

Spiritual Weather



I've always been a little bit of a weather geek. I appreciate watching the coming and going of the seasons, which is part of why this boy born in Southern California enjoys living in Michigan so much. There's a certain feeling to the coming of spring, distinct from when summer fades into fall.

It's not only the seasons; each day brings interesting changes in wind, temperature and precipitation. For me, keeping an eye on the weather is one way of simply enjoying life in all its variety. As the Weather Channel states in its slogan, "It's amazing out there."

So many of us spend so little time outdoors that we could almost choose to ignore the weather. It simply becomes something we deal with only when we have to, and we then we deal with it unprepared: caught in the rain without an umbrella, or unexpectedly stuck in traffic from ice and snow. And when this happens, we see weather as nothing more than a nuisance.

Like the physical cycles of weather, paying attention to the liturgical cycles of our worship brings a similar experience of anticipation and appreciation. Just like following the weather, once we understand these cycles of services and seasons, fast and feasts, our anticipation as one flows into the other only increases our appreciation. And just like the weather, this doesn't happen by studying it only, but mainly by living it while paying attention to it. For example, if we understand the pre-Lenten Sundays that prepare us for the Great Fast, once Forgiveness Sunday comes around we even find ourselves eager to begin our sacrificial efforts. But if we're not paying attention, we suddenly find ourselves in services that are unexpectedly longer. Like being caught in the rain unprepared we not only miss out on the appreciation of what's happening, but perhaps even find ourselves annoyed.

So keeping an eye on our liturgical cycles offers us a wonderful opportunity to encounter God and be formed by Him. Sadly, too many of us miss out on following the "spiritual weather." Going to church rarely or only going to the Sunday morning Divine Liturgy doesn't provide enough experience of the constantly changing cycle of our liturgical worship to appreciate the ebb and flow of all that the Church offers us. Like nursing home residents or others stuck inside, getting our weather through

watching a forecast or reading what's written on the white board ("Today is Cold") is a very different experience than being out in the elements.

Just like living with an appreciation of the cycles and changes of weather brings us closer to nature as God created it to be, following the "spiritual weather" brings us closer to the Creator Himself. Our liturgical cycles do more than teach us about the events that have unfolded in our salvation or in the events in the life of our Lord. They *immerse* us in those events. They bring us so intimately into the reality that we proclaim these events as happening *today*. On the feast of the Annunciation that we just celebrated, we joyfully proclaimed "*Today* is the beginning of our salvation." In a few weeks on Great and Holy Friday, we will mourn, singing "*Today* He is suspended on a tree, Who suspended the earth over the waters."

So here we find ourselves in the fifth week of Great Lent. What's the forecast, you ask? A powerful system arrives today, beginning with the singing of the Great Canon of Repentance tonight. It will bring a challenging mix of physical effort with many prostrations (for those that are able) with intermittent showers of inspiring refreshment as we hear the life of Saint Mary of Egypt in her remarkable journey from sinner to saint. This three day system continues tomorrow with some leftover showers of spiritual challenge borrowed from the tonight's Great Canon, which will highlight tomorrow's Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts. The system will move out of our area on Friday as we sing the Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God in a joyful final celebration of this year's remembrance of God's Son coming to us, taking on flesh in her womb. We therefore anticipate a challenging and active few days which contain many gifts of insight and inspiration.

Looking at the long-term forecast, we see major "weather front" making its way towards us in the form of Holy Week. Like every year, we anticipate challenging schedules, with daily life efforts of work and homework mixed with strong winds of eternal awareness and awareness of divine involvement by our loving, saving Lord. "Temperatures" will vary greatly from the "lows" as we witness Christ's betrayal, abandonment, torture and death; to the "highs" of His raising of Lazarus from the dead, triumphant entry into Jerusalem, His sharing His life with us in Holy Unction and Communion, and finally His glorious Resurrection.

All in all, and active forecast but one that will bless us greatly if only we will take our attention "outside" of ourselves and enjoy the weather. If we do that, we will find ourselves understanding the Weather Channel's slogan: "It's amazing out there."

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