

# The Confessor's Tongue for March 10, 2024

## 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.

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### Cheesefare Week

The week following Meatfare (today) 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.

### Sunday of the Last Judgement

On this Sunday one week before the Great Fast begins, the Holy Church calls us to contemplate the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection of the Dead, and the standing of all before the judgement seat of Christ. The words and images are sobering, even frightening, as we realize that we must stand there in the penetrating glory of Christ to be revealed for what we have chosen to become in the course of our lives. We shall be able to hide nothing, forget nothing, excuse nothing. Everything will be revealed, everything made manifest. The Judgement is set before us to motivate us in the fast diligently to cultivate repentance, to deal with our sins now, in this life, which is given to us for repentance, so that all our sins may be removed from us "as far as the East is from the West" and will not remain to appear on that day. But if we are negligent regarding our sins in this life, we shall answer for them there. With such a fearful certainty before us, how can we be careless now? Let us read and contemplate a few hymns for this Sunday that they may motivate us to a deeper repentance.

When Thou shalt come, O righteous Judge, to execute just judgement, / seated on Thy throne of glory, / a river of fire will draw all men amazed before Thy judgement-seat; / the powers of heaven will stand beside Thee, / and in fear mankind will be judged according to the deeds that each hath done. / Then spare us, Christ, in thy compassion, with faith we entreat Thee, // and count us worthy of Thy blessings with those that are saved. *Vespers, LIHC, tone 6*

Here (above) we affirm what we confess in the Creed, that Christ will come again in glory to judge the race of man. Then there is this:

When Thou comest, O God, upon the earth with glory, / the whole world will tremble. / The river of fire will bring men before Thy judgement seat, / the books will be opened and the secrets disclosed. / Then deliver me from the unquenchable fire, // and count me

worthy to stand on Thy right hand, O most righteous Judge. *Kontakion, Tone 1*

O Lord, supreme in love, as I think upon Thy fearful judgment seat and the day of judgement, I tremble and am full of fear, for I am accused by my own conscience. When Thou sittest on Thy throne and bringest all to trial, none will be able then to deny his sins, for the truth will accuse him and terror will constrain him. The flames of Gehenna will roar and the sinners will gnash their teeth. Therefore, have mercy upon me before the end, and spare me, Judge most righteous. *Ikos*

The hymns speak of the "books being opened", but the Church understands those books to be the human conscience opened in the full light of Christ's glory, as the *ikos* for Matins expresses.

The "Glory" verse for the Aposticha at Vespers instructs us in how we should respond now to the inevitable and inescapable coming judgement:

Alas black soul! How long wilt thou continue in evil? / How long wilt thou lie in idleness? / Why dost thou not think of the fearful hour of death? / Why dost thou not tremble at the dread judgment seat of the Savior? / What defence then wilt thou make or what wilt thou answer? / Thy works will be there to accuse thee; / thine actions will reproach thee and condemn thee. / O my soul, the time is near at hand; / make haste before it is too late, and cry aloud in faith: / I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned against Thee: / but I know Thy love for man and Thy compassion. // O good Shepherd, in Thy great mercy, deprive me not of a place at Thy right hand. *Vespers Aposticha, Glory, tone 8.*

The thought of judgement terrifies us, as it should, and provides a beginning to spiritual life in the desire to avoid condemnation at the judgement. In the hymns, we face that terror head-on, as we must. But each hymn imparts hope to the sinner tempted to despair: "Therefore we beseech Thee, O compassionate and loving Lord: spare us who sing Thy praise, for Thou alone art rich in mercy"; "O Judge compassionate, in Thy mercy save me"; "O Lord of glory, take pity on us in Thy goodness, and count us worthy of a place with them that have loved Thee"; "O God who only art compassionate, turn me back and save me." May we act on that hope.

### Health of Soul and Body

*St. John of Kronstadt*

"Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more." Experience proves that sins and passions destroy the health of the soul and the body, whilst victory over the passions affords heavenly tranquility and health both to the soul and the body. Conquer the many-headed hydra of sin--and you will be made whole. Preserve tranquility of spirit; do not be disturbed, do not be irritated by any opposition, offences, negligences, injustices--and then you will always enjoy spiritual and bodily health. Emotions, disturbances, and the fire of various passions produces in us a

multitude of maladies both of mind and body.. *My Life in Christ*, p. 124.

### 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!

### Participation in Lenten Services

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

*Lent is not just a time not to eat certain foods. It is a time for spiritual renewal, for repentance, for rededication of the Christian's whole life to Christ. This takes a certain effort on his part. The Church assists him by orienting her services to this work of repentance and renewal. The Christian who takes his faith seriously and recognizes his need for the fast will find much help in the divine services. Thus, a complete fast will include increased attendance at the divine services. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann discusses this in the following excerpt from his book Great Lent.*

No one...can attend the entire cycle of lenten worship. Everyone *can* attend some of it. There is simply no excuse for not making Lent, first of all, the time for an increased attendance of an participation in the liturgy of the Church. Here again, personal conditions, individual possibilities and impossibilities can vary and result in different decisions, but there must be a decision, there must be an effort, and there must be a "follow-up." From the liturgical point of view, we may suggest the following "minimum" aimed not at the spiritually self-destructive sense of having fulfilled an obligation, but at receiving at least the essential in the liturgical spirit of Lent.

In the first place, a special effort must be made on the parish level for a proper celebration of the *Forgiveness Sunday Vespers*....It must become one of the great "parish affairs" of the year....

The next priority must be given to the first week of Lent [Clean Week]. A special effort must be made to attend at least once or twice the *Great Canon of St. Andrew*. As we have seen, the liturgical function of these first days is to take us into the spiritual "mood" of Lent, which we described as "bright sadness."

Then, throughout the entire Lent, it is imperative that we give at least one evening to attend the *Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts* with the spiritual experience it implies—that of total fasting, that of the transformation of at least one day into a real expectation of judgment and joy. No reference to conditions of life, lack of time, etc., are acceptable at this point, for if we only do that which easily "fits" into the conditions of our lives, the very notion of lenten effort becomes absolutely meaningless. Not only in the twentieth century, but, in fact, since Adam and Eve, "this world" was always an obstacle to the fulfillment of God's demands. There is, therefore, nothing new or special about our modern "way of life." Ultimately, it all depends again on whether or not we take our religion *seriously*, and if we do, eight or ten additional evenings a year at church are truly a minimal effort. Deprived of that evening, however,

we are depriving ourselves not only of the beauty and depth of the lenten services, not only of a necessary spiritual inspiration and help, but of that which, as we shall see in the next section, makes our fasting meaningful and effective.

*Fr. Schmemmann offers a bare minimum. During the Fast, we daily will offer Matins or Midnight Office and either Vespers or the Liturgy of Presanctified gifts. The times vary somewhat in an attempt to make the services accessible to everyone's schedule. I urge everyone to take advantage of at least one weekday service each week. Further, plan to spend as much of both Clean Week and Holy Week in church. May the Lord bless you!*

### By the Waters of Babylon Psalm 136 (137)

At Matins for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, and then also for the Sundays of Meatfare and Cheesefare, after singing the Polieley of the Psalms: "Praise the name of the Lord" and "O give thanks unto the Lord", we sing also Psalm 136: "By the rivers of Babylon", "with the beautiful alleluia", i.e. in the known chant with special tenderness, with sweet singing. This psalm arouses in the sinners to understand their unfortunate condition in their captivity in sin and by the devil, similarly to the Jews in captivity in Babylon, who understood their bitter situation and repented, and represents the sorrowful soul nostalgic for the heavenly fatherland. The last verse of this psalm: "Blessed shall he be who shall seize and dash thine infants against the rock", in translation means: the one is blessed who has the courage and power to break on the rock of faith sin in its infancy—those things which give birth to evil thoughts, the depraved stirrings of the heart, and the shameful impulses of the will—before they take possession of one's soul. *Bulgakov Handbook*

### Open To Me the Door of Repentance

Beginning Last Sunday and ending with the Fifth Sunday of Lent, we sing during Matins the following hymn, which we all would do well to make our prayer throughout the season of the Fast.

Open to me, the door of repentance, O Lifegiver, for my spirit riseth early to pray towards Thy holy Temple, bearing the temple of my body all defiled. But in Thy compassion, purify me by the lovingkindness of Thy mercy.

Lead me on the paths of salvation, O Mother of God, for I have profaned by soul with shameful sins and have wasted my life in laziness; but by thine intercessions, deliver me from all impurity.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy, and, according to the multitude of Thy compassions, blot out my transgressions.

When I think of the many evil things I have done, wretch that I am, I tremble at the fearful day of judgment, but trusting in Thy lovingkindness, like David I cry to Thee: have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.

### Upcoming Events 2023

17 March: Forgiveness Vespers, 5:00 p.m.  
18-23 March: Clean Week  
29 April-4 May: Holy Week  
5 May: Holy Pascha

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!