Just a few days ago, the Orthodox Church reset the liturgical clock. September 1 is the beginning of our new liturgical year. I know. It sounds a little strange, doesn't it? Eight months have already passed in 2026, but the Liturgy tells us that a new year is beginning. On September 1, it tells us, "It's time to begin." *So the subject of my sermon this morning is going to focus on "the sanctification of time" through the seasons of the liturgical year.*

1. The Sanctification of Time

One of the tragedies of our modern world is that we take time for granted. We think we're going to live forever. Someone asks another person, "Hi, what are you doing today?" And they answer "Not much. Just killing time." "Killing time!" What a waste of life. The Psalms tell us that if we live to 70, our years have been full. Today people are living longer. We're told that the average human lives 79 years, give or take. That's 28,854 days or 692,496 hours. What do we spend most of that time doing? About 1/3 of that time is spent sleeping. 26 years out of 79 leaves 53 years left to live. Then there are 13 full years out of 79 that are spent working; 4 1/2 years is spent eating (that's a low figure for some of us!); that leaves us with

about 36.2 years of free-time left to do whatever we want to do. And some say 11 of those 36 years left are spent watching TV or scrolling through the I-Phone. That leaves you with about 25 years left, after all is said and done.

The Psalmist said, *"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."* Time belongs to God. It was created by God when He made the world, and each one of us has been given only a certain amount of time to live. The year, the day, the hour and the minute of your death has already been set by God. Some will die of cancer; others will die of a heart attack, a disease or some other life-ending event. We don't know when or how we will die, but time is going to stop for each of us. And so the Psalmist says, "*Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."*

The great liturgical teacher, Fr. Alexander Schmemann, often pointed out that time is a *sacrament.* All of our time is sacred. Time is to be sanctified so that all that we do in life will be done to the glory of God. Every meal, every workplace, every ordinary hour of human labor is meant to be lifted up to God in thanksgiving and filled with His grace. When you wake up in the morning and cross yourself, when you offer a brief

prayer over a simple meal, or when you pause during a stressful day at work to offer that labor to Christ, or even when you rest or play with your children, you are sanctifying time. You are taking all of your life and offering it up to God as an act of worship.

We might wonder, "Why are we supposed to sanctify time?" Time is to be sanctified because God has already begun saving and transfiguring the whole of creation itself—starting with Creation and culminating in the Incarnation when God took flesh unto Himself and sanctified it. When Jesus rose from the dead, He launched God's New Creation. And that means the hours, minutes, and seconds of your life today are not to be killed. They are the very space in which God is building His New Creation in you and in the whole of the created order.

2. The Liturgical Year as a School for the Christian Life

Every year, on September 1, the Orthodox Church resets the clock that sanctifies time. It's the beginning of our liturgical year. And part of the reason why it's done yearly is because we are forgetful and negligent people. We forget God.We forget

who we are. We forget the Gospel. We forget what Christ has done. And, perhaps most importantly, we forget *what kind of people we are supposed to become. And so the liturgical year is* a **school of Christian memory and of spiritual formation**. Every year the Church takes us through the great events of salvation: Annunciation → Nativity → Theophany → Great Lent → Holy Week → Pascha → Ascension → Pentecost → Transfiguration → Dormition**,** and eventually back around again. But this is not simply information about events that happened long ago. The Church is **forming us by repeatedly placing us inside the story of salvation**. In worship, the Church opens our lives to the **Kingdom of God that is already here in our midst**. Orthodoxy is not simply about accumulating information or collecting religious facts. It is about *theosis*—communion with the living God and total transformation by His uncreated grace. The Christian life is an unending pilgrimage where we are gradually being made into the people God created us to be. It is a life in which we are changed from glory to glory.

The liturgical year is the Church's school that makes this transformation possible. All of us are being formed by something. The news we watch forms us. The anxieties of our employment form us. Our entertainment, our politics, and our appetites form us. Whatever we read shapes who we become.

But the Church gives us a sacred *counter-rhythm.* It places Christ at the very center of our time so that, year after year, *His life steadily becomes the pattern of our own*. The liturgical cycle is like a screw being driven into wood. It turns around and around, passing the same angles, but with every single turn, it drives deeper and deeper into the wood. With each passing feast and fast, the Gospel moves us out of our busy minds and sinks deep into our bodies and souls -- year after year, service after service, fast after fast, feast after feast, and memory after memory. And this happens year after year, from cradle to grave.

3. How Should We Enter This New Year?

So how should we enter this new year, this "indiction" as it is called? We begin with **thanksgiving**. I invite you to look back over the past twelve months of your life. Through every joy and every trial, and every blessing and every

uncertainty...God was *faithful,* wasn't He? So start the year with thankfulness.

We can also begin with **repentance**. As you reflect on this past year, ask yourself: *Have I drifted from the faith? Was I negligent? Did I let resentment poison my heart for some reason? Did I allow spiritual laziness to take control of my life? Did I neglect my relationship with the Lord? Did I fail to go to Confession as I'd like*? If any of these things have been true, I have some good news for you this morning? *God forgives!* September is a great time for a new beginning. It's like what happens in the sacrament of Confession: Whenever people come to Confession I often remind them what Confession is all about: It's what the Church Fathers called "the renewal of our baptism." It's a time when we make things right with God; a time when we make things right with others (if needed); and a time when we make things right with the church. It's a time of spiritual growth in godliness... When was the last time you went to Confession? And what about your kids? If they are old enough to be morally accountable, they are old enough to go to Confession (a small child can obey or disobey a rule, but not be morally cognizant beyond that; but a 10 year old child is a

morally accountable child because they recognize right from wrong, and understand the impact of their choices on other people). Parents, set an example for your kids, and also encourage them to go to Confession if they haven't begun that spiritual discipline yet. The priest is there to help all of you to grow in grace, as much as he can.

So we begin the liturgical year with thanksgiving and repentance. But we also begin the year with **sincerity of heart.** This is true for all of us, but especially for those who have recently entered the Church and are stepping into this cycle for the very first time—our newly baptized and chrismated brothers and sisters. Regardless of whether you have been Orthodox for many years, or just starting out, please know that you are not expected to go through the liturgical year in strict obedience to everything that is here. You might look at this green paper and an Orthodox calendar that is filled with fast days, commemorations of saints, and special liturgical services and feel defeated at the mere sight of it all. You will naturally wonder "How in the world am I supposed to do all this? I have a family to take care of, and a job to do? Does the Church

expect me to live like a monk who does nothing all day but pray, fast, work and liturgize?" Well, let me put to rest your anxieties. One of the worse things you could do is to approach the liturgical year legalistically. None of us should think that strict obedience will "earn" God's favor. We cannot earn salvation, or grow in grace, simply by attending more services or saying more prayers. Salvation is first of all God's *gift* to us, and that gift can never be earned by strict external obedience to religious rules and rituals. The church is a *hospital* that brings you to the Physician, not a policeman writing traffick tickets.

So what we are trying to do as we go through the liturgical year is to "sanctify all our time" -- to *learn a new way of living in the time of this world- a new way of being human.* The point is not to memorize the liturgical calendar (although that's good to do); the point is to let the calendar form and shape our understanding of the Gospel, and enable us to grow in godliness and holiness of life. That is the *big picture* of what lies ahead at the start of the liturgical year. Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of blessed memory often reminded us that genuine spiritual growth happens far more slowly than we would like. Our life will not likely change dramatically in an instant; growth will be more

like the tortoise and the hare, *"slow and steady wins the race."* So look ahead at the race that lies before you and consider how you run it. Take this green sheet home and look it over thoughtfully and prayerfully. In so doing, do not try to be a monk who is called to pray, fast and work 24 hrs around the clock. Instead, go *sure and steady* as you enter the liturgical year. **At the center of your yearly journey, make the Divine Liturgy on Sunday a cornerstone of your participation in the church's calendar. Make it a non-negotiable day of worship.** Sunday is "the Lord's day", not merely "the day we go to church." It is the day on which our fellow Christians gather to encounter the risen Christ, to hear the Gospel, to offer ourselves to God, encourage one another, and to receive the Eucharist. The goal is not merely to attend the liturgy, it is to live the Divine Liturgy and participate in its life. Unless there is a *really* good reason, none of us should ever miss the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning. Hebrews 10:25 says, *"Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as is the manner of some."*

CONCLUSION:

Right now, at the beginning of September, a new journey lies before us. And perhaps the most important question we can

ask ourselves is not simply, “What services will I attend this year?” or “How faithfully will I keep the fasts?” The deeper question is this: **Will we simply go through another liturgical year—or will we allow the liturgical year to go through us?** The Church gives us this year because Christ wants to form us into His own likeness—not merely through a sequence of dates on a calendar, but to form us into the mystery of His own life.

The feasts teach us who He is.

The fasts teach us to control our appetites and impulses and to hunger for Christ.

The Scriptures teach us wisdom by knowing and doing God's will.

The services teach us how to pray.

Confession relieves the burdens of life and teaches us to repent.

The Eucharist offers us union with Christ, the "bread of life."

Week after week, and year after year, the rhythm of the Church year teaches us and empowers us to become "conformed to the image of God's Son." So as we come to the beginning of

another liturgical year, we find ourselves standing at a fork in the road. We have a decision to make: **Will we simply stand by and watch as we go through another liturgical year—or will we enter into it and allow the liturgical year to go through us?**