Some see this season of the year as a spiritual marathon. They rise from their sedentary spiritual lives, set off in a sprint and fail before the first week is out. The failure comes in anger, self-recrimination, even despondency. The first year that I “chose” to fast in the Orthodox manner (it was 4 years before I was received into the Church), the priest I discussed the fast with said, “You can’t keep the fast.” I argued with him until I realized his wisdom.

“Nope. Eat chicken. Eat everything except beef and pork.”

“What about chicken?” I asked.

“The first year that I “chose” to fast in the Orthodox manner had. No longer were we mu...

...and to en...
and deliver Thy creatures from bondage to the Enemy. Therefore with thankfulness we cry aloud to Thee:

“Thou hast filled all with joy, O our Savior,//
for Thou alone hast come to save the world.”

Tone 8 Kontakion (from the Lenten Triodion)
No one could describe the Word of the Father;
but when He took flesh from thee, O Theotokos, He accepted to be described,
and restored the fallen image to its former state by uniting it to divine beauty.//
We confess and proclaim our salvation in words and images.

Tone 4 Prokeimenon (Song of the Fathers)
Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our fathers, and praised and glorified is Thy name forever! (Song of the three Holy Children, v. 3)

v: For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us! (v. 4)

Tone 4 Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!
v: Moses and Aaron were among His priests; Samuel also was among those who called on His Name. (Ps 99/100:6)

v: They called to the Lord and He answered them. (Ps 99/100:6)

Today’s Scripture Readings:

Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-122 (Epistle)
By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

John 1:43-51 (Gospel)
The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, “Follow Me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” And Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And He said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Get Real For Lent
By Fr. Stephen Freeman

According to St. Basil, God is the “only truly Existing.” Our own existence is a gift from God who is our Creator. None of us has “self-existing” life. We exist because God sustains us in existence - in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

Sin is the rejection of this gift of God – a movement away from true existence.

+++ Much of our attention in the modern world is engaged seemingly with things that have no “true existence.” We engage with illusions, with digital constructs. Our economy allows us to escape the normal necessities such as seasonal scarcity or other mundane concerns. We are increasingly removed from the very environment in which we naturally live.

It is said that astronauts, after spending a prolonged time in space, have lingering effects of zero-gravity. Our bodies are made for gravity and require its constant pull for everything from muscle tone to bone density. But we now live in situations in which many forms of natural “gravity” have been reduced or removed. What effect does the long-term ability to have almost any food at any time of year have on the human body? As someone who has spent the better part of my life at a desk, I can attest to the effect of a sedentary existence. My lower back, my range of motion, the flexibility of my joints are all consistent with the modern white-collar worker.

What effect do such things have on the soul? For the soul requires “gravity” as well. Plato stated in his Republic, that all children should learn to play a musical instrument because music was required for the right development of the soul. We give far too little thought to such things, assuming that no matter what environment we live in, our inherent freedom of choice remains unsathed and we can always decide to do something different, or be something different. I could decide to run a marathon tomorrow, but I know that the first quarter-mile would leave me gasping for breath and exhausted. You cannot go from 40 years at a desk to the demands of a marathon – just because you choose to do so. And so we come to Great Lent.