

November 2024 - December 2024

## Why do they shut Me out of Heaven? Did I sing too loud?

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So says the great Emily Dickinson, a woman whose uncertainties about the trustworthiness of the Almighty haunts page after page of her poetry, like Marley's ghost haunted

Scrooge. But Dickinson's harsh hesitations reflect an all-too prominent theme of the Christmas season, where anticipation and hopefulness are equally burdened by dread and bittersweet remembrances. For it is this time of the year that often proves the most reflective introspection and accusations of the conscience.

There are reasons for this, some historical and others intertwined with the vicissitudes of the cultural season. Historically, because of the greater part of the path of this country, Christmas is

the be all and end all of the year; It dominates, at least until Halloween caught up with it (a different topic) in all of our commercial and social activity and planning. Retail stores, and indeed the whole of the American economy, gauge its success as a barometer of the entire economic year. All things point to Christmas.

How often do we hear when a person or child suggests a particular want, "well, that sounds like a great Christmas present" as if a special toy, or other item (especially an automobile) is best delayed until the annual bacchanalian splurge at year's end. That's when the long saved up for funds—or the blasting of the credit cards—are released in full economic fury.



The hounds are set free, and the hangover won't hit until the new year. Inevitably, stress comes from the very thought of what the damage will be.

Yet, it's the cultural ramifications that probably interfere most with a peaceful and gratitude-filled progression through the season. That great remonstrance of pacified existence, the family, raises its head most forcefully during the Christmas season, in a number of ways. First, guilt, supplied by the neglect of those whom we claim to love, or those whom we feel guilty because we don't love when we know we should, injects itself into our system like the most virulent toxin. Second, the anxiety of actually having to spend time with them, adds to the burden of preparation—house cleaning, food preparation, that one special relative who you just know is going to be an issue—all of this adds to the *mélange* of chaos and confusion that cloud a season that should be full of the greatest joy.



Now this is not to suggest in any way that everyone is so hampered by these things mentioned, but most everyone is to some extent a participant in the

aberrant hindering's of at least a partial experience of the Christmas "downside."

Our culture has almost made impossible the unadulterated enjoyment of the blessings of the season by elevating its status outside of the original meaning. Everything that affects us negatively has its origin in these extracurricular appurtenances, so much so that for some at least, the notion of Christmas is replete with sadness, depression, and fear as we attempt to assess the meaning of the last year and the oftentimes negativity toward the new.



But as we Orthodox should know especially, this season is about the promise of new life, the renewal of nature (both physical and spiritual), the event of the most profound action ever in the history of the world, when Life itself enters it.

All of the accoutrements of this time of year are but paltry stuff; in the last result, they matter not at all. Listen to what are often perceived as difficult words of the Lord: If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. The Lord is not suggesting that we should "hate" those



mentioned (as we might first think), but only in comparison to the love that we should have for Him. He who gives the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” would hardly excuse relatives from this issuance. But it does set in great relief the idea that love of God (the commandment that precedes this one) is paramount in our lives.



When we come to this season of hope and life and joyful expectation, this must be kept in mind, for it is the one thing needful in our lives, the rock from which springs forth the grace and abundance that allows us to transcend the mundane aspects of the secular season and find our rightful place in the pantheon of blessings that are offered. This focus, this single mindedness toward the Christmas season is what enables us to truly reflect on the shortcomings, difficulties, and beauties of our lives in the fullness of God’s grace, in which we

find the strength to bear crosses, and the joy of self-giving.

As the words of the great St. Romanos the Melodist tell us, *Save the world, O Savior. For this you have come. Set your whole universe right. For this you have shone on me and on the magi and on all creation ... a little child, God before the ages.* May this light of the Savior illumine our lives, today and always! ❖

*Fr. Steven*

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## Installation of the New Holy Table at St. James

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St. James was overjoyed to announce the installation of a new holy table in our sanctuary on November 14th of 2024.



This beautiful and sacred table will serve as a focal point for worship services for many years to come. The Holy Table of an Orthodox Church is more than just ornate furniture. It represents the Throne of God where the Lord is invisibly present with us.



The New Holy table was custom designed for St. James Orthodox Church by Artist and Woodcarver Artem Susidko of Lubin, Poland. Artem along with his wife Lena are an Orthodox Christian couple originally from Ukraine. They immigrated to Poland, five years ago.



Together, the couple run Artem's wood carving business as well as a home school for their four children. Artem has been creating custom pieces for churches for over 12 years.

(To see a full catalog of Artem's woodcarvings visit: [susidko-art.com](http://susidko-art.com))

The front panel depicts a carving of the icon "The Hospitality of Abraham" by St. Andrei Rublev in the 15th century. The icon is based on an event from the Book of Genesis. Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day by an oak tree and saw three men standing in front of him, in the next chapter the men are revealed as angels. When he saw them, Abraham ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth. Abraham ordered a servant-boy to prepare a choice calf, and

set curds, milk and the calf before them, waiting on them, under a tree, as they ate. One of the angels told Abraham that Sarah would soon give birth.



The consensus among scholars was the following: the three angels who visited Abraham represented the Trinity, "one God in three persons" – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The table sides are made from European Maple and were sent in separate pieces to minimize weight. The process of moving the carved medallions all the way from Poland to the United States was not without some obstacles. However, as with everything truly worthwhile, the challenges only enhance the beauty of the final piece.



Assembled and Stained by Andy Roussey.



The installation of the new holy table was a true labor of love. Many members of our parish contributed their time, talents, and resources to make this addition to our church possible. We are grateful for their dedication ❖



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***“Personally, the older I get, the more I am drawn to the great, timeless traditions of the Orthodox Church. They are the only ones who have not been corrupted by loathsome political correctness.”***

***–King Charles III (1998, in a private letter, when he was the Prince of Wales)***



## Saint Juliana of Lazarevo

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Saint Juliana of Lazarevo (January 2) is appropriately remembered during the celebrations and feasting of Christmas and New Years Eve for many reasons, but notably because she is considered a

patron saint of the kitchen and the home. Her dedication to serving others, especially the poor, is a reminder of the virtues of charity embodied by the season. The merciful Juliana provided an example of piety that teaches us that even with all the cares of the earthly world, with a family, children, spouse and all the responsibilities of our worldly obligations, that you can still please God as much as someone who withdraws from the world into a monastic cell.

Born around 1530 into a noble Russian family, Juliana was married at a young age to George Osorgin and bore him six children. Despite her noble status, Juliana's life was far from easy, marked by the travails of managing a large household and enduring the loss of many children as well as becoming a widow. Despite these challenges Juliana was most known widely for her charity work and her kindness to everyone.

In the face of hardship, Juliana turned to her faith, dedicating herself to prayer.

Her home became a place of refuge for the poor and sick, as she provided food, clothing, and comfort to those in need.

After the death of her husband, she embraced a life of even greater asceticism, despite not being a monastic. Juliana's deep piety and acts of mercy earned her a reputation for holiness, and she was sought for spiritual guidance.

Juliana fell asleep in the Lord peacefully in 1604. When her son George died in 1614, the family tomb was opened to place his body within, and the body of St. Juliana was found incorrupt and streaming myrrh and veneration of her relics spread. Some of her relics are in the Church of St. Nicholas on the Embankment, and some were placed in an icon which is at the church dedicated to St. Juliana of Lazarevo in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



St. Juliana's path to canonization as a saint by the Russian Orthodox Church in

1988 came during the transformative period in the USSR known as Perestroika or перестройка. This era was marked by Mikhail Gorbachev's economic and social reforms, aimed at revitalizing the Soviet economy through political restructuring known as "glasnost," or "openness."



Amidst this backdrop, the Russian Orthodox Church began to reclaim its place in society, leading to the canonization of numerous saints, including St. Juliana.

Her canonization was part of a broader religious revival. Alongside her, other prominent figures were canonized, reflecting the renewed freedom of religious expression. St. Tikhon of Moscow, a revered church leader and Patriarch, was canonized in 1989. St. Seraphim of Sarov, had his veneration reaffirmed. St. Xenia of Saint Petersburg, well known Fool-for-Christ, was canonized in 1988.

Saints like Juliana became symbols of spiritual resilience and moral fortitude. Her life and works resonated with the themes of perestroika—renewal, resilience, and the pursuit of a higher



purpose. As the Soviet Union underwent profound transformation and eventual collapse her recognition provided a spiritual anchor and a source of Russian identity and continuity, as well as inspiration for the faithful.

In our own times of change and political upheaval we can look to St. Juliana as a reminder not simply of the utmost importance of caring for the less fortunate through the holiday seasons, but of dealing kindly with our neighbors and fellow man during times of uncertainty, such as Juliana did during times of famine and upheaval that she faced. ❖

**By your righteous deeds you revealed  
to the world**

**An image of the perfect servant of the  
Lord.**

**By your fasting, vigil and prayers,**

**You were inspired in your evangelical life,**

**Feeding the hungry  
and caring for the poor,**

**Nursing the sick  
and strengthening the weak.**

**Now you stand at the right hand of the  
Master, Christ,**

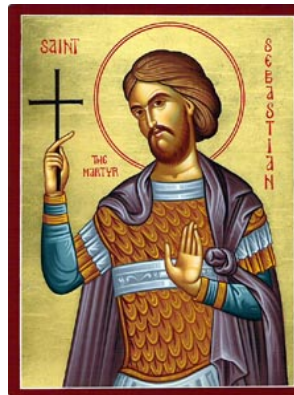
**O holy Juliana, interceding for our souls.**

*Troparion (Tone 4)*

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## Saint Sebastian of Rome

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Saint Sebastian of Rome (*December 18*) probably is one of the most revered figures in early Christian history and his story has captivated believers throughout the entire world, known

for his unwavering faith and remarkable endurance. He is also one of the most widely depicted Saints, appearing in countless artworks in the centuries after his martyrdom. The striking image of a young man tied to a tree and filled with arrows implanting itself deeply within the minds of Christians for generations to come.

Sebastian was a Roman soldier during the reign of the notorious Emperor Diocletian. Sebastian himself secretly practiced Christianity at a time where they faced violent persecution. Sebastian was a man with position, respected for his authority, and loved by the soldiers and those at court. He was a brave man filled with wisdom; his word was honest, and his judgment was known to be just. This made his opinion very powerful among the people.

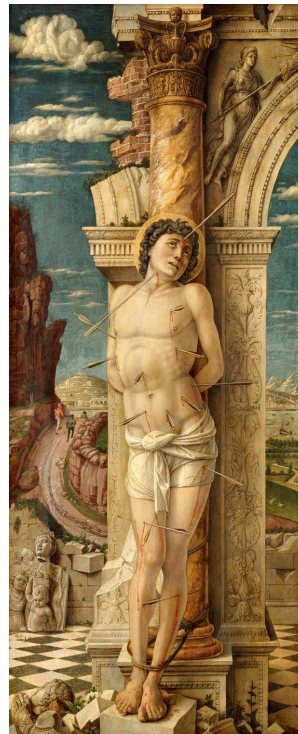
Sebastian supported Christians secretly from within the confines of the Roman prisons, offering encouragement and aid to martyrs. Eventually his acts became well known among the Christian community in Rome that led to his

identity being discovered by the Roman authorities.

After being personally interrogated by the Emperor, he ordered Sebastian to be executed by being tied to a tree and shot with arrows. Miraculously, he survived this ordeal. According to tradition, he was discovered by Irene, the wife of St. Castulus, a Christian martyr. Irene nursed Sebastian back to health in her home, tending to his wounds at great personal risk to herself. St. Castulus (*January 12*), Irene's husband, had been a chamberlain in the imperial palace and a secret Christian. Known for sheltering fellow Christians and aiding those persecuted for their faith, Castulus too was eventually martyred.

After recovering from his wounds, Sebastian refused to abandon his faith or flee from persecution. Instead, He went back and confronted Emperor Diocletian directly, denouncing the emperor's cruelty towards Christians. This act of defiance led to his final martyrdom; he was clubbed to death on the emperor's orders. His feast day is celebrated on December 18th, and he is regarded as the patron saint of athletes, archers, and soldiers, reflecting his legacy of physical and spiritual fortitude.

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Saint Sebastian's story is not just a tale of martyrdom but also a testament to the strength of faith and courage in standing up against injustice. He is one of the most commonly depicted biblical figures in art. Appearing in famous works of renaissance and baroque masters such as Carravaggio and Peter Paul Rubens. ❖

**Excelling in godly zeal,**

**you gathered a band of martyrs from  
which you shone as a star.**

**The arrows that wounded your body,  
O Sebastian,**

**pierced the hearts of the enemy.**

**Therefore Christ has glorified you!**

**Kontakion (Tone 4)**





# Bodily Fasting for the Soul's Benefit

Originally posted by The Joy of All Who Sorrow Church, Michurinsk

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The rules of abstinence prescribed by the Church for the Nativity fast are as strict as for the Apostle's fast. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday of the Nativity fast, fish, wine, and oil are not allowed by the typicon, and foods without oil can be taken only after Vespers. On the other days—Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday—food may be taken with vegetable oil. Fish is allowed during the Nativity fast on Saturdays and Sundays and on major feasts, like the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple, on a church's patronal feast, and on commemoration days of great saints if they fall on a Tuesday or Thursday. If they fall on a Wednesday or Friday, the fast may be relaxed to include wine and oil.

From December 20—25 (in the old style) the fast is intensified, and fish is not blessed even on Saturday and Sunday. Meanwhile, the civil New Year falls on these days [for those observing the Julian calendar], and we Orthodox Christians have to be especially focused, so that we might not break the strict fast by parties, eating, and drinking wine.

Fasting bodily, we must also fast spiritually. *"Brothers, in fasting bodily let us also fast spiritually, and break all communion with falsehood,"* commands

the Holy Church. Fasting is first of all man's spiritual struggle with his passions. St. John Chrysostom warns, *"He is mistaken who thinks that the fast consists only in abstinence from food. True fasting is departing from evil."*

Bodily fasting without spiritual fasting does not bring salvation of the soul; to the contrary, it can even be spiritually harmful if in abstaining from food a person is filled with an awareness of his superiority, knowing that he fasts. True fasting is bound up with prayer, repentance, refraining from passions and vices, uprooting evil deeds, forgiving offenses, abstaining from marital relations, avoiding parties, entertainment, theatres, and watching television. Fasting is not a goal but a means—a means of humbling our flesh and cleansing it from sins. Without prayer and repentance, fasting becomes no more than a diet.

The essence of fasting can be expressed in the following Church hymn: **My soul, if you fast from food but are not cleansed of the passions, in vain are we content with not eating: for if the fast does not bring you correction, it will be hateful to God as false, and you will be like the evil demons who eat nothing at all."**

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov:

*"Learn to have restraint in food—by temperance you will bring health and strength to the body and vigor to the mind, so needed for the work of salvation..."*

Torte de Santiago  
(St. James Cake)

[Tarta de Santiago \(Spanish almond cake\) -  
Caroline's Cooking](#)



- 1 cup sugar (caster sugar is better, if possible)
- 2 cups almond flour (or ground almonds)
- 1 lemon zest ie from 1 lemon
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 tablespoon confectioners sugar approx, to dust (icing sugar)
- 4 eggs

1. Preheat oven to 350F/180C. Line an 8 inch/20cm round cake tin with parchment on the bottom and rub the sides with a little butter.

2. Crack the eggs into a bowl and add the sugar. Whisk the two together until well combined and starting to become lighter in color with a bit of air in the mixture.

3. Add the almond flour/ground almonds, lemon zest and cinnamon and mix until combined, but try not to overmix and get all of the air out of the mixture.

4. Pour the mixture into the prepared cake tin and place in the preheated oven. Bake for approximately 30 minutes until a skewer inserted in the middle comes out clean. Meanwhile, make the cross stencil, if not already prepared.

5. Remove the cake from the oven and allow to cool around 10-15 minutes on a cooling rack before removing the outer ring. Allow it to cool completely before placing the stencil on top of the middle then dusting some confectioners sugar over the top. Carefully remove the stencil without letting the sugar fall on the area you had covered. Slice and serve or store at room temp, covered.



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*St. James Orthodox Church belongs to the  
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