

The Confessor's Tongue for March 6, A. D. 2016

Sunday of the Last Judgment; Forty-two Martyrs of Amorium

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.

March 6: 42 Martyrs of Amorium

During the war between the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus the Iconoclast (829-842) and the Saracens, the Saracens managed to besiege the city of Ammoria. As a result of treason on the part of the military commander Baditses, Ammoria fell, and forty-two of its generals were taken captive and sent off to Syria.

During the seven years of their imprisonment they tried in vain to persuade the captives to renounce Christianity and accept Islam. The captives stubbornly resisted all their seductive offers and bravely held out against terrible threats. After many torments that failed to break the spirit of the Christian soldiers, they condemned them to death, hoping to shake the determination of the saints before executing them. The martyrs remained steadfast, saying that the Old Testament Prophets bore witness to Christ, while Mohammed called himself a prophet without any other witnesses to support his claim.

They said to the soldier Theodore:

"We know that you forsook the priestly office, became a soldier and shed blood in battle. You can have no hope in Christ, Whom you abandoned voluntarily, so accept Mohammed."

But the martyr replied:

"You do not speak truthfully when you say that I abandoned Christ. Moreover, I left the priesthood because of my own unworthiness. Therefore, I must shed my blood for the sake of Christ, so that He might forgive the sins that I have committed against Him."

The executioners took each one separately and led him off to be beheaded, then threw the bodies into the River Euphrates.

Here is an summary of the historial account.

The Sack of Amorium by the Abbasid Caliphate in mid-August 838 was one of the major events in the long history of the Arab-Byzantine Wars. The Abbasid campaign was led personally by the Caliph al-Mu'tasim (reigned 833-842), in retaliation to a virtually unopposed expedition launched by the Byzantine emperor Theophilus (r. 829-842) into the Caliphate's borderlands the previous year. Mu'tasim targeted Amorium, a Byzantine city in western Asia Minor (modern Anatolia), because it was the birthplace of the ruling Byzantine dynasty and, at the time, one of Byzantium's largest and most important cities. The caliph gathered an exceptionally large army, which he divided in two parts, which invaded from the northeast and the south. The northeastern army defeated the Byzantine forces under Theophilus at Anzen, allowing the Abbasids to penetrate deep into Byzantine-held Asia Minor and converge upon Ancyra, which they found abandoned. After sacking the city, they turned south to Amorium, where they arrived on 1 August. Faced with intrigues at Constantinople and the rebellion of the large

Khurramite contingent of his army, Theophilus was unable to aid the city.

Amorium was strongly fortified and garrisoned, but a traitor revealed a weak spot in the wall, where the Abbasids concentrated their attack, effecting a breach. Unable to break through the besieging army, Boiditzes, the commander of the breached section privately attempted to negotiate with the Caliph without notifying his superiors. He concluded a local truce and left his post, which allowed the Arabs to take advantage, enter the city and capture it. Amorium was systematically destroyed, never to recover its former prosperity. Many of its inhabitants were slaughtered, and the remainder driven off as slaves. Most of the survivors were released after a truce in 841, but prominent officials were taken to the caliph's capital of Samarra and executed years later after refusing to convert to Islam, becoming known as the 42 Martyrs of Amorium.

The conquest of Amorium was not only a major military disaster and a heavy personal blow for Theophilus, but also a traumatic event for the Byzantines, its impact resonating in later literature. The sack did not ultimately alter the balance of power, which was slowly shifting in Byzantium's favour, but it thoroughly discredited the theological doctrine of Iconoclasm, ardently supported by Theophilus. As Iconoclasm relied heavily on military success for its legitimization, the fall of Amorium contributed decisively to its abandonment shortly after Theophilus's death in 842.

Sunday of the Last Judgment

The first name of this Sunday is explained by the fact that from it the permission to eat meat is ended, and the second name comes from the Gospel reading about the future all-inclusive Dread Judgment of the living and departed, which is described in all church services. By the commemoration of the Dread Judgment the Holy Church more strongly prompts the sinners to repentance and points out the true meaning of hope in the mercy of God. God is merciful but at the same time He is the Righteous Judge, having to render to everyone according to his deeds; therefore sinners should not be mistaken concerning their responsibility for their moral condition and abuse of the long-suffering God.

Recalling the Dread Judgment and turning our mental eyes on "the eternal fire, the Holy Church inspires us with the idea of the absolute necessity of repentance both of amending and preliminary plaintive prayer to the Lord, while there is still time and opportunity, and on behalf of all of us exclaims: "today let abstain from food, let us make haste to do good deeds and let us worthily repent our transgressions". The Holy Church especially calls us for spiritual struggles of philanthropy, so this order of

struggles is the most possible for everyone and is most proper during the of time of fasting and repentance: "Knowing the commandments of the Lord, let this be our way of life: let us feed the hungry, let us give the thirsty drink, let us clothed the naked, let us welcome strangers, let us visit those in prison and the sick: Then the Judge of all the earth will say even to us: 'Come, O blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you'"

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 (*maslonitsa*) week. The holy Church calls it "the light before the journey of abstinence" and "the beginning of tenderness and repentance". Such a meaning of Cheese Fare Week is explained in its Divine services. Especially the canons and the stichera of these Divine services contain the praise of Lent and the representation of its saving fruits. During this week the Divine services enter into a closer relation with the Divine services of the Holy Forty Day Fast as the time of the latter approaches. Thus, the holy Church, highly honoring the time of the Holy Forty Day Fast as a sacred time for cleansing and immensely important for the Christian, with truly wise foresight and by sequence directs everything to lead us to "the most precious days of the Holy Forty Day Fast", cleansing us beforehand to prepare us for the fast and repentance.

From: *S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) p 493-498. Translated by Archpriest Eugene D. Tarris © 2004. All rights reserved.*

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 "strove 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.

Great Lent

Christ's first word when He began to preach was: "Repent!" But what is repentance? To the questions: What is repentance? Why do we need it? How are we to practice it?—Great Lent gives the answer. It is indeed a school of repentance to which every Christian must go every year to deepen his faith, to re-evaluate, and, if possible, to change his life. It is a wonderful pilgrimage to the very sources of Orthodox faith—a rediscovery of the Orthodox way of life. Fr. Aleksandr Schmemmann in *Great Lent*

St. John Chrysostom on Fasting

Homily 57 on Matthew (17:23)

"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 one 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....

Upcoming Events 2015-16

13 March: 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers
14-19 March: Clean Week: Plan now to set aside as much of this week as possible for prayer.
24-30 April: Holy Week, keep it as free for church as you can.
1 May Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!