

The Confessor's Tongue for February 26, A. D. 2017

Forgiveness Sunday; Cheesefare; Expulsion of Adam & Eve from Paradise of Bliss
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.

The Commandments of Christ

"If you love Me, keep My commandments."

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."
John 6:27

The one who received unprecedented wisdom from God, King Solomon, characterized the vanity of man's life thus in Ecclesiastes: "All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled" (6:7). Man's basic physical need is for food and drink, and his labor on earth is directed towards acquiring it. He expends great energies in hunting, gathering, fishing, farming, raising livestock to satisfy the appetite of his mouth. For nearly all of human history, except of a small number of the rich and powerful, the mass of the human race lived at a subsistence level, with supply of food uncertain from year to year.

God's original intent for man was not this. He placed man in a Paradise of Bliss where food was abundant. Man's task was to tend the garden. In response to man's rebellion and failure to repent, God cursed the ground for man's sake, that it would more readily yield thorns and weeds than food to eat. Only by hard work, "by the sweat of his brow", would man now be able to eat. The fall brought scarcity, and human economics is the description of man's attempts to overcome it.

Christ acknowledges man's historical preoccupation, yea, obsession, with having a full belly in His negative command that man not labor for the food which perishes. But how else is a man to eat, if he does not work?

We are not to understand Christ as commanding us not to work for food. Elsewhere, St. Paul says clearly that "if a man does not work, neither shall he eat" expecting the faithful to engage in productive labor to support themselves. He writes, "Let him that
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stole, steal nor more; but rather let him labor, working with his own hands, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). The Proverbs of Solomon are full of warnings against sloth. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ commands His disciples to "take no thought" for the food and drink after which the Gentiles seek. This means not to worry about it or obsess over it. Rather Christ's follower is to seek first the kingdom and trust God to provide all the material things he needs for life: job, food, clothing, housing. Hence we understand Christ as not commanding His followers not to work, but to not make the whole point of their lives the regular acquisition of a full belly and comfort for the body. They are to labor to support themselves and to always have something to give to those in need, but not to make "food the perishes" the consuming goal of their lives.

Christ also gives a positive command. The Christian is not to labor for the food which perishes, but he is to labor for the food that endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give. Contrary to the notions of some, the Christian life involves work—work that Christ commands! The food He gives is freely available, but work is required to secure it.

The context for the command is as follows. The day after Jesus feeds the five thousand in the wilderness by blessing and multiplying five loaves and two fish, Jesus has slipped away across the Sea of Galilee. The crowds, hungry for more food, work at searching for Him until they find Him. Engaging them, He tells them that they make this effort to find Him not because they saw the signs of power He has performed which point to His divinity but because He filled their mouths with food, and they want them to be filled again. Christ deliberately fed the people in the wilderness, multiplying the loaves and fishes to feed the multitude, to show that He was the same one who fed Israel in the wilderness with manna. The feeding was a sign of His that He was the promised one who came to give far more than bread.

Thus Christ is not content to be used simply as a provider of physical bread. He is the Son of God incarnate. To pursue Him only for the sake of a full belly is to miss the whole point of His presence among men. He calls the people to seek from Him something more valuable than bread. It is as if He says, "Pursue Me, yes, but pursue Me for the right reason, for the truly valuable thing I have to offer you."

It is in the context of the Old Testament manna that this command must be understood. God freely provided manna for the Israelites to eat six days a week, but they had to get up early each morning to gather it before it melted in the warming sun. Food was provided, but effort was required to secure it.

Hence, Christians pray “give us this day our daily bread”, recognizing their need daily to approach the throne of grace to ask and receive not only material things but especially heavenly bread to feed their souls, the grace of God poured out daily in their lives. God gives this grace freely to those who ask, but we must do the work of standing before Him to ask for what we need and to prepare our hearts that they may be able to receive and benefit from what the Lord gives. This latter work, the preparation of the heart, is often the greater, more difficult work.

The Great Fast is such a time in which Christians in a more intense way fulfill this command of Christ to labor for the bread which does not perish. By increased prayer, fasting, almsgiving, spiritual reading, and works of mercy, they cultivate repentance, the confess their sins and so remove defiling clutter from their souls to make room to receive the heavenly nourishment Christ would give them. They wait upon the Lord looking for Him to renew their strength. The fast teaches them that all man’s labor is not for the belly, for man does not live by bread alone but every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Steps to Fasting During the Great Fast

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 (see the bulletin for the norm each week) 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, 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 and almsgiving.

Observing steps 1-7 below represents fasting as many of the faithful practice it today and should be attainable by most of us over time, while steps 8-11 bring us very close to the norm.

The primary purpose of fasting is to strengthen our prayer, to make us conscious of our dependence on God, to increase our hunger for God, and to help us cut off the passions. Fasting without prayer will do us little good, indeed, prayer and fasting are usually mentioned together in the Scriptures. If we try to fast without prayer, or with very little, the Fast will seem

burdensome rather than beneficial. But fasting combined with prayer is a powerful means of bringing us humbly before God to receive His grace to help us in our time of need—which is every day of our lives.

The rules of fasting 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.

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 are not “official” but are simply a way to identify discrete elements of the fast that one who so needs may work into it. They 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. The logic of fasting is that by doing it, we save money that otherwise would have been spent on food which we then give to those in need. Also, it is very difficult to make great spiritual progress without putting God first in this area of our lives, by offering our tithes and offerings out of love for Him, giving Him the first part of our increase and not our leftovers—or nothing. Where our treasure is, there our heart will be also.

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. In every case, we strive to strengthen and increase both the quality and quantity of our prayer during the Fast. If we ask God for grace to pray longer and more fervently during the Fast and do it, we shall find that our capacity for prayer outside of the Fast has increased.

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. Everyone should make a special effort during Clean Week and Holy Week to attend as many services as possible.

Be sure you are reading the Scriptures, and do some extra spiritual reading to nourish your soul—the life of a Saint or a work on the spiritual life. See your priest if you need a recommendation. Cut out the spiritual junk food of TV, movies, secular music, novels, etc. Cut back on (or cut out entirely) social media and the like.

Regarding marital fasting: the norm during the Fast is to abstain from marital relations. If, however, we find ourselves too weak to bear this, it is better for us come together as a couple during the Fast than to abstain from one another only to fall into one sort of temptation or another. At least we should abstain during Clean Week and Holy Week. Questions regarding this matter should be addressed to one's confessor or spiritual father.

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!

Commentary on the All-Night Vigil 8 Peace, Prokeimenon, Paroemia, Augmented Litany

As the hymn “Gladsome Light” is sung, the clergy (and servers) enter the sanctuary and prepare for the

prokeimenon by venerating the altar and going to the high place at the east end of the sanctuary.

Before the prokeimenon is chanted, however, the priest intones, “Peace be to all.” Here, standing facing the people, the priest (or bishop) is a living icon of Christ as through him and his words Christ offers His peace to His people. After the Resurrection, Jesus often addressed his disciples with these words. It is not just a greeting, but the impartation of something essential to us. As we live in a world hostile to Christian faith in many ways, especially in temptations and persecutions, we may be tempted to worry and fret. Rather, we are to remember the words Christ spoke to His disciples on the night He was betrayed: “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). Each time the priest gives the peace, we should through him hear Christ Himself speaking peace to us.

The word “prokeimenon” comes from the Greek and means “what is set forth,” that is, what is appointed to be read. A prokeimenon (plural “prokeimena”) consists of selected verses from the Psalms which are sung before readings from the Holy Scriptures. Prokeimena occur first, at Vespers after “Gladsome Light,” second, at Matins on Sundays and feasts before the Gospel, and third, at the Divine Liturgy before the Epistle.

At one time, the whole Psalm from which the prokeimenon is taken was sung, but gradually the Psalm was reduced to the key verse (the refrain) and the first verse, which identified the Psalm. Since many Christians knew the Psalter nearly by heart, they readily recognized the Psalm from which the prokeimenon was taken. Since every Sunday is a major feast of the Resurrection and the prokeimenon for Saturday refers to Sunday, the prokeimenon at Vespers is a “great prokeimon,” which simply means that more verses accompany it. The prokeimenon is Psalm 92 which begins: “The Lord hath become King, with beauty hath He clothed Himself.”

At Vespers, the prokeimenon functions as the turning point of the service: liturgically, the old day (Saturday) ends, and the new day (Sunday) begins. This turning point is clearly seen at Forgiveness Vespers, where the clergy begin the service in bright vestments for Sunday, but after the prokeimenon, they vest in darker lenten vestments and the choir begins singing the lenten melodies.

The “Paroemia” are the Scripture readings or lessons appointed for Vespers. They have largely disappeared except for Great Feasts and Saints for whom a Vigil or Polyeleon Matins are served. The readings are related to the feast or saint in some way, and at Vespers, the readings are primarily from the Old Testament. Usually there are three readings to symbolize the three parts of the Old Testament (Law, Prophets, Writings), and if they are from the Old Testament, the Royal Doors are closed and the church is darkened. If the readings should be from

the New Testament, the lights remain on and the doors open. This difference, of course, shows that what was darkly seen in signs, types, and shadows in the Old Testament is now clearly revealed in Christ. This is one reason the Old Testament is not read at the Divine Liturgy: the Liturgy represents the Kingdom, the New Covenant, the Church, and the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and reading from the Old Testament (apart from the Psalms) is not in keeping with the nature of the Divine Liturgy. But on the eve of a feast in the time and service of preparation, the reading of the Old Testament is appointed in accordance with its preparatory nature.

After the readings at Vespers, the Deacon (or Priest) comes out of the altar to stand before the closed royal doors in the darkened church to intone the Augmented Litany, also known as the Litany of Fervent Supplication. The response of the choir and people is a three-fold "Lord, have mercy" rather than the usual one.

Christ's coming into the world has been portrayed in the entrance, and He has spoken through His Word. In response, the faithful are called to intensify their prayerful communion with God through the petitions of the Augmented Litany.

If the Great Litany is the Church's prayer for the whole Church and the entire world, the Augmented Litany offers intercession for the local church and local needs. This is demonstrated by the mention of specific names of those in need and who have departed this life. The Church prays specifically by name in Her services only for those who have been united to her through Baptism. She prays for those not joined to the Church generally (not by name) in the services and specifically by name in the private prayers of the faithful.

The first two petitions of the litany, which have but a single "Lord, have mercy" as the response, are said only at Vigil or Great Vespers. At Daily Vespers, this litany is moved to the end, just after the troparia and before the dismissal, and the first two petitions are dropped. During Lenten Daily Vespers, it is dropped entirely and replaced with forty "Lord, have mercy's".

In the litany, we pray for ourselves, for "pious Orthodox Christians," for our hierarch, for the civil authorities, and all clergy. Though these are not exclusively local concerns, they do concern and affect the local community. Then we pray for the departed, those who have passed the faith to us and those who have recently left us. We pray for all the departed because the Church is one. We are joined by Baptism to the one Body of Christ, and so the death of any believer anywhere in the world affects us even though we are not personally acquainted with him. We then pray for what each believer needs: "mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, visitation, pardon and forgiveness of the sins of the servants of God. . ." who can then be mentioned by name, "the brethren of this holy temple." Here we are called to intercede for those we know, with whom we live our lives and work out our

salvation. Finally, "we pray for those who bear fruit and do good works in this holy and revered temple, for those who labor and those who sing, and for the people present who await of thee great and rich mercy." Sometimes, it may seem our service in the Church is thankless, but not only does God see all and reward what is done in secret, so, too, the Church offers prayer for all who serve locally and even for those who are simply present.

An exclamation (*vozglas*) from the priest concludes each litany. It differs from litany to litany, and each teaches us something about God and His character. The exclamation for the Augmented Litany is "For Thou art a merciful God who lovest man, and unto Thee do we send up glory..." We are able to pray effectively for others and ourselves because it is God's nature to be merciful. We need only to read the accounts of Abraham interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah, or Moses repeatedly interceding for wayward Israel to find the Scriptural basis for this appeal.

When Israel stumbled the first time with the Golden Calf (Exodus 32), God said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation" (Ex 32:8-9). Moses interceded for the people, and God spared them. On another occasion, Moses appeals directly to God's mercy for the people: "The Lord is long-suffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression... pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of Thy mercy..." (Numbers 14:18-19). And God answered his prayer. (Those who say that the God of the Old Testament is a "God of wrath" have not read it with spiritual understanding.) Because God is merciful, we may offer prayers for others and ourselves.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Upcoming Events 2017

26 February Forgiveness Vespers, 6:00 p.m.

27 February - 4 March Clean Week

10 April-15 April March Holy Week

16 April: Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!