

The Confessor's Tongue for February 25, A. D. 2018

Sunday of Orthodoxy; St. Tarasius of Constantinople

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 Mathematics of Lenten Meals

Let us take a different approach to Lent and do some math related to food in the Fast. You might think that mathematics has nothing to do with Lent—but it does.

How much do people eat? The popular norm for eating is the proverbial three meals a day. Some like their meals square. Others may prefer other shapes to their meals, but, having been too shy to express their preferences, the shapes of their meals have not made it into the general lexicon as square meals have. But today it is not for us to examine the geometry of food, only the simple arithmetic of it.

Three meals a day (square or round) translate into twenty-one meals a week for the average person following the expected practice. Even in this, we Orthodox, of course, are already out of step with society: as we do not eat breakfast on the Lord's Day, we typically get no more than 20 meals a week.

With 20 meals a week as our baseline for time outside of Lent, let us do the Lenten meal math. During the fast, not only does the substance of what we eat change, as we well know, so does the quantity of meals—if we follow the Church's norm for fasting fully. The purpose of this is manifold. First, it helps us subject the body to the soul. Second, it strengthens our prayer by keeping us from a heavy stomach and sleepy eyes so we may pray with more attention and feeling. Third, it helps us cut off our self-will and attacks our indulgent self-love. Fourth, by reducing consumption of food, it provides every person who fasts the means to give alms. If I usually spend \$10 a day for food to eat, and by fasting, only spend \$7, the \$3 I have saved is available to give as alms. Anyone who eats regularly, regardless of income, is hereby enabled to give alms.

This last reason for fasting provides us the inspiration for our exercise in Lenten meal math. Let us calculate. During the normal Lenten week (weeks two through six), one meal a day is prescribed Monday through Friday after Vespers in the late afternoon or early evening, and two meals a day on the weekend, one at midday, the other in the evening. So, the standard twenty-meal week has been cut 55% to a nine-meal week.

Clean Week, the first week of the fast, requires still more subtraction. Two meals on each day of the weekend but only one meal on Wednesday and one on Friday. The twenty-meal week has been cut by 70% to just six meals.

Holy Week, if we calculate from Palm Sunday through Holy Saturday offers us two meals on Sunday, one each day Monday through Thursday, none on Friday, and, though there isn't really a meal for Saturday but just a little bread and wine given at church to sustain the faithful through the upcoming

Vigil people usually have one after the Vespers Liturgy. That gives another six-meal week, though some try to get by with fewer.

The fast lasts seven weeks. If it is true that the typical American Orthodox Christian eats twenty square meals a week (why does geometry keep trying to intrude into our arithmetic?) would have consumed 140 meals over the seven weeks. But with two six-meal weeks and five nine-meal weeks, the Orthodox Christian following the Church's norm eats 57 meals in that time—83 fewer than usual. That is 41% of usual consumption, or, to reverse it, a 59% reduction in eating.

The Church has always troubled herself with caring for the poor by providing food, drink, clothing, and other necessities for those in need. Many people outside the church in our country evince concern for the poor as well—and typically look to government to provide for them.

Consider: if motivated by love for God and the desire to give alms more abundantly, Orthodox Christians fasted in this way, how greatly their ability to give to those in need would be augmented. Consider your own weekly food budget (everything—eating out and at home). How much do you spend each week? What if by fasting you reduced your consumption by half and could give that half as alms. How much would that be? Multiply that figure by seven, and you will see how much fasting enables the giving of alms.

Let us say a single man spends \$100 a week on food. Fasting strictly, he is able to get by on \$41 a week. Over the course of the seven weeks, he would have saved \$413 by consuming less which he would then be able to give to help the less fortunate. Suppose our man is not yet able to fast to that degree and is only able to reduce his intake of food by only 40% rather than the full 59%. He still would be able to give \$280 in alms over the course of the fast. Even if in his weakness he makes only a 25% reduction in his consumption of food. Even then, he would be able to give \$175.

Our Lenten math has granted us a glimpse of the power of the Church's Fast to enable the giving of alms. Granted, most people today do not fast to the degree that they eat only fifty-seven modest meals during Lent. The Church has always held that the Fast should be relaxed for the elderly and anyone with ill health, and today that is effectively extended to young children, pregnant women, nursing mother, and others. Today, many in good health make little effort to reduce their consumption of food, even if they do change what they eat. But if, in our contemporary weakness, we do not think ourselves capable of cutting the number of meals during the fast by 59%, what if, motivated by love for Christ and others and the desire to give alms we cut back even a modest

20% so that we could give a that percentage of our weekly food budget as alms for seven weeks? It would make a significant difference for others and for ourselves as well. As you see, math matters in Lent!

Archpriest Justin Frederick

Liturgical Changes

In the next week or two, you will begin to hear a one and the same change in two different places in what we sing. At both Matins and at Liturgy just before Holy Communion, we sing from Psalm 117:27 "God is the Lord and hath revealed himself unto us. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." The new wording simply reverses two terms to make the meaning clearer. It will now read "The Lord is God and hath revealed Himself to us. An explanation of the significance of this will appear in next week's *Confessor's Tongue*.

The Eight Principal Vices, Part II

St. John Cassian

Now let us discuss individually the different kinds of each vice. There are three kinds of *gluttony*. The first impels a person to hasten to eat before the fixed and lawful hour. The second is pleased with a full stomach and with devouring any edibles whatsoever. And the third desires more refined and delicate foods. These three entail no small loss for a person unless he struggles to extricate himself from all of them with equal diligence and care. For just as breaking the fast before the canonical hour is never to be dared, so likewise filling one's stomach and the preparation of costly and choice dishes must be avoided. From these three causes different and very bad states of health of the soul are produced.

We notice that the traces of this passion are in us when perchance, having been invited to eat by one of the brothers, we are not content to eat the food with the condiment with which it was seasoned by our host but demand with importunate and unbridled boldness that something be poured on it or added to it.

There are three reasons why this must never happen. In the first place, because the mind of the person must be practiced in the discipline of endurance and moderation and must, according to the Apostle, learn what a sufficiency consists in. For whoever takes offense at a slightly unpleasant taste and is unable to restrain the pleasure of the palate even for a moment will be completely incapable of controlling the hidden and greater desires of the body. Secondly, because it sometimes happens that the particular thing that we are asking for at a given moment is lacking and we would shame our host in his need and frugality by making known this poverty, which he would prefer to be known to God alone. Thirdly, because occasionally the condiment that we ask to have added is unpleasant to others, and we discover that we are annoying many people in trying to cater to our own gormandizing and desire.

Therefore this boldness in us is to be disciplined in every respect.

There are three kinds of *fornication*. The first takes place in the union of the sexes. The second occurs without touching a woman, and for it we read that Onan, the son of the patriarch Judah, was struck down by the Lord (Genesis 38:9-10). This is called impurity in Holy Scripture. About this the Apostle says: "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." (I Corinthians 7:8-9). The third is that which is conceived in the soul and in the mind, and about which the Lord says in the Gospel: "But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matthew 5:28).

"The blessed Apostle declares that these three kinds must all be extinguished in the same way when he says: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." (Colossians 3:5). And again he speaks of two of these to the Ephesians: 'Fornication and impurity should not be mentioned among you' (Ephesians 5:3). And again: "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (Ephesians 5:5). Just as we should guard against these three with equal care, so one is enough to keep us out of the kingdom of Christ.

There are three kinds of *avarice*. The first does not permit renunciants to be deprived of their wealth and property. The second persuades us by a still greater covetousness to take back What we have dispersed and distributed to the poor. The third demands that we long for and acquire what in fact we did not possess before.

There are three kinds of *anger*. One blazes up interiorly. . . Another breaks out in word and deed and effect... About these the Apostle says: "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth." (Colossians 3:8). The third, unlike that which flares up, is not finished in a short space of time but is held over for days and seasons... All of these must be condemned by us with an equal horror.

There are two kinds of *sadness*. The first is begotten once anger has ceased, or from some hurt that has been suffered or from a desire that has been thwarted and brought to naught. The other comes from unreasonable mental anguish or horn despair. There are two kinds of *acedia* (anxiety or weariness of heart). One makes those who are seething with emotion fall asleep. The other encourages a person to abandon his home and to flee.

Although *vainglory* is multiform and multifarious and exists in many subdivisions, nonetheless it is of two kinds. The first is that by which we are uplifted because of carnal and external things. The second is

that by which we are inflamed with the desire for empty praise because of spiritual and hidden things.

Yet in one way vainglory is beneficial for beginners, for those who are still stirred up by carnal vices. If, thanks to a word spoken at the time when they happen to be harassed by the spirit of fornication, they should think of the dignity of the priestly office or of the opinion of people who might believe that they are holy and blameless, and if only because of this consideration they should reject the impure urges of desire, judging them as base and unworthy either of their own good name or of that rank, they are restraining the greater evil with a lesser one. For it is better for a person to be troubled by the vice of vainglory than for him to fall into the fire of fornication, from which he could not or could barely be saved once he had been ruined.

One of the prophets expresses this sense very well when he speaks in the person of God: "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off" (Isaiah 48:9). That is to say: As long as you are shackled by the praises of vainglory, you will never rush into the depths of hell and sink irretrievably by the commission of deadly sins.

It is not surprising that this passion is so strong that it can hold back someone who is hastening to the destruction of fornication, since the frequent experience of many people shows that once someone has been poisoned by this disease he becomes so tireless that he does not even feel fasts of two or three days.

Even in this desert we have often seen some people admit that when they were living in the cenobia of Syria they were easily able to go without eating for five days, whereas now they are so hungry at the third that they can hardly keep the daily fast until the ninth hour. When someone asked why, after having lived in a cenobium where he felt no hunger and often disdained to eat for whole weeks, he should now be hungry at the third hour. Macarius replied pointedly: "Because here there is no one to see you fasting and to support and sustain you with his praises. But there the attention of others and the food of vainglory filled you to repletion." *To be continued...*

Homily Against Anger, Part II *St. Basil the Great*

...Does he call you stupid and a beggar and worthy of nothing? Then say that you are yourself a "worm" [Ps 22.6], and born from a dunghill, as David's words say. To these examples add also the goodness of Moses. When abused by Aaron and Miriam, he did not accuse them before God but prayed for them [Num 12.iff]. Would you not choose to be a disciple of such men, who are friends of God and blessed, rather than of those filled with the spirit of wickedness?

When you are stirred by the temptation to abuse, consider that you are being tested as to whether through longsuffering you will come near to God, or

through anger run away toward the adversary. Give your thoughts the opportunity to choose the good portion. For you will either help that person somehow through your example of meekness, or exact a more severe vengeance through disdain. For what could become more painful to your enemy, than to see his enemy as above insults? Do not overturn your own purpose, and do not appear to be easily accessible to those who insult you. Let him bark at you ineffectually; let it burst upon himself. For the one who strikes one who feels no pain takes vengeance on himself, for neither is his enemy repaid, nor is his temper assuaged. Likewise, the person reproaching one unaffected by abuse is unable to find relief for his passion. On the contrary, as I have said, he is indeed cut to the heart. Moreover, in these circumstances, what sorts of things will each of you be called? He is abusive, but you are magnanimous; he is prone to anger and hard to bear, but you are longsuffering and meek. He will change his mind about the things he said, but you will never repent of your virtue.

Why must I say so many things? The abuse shuts him out of the kingdom of heaven, "for abusers will not inherit the kingdom of God" [I Cor 6.10]; but your silence prepares the kingdom, "for he who perseveres until the end, that one will be saved" [Mt 10.22]. But when you take revenge and oppose the abuse by equaling it, what will you say in your defense? Is it enough that he provoked you? And does that make you worthy of pardon? For the fornicator who transfers the blame to his girlfriend, as having greatly enticed him toward the sin, is no less worthy of condemnation. There are neither crowns without opponents, nor defeats without adversaries. Listen to David, who says, "When the sinner stood against me;" not "I was provoked," or "I took revenge;" but "I was mute and humbled, and I kept silence from good things" [Ps 38.2-3, LXX].

...But you are provoked by the abuse since you consider it rude, bad, crass; yet you imitate it as good. For behold, you have the same passion that you condemn. Are you anxious to look down on another's evil? Or do you regard your own disgraceful conduct as nothing? Are insults wicked? Flee from imitating them. For indeed the fact that another started it does not suffice to excuse you. Therefore, it is more just, as I myself am persuaded, even if his irritation is greater, since he did not have an example of self-control; but you, seeing the ugliness of the angry person, did not guard yourself against taking on his likeness, but are irritated and annoyed and angry in return; and your passion becomes an excuse for the one who started it. For by the things you do yourself, you release him from guilt, and you condemn yourself. For if temper is wicked, why did you not turn away from the evil? But if it is worthy of pardon, why are you annoyed at the bad-tempered person? So, if you came second to the angry exchange, this is no advantage to you. For in wrestling matches, it is not the one who moves first in a bout but the one who wins that is crowned. Accordingly, not only one who initiates something

terrible, but also one who follows a wicked leader toward sin, is condemned.

Suppose he calls you a poor laborer. If he speaks truly, admit the truth; but if he lies, what are his words to you? Neither be filled with conceit about praise that goes beyond the truth, nor be aggravated over insults that do not apply to you. Do you not see how arrows naturally pierce through hard and rigid objects, but their force is blunted by soft and yielding objects? Consider indeed that the power of abuse is of the same kind. One who resists it receives it into himself, while one who yields and withdraws dissolves by his gentleness of character the wickedness brought against him.

But why does the name "poor" trouble you? Remember your own nature, that you came naked into the world and will leave it naked [Job 1.21]. What is more poor than a naked person? You have heard nothing terrible, unless you claim what has been said as your own. Was anyone ever carried off to prison because of poverty? It is not shameful to be poor, but it is shameful not to bear the poverty nobly. Remember the Master, who "being rich, became poor for our sake" [2 Cor 8.9]. If you are called foolish and stupid, recall the Judean insults through which the true Wisdom was abased: "You are a Samaritan, and you have a demon" [Jn 8.48]. So if you act angry, you have confirmed the reproaches; for what is more foolish than anger? If you remain without anger, you shame the one insulting you, showing self-control through your actions.

...Have you been struck? So also was the Lord. Have you been spat upon? So also was our Master. For, "he did not turn away his face from the shame of spitting" [Is 50:6]. Were you falsely accused? So also was the Judge. Did they tear off your garment? They also stripped my Lord and divided his clothes among themselves [Mt 27:31-35]. You have not yet been condemned, you have not yet been crucified. Many things are lacking to you, if you would overtake him through imitation.

Let each of these things enter into your mind, and let them hold back the flames. For by preparing and predisposing ourselves beforehand through such reflections, we stop the leaping and throbbing of our heart and bring back our thoughts to steadiness and calm. This also, then, is what was said by David, that

"I am prepared and am not troubled" [Ps 119:60]. Accordingly, it is necessary to hold back the frantic and passion-stricken movement of the soul by remembering the examples of blessed men: how meekly the great David bore the raving violence of Shimei. For he did not give opportunity to the movement of anger, but redirecting his thought toward God, he said, "The Lord told Shimei to curse David" [2 Sam 16:10]. Therefore, upon hearing himself called a man of blood, a lawless man, he did not become aggravated by this but humbled himself, accepting the insults as if he deserved them. Strip away from yourself these two attitudes: neither consider yourself worthy of great things, nor regard

another human being as greatly inferior to you in worth. For then our temper will never rise up against the dishonors that are brought upon us.

It is terrible for one who has benefited from good deeds and is indebted for great favors to be ungrateful and besides this to begin inflicting insults and dishonors. It is terrible, but more for the one doing it than for the one who suffers the evil. Let him insult you, but do not yourself inflict insults. Let what is said be an athletic school to train you in philosophy. If you have not been bitten, you are not wounded. But if indeed you suffer something in your soul, keep what causes pain within yourself. For the Psalmist says, "My heart is troubled within me" [Ps 143:47], that is, he did not let the passion pass to the outside but calmed it, as a wave is broken on the beach. Quiet for me your howling and raging heart. Let your passions respect the presence of reason in you, like a disorderly child at the coming of a respected man. *TBC*

A Prayer for Control of the Tongue

O Lord my God who hast spoken the truth to me through Thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, who hatest lying lips, a deceitful tongue, and those who sow discord among brethren: set a watch upon my mouth and a gate of enclosure about my lips that no impure, false, blasphemous, or flattering word may escape to offend Thee and harm myself and others. Keep my tongue from evil and my lips that they speak no deceit. Cleanse my mind and purify my lips that I may speak this day only what is true, what is just, what is honest, what is lovely, what is needful, and what is edifying. Grant that my lips may always honor, bless, and praise thine all-honorable and magnificent Name, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen. *Archpriest Justin Frederick 2018*

Sayings of St. Poemen the Great

Abba Poemen said, "Experience is a good thing; it is that which tests a man."

He also said, "A man who teaches without doing what he teaches is like a spring which cleanses and gives drink to everyone, but is not able to purify itself."

He also said, "A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent; that is, he says nothing that is not profitable."

He also said, "If man remembered that it is written, 'By your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned' (Matt. 12:37), he would choose to remain silent."

Upcoming Events 2018

25 March: Annunciation

1-7 April: Holy Week

8 April: Pascha: All-Night Vigil, Agape Vespers, Picnic

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!