

# The Confessor's Tongue for March 17, 2024

Forgiveness Sunday, Forgiveness Sunday, Cheesefare; SS Patrick & Alexis

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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## 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.

## 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.

## From the Triodion

We were banished once, O Lord, from Paradise through eating from the tree;  
but thou hast led us back again, O my God and Savior, through Thy Cross and Passion.  
At the intercessions of Thy Mother,  
give us strength through this Thy Cross to keep the Fast in holiness  
and to worship thy divine Awakening, the Passover of Salvation.

*Exapostilarion at Matins of Cheesefare Sunday*

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. We should keep the other three fasts as well, the Holy Apostles' Fast, the Holy Dormition Fast, and forty-day Holy Nativity Fast. The Holy Fathers instituted four periods of fasting, corresponding to the four seasons of the year. However, they ascribed a greater prestige to this forty-day fast of Great Lent because of the Lord's Passion, and because Christ

likewise fasted forty days and was glorified. The Holy Prophet Moses received the Law after fasting forty days, and the Holy Prophet Elijah and the Holy Prophet Daniel likewise fasted, as did all those who were approved by God.

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 the Triodion**

The season of the virtues now hath come and the Judge is at the door.

Let us not hold back with darkened face, but let us keep the Fast, offering tears, contrition, and almsgiving; and let us cry:

Our sins are more in number than the sand of the sea; but, Deliverer of all, forgive each one of us, that we may receive an incorruptible crown.

*Sessional Hymn at Matins of Cheesefare Sunday*

**On the Great Canon of St. Andrew**

*Metropolitan Luke of Zaporozhye*

Great Lent for us always begins with the reading of the penitential canon of St. Andrew of Crete [Monday through Thursday of Clean Week]. Every year our Mother-Church reminds us of world history, of whence came evil, and what is good.

God created the world good. The uniting link between the spiritual, eternal, incorrupt world and the earthly world was man. But he fell, having been stricken by sin. From that time, suffering entered the world, with sickness, death, and corruption. They struck not only man, but also everything living on earth. Only the God-Man Jesus could renew this connection, place a bridge over the abyss that appeared between Heaven and earth. Thanks to Him, each one of us can, by walking the saving path placed by our Lord Jesus Christ, enter into eternal life.

Satan well knows this and does everything he can so that man would not only not enter the door, but not even find the road to it. His main weapon, which he traditionally uses against people, is lies and slander. One can only find the path to salvation by walking the path of truth. But the demons, through their servants on earth, do everything so that people would forget what is good and what is evil. The propaganda of world media tries to reformat the fundamental moral laws of the life of mankind. They call evil "good", and good "evil". But what happens when people cease to hold on to the good and struggle against evil? Life on earth becomes unbearable. This is the answer to the question of why we are experiencing the catastrophes that are now happening to us; why there is so much suffering in the world today.

Each of us participates in the grandiose universal battle between good and evil. Each of us is a warrior for divine righteousness and truth. If when looking at

us, people see in us the embodiment of divine love and goodness, then we can be sure that we have not lived our lives on earth in vain. In this is the main meaning of life. This is what St. Andrew of Crete wants to bring to our attention in his canon. 2023

**Power To Do Good and Seize the Kingdom**

*St. John of Kronstadt*

Our soul, as a spiritual, active being, cannot remain idle; it either does good or evil, one of the two; either wheat grows in it or tares. But as every good comes from God, and as the means of obtaining every good from God is prayer, those who pray fervently, sincerely, from the depths of their hearts, obtain from the Lord grace to do good, and, before all, the grace of faith; whilst those who do not pray, naturally remain without these spiritual gifts, voluntarily depriving themselves of them by their own negligence and spiritual coldness; and as the wheat of good thoughts, inclinations, intentions and works grows in the hearts of those who labor and pray fervently to the Lord, so in the hearts of those who do not pray the tares of every evil grow, smothering the small amount of good that has remained in them from the grace of Baptism, Chrism, and subsequent Penitence and Communion.

Therefore, we must most carefully look after the field of our heart, lest the tares of evil, slothfulness, luxuriousness, self-indulgence, unbelief, avarice, envy, hatred, and others, should grow within it; we must daily weed the field of our heart—at least, at morning and evening prayers, and refresh it by salutary sighs, as by early and late rain. Besides this, we must by every means implant in the field of our heart the seeds of the virtues, faith, hope in God, and love for God and our neighbor, fertilize it by prayer, patience, good works and not for a single hour remain in complete idleness and inactivity, for in times of idleness and inactivity the enemy zealously sows his tares. "While men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way." We must also remember that it is impossible to do good works without effort. Since our voluntary falling into sin, the kingdom of God cannot be taken otherwise than by "violence, and the violent take it by force." Why is it that only the narrow way and the narrow gate lead to life? Who makes the way of the chosen narrow? The world oppresses the chosen, the devil oppresses them, the flesh oppresses them; it is these that make our way to the kingdom of heaven narrow. *My Life in Christ*, p. 130-31.

**Homily 48 For Friday of the First Week**

*St. Theodore the Studite*

Brethren and Fathers! If anyone who is a layman wishes to construct a large and magnificent home, then he gives himself no rest either day or night, but labors, worries, and endures deprivation until he finishes the building of the house. They have such zeal and diligence in this work that their minds and

thoughts, day and night, are occupied with nothing else but only with how the roof might be finished more beautifully and excellently, and so that all below and all the rest might be adorned and done so that anyone who might see it would like to have such a home. And if anyone should desire to keep them from this work, then this would be for them so painful that it would be as if they suffered a great offense.

What is it that I wish to say to your love, respected Brethren? Since each of us builds and sets up for his soul not a house that is tangible and corruptible, which is made of stone and wood, but a heavenly dwelling that is incorrupt and eternal, which is composed of the virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, then tell me, shall we be actually less concerned and more slothful in constructing it than we would be in constructing a temporal house? Would not the loss of it be hard for us to bear? And the more so, since a house that is corruptible and temporal receives people of the flesh and thereafter when the house has had many owners, it itself grows old, goes to ruin and collapses, but our spiritual house, which is built of the virtues, receives the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle says, "Ye are the temple of the living God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (*I Cor. 3:16*). And when the time comes for us to leave this world, He also follows us into heaven, and we shall be there eternally.

The beginning of building the virtues is the fear of God, as the Divine Scriptures say, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (*Psa. 110:9*). And thereafter the four great virtues, that is, wisdom, courage, chastity, and righteousness, and the others with them, each linked to another and forming a union of love, will grow into a holy temple of the Lord. Let us then, Brethren, build this habitation and adorn it with the virtues so that we might have within us the Holy Spirit, and so that we may bring joy to the holy angels and be of benefit to mankind through the accomplishment of the virtues. And since temperance is one of the greatest virtues which we struggle to attain, then let us render glory unto God for having vouchsafed us to complete the span of one holy week. Our faces have changed and become pale, but there shines in us the grace of temperance. From the gall that arises as a result of the fast, we feel in our mouths a bitterness, but our souls are sweetened by the hope and grace of salvation. For these two, that is, the soul and body, by nature battle against one another, and when one grows stronger, the other becomes weaker. And so we shall rejoice, Brethren, in that we have made the better aspect, that is, the soul, much stronger.

It may be that someone will say: Will not eating once a day ruin the perfection of temperance? No, we need not fear this, for if it were so, then Christ would not have commanded us in the prayer "Our Father" to ask for our daily bread; nor would the raven have brought to the Prophet Elias food each day, and likewise the divine Paul of Thebes; and Anthony the Great would not have considered it better to eat a little each day rather than to remain fasting for three,

four, or seven days. And it seems to me that the cause for this is as follows: since our bodies are exhausted and weakened from daily work, that God, Who created us as He designed, might strengthen them by daily rations and we might fulfill the commandments of God, and would not be like a man paralyzed, as happens with those who fast for two or three days. They cannot accomplish prostrations, nor become experienced in readings and chanting, as they should, nor fulfill properly the other services; we will not mention what is supernatural. Thus the daily use of nourishment, according to the rule and order indicated, is not something imperfect, but something quite perfect, since all that has been instituted for us by the Holy Fathers is good and pleasing to God. O would that the Lord grant us still more health and strength of soul and body in order to serve the living and true God, and gain the reward that awaits us in the last day, in which may you, with all the saints from the ages, shine like the sun, having received an inheritance in the heavenly kingdom of Christ our Lord, to Whom is due glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages, Amen.

#### **On the Holy Lenten Fast** *Saint Dorotheos of Gaza:*

In the Law, God laid down that the sons of Israel should each year give tithes of all they possessed, and if they did so they were blessed in all their works. The holy apostles, knowing this to be for the help and advancement of our souls, resolved to fulfill it in a better and higher way, namely, for us to deliver up a tithe of the very days of our lives as if to consecrate them to God, so that we may be blessed in all our works, and each year to be unburdened of the whole year's sins. They elected to consecrate out of the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year, seven weeks of fasting, and so they ordained; but our Fathers, in their time, thought it advisable to add another week, both to train and to better prepare themselves to enter on the labor of fasting and to honor with their fasting the holy number of forty days which Our Lord fasted. The eight weeks, subtracting Saturdays and Sundays, makes forty days, but we honor Holy Saturday with a fast because it is a very holy day and the only Saturday fast of the year.

The seven weeks, without Saturdays, gives thirty-five days, and if finally we add the half of the brilliant and light-giving night, this makes thirty-six and a half, which is exactly a tenth of three hundred and sixty-five. For thirty is a tenth of three hundred, six is a tenth of sixty, and the tenth of five is one half. Here then, as we said, are the thirty-six and a half days, the very tithing of the whole year as one might say, which the holy apostles consecrated to penance for the cleansing of our sins of the whole year. Whoever, therefore, keeps a careful guard over himself, as is fitting during these holy days, will be rewarded with blessings, brothers, even if it happens that, being a man, he has sinned either through weakness or

carelessness. You see, God gave us these holy days so that by diligence in abstinence, in the spirit of humility and repentance, a man may be cleansed of the sins of the whole year and the soul relieved of its burden. Purified he goes forward to the holy day of the Resurrection, and being made a new man through the change of heart induced by the fast, he can take his part in the Holy Mysteries and remain in spiritual joy and happiness, feasting with God the whole fifty days. Paschal time, as has been said, is the resurrection of the soul and the sign of this is that we do not kneel in church during the whole season up to Pentecost.

Everyone who wants to purify himself of the sins of the whole year during these days must first of all restrain himself of the pleasure of eating. For the pleasure of eating, as the Fathers say, caused all man's evil. Likewise he must take care not to break the fast without great necessity or to look for pleasurable things to eat, or weigh himself by eating and drinking until he is full.

There are two kinds of gluttony. There is the kind which concerns taste: a man does not want to eat a lot but he wants it to be appetizing. It follows that such a person eats the food that pleases him and is defeated by the pleasure of it. He keeps the food in his mouth, rolling it round and round, and has not the heart to swallow it because he enjoys the taste. This is called fastidiousness. Another man is concerned about satisfying himself. He doesn't ask for fancy food nor does he care especially about whether the taste is nice or not, he only wants to eat and fill his stomach. This is gluttony. I will tell you how it gets this name: *margainein* means to rage furiously, to be mad; according to the profane, *margosis* the name given to the man who rages furiously or is mad. When this disease or mania for packing his belly full of food comes upon a man, therefore, it is called *gastromargia*, the madness of the stomach, whereas *lairmargia* is the madness of the palate. These must be guarded against and abandoned seriously by the man who desires to be cleansed from his sins. They accord not with the needs of the body, but with its vicious inclinations, and if they are tolerated, they lead a man into sin.

As is the cause with legitimate marital union and fornication, the practice is the same but the object is different. In the one case, there is copulation in order to raise a family, in the other, to satisfy a desire for pleasure. The same is true with feeding: in one case it is a question of the body's needs and in the other of eating for pleasure. The intention is what makes it a sin. A man eats to satisfy a need when he lays down how much he will take each day and, if what he has determined on overloads him, takes a little less, or if he is not overloaded and his body weakened, adds a little. And so he estimates exactly his need, and he bases his conclusion not on pleasure but on preserving the strength of his body. And what he takes he receives with prayer, deeming himself unworthy of that comfort and he is not on the lookout to see if others, as is likely, because of special need or necessity are given special attention, lest he himself hankers for that comfort or think it a trivial thing for the soul to be at rest.

One day when I was in the monastery, I went to see one of the seniors—and there were many great men among the seniors there. I discovered that his disciple sat down to eat with him, and in private I said to the young man, 'You know, brother, these seniors whom you see eating and taking a little recreation re like men who had deep purses and kept at work, always putting something into them until they filled them up. And after sealing them up they went

on working some more and amassed another thousand crowns, so as to have something to draw on in time of need, and so they preserved what was sealed up in the purse. And so it is with these [seniors], they preserved in their labors, always storing up treasures for themselves, and after sealing up the treasure they worked a little more, and they hold these treasures in reserves for times of sickness and old age so they have something to draw on, and still preserve the treasures they have stored up. But we haven't even a purse to draw on!'

As I was saying, therefore, we ought, even if we take food out of necessity, to consider ourselves unworthy of any kind of special relief or even of monastic life itself—and not take food purely for pleasure, and in this way food will not bring our condemnation.

Enough about sobriety in eating. We must not only keep a sharp watch over our diet, but keep away from all other kinds of sin so that as our stomach keeps fast, so also may our tongue as we abstain from calumny, from deceit, from idle talk, from railing and anger and all other vices which arise from the tongue.

So also let our eyes keep fast. No looking for trivialities, no letting the eyes wander freely, no impudent lying in wait for people to talk to. The same with the hands and feet, to prevent us from doing anything evil. Fasting in this way, as St. Basil says, is an acceptable fast and, leaving behind all the evil to which our senses are inclined, we may come to the holy day of the Resurrection, renewed and cleaned and worthy to share in the holy mysteries, as we have already said.

First we go out to meet Our Lord and receive him with palms and olive branches and we seat him on the colt and come with him into the Holy City. What does this mean: sitting on a colt? He is seated on a colt that he may convert the soul (which, as the prophet says, has become irrational and is compared to senseless beasts) into an image of God, and subject it to his own divinity. What does it mean: going to meet him with palms and olive branches? When someone marches out to war against an adversary and returns victorious, all his own people go before him with palm branches to mark his victory. The palm-branch is the symbol of victory. Again, when one man is injured by another, he desires to approach an authority who can vindicate him. He carries an olive branch and calls out, asking to be heard and helped. The olive branch is the symbol of mercy [pity].

Therefore, we go out to meet our Master Christ, with palms because he is victorious—for he conquered our enemy—and with olive branches—for we are asking his mercy. May we, by asking, conquer through him and be found carrying the emblems of his victory, not only the victory by which he won for us, but also the victory which we also won through him by the prayers of all the saints. Amen.

#### 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  
5-11 May: Bright Week

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!