



# Orthodox Parish of St Martin & St Helen Colchester

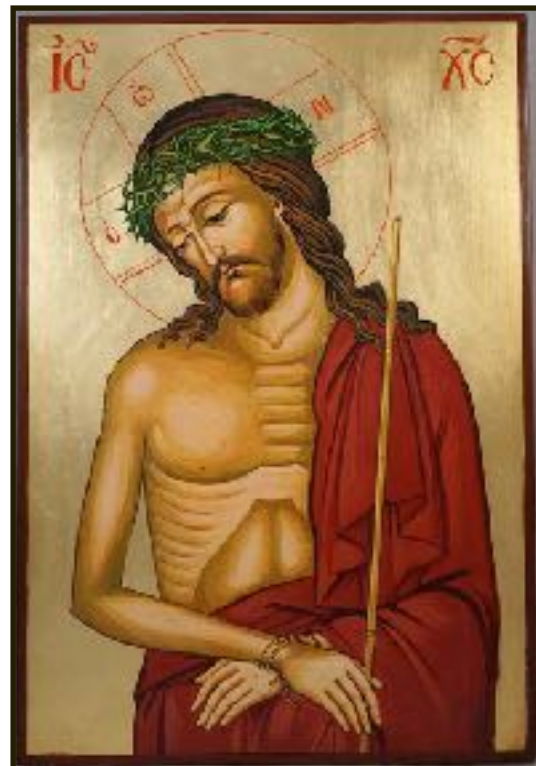
SERIES 2 NO 3 | MARCH 2023

## The Great Fast

With the beginning of the Triodion and the Sundays of preparation for Lent behind us; we are now at last in the Great Fast itself. And as the children of Israel ate ‘the bread of affliction’ (*Deuteronomy 16:3*) in preparation for the Passover, so we Christians prepare for the Glorious New Passover (Holy Pascha) by observing a fast.

What is the meaning of fasting? The Orthodox Church teaches that the practical and active Christian life has three defining practices at its heart: prayer, almsgiving and fasting. These correspond to the three focal points for the proper attention of Christians: God, our neighbour and our own souls. It is fasting which turns our attention inward to our souls. The expectation that we will practice fasting is clear from the words of Jesus Himself, recorded in St Matthew’s Gospel (*Matt 6:16*). Our Lord says, in the Sermon on the Mount: “**when** you fast...”, notice, not “**if**” you fast but “**when**”.

Fasting, as an ascetical and pious practice, was taken for granted in the ancient world by the people who heard Jesus preach and it is preserved by the church as an essential component of our Orthodox faith and life today. We fast from certain foods as an exercise in self-denial, gently disciplining ourselves by exercising control over our bodily appetites. We should also look within our hearts and refrain from such things as anger, boasting, lying and idle talk; instead practicing reconciliation, humility, truthfulness and peaceful silence. We may also consider limiting our use of devices such as smartphones, TV and computers, being careful what we let our eyes see and our ears hear. This time can perhaps be used instead for productive tasks, extra prayer or spiritual reading. In this way, we begin, little by little, to become free from our passions so that we may reorient our lives towards Christ our Saviour who desires that all men be saved and come to the



knowledge of the Truth (1 Timothy 2:4). Above all we must do this humbly and cheerfully for Christ and not grudgingly and with long, sad faces and *definitely* not in an attention seeking way! The coming weeks will surely be tough and will test us all in different ways. Therefore, I urge you all to pray, give alms and fast, come to church regularly and encourage your families and friends in this great spiritual struggle!

**Father Mark**

## Services March 2023

Saturdays: Great Vespers 4.30 pm

Sundays: Holy Liturgy of St Basil 10:30 am

**Sunday**  
26 Feb      Sunday of Cheesefare, Forgiveness  
Sunday, Holy Liturgy 10:30am &  
Forgiveness Prayers

**Monday**  
27 Feb      *First day of the Great Fast (Lent)*

**Wednesdays**  
1, 8, 15, 22, 29      *Holy Liturgy of the Presanctified*  
March & 5      9.30am  
April at St  
Helen’s Chapel

**Fridays 3, 10,**      *Akathist of the Mother of God 6pm*  
17, 24, 31  
March at St  
Helen’s Chapel

**Saturday 25**      *Annunciation of the Mother of God*  
March      *Holy Liturgy of St John 9.30am*

## News and updates of the month:

The final drawings and technical specifications for our new iconostasis have at last been submitted to the local planning authorities by our architect.

Our woodworker Silviu Iftime has worked very hard to provide all the detailed material for the application and our iconographer Sophronia Kelpi is hard at work on the preparation of our icons. We pray and ask you to pray that the plans will pass quickly through the planning approval stage and allow us to begin the long awaited installation of this beautiful design.



*Father Mark*

## A word from the Fathers:

“One cannot love without suffering. The greatest suffering is to love until the end. Christ loved so much that He surrendered Himself to a horrific death. The saints did the same. Heaven always has that price. Prayer for the world is the fruit of an extremely deep and acute suffering.”

*(St Sophrony The Athonite,  
Words of Life)*

## Also in March:

Holy Apostle Aristobulus of the Seventy, first Bishop of Britain (1st c.). He is commemorated on 16 March and he was born in Cyprus. He was a follower of Apostle Paul who mentions him in his Epistle of the Romans (16:10). He built many churches in Britain and ordained many priests and deacons as well.

## St Benedict of Nursia, Abbot and Confessor (480-547 AD)

St Benedict of Nursia is considered to be the “Father” of Western monasticism. He was born in the Italian town of Nursia in 480. When he was 14 years old, his parents sent him to Rome to study, however, he became disappointed by what he found around him. Around the age of 20, he and an old family attendant moved into the mountains east of Rome. There he gained attention for his spiritual progress and so he had to retire alone further into the mountains. It was here that he met the hermit Romanus, who tonsured him into monasticism and guided him to a nearby cave. After three years, a local priest discovered his retreat and people soon began to gather to him, thirsting to live under his guidance. The number of disciples grew so much that the saint divided them into 12 communities, each having 12 monks and one igumen. The novice monks remained with St Benedict for instruction. Later on he withdrew to the territory of Monte Cassino. This was the site of very ancient pagan celebrations. However, through the saint’s prayers, fasting, and preaching, many locals were converted - and an abbey was built instead of the existing temple. Here began a very important chapter of St Benedict’s life, because during this time he designed the famous ‘Rule’ which has become the foundation stone of Western spiritual discipline. The Rule prescribed the renunciation of personal possessions, as well as unconditional obedience, and constant work. Every new monk was required to live as a novice for a year and every deed required a blessing. Keeping the monastic Rule was strictly binding for everyone and an important step on the way to perfection. St Benedict had the gift of foresight and wonderworking, healing many through his prayers. He foretold the day of his own death in 547. St Benedict’s sister, St Scholastica is also famous for her strict ascetic life.



*“By your ascetical contests, O God-bearer Benedict, / you were true to the name that you bear; / for you blossomed as a son of benediction, / and became a Rule for all who desire to emulate your life. / Thus, with one voice we cry: / “Glory to Him Who strengthened you; / glory to Him Who crowned you; / glory to Him Who, through you, works healings for all.” (Troparion - Tone 1)*



**St Martin’s Church, West Stockwell Street, CO1 1HN**  
**St Helen’s Chapel, Maidenburgh Street, CO1 1UB**

Both temples are off the High Street, but accessible from there only on foot. Nearest car park NCP Nunn’s Road, CO1 1EJ.

Confessions: Saturdays 5pm, after Vespers or by arrangement.

Holy Marriage, Holy Baptism, Funerals, Memorials etc: by arrangement.

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We are grateful to those continuing to support our church by regular or occasional gifts: God bless you.

### Bank details:

**Orthodox Parish of St Martin & St Helen: Registered Charity No: 1134418**

**IBAN:** GB05BUKB20226780219819

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**Account No:** 50349364

**Appeal Account No:** 80219819

**Parish Website:** <http://www.orthodoxcolchester.org.uk/>