

## "Real Contact"

The human search for something beyond ourselves is continually being played out by the movie industry. Whether it's the science fiction of Star Wars, the re-incarnation of Field of Dreams, the romance of Titanic or the search for God in Contact, all are efforts to satisfy a thirst that the movie industry is exploiting.

Movies provide a passage into another world. With the accomplishments of special effects and enormous sums of financing, movies today also have the power to change lives. A movie accomplishes a type of contact with another world by providing a passage. As human beings we need passages; we need a place through which we can pass in order to get beyond the mundane and encounter the One beyond all. How are we to get there?

Movies offer a temporary and often fleeting experience. The human soul needs something more. The Orthodox Church has been described as being the passage into the Kingdom of God. As pilgrims entered the ancient Church of Agia Sophia in Constantinople, they did not know whether they were in heaven or on earth. It was not just the architecture that moved them; it was the worship that was taking place inside. The passage for the Orthodox Christian is worshipping the Resurrection of Christ, and the key to making the journey is repentance. If we truly want to encounter God and be permanently changed by such an experience we must learn how to repent so that our worship of God may provide the means of contact.

*"Repentance we are told, is the beginning and the condition of a truly Christian life. Christ's first word when he began to preach was: "Repent!" (Matt.4:17) But what is repentance? In the rush of our daily life, we have no time to think about it, and we simply assume that all we have to do during Lent is abstain from certain foods, cut down on "entertainment," go to Confession, be absolved by a priest, receive Holy Communion, and then consider ourselves perfectly "in order" till next year. ...Is it not then my first duty to try to understand the teaching of my Church about Lent, to try to be an Orthodox Christian not in name only but in life itself?" -Fr. Schmemmann, Great Lent*

What is the teaching of the Church about Lent? The five Sundays prior to Great Lent (Feb. 1 - Mar 1, 1998) give an outline of repentance and are the door way to God's Kingdom.

- Desire. In the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), a short man overcomes his limitation by climbing a tree in order to see Christ as he passed by. The first lesson in repentance is to re-discover the deep meaning behind all desiring which is to desire God. God created us with a desire for the divine that can only be satisfied by Him.
- Humility. In the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18:10-4), the humility of the tax collector illustrates the second requirement of repentance. Where does humility come from? Humility is a gift from God, that comes from

Him who is Humility. By contemplating the passion of Christ, the humility of God begins to be revealed to us. When a desire for God is combined with knowledge of our sinfulness, humility is born.

- Return from Exile. The Sunday of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) identifies sin as being in exile from God. Having a feeling of alienation from God is a good sign. When true repentance is born in the heart, suddenly the realization is made of the great distance sin created between us and God.
- The Last Judgement. In the parable of the Last Judgement (Matt. 25:31-46), Christ reveals that the basis of our judgement will be Christian love. When there was a need, did we respond from our hearts to help? Christian love is not possible without repentance.
- Forgiveness. On the last Sunday before Lent, (Matt. 6:14-21) two conditions are set as standards - fasting and forgiveness. By fasting, hunger is experienced which awakens the deeper meaning of hunger - to hunger for God. Fasting is a dying to a lust for the world. If fasting is combined with repentance forgiveness is a fruit of the effort. On Sunday evening, March 1, Lent begins with forgiveness Vespers. At this service we acknowledge our failures as members of one another and the body of Christ.

*"What is repentance? -- Great Lent gives the answer. It is indeed a school of repentance to which every Christian must go every year in order to deepen his faith, to re-evaluate, and, if possible, to change his life. It is a wonderful pilgrimage to the very sources of Orthodox faith - a rediscovery of the Orthodox way of life." -Fr. Schmemmann*

*Good Strength,*  
Fr. Andrew