

The Confessor's Tongue for February 7, 2010

Sunday of the Last Judgment

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.

February 7: Ss. Parthenius of Lampsacus

The son of Deacon Christopher in his youth was engaged in fishing and, "from a young age carrying God in himself", he sold the fish and distributed the money to the poor. Having learned about his good works, the local bishop educated him and then ordained him a presbyter. Soon, for his god-fearing life, St. Parthenius was elected bishop of Lampsacus. Having accepted the episcopate in the reign of the Emperor Constantine, the Venerable Parthenius zealously abolished paganism, destroyed pagan temples and built holy churches. He was blessed with the gift of wonder working and died in very old age (in the fourth century). His body was buried close to the cathedral church in the city of Lampsacus (in *Mizia*, near the sea of Marmara).

S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp 73-4. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris. © January 16, 2002. All rights reserved.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

Abba Anthony said, "Whoever has not experienced temptation cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven." He even added, "Without temptation, no one can be saved."

Saying 5 in The Sayings of Desert Fathers Commentary: We don't usually think of temptation as something that assists us on the path of salvation. How can it be? Why do we need temptation and trials to be saved?

In his epistle, the Apostle James writes, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

The word 'temptations' refers both to temptation to sin and trials (which may tempt us to sin). We are to accept them joyfully, knowing that God uses these things to perfect us. We know from St. Paul that God does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, always makes of way of escape for us, and that His grace is sufficient for us to patiently endure whatever we face. Consider the following words from the Desert Fathers on the subject:

Abba Poemen said of Abba John the Dwarf that he had prayed God to take his passions away from him so he might be free from care. He went and told an old man this: "I find myself in peace, without an enemy." The old man said to him, "Go, beseech God to stir up warfare so that you may regain the affliction and humility that you used to have, for it is by warfare that the soul makes progress." So he besought God, and when warfare came, he no longer prayed that it might be taken away, but said, "Lord, give me strength for the fight."

We must give thanks for the temptations and trials, knowing that God is using them to strengthen our faith and prepare us for His Kingdom.

The following words of Abba Poemen should be of comfort to us in temptation: Abba Poemen was asked for whom the saying "Do not be anxious about tomorrow" (Matt 6:34) is suitable. The old man said, "It is said for the man who is tempted and has not much strength, so that he should not be worried, saying to himself, 'How long must I suffer this temptation?' He should rather say every day to himself, 'Today.'"

Looking at temptations in the long term overwhelms us and leads us to despair. But our struggle is only for today, the only time in which we live, and the only time God gives grace and bread. He does not give us grace to bear tomorrow's struggle (or next year's) ahead of time, but only when we need it. Whatever our struggle, if we face it only 'today', day by day, and each day seek to make a beginning of good, we shall have success against the necessary temptations and trials sent to us to try and refine our faith.

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 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 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'll 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.

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!

Upcoming Events 2010

- 14 February 2010, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers, Great Lent Begins. If you attend this parish, you should consider this service to be mandatory.
- 27-28 February 2010 Metropolitan Jonah visits for Vigil and Liturgy. Parish workday Saturday morning the 27th to prepare.
- 4 April 2010, Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts.

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!