

Detox-Trends For 2009

Every year, research companies help businesses understand their consumers and identify upcoming trends that will help them sell their products. One trend predicted for the coming year is labeled detoxing. "Detoxing is having an aversion to 'toxic spending' - living above one's means and buying things one doesn't really need or want. 'Lately, several people have even mentioned that the recession almost seems like a blessing because they are now forced to readjust their values and make different choices,' said Newman. Even those who are OK financially are choosing to place more value on substantive things and focus on personal relationships that are not based on buying (Associated Press, December 15, 2008, Anna D'Agrosa and Paige Newman, the Zandl Group)." Any person who attempts to live according to the way Christ taught will constantly be challenged to readjust one's values and make different choices.

Kurt Warner's (hopefully a super-bowl champ again) favorite bible verse is Matthew 6:33 (www.kurtwarner.org). On a Cardinal's forum Warner recently said, "Matthew 6:33 says "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you," Kurt observes, "(This verse) encourages me to set aside everything I ever thought was important and focus on what He is telling me is important. From the day I became a Christian, until the day I see Jesus face to face, my goal in life is to align my thoughts, my actions and my life with the perfect plan of my Heavenly Father. This, to me is what being a Christian is all about and the reason Matthew 6:33 has changed my life."

Perhaps there has never been a time as appropriate as the coming year for the relevancy of Great Lent. God can use the afflictions of the day in order to grab our attention so that we make the necessary changes to realign our lives according to His will.

Lenten spring training (Triodion) begins on Sunday, February 8, and is followed by three weeks of summarizing the art of repentance. Each Sunday identifies the essential elements of repentance as humility, return from exile, living the faith and forgiveness. The Sundays are: Publican & Pharisee (Humility- February 8), the Prodigal Son (return from exile- February 15), Judgment Sunday (Faith in Action- February 22) and Forgiveness Sunday (Love in action- March 1). The following day, March 2 is Clean Monday, the first day of Great Lent.

Spring Training Summary:

Desire: In the story of Zacchaeus (Some years included - 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 the power to desire so that we make exercise our free will and choose to be in communion and relationship with Him.

Humility: In the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18:10-4), the humility of the tax collector illustrates repentance as the acknowledgement of one's weaknesses and freedom from judging others. Humility teaches humility. Humbling ourselves before Christ, asking Him to reveal to our darkened senses the sin that lies hidden to us is an act of humility. 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 a life that is dead to God as being in a state of exile from God. A repentant heart knows that sin leads to alienation from God's grace. "Communion is given 'for the remission of sins,' 'for the healing of the soul and body,' and it implies, therefore, repentance, the awareness of our total unworthiness, and the understanding of communion as a heavenly gift which never can be 'deserved' by an earthly being (Schmemmann)."

The Last Judgment: In the parable of the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46), Christ reveals the basis for our judgment is the presence or non-presence of Christian love in action. When others stood before us presenting their need, what was our response? Putting Christian love into action is the fruit of repentance.

Forgiveness: On the last Sunday before Lent, (Matt. 6:14-21) forgiveness is presented as the means of reconciling our lives with God. By fasting, hunger is experienced in order to awaken within us our hunger for God. Obedience is greater than fasting and must precede it as a turning of the heart which is repentance towards God. 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.

Repentance & Detoxing our Life

Lenten spiritual journey leads us to the celebration of Pascha as the resurrection of Christ and our personal entrance into a new way of being - living our faith in action and healing that which is broken within.

"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)

A Lenten "Detox"

Great Lent is an opportunity to "detox" one's life from many things here are just a few time tested goals for Great Lent as the school of repentance as having a changed mind.

Detox Spending: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Mt. 6:21)."

"Many Americans believe that our excessive consumption led us astray - people were living beyond their means & buying things that they didn't need. Today, consumers are more likely to take a step back and gauge the value of their purchases; there's more of a sense of wanting to buy things that are useful and to not waste money on 'junk.' (Zandl Group)"

Many have already made changes in their spending since the economic downturn. What are the spiritual benefits from changing spending? There are two points here. One is that "excessive consumption" is a symptom of a spiritual ill - finding happiness in something rather than someone - our Lord. Secondly, viewing money as a possession rather than an opportunity to become generous and make a real difference in the lives of others. Great Lent is a call to live simply, eat simply and re-connect with God and change what is the treasure of our heart.

Detoxing the Social Circle: "Keep on becoming those who give no occasion of stumbling...to the Church of God...(1 Cor. 10:32)."

"In tough times, people like to be able to draw on their network of friends and families for assistance. Many are realizing that "toxic friends" or "frenemies" just don't fit into their new-found support structure and these relationships are being weeded out in favor of small circles of trusted allies and positive influences (Zandl Group)."

Friendships that encourage the development of one's spiritual life keep us on the right track. Finding people who are spirit-filled is easy, they attend bible study, evening classes and they are the people leading the many ministries of Assumption.

They are also found in the people sitting next to you in the pews. The reason we might not know them is because we haven't taken the opportunity to introduce ourselves and discover Christ in the stranger next to us. The Church fosters the development of small circles of friends through its ministries. Each ministry has the potential to create relationships that can be relied upon for positive influences in our lives. This means that each group must pay special attention to how it reflects the gospel and conducts itself; how inclusive it is and state its mission clearly.

Detoxing the Home: "But according to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness (2 Pe. 3:13)."

"In order to maintain this positive shift, American's are finding it more and more important to focus their efforts on the home. From de-cluttering to free up space & energy...the home is being converted to a safe haven from toxins (Zandl Group)."

Every year, homes are blessed with Holy Water in order to make them a safe haven from toxins. Over the time of a year, harmful influences may find their way into a home, known and unknown. Sometimes parishioners call for their homes to be blessed after having a visitor come into their home who they feel may have brought with them intentions contrary to the family. When a home is blessed, the peace of Christ descends upon it and those who dwell there. It marks a new beginning for the year, dedicated to deepening one's commitment and life to Christ.

Perhaps you expected an article about detoxing a body from harmful foods. If we enter into Lent with the right attitude and goal, fasting from certain foods becomes a way of enhancing our inner hunger for God. Fasting in its purist definition is a form of dying to oneself, the world and sin. We die in order to come to life again in Christ, to experience a new life in the Spirit and to become more than a Christian in name only but also in life itself.

"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)."
May your Lenten journey be fruitful!

In Christ,
+ Fr. Andrew