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BULLETIN OF DECEMBER 7, 2008

SUNDAY/DECEMBER 7th
25th Sunday After Pentecost (Tone 8)
St. Ambrose of Milan

9:10a.m. Hours; 9:30a.m. Divine Liturgy
Coffee Hour; Church School
Book-for-the-Month from Parish Library

WEDNESDAY/DECEMBER 10th
6:30p.m. Memorial for Ann Karlovich
7:00p.m. Adult Study Class: "Why God Became
Man - Part II"

THURSDAY/DECEMBER 11th
7:00p.m. Compline with Akathist to
St. Spyridon; Confessions

FRIDAY/DECEMBER 12th
6:30p.m. Memorial for Fr. Alexander
Schmemmann (25th Anniversary)
7:00p.m. Vespers; Confessions

SATURDAY/DECEMBER 13th
St. Herman of Alaska
9:10a.m. Hours; 9:30a.m. Divine Liturgy
5:30p.m. Vigil; Confessions

SUNDAY/DECEMBER 14th
Sunday of the Holy Forefathers
9:10a.m. Hours; 9:30a.m. Divine Liturgy
Coffee Hour; Church School
11:00a.m. Christmas Cookie Walk



Tropar To St. Herman of Alaska Tone 7
O Joyful North Star of the Church of Christ
Guiding all men to the Heavenly Kingdom
Teacher and Apostle of the True Faith
Intercessor and Defender of the Oppressed
Adornment of the Orthodox Church in America
Blessed Father Herman of Alaska
Pray to our Lord Jesus Christ that He have
mercy on our souls!

Nativity 40 Day Lent
(November 15th - December 25th)

A Fast is held from meat, dairy, fish, wine and oil. Certain days allow for modifications, see your parish wall calendar or below.

Sunday	Dec. 07	Fish, wine and oil
Monday	Dec. 08	
Tuesday	Dec. 09	Wine and oil
Wednesday	Dec. 10	
Thursday	Dec. 11	Wine and oil
Friday	Dec. 12	Wine and oil
Saturday	Dec. 13	Fish, wine and oil
Sunday	Dec. 14	Fish, wine and oil

Christmas Cookie Walk

On Sunday, December 14th at 11:00a.m., the Annual Cookie Walk will be held in our Lower Hall. This is a very good fund-raiser. Please sign-up on the sheet on the vestibule stand if you plan to bake something. For more information, contact Jill Peterson (908-541-9586).

2009 Parish Wall Calendars

May be picked up in the church vestibule. One per household please.

2009 Weekly Offering Sheet

For donations of Olive Oil (\$5), Wine (\$10) or Flowers (\$20) is located on the vestibule stand. Please place your offering in an envelope with notation when you sign up.

Cancellations Due to Weather

The Parish Website will indicate any changes to the schedule as necessitated by the weather, at least one hour before the service or event. Please check the website before you leave home if the weather is "iffy."

The Mysteries of Holy Confession and Holy Communion

Should be received by all the faithful in the time of this 40 Day Nativity Lent. Those who desire to partake of Holy Communion on the Feast of the Nativity, December 25th, must have gone to Holy Confession in the time period after November 15th.

Those Who Are Home Bound

Fr. James will be bringing the Holy Mysteries to the homes for those who cannot make it to church. Please call him to make sure you are scheduled to be visited this Nativity Lent.

Congratulations & Many Blessed Years!

To the newly-illuminated servant of God, Nikolas Holot on his Baptism and Chrismation.

Parish Synodicon – Memory Eternal!

40 Days Dec. 27, 2008	Vaschen Sarichisian
40 Days Dec. 31, 2008	Anastasia Barna
December 07, 1999	Fr. Jaroslav Roman
December 09, 1965	Max Horbel
December 09, 1970	Helen Horbel
December 10, 1946	David Gersaemchuk
December 10, 1956	Anthony Pawlik
December 12, 1988	Michael Sofko
December 12, 2004	Ann Kralovich
December 11, 1961	Paul Romanovich
December 12, 1976	Christian Swidonovich
December 14, 1978	Pauline Jackowlew

Mid-Week Mailing

In the middle of the week – usually Wednesday or Thursday, an email is sent to some 50 of our parishioners and friends with information, latest parish news, prayer requests and a few inspirational words. To be added to the list, let Father James know or subscribe on the parish website: www.ssppoc.org

Memory Eternal!

Our sympathy is expressed to Tessie Nevitt and her family and to Stacey Kita and her family on the repose of Richard Nevitt, beloved husband and father on November 30th.

Offerings for the week of December 7th

Olive Oil – in memory of Michael and Justina; in memory of Emilia and Vaschen; in memory of Joan; in memory of William; for the health of Alexander (birthday).

Green Tip

Save a Tree! Stop getting junk mail by signing on to www.directmail.com This is a free service where you can ask advertisers to stop sending mailers to you. You can pick which mailers you want to stop of continue. It's easy and can make a huge impact on our environment.



THE FEAR FACTOR AND CONFESSION

From the Counsels of St. Theophan the Recluse

There are some people who fear Confession. But why? The priest is merely a witness, the Lord forgives the sins. It is He who commands the priest to give absolution to the person who confesses. It is the Lord who is merciful. He is just waiting for a person to confess his sins, and as soon as he does, the Lord immediately forgives him. What is there to fear from such a Lord?

Confession — not a novel but a battle

Православие.Ру / Интернет-журнал, 17 октября 2008 г.
<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/jurnal/7429.htm>

Interview with Archpriest Valerian Krechetov

“How should I tell the priest about my sins? Is a feeling of repentance indispensable during confession? After confession, should one expect a feeling of spiritual relief, or lightness of soul? These beginners’ questions often remain troublesome even for very experienced parishioners. Many of us are too fainthearted to “waste a priest’s time” with such “simple and insignificant” questions. In order to fill in this gap about confession, such “simple and insignificant” questions were given by our NS correspondent Dmitry Rebrov to the highly-respected Protopriest Valerian Krechetov, the senior father-confessor^[1] in the Moscow Diocese and head priest of the Church of the Protection in the village of Akulovo, Moscow Province.



IS REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS POSSIBLE WITHOUT A PRIEST AS INTERMEDIARY?

- Father Valerian, how would you explain to a church-newcomer what confession is and why it is necessary?

- Once a professor at a theological academy gave my father—also a priest—this question during an exam: “Tell me, young batiushka^[2], (and my father was already in his fifties; he was 49 when he entered the seminary), what does God do when he wants to bring someone to Himself? My dad answered this way and that, and the old professor agreed. Yet towards the end, to get at the heart of the matter, he asked, “And what is the most important?” He himself answered, “He sends a person spiritual heaviness and sorrow of soul, so that the person will seek God, so that he will realize that he cannot be delivered from that condition by any earthly means.” And I think this is very true! During his life, a person constantly and inescapably runs into the consequences of his sins. There is a saying, “Live in such a way during the day, so that at night your conscience won’t bite.” This is an expression of folk wisdom: it is certainly true that one’s sleep is disturbed by impressions of what one did, said, or saw during the day. It seems that everything has gone without problems, but then one begins to ponder on some incident or other, and hears a certain voice saying something to him—the voice of conscience. Sometimes a person, seeing that what he has done is irrevocable, takes a terrible step: he decides to “deliver” himself from this earthly life, or he begins to drink. And thus a person falls into a state even more ruinous than that from which he is fleeing. All of this is but anesthesia; the person can’t cure the disease, but he gets rid of the symptoms, or at least numbs himself to them. Searching for a way out of this pain of soul also brings him to see his need for repentance and forgiveness, one of the basic causes compelling a person to go to Church and confession.

- It is often asked, “Why does a person have to go to church and confess before a priest? What’s wrong with repenting alone, by yourself, before God—at home, for example—without an intermediary?”

- If confession in a church isn’t possible for some reason, then it *is* possible to confess this way, without an intermediary. But can a neophyte hear when God says, “Very good, I forgive you?” Saint John of Kronstadt, when he sinned in some way, would pray until he received forgiveness and spiritual healing from God. But does a neophyte have such a degree of communication with God?

People have a natural need for personal contact. But both in relations with another person and in relations with God, it is very important not only to be understood, but also to have a visible sign that God or the other person understands you. The Lord established it thus, that a person receive His forgiveness through another person: a priest. *Whose*

soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained (John 20:23).

- When a person comes to confession, sometimes the question arises: What kind of things specifically should a person confess? Our conscience doesn't seem to bother us, doesn't accuse us of anything; we didn't kill anyone, didn't rob anyone.

- Yes, the conscience accuses a person first of the serious sins. But if the conscience doesn't say anything, often that is because the conscience has opened its mouth before, but the person stopped it up. The holy fathers say that if a person goes from sunlight into a dark room, he begins first to see big objects, then smaller; if he lights a light, then he begins to see everything. In the same way, a person who begins to keep track of his inner life at first sees only the big sins, then the smaller. Then grace gives him light so that he can see his own sins, for this is what we ask God during Great Lent through the prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian.

Specifically of *what* sins one should repent is a question of time. At first a person doesn't understand or notice very much. But during the sacrament itself ... *grace*, the spirit of God, begins to open up a person's ability to see his sins. And the person, perhaps not even realizing specifically how he has sinned, all the same *feels* his sinfulness. Although the confession of sins includes the idea of comprehension; there is also a state of feeling when a person realizes simply that he is sinful in comparison to holiness; and this also is the action of grace. For example...

My father was born in 1900, so the post-revolutionary years came during his youth. There were all these new currents of thought, this breath of "freedom" ... and so he drifted away from the Church. His mother, my grandmother, asked him during Lent if he wouldn't go to Church and take Holy Communion. She said, "If you do, I'll bow down at your feet." "Oh Mama, you don't have to do that, I'll just go," he answered, and went to the church on the Arbat, to Father Vladimir Vorobiev (the grandfather of Archbishop Vladimir Vorobiev, the current rector of St Tikhon's Orthodox University). He got in line for confession and had not a single thought about repentance; he just stood there and looked at the pretty girls. When his turn came, he knelt down, and to the priest's question, "Well, young fella, what do you want to say?" my papa answered, "I don't have anything to say." "And why did you come?" "My mama asked me to." The priest was silent for a little while, and then answered, "That's very good, that you listened to your mama." He covered my father with his epitrachelion^[1] and began to read the prayer of forgiveness. "What happened to me next, I don't understand to this day," my father told me later. "I began to sob; tears came out of my eyes as if from a spigot. And when I got up and returned to my place in the church, I didn't look at anyone, anyone at all. The world had become completely different for me." From that time on, my father began to go to Church. Then by the Providence of God, he was sent to prison, where he was in the same prison cell with holy confessors of the faith. After prison he became a clergyman.

THE SINS WHICH WE SEE MOST OFTEN IN OTHERS ARE ALSO IN US

- Are there any aids to help prepare for confession?

- One could advise a person to read something written for this purpose; there is a good book by Father John Krestiankin, "Experience in Preparing for Confession"^[4], and some other material; but here we find a complication: there have appeared some enumerations or lists of sins in which we find a certain "relishing" or "savoring" of the sins. And one must be very careful with such lists, since they sometimes function like a kind of textbook, or manual of sins; because there are listed there such sins that a person not only never did but never even thought of. One should not read a list detailing the sins of the flesh, because it soils the soul. As for the other kinds of sin, it's better simply to pay attention to your inner state. For example, when we see a weakness in someone, the very fact that we notice that weakness means that that sin is also in us. You remember the "mote" in someone else's eye and the "beam" in your own? What is it, this mote? A mote grows into a log, and a log is a passion. The mote is a sin; that is, a concrete manifestation of that passion. But if we do not know what kind of tree it is, or what kind of log, if we don't even know that they are harmful, then we will never suspect what the mote is all about. As it is now expressed, "Everyone understands things according to the degree of his depravity." And so we notice in another person specifically that sin, we *understand* specifically that passion, which is *in us ourselves*.

- **Some people are disturbed that forgiveness, it turns out, is so easy to receive. A person sins, then repents, then sins again, then repents ... and over and over? Without any repentance?**

- Why do you say that? Who told you such a thing? At confession, sin is forgiven; but even so, a person still has to bear the consequences of his sin. The classic example is the repentant thief who was crucified on the cross beside Christ. He repented, and the Lord said to him, *Today you will be with Me in Paradise*. Nothing unclean can enter into Paradise, so we know that the Lord has already purified him and forgiven him his sins; nevertheless, he remained hanging on the cross! And if that weren't enough, the Gospel tells us that the soldiers then broke his legs (cf. John 19:32). A person all the same has to bear consequences for his sins, although certainly not to the degree he deserves to suffer.

- **Many Christians, although they confess every week, nevertheless remain sinners, in no visible way differing from everyone else. Furthermore, they repent over and over again of the very same sins. It turns out, does it, that confession hasn't helped them?**

- Nothing of the sort. He who constantly labors over himself already differs from other people. Regarding the very same sins, even the Apostle Paul was given a *thorn in the flesh*, some kind of pain, suffering, or trial, so that he would not get puffed up. As they say, "Until the last breath, even up to the gates of Paradise, the battle with sin goes on." St Mary of Egypt repented, but for another 17 years she struggled fiercely with sin!

- **Is it necessary to have a feeling of repentance during confession? Some people simply list their sins without any visible emotion. Is this also okay?**

- The importance of the struggle with a sin is not simply that a person names it, but that the sin becomes disgusting and repulsive to him or her. When we were on Mount Athos, a priest asked one of the spiritual fathers, "Why does it happen that we repent, have Holy Communion, and then go out and commit the same sins again?" The elder answered, "It is simply because pain of heart has not yet outweighed and overpowered the sin!"

If you simply enumerate sins, with no pain of heart, that means that you don't have an inner battle with sin. Repentance obviously includes acquiring an inner feeling of repentance. And this feeling is from God—you can't give orders to your heart. But sometimes, simply naming your sin at confession is a labor unto blood.

Confession is only the *beginning* of repentance; repentance is the backbone of one's whole spiritual life. Regarding the prayer which the priest reads at confession (the priest usually reads the beginning of the prayer at the start to everyone together, but the end of the prayer to each person *individually*). "I forgive and remit..." Thus begins the concluding part, and includes the words, "...give him/her (the person confessing, whose sins are being remitted by this prayer) the image of repentance." What was before that, you ask? He or she has clearly already repented, yet we priests immediately read, "...give him/her the image of repentance!" This is in order to show clearly that immediately after our confession, a new level of repentance begins.

Do you remember how the Apostle Peter in the Gospel fell at the feet of the Saviour and said, *Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord* (Luke 5:8)? This too is a repentant state, which my father also experienced that time when he felt the grace of God!

- **When some people come to the Church, they totally change their lives after their first confession. Some, on the contrary, hardly change at all, continuing to live in their sins as before. On what does this depend?**

- It depends on one's determination, one's resolve. One needs to ask for God's help for firm resolve, and also for patience. About 40 years ago we were talking with Father John Krestiankin (he was still young then), and he asked if I had read these words of the Apostle James: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God* (James 1:5). He asked me, "What kind of wisdom do you think this is? The wisdom of Solomon? No, it is *patience*!" Patience is a spiritual art, a spiritual science. And *through patience* a person can truly be delivered from sin.

- **Sometimes after confession there comes a feeling of spiritual relief or lightness of soul, and sometimes not. What does this mean? Should one expect such a feeling after every confession?**

- If there is such a feeling, glory be to God. But one should not expect it, or wait for it. It will not necessarily appear; and if it doesn't, that means that one should keep working, that in the battle with sin one can never relax. In general, one should not expect spiritual states, and certainly not seek them. If such states are granted—good; but one shouldn't expect them. Actually *seeking* or pursuing such spiritual or emotional states is categorically forbidden. If you do not feel spiritual lightness or emotional relief after confession, that does *not* mean that God has not accepted your confession. One of the incidents of the holy fathers goes like this: A certain man repented all the time, genuinely, but all the same was still not delivered from a feeling of heaviness; the fathers of the monastery began to pray for him, "O Lord, he repents so sincerely; why have You not yet forgiven him?" And the answer came, "I forgave him long ago, but this suffering is necessary for his salvation."

- How much detail should a person go into when describing his sins at confession? Is it enough to simply list them, or is it necessary to tell the priest in detail??

- Unfortunately, if each person described everything in detail, confession might last till evening. Sins of the flesh, in particular, should not be told in detail. Also regarding this kind of sin: when a person explains about the circumstances, in my experience, there is often an element of self-justification. Other people sometimes start to retell their whole workday; they have brought me at times entire notebooks. If you start to describe what you have done over the last week or month, then you end up with a whole novel!

The most important thing is not the details but the struggle: if one has named a sin, he should also wrestle with it. If there is not a real battle with sin, then all the details in the world won't help.

Protopriest Valerian Krechetov was born in 1937 into the family of the repressed^[5] accountant and afterwards priest Michael Krechetov. The future Father Valerian graduated from high school in 1959 and then was accepted at the Moscow Forestry-Engineering Institute. Three years after graduation, he followed the example of his father and entered Moscow Seminary. He was ordained a priest on January 12, 1969, and in 1973 graduated from Moscow Theological Academy. During his long years of service as a priest he was able to get to know many outstanding pastors, including Father Nicholas Golubtsov, Father John Krestiankin and Father Nicholas Guryanov. At present, he is the senior father-confessor of the Moscow Diocese and head priest of the Church of the Protection in the village of Akulovo, Odintsovski District.

[1] father-confessor (*dukhovnik* in Russian): in this context, the meaning is not simply "spiritual father", but an experienced spiritual father and priest who has been granted by his bishop the right to confess other priests in that diocese; these confessions customarily take place during a fasting period such as Lent.

[2] *Batiushka*: an endearing term for a priest or monk; and respectful, old-fashioned word for one's father. Accented on the first syllable: "batiushka."

[3] *Epitrachelion*: a vestment which hangs as a stole from the neck of a priest, and is placed on the penitent's head when the prayer of absolution is said; it is the one indispensable vestment for all priestly ministrations.

[4] In Russian this book is entitled *Opyt Postroenia Ispovedi*, the printed version of a series of talks given at Pskov Caves Monastery during Great Lent to help people prepare for confession.

[5] *repressed* (in Russian *repressirovanni*): a victim of political repression; this usually includes years of suffering in a concentration camp.