

The Confessor's Tongue for March 17, A. D. 2013

Forgiveness Sunday; Cheesefare; Expulsion from Paradise

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.

The Forgiveness Sunday

On this Sunday the Holy Church focuses on the memory of the exile of our ancestral parents from paradise for disobedience and intemperance in order that through misfortune it more evidently emphasizes the importance of the presented ascetical effort for all, and in the loss of the blessedness of paradise it specifies a subject, worthy of repentance and tears. The example of the ancestral parents shows us the whole weight of sin and its fatal consequences and teaches us to avoid intemperance as the beginning and the source of sin, and to turn to repentance, as to the unique means of deliverance from the anger and judgment of God.

Prayer for the Start of the 40-Day Fast

O God, Hope of all the ends of the earth, and of those who are far off at sea, who didst foretell these holy days of fasting in the Law, and in the Prophets, and the Evangelists: Do Thou count all of us worthy to pass the course of the Fast in purity, to preserve the Faith undivided, and to keep Thy commandments all the days of our lives. Bid an Angel of peace to preserve our comings-in and goings-out for every good work, being obedient together and together pleasing Thee unto a perfect communion of Thy most-pure Mysteries. And accept, O Master, the bending of the knees and the fasting of Thy servants, granting unto all of us spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus our Lord, with Whom Thou art blessed, together with Thy most-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

The arena of the virtues hath been opened. Let all who wish to struggle for the prize now enter, girding themselves for the noble contest of the Fast; for those that strive lawfully are justly crowned. Taking up the armor of the Cross, let us make war against the enemy. Let us have as our invincible rampart the Faith, prayer as our breastplate and almsgiving as our helmet; and as our sword, let us use fasting that cutteth away all evil from our heart. If we do this, we shall receive the true crown from Christ the King of all at the Day of Judgement.

Matins for Forgiveness Sunday

St. John Chrysostom on Fasting

“And yet, if faith be requisite,” one may say, “what need of fasting?” Because, together with our faith, that also brings no small power. For it both implants much strictness, and of a man makes an angel, and fights against the incorporeal powers: yet not by itself, but prayer too is needed, and prayer must come first....He that fasts is light, and winged, and prays with wakefulness, and quenches his wicked

lusts, and propitiates God, and humbles his soul when lifted up. Therefore even the apostles were almost always fasting. He that prays with fasting hath his wings double, and lighter than the very wings....But if thy body be too weak to fast continually, still it is not too weak for prayer, nor without vigor for contempt of the belly. For although thou canst not fast, ye canst thou avoid luxurious living; and even this is no little thing, nor far removed from fasting, but even this is enough to pluck down the devil's madness. For indeed nothing is so welcome to that evil spirit, as luxury and drunkenness; since it is both fountain and parent of all our evils....

Five Paths of Repentance

St. John Chrysostom

Would you like me to list also the paths of repentance? They are numerous and quite varied, and all lead to heaven.

A first path of repentance is the condemnation of your own sins: “Be the first to admit your sins and you will be justified.” For this reason, too, the prophet wrote: “I said, I will accuse myself of my sins to the Lord, and Thou forgavest the wickedness of my heart.” Therefore, you too should condemn your own sins; that will be enough reason for the Lord to forgive you, for a man who condemns his own sins is slower to commit them again. Rouse your conscience to accuse yourself within your own house, lest it become your accuser before the judgment seat of the Lord.

That, then, is one very good path of repentance. Another and less valuable one is to put out of our minds the harm done us by our enemies, in order to master our anger, and to forgive our fellow servants' sins against us. Then our own sins against the Lord will be forgiven us. Thus you have another way to atone for sin: “For if you forgive your debtors, your heavenly Father will forgive you.”

Do you want to know of a third path? It consists of prayer that is fervent and careful and comes from the heart.

If you want to hear of a fourth, I will mention almsgiving, whose power is great and far-reaching.

If, moreover, a man lives a modest, humble life, that, no less than the other things I have mentioned, takes sin away. Proof of this is the tax collector who had no good deeds to mention, but offered his humility instead and was relieved of a heavy burden of sins.

Thus I have shown you five paths of repentance: condemnation of your own sins, forgiveness of our neighbor's sins against us, prayer, almsgiving, and humility.

Do not be idle, then, but walk daily in all these paths; they are easy, and you cannot plead your

poverty. For, though you live out your life amid great need, you can always set aside your wrath, be humble, pray diligently, and condemn your own sins; poverty is no hindrance. Poverty is not an obstacle to our carrying out the Lord's bidding, even when it comes to that path of repentance which involves giving money (almsgiving, I mean). The widow proved that when she put her two mites into the box!

Now that we have learned how to heal those wounds of our, let us apply the cures. Then, when we have regained genuine health, we can approach the Holy Table with confidence, go gloriously to meet Christ, the King of Glory, and attain the eternal blessings through the grace, mercy, and kindness of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Why Some Christians Fall Away

St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

Why do some people, well-educated, baptized as Christians, fall away from Christianity into philosophy or learned theories, alleging them to be something truer than Christianity? For two main reasons: either from an utterly superficial knowledge of Christianity, or from sin. A superficial knowledge of Christ rejects Him, and sin flees from Christ like a felon from judgment. Superficial and guilty Christians have often become as bitter enemies of Christianity as are pagans. To the superficial and the guilty it is more comfortable to bathe in the shallow pool of human thought than in the dangerous depths of Christ. Those who sincerely set themselves to follow Christ are constantly invited by Christ to a greater and greater depth, as He once said to the Apostle Peter, "Launch out into the deep." St. Mark the Ascetic writes that one understands the Law of God insofar as one fulfills His commandments. 'Ignorance urges man to speak against that which is helpful, and insolence breeds vice.'

On the Use of Images

St. John of Kronstadt

My carnal nature needs images. Therefore, we rightly and justly make images and reverence them. What else is man but a living image of the living God?

Can our nature do without an image? Can we recall to mind an absent person without representing and imagining him? Has not God himself enabled us to represent and to imagine? Images are the Church's answer to a crying necessity of our nature.

Images or symbols are a necessity of human nature in our present spiritually sensual condition; they explain visually many things of the spiritual world which we could not apprehend without images and symbols. It was for this reason that the divine teacher, the personal Wisdom through whom all things were created, the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, often taught men by means of images or parables. It is for this reason also that in our Orthodox churches it is the custom to represent

many things to the sight of the Christian by imagery; for instance, to represent the Lord Himself, the immaculate Mother of God, the angels and saints, on images, in order that we may conform our lives, all our thoughts, words, and deeds, to the image of the thoughts, words, and deeds of the Lord and his saints.

By reverencing icons, first, I reverence in them God, who has begotten before all worlds the Son, his living image, who clothed in matter the infinite thought of God the Father by creating the worlds and all creatures that were in the thought of God and man, created after the image and likeness of God; second, I honor in them the image of God incarnate; third, I honor in them myself, man made in the immortal divine image, called to be a partaker of the divine nature, to unity with the Lord, to be the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Icons replace the persons themselves whose names they bear. The images of the saints upon our icons represent to us the nearness in the spirit of God's saints, who live in God, and are always close to us in the Holy Spirit, through our hearty faith and prayer to them.

We have images in our houses and venerate them in order to show, amongst other things, that the eyes of God and of all the company of heaven are constantly fixed upon us, and see not only all our acts, but also our words, thoughts, and desires.

Kissing with the lips corresponds to kissing with the soul; and when we kiss holy things, we ought to kiss them with the soul and heart as well as with the lips.

From *Spiritual Counsels: Select Passages from My Life in Christ*, SVS Press.

From the Optina Elders on Fasting

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

Fasting is praiseworthy and necessary in its time and place: it is better to keep to a moderate use of food and drink, avoiding satiety, indicated by a slight heaviness, and on the other hand, avoiding excessive and inappropriate abstinence. Moderation, the middle path, makes a person more capable of spiritual activity.

St. Ambrose

Upcoming Events 2012-2013

- 17 March: Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m. We ask that all who consider St. Maximus their church home plan to attend this service. Great Lent begins at Midnight.
- 18—23 March: Clean Week & Great Canon
- 25 March: Annunciation
- 5 May: Great and Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!