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
8:05 pm Small group discussion
8:30 pm Concluding remarks and closing prayer

Great Lent 2023
St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
Tampa, FL
First Things First:  
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

PART TWO: Community

BIBLICAL KOINONIA
- The Greek word Koinonia means communion, fellowship, community. Community is essential to our relationship with God and with one another. This is firmly established throughout the Bible.
- Community existed before everything else in the fellowship of the Holy Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a mystery - co-eternal, of one essence, undivided. Genesis 1:1-3
- When man was created, God knew the value of living in community and said, "it is not good for man to be alone." Genesis 2:18
- The Old Testament is filled with communities of people - friends, couples, families, tribes, kingdoms. Psalm 133:1
- In the New Testament, Jesus' earthly ministry was lived out in community. His family, the 12 disciples, the inner circle of three, a broad group of friends, and women were all integral in His life. Though He often desired time to be alone in prayer, this should not be mistaken for being lonely. Mark 1:35
- The early Church, as described in the book of Acts, was based on community. Nobody found their faith alone or apart from each other and nobody was expected to. Acts 2:46-47

COMMUNITY IN TODAY'S WORLD
- Community for the Orthodox Christian is found in three principal places:
  - Inner circle. This includes immediate family, extended family, close friends.
  - The Greater community. This includes our neighborhoods, towns, places of work. Each person has been entrusted a talent to help the greater community. Some are teachers, some healers, etc. Ephesians 4:11-12
  - The Church. The Greek word Ekklisia, refers to the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:27-30 Christ didn't mean building a church edifice, He wanted to build a community of believers. Matthew 16:18
- All three types of community flourish when there is trust, respect, vulnerability, mutuality.
- Some of the greatest benefits of belonging to a community include accountability, encouragement, honor. Proverbs 27:17

"ONE ANOTHER"
- Our faith journey requires us to be in a community and compels us to have the mutual concern for the salvation of all its members. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10
- In the New Testament alone, the words "one another" appear over 100 times. The writers often exhort us to encourage, love, help, serve, greet one another. Galatians 6:2, Romans 12:10
- To reinforce this in our worship, as part of the Divine Liturgy, we hear "one another" seven times:  
  - "Let us commend ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God."  
  - "Let us love one another so that with one mind we may confess."
- The entire Divine Liturgy is offered as a communal act. It is written in the plural, inviting us to worship with others around us and in fellowship with the saints and angels. Hebrews 10:24-25
- The ultimate expression of community is Holy Communion, Thia Koinonia, which is literally translated "Divine Fellowship." Matthew 18:20

A CASE STUDY IN COMMUNITY - MARK 2:1-12
- This is the Gospel reading of the upcoming second Sunday of Lent.
- In the story, there are four friends who are bold, desperate, creative, concerned, faithful, hopeful, all for their friend, the paralyzed man, who is helpless and stuck, yet trusting and vulnerable.
- The paralyzed man had to first be brought to Christ, was then forgiven of his sins, and was ultimately healed.
- This miracle not only benefited the paralytic, it also inspired his friends and those who witnessed it.
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1. As we see so often in Scripture, we were made to live in community. How can the concept of biblical "Koininia," (or fellowship and community) help us to cope with the pervasive problem of loneliness in today's world?

2. Some of the greatest benefits of belonging to a community include accountability, encouragement, honor. How is this true for you? What other benefits can you think of?

3. Consider the statement “one another” used so often in Scripture. How can we best love/serve/encourage one another in our families, our communities, our church?

4. In this Sunday's Gospel lesson, a paralytic is carried to Christ by a “community” of four friends. Have you ever helped carry someone to Christ? Who has helped carry you to Christ?