

The Confessor's Tongue for March 10, A. D. 2013

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.

The Sunday of the Last Judgment

Here on this third preparatory Sunday the reality of judgment and hell is portrayed in vivid language. Man generally lives oblivious to death, judgment, and the fact that he will live eternally. Though it seems far off, the judgment is just outside the door for each of us. We must live with this awareness: each will stand before God to account for how he has spent the life God gave him. What, indeed, shall we do on that day if we do not begin preparation for it now?

Preparation consists, first of all, in repenting from and confessing every evil deed. On that day, every secret will be revealed, every sin disclosed. We shall not escape this, and shall have no excuse to offer. Our choice is this: repent and confess our sins now, voluntarily making a full disclosure of our evil deeds and words, or waiting for all to be disclosed at the Judgment. If we confess them and forsake them now, our sins will not be found in the books opened at the Judgment: they will already be forgiven and forgotten. What an incentive this is for repentance!

Preparation also consists in clothing our souls with the virtues and good works. The Gospel lesson (Mat 25:31-46), "The Sheep and the Goats," shows that we shall be judged according to our deeds. Our deeds, after all, are the proof of our faith. They may condemn us: "Thy works will be there to accuse thee; thine actions will reproach thee and condemn thee" (Vespers, Aposticha). They may justify us: "Since God is the Judge, nothing can help thee there, no zeal, no skill, no glory, no friendship, but only the strength that thou gainest, my soul from thy works" (Matins Canon, ode 6).

Daniel the Prophet, a man greatly beloved, when he saw the power of God, cried out: "The court sat for judgment, and the books were opened. Consider well, my soul: dost thou fast? Then despise not thy neighbor. Dost thou abstain from food? Condemn not thy brother, lest thou be sent away into the fire, there to burn as wax. But may Christ lead thee without stumbling into His kingdom.

Matins for the Sunday of the Last Judgment

Cheesefare Week

The week following Meatfare is known as Cheesefare Week. This week received its name because the holy Church, gradually leading believers into the ascetical deeds (podvig) of the holy Lent, with the approach of Cheese Fare Week puts them on the last step of the preparatory abstinence by prohibiting the partaking of meat and permitting the partaking of cheese and eggs, in order to accustom them to avoid pleasant foods and without grief to enter the fast. In popular speech it is called butter week or shrove tide (maslianitsi) week. The holy

Church calls it "the light before the journey of abstinence" and "the beginning of tenderness and repentance". The hymns of the services of this week help prepare and inspire the faithful to ascetical effort during the Fast.

Elder Epiphanius of Greece on Fasting

Once, the Elder related: A certain spiritual child of mine came and was telling me, "You know, Father, I don't accept fasting. What does fasting mean anyway?"

I answered him, "Fasting is an institution of the Church. It was given as a law in Paradise. The Prophets fasted, as did Moses, the Lord Himself, the Apostles, the Fathers....If you continue not to fast and hold on to this viewpoint, then change Elders!

That's what I told him. If, however, he told me, "You know, Father, I accept fasting as the Church ordains, but I cannot fast so much. I am trying, however, to achieve something," I would tell him, "I accept you, my little child. Try as much as you can to live up to what our Church says." But to tell me, "I don't accept fasting!" Who are you? What are these things you are saying? Do you hear them?

He responded similarly to someone, who mentioned to him in confession that he placed the fasts among the smaller obligations and for this reason did not keep them, but "stroved to be correct in the basic elements of our Faith."

"Won't you tell me—did you come here as a repentant sinner to receive remission, or as a lawgiver? If the first is the case, you cannot place fasting in the secondary elements of Christian life. If the second is the case, then you are not a disciple of Christ and I cannot read the prayer of absolution over you.

Thanksgiving After Meals

Orthodox tradition has it that the faithful pray before the meal to ask God's blessing upon it and after the meal the give thanks for what they have received. The prayer of thanksgiving after meals is one all the faithful should know. It is customarily sung in troparion tone 8, just like we sing "Meet it is" after a class.

We give thanks to Thee, O Christ our God that Thou hast satisfied us with Thine earthly blessings.

Deprive us not also of Thy heavenly kingdom, but as Thou didst come to Thy disciples and didst grant them peace, so come to us and save us, O Savior!

Steps to Fasting During the 40 Days

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 us 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 will be a challenge for many and will require incremental application. Each year when the Great Fast arrives, 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 Church's norm.

The primary purpose of fasting is go make us conscious of our dependence on God and to help us cut off the passions. 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.

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 should always be prayed faithfully.

The services of the Church are an essential part of our prayer. While few of us can attend every service offered, 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. Cut out the spiritual junk food of TV, movies, secular music, novels, etc.

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 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

5 May: Great and Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!