

# The Confessor's Tongue for March 13, A. D. 2016

Sunday of the Expulsion from Paradise; Forgiveness Sunday; Cheese-fare; St. Nicephorus  
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.

---

---

## 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.

## Participation in Lenten Services

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

*Lent is not just a time not to eat certain foods. It is a time for spiritual renewal, for repentance, for rededication of the Christian's whole life to Christ. This takes a certain effort on his part. The Church assists him by orienting her services to this work of repentance and renewal. The Christian who takes his faith seriously and recognizes his need for the fast will find much help in the divine services. Thus, a complete fast will include increased attendance at the divine services. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann discusses this in the following excerpt from his book Great Lent.*

No one...can attend the entire cycle of lenten worship. Everyone *can* attend some of it. There is simply no excuse for not making Lent, first of all, the time for an increased attendance of an participation in the liturgy of the Church. Here again, personal conditions, individual possibilities and impossibilities can vary and result in different decisions, but there must be a decision, there must be an effort, and there must be a "follow-up." From the liturgical point of view, we may suggest the following "minimum" aimed not at the spiritually self-destructive sense of having fulfilled an obligation, but at receiving at least the essential in the liturgical spirit of Lent.

In the first place, a special effort must be made on the parish level for a proper celebration of the *Forgiveness Sunday Vespers*....It must become one of the great "parish affairs" of the year....

The next priority must be given to the first week of Lent. A special effort must be made to attend at least once or twice the *Great Canon of St. Andrew*. As we have seen, the liturgical function of these first days is to take us into the spiritual "mood" of Lent, which we described as "bright sadness."

Then, throughout the entire Lent, it is imperative that we give at least one evening to attend the *Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts* with the spiritual experience it

implies—that of total fasting, that of the transformation of at least one day into a real expectation of judgment and joy. No reference to conditions of life, lack of time, etc., are acceptable at this point, for if we only do that which easily "fits" into the conditions of our lives, the very notion of lenten effort becomes absolutely meaningless. Not only in the twentieth century, but, in fact, since Adam and Eve, "this world" was always an obstacle to the fulfillment of God's demands. There is, therefore, nothing new or special about our modern "way of life." Ultimately, it all depends again on whether or not we take our religion *seriously*, and if we do, eight or ten additional evenings a year at church are truly a minimal effort. Deprived of that evening, however, we are depriving ourselves not only of the beauty and depth of the lenten services, not only of a necessary spiritual inspiration and help, but of that which, as we shall see in the next section, makes our fasting meaningful and effective.

*Fr. Schmemmann offers a bare minimum. During the Fast, we daily will offer Matin and either Vespers or the Liturgy of Presanctified gifts. The times vary somewhat in an attempt to make the services accessible to everyone's schedule. I urge everyone to take advantage of at least one weekday service each week. Further, plan to spend as much of both Clean Week and Holy Week in church. May the Lord bless you!*

## From the Triodion on the Fast

*The hymns of the Triodion, the liturgical book from which hymns for services are taken during the Fast, express the goal, the rationale, and the how-to of the Fast. Here is a sample from last week, a week of preparation for the Fast.*

Fasting as man, the Lord, overcame the tempter; and so He gave us an example, showing us what lies within our power and setting limits for us.

Make ready, O my soul, and cleanse thyself before the Passion of the Lord, that thou mayest keep festival with Him in spirit at His Resurrection.

The blessed season of the Fast has dawned, and shines upon us with the light of repentance. Let us draw near with love and reverence, and greatly rejoicing, let us shake off the darkness of sloth.

The approaching Fast calls us to repentance: let us run the race with eager hearts, and learn what is the gift of abstinence.

Fasting kills the passions that destroy the soul and the pleasures which bring death upon us, and it sets in order the impulses and movements of the heart. With faith, then, let us eagerly accept the Fast.

The Fast enabled Moses to share in the vision of God. Follow his example, O my soul: establish within thyself by fasting a path of ascent to God, and thou wilt behold His glory.

Helped by the coming season of the Fast, may we refrain from every sin. Let us not turn aside to things

below, let us not run with slothfulness; but, in a few short days, through contrition of heart, let us wipe away the stains of many years, singing the praises of our only God.

The path of holiness lies open before us today. See, the arena of the Fast is made ready for us all. Striving lawfully for the prize, let us pray to Christ to grant us from on high a peaceful Lenten season.

*From Various Matins Canons of Cheese Week*

### An Invitation to Love One's Spouse

*The following is a summary from the recent NTOM Marriage and Family Council from one who attended.*

Dr. Makalakis defines marriage as a journey toward the acquisition of perfect love. This perfect love is primarily acquired through struggle. Dr. Makalakis further distinguishes not just that there are struggles in marriage, but that "struggle is the journey of marriage." This kind of struggle is not against each other but against the flesh. Marriage reveals the diseases of our heart and the limitation of our love. Upon recognizing our diseases and limitations and turning toward Christ, we then have the potential to love our spouse with Christ's love.

So, how practically, can we choose to love our spouse? Throughout the day several times a day, Dr. Makalakis says, we have myriad sixty-second moments to choose to either turn towards, turn away, or turn against our spouse. These micro-opportunities could be in the form of text messages, or short phone conversations exchanging seemingly banal information like "When are you coming home?" "What's for dinner?" Or "How was your day?" When we stop seeing these trivial exchanges solely for the information they impart and rather start to value them as an important "bid for connection," we will see that we have many opportunities throughout the day for meaningful relationship building or breaking.

So, a wife calls her husband right before he is heading into a business meeting to ask him if he knows the answer to a word-search. How will he choose to respond? He turns towards his wife when he says something like "That sounds interesting. I wish I could help you right now. Can I call you as soon as I finish my meeting?" He turns away from his spouse when he responds with indifference: "I am too busy right now to think about that, and I don't have a clue." He turns against his wife when he responds with aggression or criticism: "Why are you calling me at work? Don't you know I have more important things to think about?"

We are all wired for connection. Yet with family demands and work schedules competing for our attention, we must endeavor all the more intentionally to make the most of the moments we have to connect with our spouse. Choose to cease scrolling down that Facebook screen, close that book, look up and towards your spouse, and respond in love! When we start to see these "bids for connection" as an invitation to love, we begin to realize that in

turning towards our spouse, even in the most ordinary or inconvenient moments, we are turning toward Christ. May God grant we live as icons of Christ in our marriages not in theory but in practice.

*The talks were recorded and will be available at the upcoming Pan-Orthodox Vespers. I highly recommend listening to this engaging and insightful counselor and teacher, Dr. Makalakis of Holy Cross Seminary.*

*Sophia Lyda provides this report for us.*

### Lenten Notes

**Rule of Silence:** Strive during this first week of the Fast to abstain from any unnecessary speech. Remember that if a man can control his tongue, he may be considered perfect (James 3); misusing our tongues either for wrong purposes or for excessive speech does great harm to us and others.

The **Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem** ("O Lord and Master of my life...") is said as part of our morning and evening prayers with prostrations, if we are physically able. It is not said on weekends.

O Lord and Master of my life, the spirit of idleness, of despondency, of love of power, and of idle words, grant me not. (*Prostration*)

But the spirit of continence, of humility, of patience, and of love, do Thou grant unto me Thy servant. (*Prostration*)

Yea O Lord and King, grant unto me to perceive mine own offences and not to judge my brother; for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen.

(*Prostration*)

*Then 12 bows to the waist while saying:*

O God, cleanse Thou me a sinner and have mercy on me. (12)

*Then repeat the prayer once with a prostration.*

**Entering and leaving the Church** during Lent from Sunday evening after Vespers through Saturday evening before Vigil (or after a service when we have received Communion) it is customary to make three prostrations (if physically able). When prostrations are not made, we make three bows to the waist instead. In both cases, as we bow, we pray "Thou hast created me, O Lord, have mercy on me," "O God, have mercy on me a sinner," "Countless times have I sinned, O Lord, forgive me."

**Confession:** We should plan on making at least one confession (if not more!) during the Fast. All the faithful are expected to receive Confession Holy Communion during the Fast. Please make your Confession before Holy Week, if at all possible. If you confess to someone other than your parish priest, please inform him as to when and to whom you confessed.

### Upcoming Events 2015-16

13 March: 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers

14-19 March: Clean Week

24-30 April: Holy Week | May Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!