

The Confessor's Tongue for February 22, 2009

Sunday of the Last Judgment; Meatfare

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

Meatfare Sunday/Last Judgment

The first name of this Sunday is explained by the fact that from it the permission to eat meat is ended (*miasopustj*=meat dismissal, or the discontinuance of meat), and the second name comes from the Gospel reading about the future all-inclusive Dread Judgment of the living and departed, which is described in all church services. By the commemoration of the Dread Judgment the Holy Church more strongly prompts the sinners to repentance and points out the true meaning of hope in the mercy of God. God is merciful but at the same time He is the Righteous Judge, having to render to everyone according to his deeds; therefore sinners should not be mistaken concerning their responsibility for their moral condition and abuse of the long-suffering God. Recalling the Dread Judgment and turning our mental eyes on "the eternal fire, the multitude in darkness and the Tartarus, the dread worm, the gnashing of teeth and the unceasing anguish that befalls those who have sinned without measure", "the inscrutable trembling and dread", "the incorruptible torture" and "the soul corrupting Hades", the Holy Church inspires us with the idea of the absolute necessity of repentance both of amending and preliminary plaintive prayer to the Lord, while there is still time and opportunity, and on behalf of all of us exclaims: "today let abstain from food, let us make haste to do good deeds and let us worthily repent our transgressions". The Holy Church especially calls us for spiritual struggles of philanthropy, so this order of struggles is the most possible for everyone and is most proper during the time of fasting and repentance: "Knowing the commandments of the Lord, let this be our way of life: let us feed the hungry, let us give the thirsty drink, let us clothe the naked, let us welcome strangers, let us visit those in prison and the sick: Then the Judge of all the earth will say even to us: 'Come, O blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you'"

During our century the reminder of the Holy Church on this day about the Dread Judgment is especially timely. From this day we already enter into the very "preparation" of the holy fast, as it is called in the church language the stepping week, in which, according to the intention of the Holy Church even to already serve as the beginning of the Lenten effort and work; but, unfortunately, according to the usage of the world this week has become some kind of pagan feast, full of temptations and seductions, as a time of various and noisy amusements [i.e., the "Fat Tuesday" genre of amusement]. In order to not allow ourselves to begin to spin in this whirlwind of pleasures up to the self denial and darkening of the senses in order to be warned of heavy falls among diverse seductions and temptations, it is necessary to be especially attentive to the reminder of the Holy

Church: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:10). Although "of that day or that hour no one knows", "only the Father" (Mk. 13:32), but our day of judgment will come for us: for the days of our life are evil, running not stopping, passing by so soon and imperceptibly, that we do not notice their flow, and for each of us the hour of death is completely unexpected and can seize us and present us to the judgment of God. That is why we should also hasten to forestall the day of the judgment of God by judging ourselves, by sincere repentance, with tears of contrition and with complete sincerity; to free our soul from the bonds of sinful and forceful passions by deeds and persistence, with vigils and prayer, with fasting and studying the Word of God, to adorn it with the garment of good deeds, of faith and piety, truth and love, humility and meekness, by compassion and mercy to neighbors, let us with graciousness and courtesy turn to our Judge and Lord, let us listen with yearning for His voice: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:34)" S. V. Bulgakov, *Handbook for Church Servers*, 2 ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) p. 0493-4 Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © January 7, 2004. All rights reserved.

Fasting Step by Step

Fasting, especially during the Great Fast can be not only difficult but also intimidating when we consider the full strictness of the fast. One may readily be tempted to think it is not possible to follow and so not try at all. Yet fasting is something we learn to do; we begin simply and, with God's help, we move forward in it year by year.

The following steps are offered to help break down fasting for us so we can both have a sense of where we are in our fasting and how we can make incremental progress in it to approach the Church's norms for fasting as closely as we can.

The Church gives us a norm for fasting in order to combat our self-will and to unite us a common way of fasting. While we should endeavor to follow the norm for fasting, it does represent a rather drastic change from the eating habits of most Americans. Some take right to it, but others may have to work into it gradually. Each year when the Great Fast rolls around, we seek to keep what we have done in the past and build upon it, taking an additional step forward in our fasting, along with our prayer, almsgiving, and reading.

Observing steps 1-7 below represents fasting as many of the faithful practice it today (no meat and dairy at all during Lent; fish only on Annunciation and Palm Sunday; wine and oil as permitted on the calendar) and should be attainable by most of us over time, while steps 8-11 bring us very close to the

Church's norm of one simple meal a day on weekdays.

The primary purpose of fasting is go make us conscious of our dependence on God, to help us cut off the passions, and to help subject the body to the soul so that the body is governed by the soul rather than the soul by the body. The rules are given to keep us from being arbitrary and self-willed in our fasting, but they are not to be interpreted with a "dour and pedantic legalism", for as St. Paul writes, "the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). So though we should seriously attempt to follow the rules of the Fast, we must realize that the Fast is made for us, not we for the Fast. God does not need our fasting and it does not impress Him; but we need our fasting to humble ourselves before Him that we may receive the grace He desires to give us.

It has always been held that the rules of fasting should be relaxed in the case of anyone elderly, in poor health, with child, etc.

As always, if you have any questions, please see your father-confessor. If you feel the norms of the fast are too much for you given your experience, health, age, etc., you should seek counsel to help you discern God's will for you in how you keep the fast rather than granting yourself a dispensation from it.

The steps below do not necessarily have to be followed in order.

Step 1: Quit eating between meals. Instead of snacking, take water or fruit juice.

Step 2: Eliminate alcohol during the Fast except on the days it is permitted (see calendar).

Step 3: Eliminate meat, meat products, and dairy products on Wednesdays and Fridays. (This is what is called for most weeks of the year anyway.)

Step 4: Eliminate meat, meat products, and dairy products on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

Step 5: Eliminate meat, meat products, and dairy products during Clean Week (the first week of the fast) and Holy Week, when the fasting is stricter than during the other weeks of the Fast.

Step 6: Eliminate meat, meat products, and dairy products all days during the Fast. (If eliminating both meat and dairy is too difficult for one in steps 3-6, start with meat and then go back through steps 3-6 with dairy).

Step 7: Eliminate fish all days during the Fast except Palm Sunday and Annunciation (or follow steps 3-6 in regards to fish).

Step 8: Skip breakfast on weekdays during Clean Week and Holy Week.

Step 9: Skip breakfast and lunch on weekdays during Clean Week and Holy Week.

Step 10: Skip breakfast on all weekdays during the Fast.

Step 11: Skip breakfast and lunch on all weekdays during the Fast.

Step 12: Read the introduction on Fasting written by Kallistos Ware in the *Lention Triodion* to get more details on which days one doesn't eat at all and on which days "dry eating" is practiced.

At Every Step: Remember tithing and almsgiving. If you don't tithe, increase the percentage of your regular giving. Give alms over and above tithes (the money saved from not eating out, not eating meat, etc.) to worthy causes or to our own almsbox to help the needy.

At Every Step: Remember that our physical fasting from food is combined always with prayer. A little bit of consistent prayer every day is better than a lot of prayer occasionally. Prayers before and after Holy Communion are always very important and should be prayed faithfully.

The services of the Church are an essential part of our prayer. While few of us can attend every service offered during the week, all of us can attend at least some of the lenten weekday services. We should Confess and receive Holy Communion as frequently as possible to help sustain us during the Fast.

Do some extra spiritual reading to nourish your soul. Don't forget to cut out the spiritual junk food of TV, movies, secular music, novels, etc.

Remember that while this may seem very difficult if not impossible to you, all things are possible by God's grace. We have to open our hearts in willingness to obey, asking Him to give us strength to do what we in ourselves cannot do. It is a glorious thing to find oneself empowered by God's grace; but we have to give ourselves the opportunity to experience it, and the Fast provides such an opportunity.

Last of all, it is God and His glory that we seek to perceive more clearly and know more intimately. Our hunger pangs and our cravings for the "forbidden" foods remind us of how we need to hunger and thirst after righteous and God Himself so that God can satisfy us.

May God grant us all a blessed and profitable fast!

Fr. Justin Frederick, inspired by Fr. Boniface Black of St. Philips, Souderton, PA

The Holy Church cries out: fasting is not avoiding food, but putting away all evil, controlling the tongue from idle talking and gossip, forbearing from anger, and abstaining from lust, falsehood, and flattery. Whoever fasts in this way, his fast is pleasing to God.
St. Anthony of Optima

Upcoming Events 2009

1 March, Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m. All parishioners should make every effort to attend this service, which marks the beginning of the Great Fast.
2-6 March, Clean Week
12-18 April, Holy Week
19 April, Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!