

# ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST ORTHODOX CHURCH

ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

A PARISH OF THE DIOCESE OF NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY

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Department of  
**CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**  
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

## Are Your Hearts Hardened?

**On December 13th we read Mark 8: 11-21, in which the Pharisees come to Jesus and ask Him for a sign from heaven. Their aim, as it is so often, is to test Him..**

Considering all that Jesus has already done—healings, miracles, loving acts toward all kinds of people—it's a curious request that the Pharisees are making. They certainly are aware of these things He has done, and also of the miraculous feeding of several thousand people, described in the verses just before these.

Mark uses some striking words to describe Jesus' reaction to their questioning. He says that the Lord "sighed deeply in His spirit." It profoundly grieved Him to encounter the obstinate refusal of some people to acknowledge Him, because it was a rejection of His love and of His desire to give them salvation.

In the Old Testament we have, long before the Incarnation of Christ, an example of God's interest in those who grieve over the sins of others. God asks His servant to "go through the city,

through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed there" (Ezekiel 9:4). Centuries later, in the letter Saint Paul writes to the Romans, he expresses a similar grief. He writes that because of the unbelief of the people of Israel, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart" (Romans 9:2).

The Pharisees were not the only ones who grieved the heart of Jesus. In the passage from Mark, the disciples are in a boat with Him, and discover that they have forgotten to bring bread, and now they have only one loaf. They go on talking about this, even

## Intercessory Prayers

We pray for all our fellow parishioners, and we pray especially for those who are incapable of being with us in church. Please keep in your prayers our Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Genevieve Bobenko, Mary Fechisin, Andrew Fabian, Edward Fedush, Mary Hadginske, Helen Kurnewitz, Margaret Lawler, Kathleen Lazorczyk, Marian Nagel, MaryAnn Rabakozi, Helen Rahnefeld, Anna Rozanovich, Nadia Sojka, Maryann Stagen, Eva Stashitsky, Ann Velebir.

as He tries to warn them about other, serious things. He urges them to remember how He provided bread for the crowds, and then asks, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?"

Jesus Himself is the Living Bread that the disciples need, but they are too preoccupied with fretting about their "bread problem" to understand. The Pharisees have seen many signs, but they want more, or a different kind. They are too preoccupied with their expectations to understand.

What about us? Will we demand some "sign" that specifically suits our expectations, and waver in our belief in Him if we don't get that very specific sign? Will we forget the wonder of having a God who feeds us and is present with us, as we fret about the needs of our daily life?

He asks, "Are your hearts hardened?" How good for us if we can offer Him not hardened hearts but soft ones, "broken and contrite" ones that grieve over our sins and the sins of others, and are open to His healing love.



## Announcements

◆ Just a reminder: we are in a **Nativity Fast** that will last until the Feast of Nativity of Christ. This is the time when each member of our parish community is encouraged to prayerfully prepare for, and then participate in the Sacrament of private Confession and Holy Communion. **Parish Confessions** will be offered this coming **Saturday, Dec. 17**, right after the Healing service. If for any reason you cannot make it that day, you can have your Confession after any Vespers service or half-an-hour before the Divine Liturgy on Sundays, just let Fr. Igor know in advance.

◆ This **Saturday, December 17 at 1:00pm** in our church there will be a **Healing service** to the Mother of God in front of her icon "Queen of All". This service is open for everyone and is for the healing from any disease (this icon is especially known for the healings that occurred of those who suffered with cancer).

◆ The Board of Trustees will not meet in December. The next meeting will be on Sunday, January 15, 2017 following coffee hour.

◆ A special thank you to all who donated to our **Thanksgiving appeal** to help all our neighbors in need. We are always grateful for your help and again our need continues at this special time of year. Please remember those less fortunate and make this a true season of blessings for those in need and for those who give with a cheerful and loving heart.

## Welcome Visitors

We welcome all visitors to our Divine Liturgy. It is our joy to have you with us today. If this is your first visit to our parish, we welcome you and invite you to return as often as you are able. While Holy Communion may only be received by prepared Orthodox Christians, our non-Orthodox guests are welcome to join us in venerating the Cross, receiving blessed bread at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, and for fellowship in our Church Hall after the service.



December 11, 2016

25<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
Holy Forefathers

- **8:50am** – Hours
- **9:00am** – Divine Liturgy  
Epistle: Col. 3:4-11  
Gospel: Lk. 14:16-24
- **Coffee Hour** – everyone is invited for a fellowship following the service.

## Schedule of Services

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13**

**VEN. HERMAN OF ALASKA**

9:00am - Divine Liturgy

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17**

1:00pm - Akathist / Healing service to the Mother of God "Queen of All", followed by Parish Confessions

6:00pm - Great Vespers

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18**

9:00am - Divine Liturgy