devalokam*, the headquarters (Holy See) of the Indian Orthodox Church, residence of H.H. Baselios Marthoma Paulose II. Of all the places that we visited, this was the place that inspired us most, to be in the presence of St. Thomas' remains was overwhelming. We could not help but weep while meditating on the Apostle's life with the Messiah and his subsequent mission to India. We felt so privileged to have been allowed to enter the shrine and also the burial site of the three Orthodox Patriarchs.

We also visited St. Mary's Church in Niranam, founded in A.D. 54 by St. Thomas, and the *Leaning Cross Church*, famous for the oath taken there by the Kerala Christian Orthodox community not to submit to Portuguese dominance in 1653. A replica of this latter church is being built in Cochin. This project is headed by Fr. Thomas with whom we were privileged to have dined with. Of great importance is Parumala, where the Holy Shrine of St. Gregory (Mar Gregorios) is located. On the evening prior to our visit to this church Fr. Mathew gave us a teaching on Baptism and when we entered the Church there was a baptism of two girls. This was a coincidence but his instruction came alive with the experience. A Bishop was officiating at the ceremony and he invited Fr. Mathew to join him with four other priests at the altar. When the service was over His Grace greeted and blessed us. -----

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MGOC SM DEVOTIONALS

<http://www.mgocsmamerica.com/devotionals>

MGOC SM North America releases weekly devotionals based on the Gospel readings for each week. These devotionals are written by leaders of the Church- both clergy and lay leaders. This is a great way to revamp your week with self-reflection and in the word. Please subscribe and spread the word in your areas as well

Around the Diocese

MGOCSM Council Meeting Held in LA

The Diocese of South-West America (DS-WA) held its first MGOCSM Council Meeting of 2014 from January 17-19 in California, the location of this year's MGOCSM National Leadership Camp. The gathering took place at St. Thomas Orthodox Church, Los Angeles. The weekend officially began with evening prayer on Friday and was followed by the Council meeting which was split over two days. Presiding over the meeting was His Grace Alexios Mar Eusebius (Metropolitan and President of DS-WA MGOCSM), and in attendance were MGOCSM leaders, Rev. Fr. Joel Mathew (General Secretary), Sangeetha Thomas (Joint-Secretary), Rejina Mathew (Treasurer), and the eight Area Council Members. A few of the items discussed during the meetings were: improving the Campus Ministry initiative, continuation of the Weekly Devotionals, and the printing of a Sh'himo prayer book specifically designed for students and families. The meetings were also a great opportunity for the Area Council Members to exchange ideas about ministry initiatives and/or the struggles within their respective areas. Afterward, the California Leadership Camp Committee presented various aspects of their progress and received feedback from the Council. In addition to the Council meetings, the weekend also consisted of praying the hours of the Sh'himo as well as plenty of time for fellowship which came to a culmination with Holy Qurbana on Sunday.

***Diocesan Metropolitan Inaugurates Raffle for St. Mary's Houston***

The Diocesan Metropolitan H.G. Alexios Mar Eusebius inaugurated the Fundraising Raffle of the **St. Mary's Malankara Orthodox Church, Houston, Texas**. By the grace of God and by the generous contributions of their own members and several well-wishers over the past 3 years they purchased 3.05 acres of land in a prime location in Southwest Houston near our old Diocesan Center in Missouri City. They have



recently received ordinance of SUP (Specific Use Permit) to construct worshipping facilities on the acquired land. To raise funds for construction, they are selling \$100 raffle tickets with several grand prizes to be drawn on August 15, 2015. They have asked for the prayers and support of all the faithful and well-wishers to complete this project. May God bless them in their endeavors.

Reflections

My worries

When I was worrying over some issues my youngest daughter, Caroline Elson (Ammu), found this conversation on my wife's Facebook and told me to read it. I want to share this heartfelt story with you, the readers.

Me: God, can I ask you a question?

God: Sure

Me: Promise you won't get mad

God: I promise

Me: Why did You let so much stuff happen to me today?

God: What do u mean?

Me: Well, I woke up late

God: Yes

Me: My car took forever to start

God: Okay

Me: at lunch they made my sandwich wrong & I had to wait

God: Hmmm

Me: On the way home, my phone went DEAD, just as I picked up a call

God: All right

Me: And on top of it all off, when I got home ~I just want to soak my feet in my new foot massager & relax. BUT it wouldn't work!!! Nothing went right today! Why did You do that?

God: Let me see, the death angel was at your bed this morning & I had to send one of My Angels to battle him for your life. I let you sleep through that

Me (humbled): OH

GOD: I didn't let your car start because there was a drunk driver on your route that would have hit you if you were on the road.

Me: (ashamed)

God: The first person who made your sandwich today was sick & I didn't want you to catch what they have, I knew you couldn't afford to miss work.

Me (embarrassed): Okay

God: Your phone went dead because the person that was calling was going to give false witness about what you said on that call, I didn't even let you talk to them so you would be covered.

Me (softly): I see God

God: Oh and that foot massager, it had a shortage that was going to throw out all of the power in your house tonight. I didn't think you wanted to be in the dark.

Me: I'm Sorry God

God: Don't be sorry, just learn to Trust Me.... in All things, the Good & the bad.

Me: I will trust You.

God: And don't doubt that My plan for your day is Always Better than your plan.

Me: I won't God. And let me just tell you God, Thank You for Everything today.

God: You're welcome child. It was just another day being your God and I Love looking after My Children...

Last Breath

When you take your last breath have no regret

When you take your last breath have no greed

When you take your last breath smile and say goodbye

When you take your last breath be thankful

When you take your last breath have joy in your eyes

When you take your last breath have energy in ever motion

When you take your last breath say I love you to everyone

When you take your last breath cry to show feeling not hide them

When you take your last bath take it in full and deep

When you take your last breath don't hold on to this world

When you take your last breath simply let go

When you take your last breath fly don't walk

When you take your last breath be at peace and know that you are loved

When you take your last breath take pride in what you have done

When to take your last breath remember those special moments

When you take your last breath have faith

When you take your last breath die and leave your legend behind

When you take your last look ahead

Because when you take your last breath that is when you meet your Savior

Slootho

Tuesday Prayer

Let us come together for fellowship and intercession!

Tele-Prayer Meeting in English

From 9:05 pm to 9:35 pm (CST) every Tuesday.

Soothoro prayer, Devotional message,

Intercessory prayer for the needy & the sick.

Please send prayer requests to: slootho@ds-wa.org

Phone # (218) 632-0187

Access code: 3703#



A Pilgrimage to Kerala -cont'd

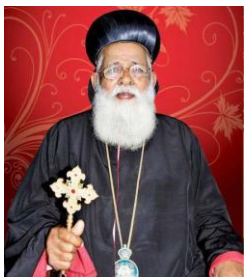
A Pilgrimage to Kerala - Cont'd from p. 5

Another place of great historical and spiritual importance for the Orthodox Church of India is the Shrine of H.H. Mar Ignatius Elias III, Patriarch of Antioch and all of the East. It is situated in Manjanikkara. H.H. came to India in 1931, invited by the British Viceroy to India, Lord Irwin. Despite his frailty and against medical advice, H.H. traveled to India hoping to bring peace to feuding Christian factions in Kerala. He died on February 13th, 1932, failing in his attempt to bring reconciliation to the Malankara church. Our brief visit there has left us with the conviction that as Christians we must strive for peace and harmony. Our pilgrimage brought us to ancient Indian palaces and Hindu temples. Fr. Mathew wanted us to learn not only about Orthodox rites, tradition and history but also about Hinduism. He stated that it is imperative for a student of Christian theology to have some comprehension of Hinduism. We travelled to the very tip of India, where there is a monument to Gandhi containing his ashes. Unbelievable experience! Last but not least, we travelled through "Jew Town" at Cochin and visited the famous synagogue located there.



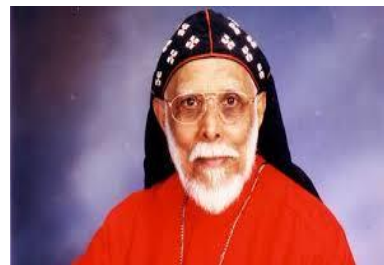
In between our trips, we found time to enjoy the food and a train trip to Thiruvananthapuram where we stayed at a hotel and were greeted by the owner. We even spent a whole day on a house boat with Fr. Mathew's family and friends who included Mrs. Sally Skariah who is a church member in Watsonville, CA and who also cared for us with great love and affection. We made a pilgrimage to the Orthodox shrines of Kerala and to teach some first aid skills. We were amazed by the great learning and experience of spiritual growth that our journey has given us. The Orthodox priests and people that we encountered were a great blessing to us. Above all, we have found a new family, the Alakots, and a new understanding of Orthodox Christianity in India, of which we knew nothing. I think "we left our hearts in Mezhuveli", and are looking forward to a return visit to Kerala.

Memory Eternal



Second Memorial Feast of H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, Metropolitan

The Second Memorial Feast of H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, Metropolitan was celebrated on February 16 & 17 at the St. Paul's Mission Training Center in Mavelikkara. Thirumeni's mortal remains are entombed adjacent to the St. Paul's Mission Training Center Chapel. Thirumeni had a great vision of love and encouraged all those he encountered to share the Love of God and be witnesses of Christ in the world.



Sixth Memorial Feast of H.G. Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios, Metropolitan

The Sixth Memorial Feast of H.G. Dr. Thomas Mar Makarios, the first Metropolitan of the American Diocese, was celebrated on February 23. Thirumeni's mortal remains are entombed adjacent to the Devalokam Catholicate Aramana Chapel. Services and prayers were held throughout America in both dioceses to remember Thirumeni who was a pioneer in the establishment of the Church in North America.

Sabha News



80th Dukhrona of St. Dionysius Vattas

The 80th memorial Feast of the 2nd dec (Dionysius VI - Vattasseril Thirumeni) was Mathews Mar Severios, Metropolitan of Evening prayers on the 21st (Friday) commencing. Evening Prayer at the Seminary commenced with Paulose II and other bishops following with Blessings, dinner was served to all during morning prayer commenced at 7am and at the tombs of St. Dionysius and other bishops. Pazhaya Seminary Facebook Page



© Orthodox Theological Seminary (www.ots.edu.in)



'Kandeela Susrusha' of H.H. Moran Mar Baselios Marthoma Didymus I

The Sacrament of the Holy Anointing of the Sick (Kandeela Susrusha) of H.H. Moran Mar Baselios Marthoma Didymus I was held on Friday Feb 21 at Devalokam Aramana Chapel. All Metropolitans of the Holy Church were in attendance. His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Paulose II, Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan presided over the service.

Kandeela is a more elaborate form of the traditional Holy Sacrament of the Anointing of the sick. When one is ill and in pain, there can very often be a time of life when one feels alone and isolated. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, or Holy Unction as it is also known, reminds us that when we are in pain, either physical, emotional, or spiritual, Christ is present with us through the ministry of his Church. He is among us to offer strength to meet the challenges of life, and even the approach of death. As with Chrismation, oil is also used in this Sacrament as a sign of God's presence, strength, and forgiveness. After the reading of seven epistle lessons, seven gospel lessons and the offering of seven prayers, which are all devoted to healing, the priest anoints the body with the Holy Oil. Orthodoxy does not view this Sacrament as available only to those who are near death. Rather than being 'extreme unction' the Holy Unction is a sacrament that can be received at any stage of illness. It is offered to all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit.

Oil is the symbol of love and compassion. Hence the oil symbolizes divine mercy and compassion with which the sick are anointed. The Holy Unction is administered with the hope and prayer that the person may be cured of his sickness and restored to normal health. The Sacrament of Holy Confession is conducted together with Holy Unction also.

Source: www.ds-wa.org



Lenten Thoughts

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THE GREAT LENT

A LIFE OF PARADISE ON EARTH

RESTORING A LIFE OF BIBLE READING, PRAYERS, AND MEDITATION

Sanctify your Body, Mind,
and Soul through Ascetic
Practices

Remember that
through Holy Baptism
you are born of Water
and Spirit

Continue on
the Path to
Eternal Life

Repent and Seek
Forgiveness

Through the sacraments
of Holy Confession and
Holy Qurbana partake
in the Body and Blood
of Jesus Christ

Be born again
through the Renewal
of the Mind

Stand firmly
against Satan

Commit ourselves
to a righteous life

☆ DURING THIS GREAT LENT ☆

- ❖ Follow the Rules of Abstinence and Lenten Practices prescribed by the Church
- ❖ Read the Scriptures Daily and Pray Unceasingly
- ❖ Fast
- ❖ Participate in Church Services Regularly
- ❖ Give food to those who hunger, and drink to those who thirst
- ❖ Set aside a portion of your wealth for the Needy
- ❖ Be Enthusiastic in Good Works
- ❖ Do not be Wasteful and Avoid Arrogance
- ❖ Forgive Everyone and let go of all Grudges
- ❖ Love your neighbor as yourself