



# First Things First:

## MAKING TIME FOR WHAT MATTERS MOST A SIX-WEEK LENTEN STUDY

*Join us Wednesday evenings during Great Lent*



March 1 First Things First: *Worship*

*Dinner Sponsored by the Sunday School*

March 8 First Things First: *Community*

*Dinner Sponsored by the Choir*

March 15 First Things First: *Love*

*Dinner Sponsored by the AHEPA/Daughters*

March 22 First Things First: *Learning*

*Dinner Sponsored by the Young at Heart and Welcome Ministry*

March 29 First Things First: *Service*

*Dinner Sponsored by the Philoptochos*

April 5 First Things First: *Priorities*

*Dinner Sponsored by the Young Adults and Bible Studies*

### EACH WEDNESDAY EVENING SCHEDULE:

6:00 pm Pre-Sanctified Liturgy

7:15 pm Lenten Dinner provided by one of our ministries

7:45 pm Presentation by Father Stavros

8:15 pm Small group discussion

8:45 pm Concluding remarks and closing prayer



GREAT LENT 2023  
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH  
TAMPA, FL



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**MAKING TIME FOR WHAT MATTERS MOST**  
*Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well.*  
Matthew 6:33



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## PART SIX: *Priorities*

### **CORE VALUES**

Worship ~ Community ~ Love ~ Learning ~ Service

#### **SEEK YE FIRST**

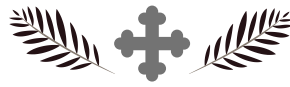
- The Lord established covenant relationships with His people that set in order that we are God's priority and that He is supposed to be our priority. **Genesis 17:7-9**
- The very first commandment the Lord gave to Moses was the declaration that God should always come first. God does not want us to place anything before Him. His desire is that we worship Him and Him alone. Anything or anyone, even something good, that takes first place in our life is an idol. **Exodus 20:2-3**
- Among the many topics covered in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spent time addressing fasting, prayer, money, and worry. He knew that our hearts would be challenged by these worldly distractions and encouraged us to always seek God first. **Matthew 6:33**
- When a lawyer tested Jesus and asked Him which was the greatest of the commandments, Jesus summarized the entire Old Testament Law in just two commandments: Love God, love your neighbor. **Matthew 22:35-40**

#### **FIRST THINGS FIRST**

- We must intentionally strive to keep building our lives on a firm foundation in Christ. **Matthew 7:24-27**
- When we surrender to God's will, we realize we should be living for Him, not just our own desires. **Luke 22:42**
- When we truly decide to put God first, we must look at key areas of our lives in practical ways. How we choose to spend our time, our money, our gifts and talents, all tell of how we prioritize the Lord. A sobering way to check is to look at one's calendar and one's bank account.
- In reality, every day, with no excuses, we are supposed to give the first part of our day in prayer, reading Scripture, and quiet time with God. We are supposed to spend the first part of our week in worship, arriving on time and joyfully and actively participating. **Hebrews 10:24-25**
- The tithe is an ancient discipline of giving the first (and best) 10% of whatever you have as an offering to the Lord. Giving joyfully and investing in Godly things reinforces that God, rather than money, is our master. **Proverbs 3:9-10, Malachi 3:8-10**
- We must be aware of the mental "junk food" that we consume. When we are careful with the thoughts that enter our minds, we are more likely to stick with our priorities. **Philippians 4:8**
- In order to love our neighbors, we must make ourselves available to serve them. Christ taught that we must be reconciled in our relationships before we worship Him. **Matthew 5:23-24**
- Prioritizing sounds simple, and yet it is very difficult. We must intentionally choose to rearrange everything in our world in order to put God first. **Matthew 6:21**

#### **MAKING HOLY WEEK A PRIORITY**

- The Worship experience during Holy Week for Orthodox Christians is intense, demanding, and rewarding. We get to relearn and intentionally relive Christ's passion and sacrifice for us and our salvation. **Exodus 12:14**
- Holy Week offers a unique opportunity to connect with Christ in the sacraments, creating spiritual renewal, beauty, hope and joy on the journey that leads to the Resurrection.
- Be warned: there will be distractions. The devil will do his best to tempt us to forget our priorities. "If the devil can't make us bad, he will make us busy."
- Just remember above all other things to focus on What and Who is most important. It's all about Jesus!



## SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

GENESIS 17:7-9	<i>7 And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. 8 And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. 9 And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.</i>
EXODUS 20:2-3	<i>2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.</i>
MATTHEW 6:33	<i>But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.</i>
MATTHEW 22:35-40	<i>35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, to test Him. 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" 37 And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."</i>
MATTHEW 7:24-27	<i>24 "Every one then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; 25 and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And every one who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; 27 and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it."</i>
LUKE 22:42	<i>"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."</i>
HEBREWS 10:24-25	<i>24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.</i>
PROVERBS 3:9-10	<i>Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; 10 then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.</i>
MALACHI 3:8-10	<i>8 Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me. But you say, 'How are we robbing You?' In your tithes and offerings. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me; the whole nation of you. 10 Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house; and thereby put Me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.</i>
PHILIPPIANS 4:8	<i>Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.</i>
MATTHEW 5:23-24	<i>23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.</i>
MATTHEW 6:21	<i>For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.</i>
EXODUS 12:14	<i>This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever.</i>



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### PART SIX: *Priorities*

1. What has helped you most to make Christ central in your daily life? What things do you need to change so that you are more focused on Christ? What has the greatest temptation of becoming an idol in your life?
  
2. What encourages you to engage in prayer, worship, giving, and serving others? If we know we are supposed to put God first, what is getting in the way of us praying first thing in the morning, worshiping the first day of the week, giving the first of our income, etc?
  
3. How can you plan to order your days differently during Holy Week? Consider your time, prayer, eating/fasting, attending services, participating in the Vigil. Is there an aspect of your faith or life that you hope will be rejuvenated or transformed during Holy Week?
  
4. What is something you did during Lent that you'd like to continue doing?