

The Confessor's Tongue for February 26, A. D. 2023

37th Sunday After Pentecost; Forgiveness Sunday, Expulsion of Adam from Paradise
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.

Prayer for the Start of the 40-Day Fast

O God, Hope of all the ends of the earth, and of those who are far off at sea, who didst foretell these holy days of fasting in the Law, and in the Prophets, and the Evangelists: Do Thou count all of us worthy to pass the course of the Fast in purity, to preserve the Faith undivided, and to keep Thy commandments all the days of our lives. Bid an Angel of peace to preserve our comings-in and goings-out for every good work, being obedient together and together pleasing Thee unto a perfect communion of Thy most-pure Mysteries. And accept, O Master, the bending of the knees and the fasting of Thy servants, granting unto all of us spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus our Lord, with Whom Thou art blessed, together with Thy most-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Clean Week

Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil. Isaiah 1:16

The first week of the Great Fast is known as Clean Week. The name refers to laying aside non-fasting foods, sin, and sinful thoughts that we may turn wholeheartedly to the Lord in humility. Facetiously, it may refer to one's dinner plate, strictly used only twice during the first five days, as Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday of this week are prescribed to be strict fast days on which no solid food is taken.

Clean Week proffers rich support to our fasting and pursuit of Christ through its prescribed services. We are wise to partake generously of what is offered that we may be nourished in soul to keep the Great Fast most profitably.

During Forgiveness Vespers on Sunday evening, the Church makes the liturgical transition to Lent by changing the color of the vestments to purple or black and changing the order of service to the lenten order and beginning to pray the prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian, "O Lord and Master of my life..."

Vespers and Matins during the week take on their Lenten forms with extra prostrations and the prayer of St. Ephrem. At Matins, the texts of the nine Biblical Canticles are used with the canons.

During the Fast, the after supper service, Little Compline, is replaced with the Great Compline service, which runs some forty minutes rather than fifteen. During Clean Week, the Penitential Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete is read in four different parts near the beginning of Great Compline each night Monday through Thursday. The Great Canon takes us through all of holy Scripture to put before our eyes both the righteous and the unrighteous found there for us to use in considering the quality of our own life. Have we demonstrated the repentance

of David or the chastity of Joseph or lived contrary to their good example? As the *Synaxarion* puts it, the canon "incites every soul to emulate and imitate to the best of its power all the good things, and to flee from all that is bad, and always to come back to God by repentance, by tears and confession and by every other way of well-pleasing."

The service most characteristic of the Great Fast is the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts, which consists of the first half of Vespers with a Communion service added. The name indicates that the gifts from which we commune were consecrated ahead of time at the Divine Liturgy on Sunday. As the Church considers the Divine Liturgy too festive to serve on weekdays during the Great Fast but recognizes the need of the faithful for the grace and comfort of the Holy Mysteries, she appoints the celebration of the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts. Moreover, as receiving Holy Communion represents a breaking of each day's fast, the Typicon of the Church prescribes the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts for the end of Wednesdays and Fridays in the Fast so that the faithful may keep fast all day but partake of the Holy Mysteries in the evening. Our bishops, as a concession to our weakness, permit us to begin the eucharistic fast for Presanctified Liturgies six hours before the service begins if it is served later than the usual morning time for Liturgy (there is a widespread custom of serving the Presanctified in the morning, but we do not practice that here). Strictly, however, the eucharistic fast even for evening Liturgies begins at midnight. If we can, it is good to cultivate not eating all day before the Presanctified, even if we find we need to take drink until noon. Any questions about eucharistic fasting for evening services should be directed towards your priest.

After the Presanctified Liturgy of Clean Friday, we offer an intercessory service to St. Theodore the Recruit with an offering kolyvo, a dish of sweetened boiled wheat, nuts, raisins in his honor and in remembrance of the departed. The commemoration of St. Theodore is inspired by the miracle of the kolyva associated with him, which underlines the importance of keeping the fast.

Fifty years after the Saint Theodore's martyrdom, Emperor Julian the Apostate (reigned 361-363), planned to commit an outrage upon the Christians during the first week of Great Lent. He ordered the city magistrate of Constantinople to sprinkle all the food in the marketplaces with blood which had been offered to idols. Saint Theodore appeared to Archbishop Eudoxios in a dream, and told him to inform all the Christians that no one should buy anything in the marketplaces, but to eat boiled wheat with honey (kolyva) instead.

In remembrance of this occurrence, the Orthodox Church commemorates the holy Great

Martyr Theodore the Recruit each year on the first Saturday of Great Lent. On Friday evening, at the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, after the prayer at the Ambo, the Canon to the Holy Great Martyr Theodore, composed by Saint John of Damascus, is sung. After this, kolyva is blessed and distributed to the faithful. The celebration of the Great Martyr Theodore on the first Saturday of Great Lent was established by Patriarch Nektarios of Constantinople (381-397).

By this commemoration of St. Theodore, "the Holy Church inspires the faithful that Lent is pleasing to God and that fasting is under the special protection of God."

Keeping the fast of Clean Week as strictly as we can with God's help and partaking abundantly of the services offered will do much to set us on a good course to gain great profit through the fast.

Prostrations During Lent

During Great Lent, we are familiar with the prostrations that accompany our entrance into (3) and exit from the temple (3), the Prayer of St. Ephrem (4), and the various moments of the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts.

Yet there are others appointed by the *Typicon* that we have not practiced and have fallen out of parish use.

At Vespers, besides at the Lenten troparia and the prayer of St. Ephrem, prostrations are prescribed:

At the opening Trisagion "Holy God, Holy Mighty..." 3.

Before Psalm 103 at "Come let us worship..." 3.

After Psalm 103 at "Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia" 3.

After each stasis of the kathisma at "Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia" 3.

At the end of the prayer "Vouchsafe"

At the Trisagion after St. Simeon's Prayer, 3.

At Matins, additional prostrations are made:

After each stasis of the kathisma at "Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia" 3.

During each refrain of the Magnificat "More honorable than the cherubim..."

During "Meet It Is" at the end of the canon.

We may during this fast attempt to implement some of these. It will be necessary to slow the reading at the prescribed places to facilitate prostrations. Those who wish to do this, please follow the priest's example.

Orthodox Asceticism

The term "asceticism" in the Orthodox Church does not have the narrow sense that has often been given to it in the West. Rather, the word points to what every Christian must accomplish in order to benefit effectively from the salvation wrought by Christ. From the point of view of the great Tradition of the Orthodox Church, the work of salvation appears as a cooperation between divine grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit and the effort each

baptized person must make personally in order to be open to this grace and to take hold of it. One makes this effort throughout one's life, at every moment and in every act of existence. Besides this, the Greek word *askesis* means "exercise," "training," and "way of life." In addition, the corresponding Russian words *podvig* and *podvizhnichestvo*, derived from the Slavonic verb *podvizatsya* (meaning 'to move or go forward') translate an eminently dynamic conception of spiritual life. These words make it clear that the spiritual life is conceived of as a process of growth; namely, that of the gradual actualization of the grace received in the sacraments and particularly in Baptism. Likewise, the process is that of the progressive assimilation of the grace of the Holy Spirit that effectively incorporates the baptized into the dead and resurrection Christ. Such grace allows man to acquire for himself the human nature that is restored and deified in the person of the God-man. Dr. Jean-Claude Larchet, in *Therapy of Spiritual Illness*, volume 1, p. 8.

From St. Gregory Palamas

There are three degrees of eating: self-control, sufficiency, and satiety. Self-control is to be hungry after having eaten. Sufficiency is to be neither hungry nor to be weighed down. Satiety is to be slightly weighed down. To eat again after reaching the point of satiety is to open the door of gluttony, through which unchastity comes in. Attentive to these distinctions, choose what is best for you according to your powers, not overstepping the limits. For according to St. Paul, only the perfect can be both hungry and full, and at the same time be strong in all things (Philippians 4:12).

The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Give to him that asketh thee: and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away. Matthew 5:42

Almsgiving is one of the pillars of spiritual life in Christ, but it was established in the Old Testament. The Hebrews under the Law of Moses had obligations to the poor among them. For instance, they were not to reap the corners of their fields or pick up the stalks of grain that fell to the ground during harvesting so that food would be left in every field for the poor to come and glean. So too, they were not to charge each other interest on loans to those in need (a fee for the use of someone else's money traditionally is called 'usury'). All debts were wiped out every fiftieth year in the Year of Jubilee, and one was forbidden to refuse a requested loan on the grounds that the Jubilee was near.

Jesus expands the command on giving alms as He instructs his Jewish audience in the Sermon on the Mount. Later He will tell them *how* to give alms (secretly without public notice), but now He establishes the principle of giving them and to whom they should be given. Notice, He does not say "give to

your fellow Jew who asks" or "give to the worthy man in need". The command is not limited by race or any condition other than one: give to the one who asks.

Christ's command to give is activated by someone's request for help. If someone asks for help, the Christian is to give it. This mirrors the Christian's relationship with God: Christ says, "Ask, and it will be given to you." As the Father gives in response to His adopted children's requests, so the children are to give to those who ask them. Notice, too, that there is no qualifying how morally worthy the one asking is, the truthfulness of his claims, or any other such thing. Someone has asked us for help, we are to give, even if, as one elder put it, the beggar comes riding a fine horse.

Naturally, the command is mitigated by our ability to give. If we do not have it, we cannot give it. Jesus also does not say that we have to give exactly whatever someone asks for, e.g., someone says he has a need for a particular sum. If we give cash, we are not told we necessarily have to give the whole sum requested, but we are to give something if we have it. We may also give goods to meet a need rather than cash. What is requested is also relevant. When someone wants the basic necessities of life—food, drink, clothing, shelter—we are obligated to help if we can. Beyond this, the obligation lessens or dissipates. Things like utility bills, rent, transportation, telephone might well be seen as necessities in modern life. Other things, however desirable they may be, are not necessities, and the request for them does not place us under obligation. One is under no obligation to give to one asking for a big screen television, a new computer, or a leather basketball. When a man says he is hungry and you offer him food, but he spurns it, demanding cash, you are also not obligated. Some concerns for safety may limit giving. We probably should not stop our car to give to every beggar on the side of the road, as that could create a danger for other drivers. A woman alone should not feel obligated to stop to help a strange man on a lonely street. Nonetheless, each must seriously consider the person he encounters

How does one give? St. Philaret the Merciful (Dec. 1) would reach into his bag and give whatever his hand drew out, whether the coin was gold, silver, or brass, trusting that God had guided his hand. This would be analogous to us reaching into our wallets and blindly pulling out a bill—and giving it, regardless of the denomination. St. John the Merciful, Archbishop of Alexandria, would give a set amount to anyone who asked. Both of these are possible models for us, depending on our faith and our discernment of God's will for us. We may also conceive other approaches.

In the Orthodox wedding service, we pray that God will bless the new couple with an abundance of wheat, wine, and oil so that they will always have something to give to the poor and never have to turn anyone away empty-handed. Part of our keeping this commandment lies in living in such a way that we

always have something we could give. This means bucking the flow of American consumerism and not living on 110% of our income as so many do—or even only on the full 100%. In contrast, Ss. Joachim and Anna gave a third of their income to the temple, third to the poor in alms, and lived on the remaining third. The typical American now gives about 2.9% of his income in charitable giving, (a bit more than one fourth of a tithe, far less than was expected of the Jews under the Old Covenant). It is disobedience to Christ to live beyond our means, to be bound with consumer debt, and consistently to have nothing left over to give to those in need because we have spent it all on ourselves, whether we are consuming it on pleasures and desires or responsibly saving it for a rainy day.

Some almsgiving takes the form of an immediate gift. Other almsgiving may take the form of a loan. When we give a loan, we do not set our hearts on having it repaid. If it comes back, well and good, but if it does not come back, it is credited to us as alms. So too, when we suffer loss by theft, if we do not complain but give thanks to God, God credits that loss to us as alms given willingly.

Christians understand that all that they have is God's; they are stewards, not owners, who will give an account for their use of what God entrusted to them. How does God want us to use what He has entrusted to us? Christ reveals part of His will for us in this matter by the command: "Give to him who asks you, and don't turn away from those who wish to borrow from you."

From Discourse IV: On Tears of Penitence *St. Symeon the New Theologian*

Thus it is not, as some think, by nature but by will that every man becomes either humble and apt for compunction, or hard-hearted, hardened, and insensitive. When, tell me, will he be contrite in soul and shed a tear from his eyes who passes almost all the day aimlessly, without paying heed either to silence of lips, or prayer, or reading, or recollection, but at times talks to his neighbors at the services (thus depriving of profit both himself and those to whom he talks), at other times disparages and reproaches the devout brethren and sometimes even the superior himself? When will he acquire compunction who meddles in all the affairs [of the parish], and not of the [parish] alone, but of everyone's life? One at such times says to some of the brethren, "Yesterday, I heard such and such," and again, "Do you know what happened to poor so-and-so? and, "Did you hear of such a one's misfortune?" Will such a person ever be mindful of his own vices and be so distressed that he will shed a tear from his eyes? One who leaves the services at the time of the reading of the divine Scriptures to sit somewhere near some and converse with some of the others, one after the other, as they retail unprofitable events in such terms as these, "Have you heard how the abbot [the

priest] treated brother so-and-so?" and the other, "But what will you say if I tell you how he treated that poor fellow?"—he who occupies himself and others with such conversations and worst than these, and with such nonsense, when will he attain to the perception of his own faults and bewail himself?

What of a man who does not heed the inspired oracles and does not "set a watch about his lips", nor turn away his ear from hearing vanity? One who is not mindful of the final defense before Christ and His awesome judgment seat, where we must all stand before Him naked and exposed to view and give account of the lives that we have lived? Even if he has lived more than a hundred years in the monastic habit [parish], how will he find a tear that he may fervently mourn over himself? How will he who seeks for the front place in the church and the first seat at table and is always fighting and grieved for such things ever grieve for his own soul and weep bitterly before God? He who "makes excuses for his sins" and pleads his weakness even though he is strong and vigorous and young? One who stands in the church and compares himself with the more devout brethren who have labored much and spent a long time in asceticism and says, "Surely I am not inferior to this man or that man? He has a place where he can lean at prayer and stands there when he comes back." If he put himself on a level with them (thou he may be unworthy of even the lowest place!), will he ever become conscious of his own weakness, so that he may groan in his soul, be contrite of heart, and weep with his eyes?

The vainglory that enslaves him to *accidie* {sloth, listlessness} will never permit him to persevere in anything with patience. Anyone who is in this state will thenceforth waste his time in idleness and carelessness at every service as he constantly tells vain and silly stories to those of his neighbors who endure listening to him. So when he joins with spiritual and God-fearing men for the divine Services, he does so without feeling, or, rather, without pain. He goes out thence without any benefit and perceives no change whatever for the better coming on him. Such a change is given by God to those who strive through compunction. He thinks that it is enough for him that he merely does not miss the compulsory Services, that is, Matins and Vespers and the Hours that are sung in common, and that by simply doing this he will attain to perfect virtue and to the perfection of those who have achieved it, to "the full stature of Christ". I have known some who were under such a delusion and who most zealously avoided any fall into carnal sin, in the sense of union with the bodies of others, and who were yet not at all concerned to avoid sins committed in secret or meditated in the hidden depth of the heart. They thought that they would be saved without any further effort, without prayer, silence, vigil, abstinence, poverty of spirit, humility, or love, but merely by attending the Services in the way mentioned above. But this is not so! God does not look on the appearance nor on the mere sobriety of conduct, nor on our cries, brethren! He looks on the

"contrite and humbled heart", the heart that is quiet and clothed with the fear of God. "on whom," says He, "will I look, but on the man that is humble and quiet, and who trembles at My word?"

The Fast

If thou fast from food, my soul, yet dost not cleanse thyself from the passions, thou dost rejoice in vain over thine abstinence. For if thy purpose is not turned towards amendment of life, as a liar thou art hateful in God's sight, and thou dost resemble the evil demons who never eat at all. Do not by sinning make the Fast worthless, but firmly resist all wicked impulses. Picture to thyself that thou art standing beside the crucified Savior, or rather, that thou art thyself crucified with Him who was crucified for thee; and cry out to Him: remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.

Aposticha of Wednesday Matins of Cheese Week

Cheese Week, the week between Meatfare Sunday and Cheesefare/Forgiveness Sunday is a week of preparation for the Great Fast. The hymns look ahead to the ascetic labor we shall undertake during the forty days to cleanse ourselves and draw near to God.

The hymn above from Wednesday Matins sets forward the priority for the Fast. While we are to abstain from certain foods and generally to eat less so that we may increase our almsgiving, the deeper purpose the Fast is "amendment of life", being changed by turning away from our sins and putting on the virtues which are found in the keeping of Christ's commandments. The demons, indeed, do not eat at all; they keep a stricter fast than we do! We resemble them in our fasting when we are strict about food but freely indulge in sin. Such fasting holds no benefit for us.

The bodily fasting assists us in the task of amending our lives and putting of sinful habits by humbling the body and soul and not unduly feeding the passions with rich or excessive food. But the focus is overcoming pride, greed, lust, sloth, anger, vainglory, gluttony, and despondency and their numerous offspring.

If we stumble during the Fast, let us not lose hope and give up, but get up and renew our efforts to humble ourselves in order to receive God's grace to change.

From *The Diary of a Russian Priest*

We must not put our vices to sleep—we must uproot them. Here lies the advantage of life in the world: through conflict with other people and through situations which expose us to temptation, it reveals our own heart to us.

Upcoming Events 2023

26 February: Forgiveness Vespers, 5:00 p.m.
4 March: Retreat at Nativity Monastery with Fr. Stephen Freeman: The Humility of Christ
9-15 April Holy Week

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!