

The Confessor's Tongue for March 14, A. D. 2021

4th Sunday Before Lent; Expulsion from Paradise, Cheesefare, Forgiveness

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.

Sunday of Forgiveness: Cheesefare

On this day, Cheesefare Sunday, we commemorate the banishment of Adam, the First Creature, from the Paradise of Delight.

Our Holy Fathers appointed this commemoration before the beginning of Great Lent to demonstrate how beneficial the medicine of fasting is to human nature and how shameful are gluttony and disobedience by an example of the results of each. They set before us the example of Adam, the first-formed man. They give a clear, case-in-point demonstration of how many evils he suffered—and hence introduced into our nature—from neglecting to fast for only a short time. Furthermore, they show that the first precept of God given to mankind was the ideal of fasting. By not keeping this precept but yielding instead to his stomach, or rather to the serpent-deceiver by the agency of Eve, Adam not only failed to become God, but he also brought death upon himself and communicated this sickness to the entire human race. In order to remove the first Adam's indulgence, the Lord fasted forty days, thus obeying the commandment of fasting. This was the origin of the forty-day Fast of Great Lent. It was instituted by the Holy Apostles so that, if by means of Great Lent we keep the Fast, unlike Adam who did not, we might again enjoy the incorruptibility that he lost....

The purpose of the Holy Fathers was to include in the *Triodion* a concise account of the deeds wrought by God from the beginning of time to the end. Adam's disobedience and subsequent fall from the delight of Paradise are the cause of everything relating to us. In today's commemoration of the fall, the Holy Fathers develop the theme of disobedience so that we might avoid it and strive not to be immoderate in anything....

Therefore, it is because Adam neglected to fast just once that we have had to endure such woes. The commemoration of this is appointed now at the beginning of Holy Lent so that by remembering how many evils the failure to fast has brought upon us, we might welcome Great Lent eagerly and gladly keep the Fast. For by means of it, we can attain *theosis*—deification—of which Adam fell short. We shall attain this only by lamenting and fasting until the appointed time that God shall visit us. For it is not easy or feasible to regain what we have lost in any way.

We should know that today we ask forgiveness from our brethren in Christ so that we may begin the race in the stadium of Great Lent unhindered by any animosity. As long as we live self-centered lives, we cannot forgive our neighbor—our ego will not allow it. Once our lives are God-centered, however, we are able to forgive others as God forgives us. Let us remember that God's mercy and forgiveness to us is often hidden in our mercy and forgiveness to others. Our Lenten journey is not an isolated or individual affair but a "family" event. Therefore, we are reminded in today's reading from the Holy Gospel that unless there is mutual forgiveness between one another, there can be no true reconciliation with God.

We should also know that this Holy and Great Lent is like a tithe of the entire year. Due to our laziness, we do not choose to fast and abstain from evil all the time. Knowing this, the Holy Apostles and Holy Fathers gave us this Lenten tradition as a kind of harvest-time for our souls. It provides us with the opportunity to remove

whatever unseemly deeds we have committed throughout the year by now becoming contrite and humble through fasting. For this reason, we ought to keep it all the more strictly. . . .

Therefore, fasting is something beneficial. Adam proved this by doing the opposite. It was for this reason the Holy Fathers placed here today's commemoration of Adam's exile from Paradise. *From the Synaxarion.*

From Festal Letter Number One

St. Athanasius the Great

Behold, my brethren, how much a fast can do, and in what manner the law commands us to fast. It is required that not only with the body should we fast, but with the soul. Now the soul is humbled when it does not follow wicked opinions, but feeds on becoming virtues. For virtues and vices are the food of the soul, and it can eat either of these two meats, and incline to either of the two, according to its own will. If it is bent toward virtue, it will be nourished by virtues, by righteousness, by temperance, by meekness, by fortitude, as Paul saith; 'Being nourished by the word of truth [3912]'. Such was the case with our Lord, who said, 'My meat is to do the will of My Father which is in heaven [3913]'. But if it is not thus with the soul, and it inclines downwards, it is then nourished by nothing but sin. For thus the Holy Ghost, describing sinners and their food, referred to the devil when He said, 'I have given him to be meat to the people of Ethiopia.' For this is the food of sinners. And as our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, being heavenly bread, is the food of the saints, according to this; 'Except ye eat My flesh, and drink My blood;' so is the devil the food of the impure, and of those who do nothing which is of the light, but work the deeds of darkness. Therefore, in order to withdraw and turn them from vices, He commands them to be nourished with the food of virtue; namely, humbleness of mind, lowliness to endure humiliations, the acknowledgment of God. For not only does such a fast as this obtain pardon for souls, but being kept holy, it prepares the saints, and raises them above the earth.

Homily 70 on Repentance & Temptations

St. Isaac the Syrian

The concise sense of this chapter is the following: at every moment we should know that we stand in need of repentance throughout the twenty-four hours of the night and day. The meaning of the word *repentance*, as we have learned from the true means of its performance, is this: continual and intense supplication which by means of prayer filled with compunction draws night to God in order to seek forgiveness of past offenses, and entreat for preservation from future ones. For this reason our Lord fortified our infirmity by his prayer, saying,

“Awake, watch, and pray that ye enter not into temptation.” Pray and be not slothful, being watchful and praying always. “Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” He strong corroborates His word and induces us to become the more zealous by the parable of the friend who went to his friend in the middle of the night and asked him for bread, and He says, “Verily I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.” Pray he also, therefore, and be not negligent. O the ineffable encouragement! The Giver incites us to entreat Him to the end that He might give us His divine gifts. And although the Lord, as He Himself knows, provides us with everything that will profit us, nonetheless, what He here says is filled with great power to give us courage and to make us confident. For He knows that until our death He does not take away from us the capacity of going astray, and how close this change is to us (that is, from virtue to vice), and that human nature itself is susceptible to contrary states. For these very reasons He enjoins us to be zealous and to struggle in continuous prayer. If the state of certainty were to be found in this world, and, having attained it a man's nature would be raised above every necessity and his labour above fear, then the Lord would not have enjoined us and, in His care for us, exhorted us to struggle in prayer. In the future age the saints will not offer prayers to God as petitions for something. For in that fatherland of freedom our nature will not be susceptible to changes, nor to submission to the fear of adversities, because it will be perfect in every way.

Therefore the Lord does not urge us only to prayer and vigilance, but His providence often hurls us into the realm of temptations due to the subtlety and incomprehensibility of those things which continually confront us, which the knowledge of our mind cannot comprehend, and in which we are often found against our will even though our understanding be very firm and cleave to the good. Thus the blessed Paul said: “Let I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet me. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”

Wherefore, O Lord (so speaks Paul), I rejoice, if this be Thy will, and our childishness requires all these things to be instructed, trained, and awakened by Thee, even when a man is inebriated with fervent love for Thee, as am I, and is drawn after good things, not seeing the world at all because of the inebriation of the love that he has for Thee. Thou hast granted me to attain to this, even to revelations and divine visions which the tongue of flesh cannot express, and to see and hear the voice of the liturgy of spiritual beings, and to be deemed worthy of Thy beholding, a thing replete with holiness. But despite all these, I have not the power to guard myself, I who am a man that is perfect in Christ, because there remains something yet, which by reason of its subtlety I am unable to comprehend, I who possess the mind of Christ. Hence, O Lord, I rejoice in infirmities, in tribulations, in prisons, in bonds, in necessities: whether they be from nature, or from the sons of nature, or from her enemies. Joyfully I now endure in mine infirmities, that is, in my temptations, so that the power of God may overshadow me. If, with all these, I still

require the rod of temptations, that Thine indwelling may be thereby increased within me, and that I may be protected by Thy nearness to men, then I know that there is no man whom Thou lovest as me. Therefore Thou hast magnified me above many. Thou hast granted to none of my fellow apostles so to know Thy wondrous and glorious powers as Thou hast to me, and a chose vessel Thou hast called me, as one who is faithful in keeping the rule of Thy love. Because of all these things, and especially because of the work of temptations, I know that if it were profitable for me, Thou wouldst have given me freedom; but it is not Thy pleasure that I should be without tribulation and care in this world. As many times as I have suffered trials Thy concern was not so much that the work of preaching Thy Gospel should multiply in the world, but that I should be profited by temptations, while my soul was being kept sound by Thee.”

So, O man of discretion, if all this be true, great is the profit of trials! For however much a man in the likeness of Paul is raised aloft and enters into the spiritual state, he still stands in need of fear and watchfulness, and he reaps great profit from temptations. Show me the man who has reached the state of certainty [in this mortal world] that is full of despoilers, who has received that portion wherein there is no aberration (which even the holy angels have not been given, “that they without us should not be made perfect”), and that no temptation should approach him in his thought! But the knowledge of this world's order as expressed in all the Scriptures I this: if each day recurring we should receive a thousand wounds, we should not become faint-hearted and abandon our course in the arena. For it is possible through one small opportunity to seize the victory and to win our crown.

This world is the course of the contest and the arena of the courses. This time is the time of combat; and there is no law laid down in the field of combat and in the time of contest. That is to say: the King lays no limit on His warriors until the contest is finished and all men are brought to the gate of the King of kings, where each is examined whether he persevered in the contest and refused to admit defeat, or he turned his back. For many times it happens that a man who is altogether useless, who, because of his lack of training, is constantly pierced and thrown down, who is feeble at all times, suddenly seizes the banner from the hands of the mighty warriors, the sons of the giants, and makes his name famous. He thus gains greater renown than those who always constant and are known by the victories, and he receives a crown and gifts esteemed precious by all his companions. For this reason no man should despair; only, let us not be negligent in prayer, nor be slothful to beseech the Lord for succour.

And let us implant this also in our minds: that so long as we are in this world and left in this flesh, even though we be exalted to the vault of heaven, we cannot be without labours and hardship and be free from care. This is the end of it; forgive me. More than this is speculation devoid of sense. To our God be glory, dominion, and majesty unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Upcoming Events 2021

14 March 5:00 p.m. : Forgiveness Vespers, Ice Cream
15-20 March: Clean Week
25 March: Annunciation
26-30 April: Great & Holy Week
2 May: Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!