



reminds us of our need for God's forgiveness and guides our hearts, minds, and spiritual efforts on returning to Him in repentance.

Forgiveness Sunday (Cheesefare Sunday), Commemoration of the exile of Adam from Paradise

17 February / 1 March

The Sunday of Forgiveness is the last Sunday prior to the commencement of Great Lent. During the pre-Lenten period, the services of the Church include hymns from the Triodion, a liturgical book that contains the services from the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, the tenth before Pascha, through Great and Holy Saturday. On the Sunday of Forgiveness focus is placed on the exile of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, and event that shows us how far we have fallen in sin and separated ourselves from God. At the onset of Great Lent and a period of intense fasting, this Sunday

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 4: When the women disciples of the Lord / learned from the Angel the joyous message of Thy Resurrection / they cast away the ancestral curse / and elatedly told the Apostles / death is overcome / Christ God is risen / granting the world great mercy.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 4: My Saviour and Redeemer / as God rose from the tomb and delivered the earth-born from their chains / He has shattered the gates of hell, / and as Master, / He has risen on the third day.

Kondak to Cheese-fare Sunday, Tone 6: O Thou guide unto wisdom, bestower of prudence, instructor of the foolish and defender of the poor: Establish and grant understanding unto my heart, O Master. Grant me speech, O Word of the Father; for behold, I shall not keep my lips from crying unto Thee: O Merciful One, have mercy on me who have fallen.

Matins Gospel IV

Epistle: St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans 13: 11 — 14: 4

11. And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.

Romans 14: 1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

WHO ARE YOU TO JUDGE ANOTHER'S SERVANT?

Why do we usurp God's right to judge? ...It is for God alone to judge, to justify or to condemn. He knows the state of each one of us and our capacities, our deviations and our gifts, our constitution, and our preparedness ...according to the knowledge that He alone has ...And how do you know what tears he has shed about it before God? You may well know about the sin, but you do not know about the repentance.

St. Dorotheos of Gaza. Discourse on Refusal to Judge our Neighbour. B#45, pp. 133,135.

The Gospel According To St. Matthew 6: 14 -21

14 The Lord said: if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. 16 Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. 17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, 18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father, which is in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. 19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

FORGIVENESS SUNDAY

This is the very beginning of Great Lent. For whatever we begin in life, we always compose some kind of plan of action, a program of what we have to accomplish and in what order. But here we don't have to do this; today's Gospel gives us this program. Earlier, the Holy Church was more often teaching us, but now she is requiring actions from us. Just let us examine the present Gospel attentively, and we will see how simple, how accessible for each of us, and at the same time, how comprehensive these rules are.

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mt. 6:14-15). Therefore, what is the real purpose of Great Lent? Here it is: so that our Heavenly Father will forgive us our sins. And how do we achieve this? Forgive people their sins. Let us start here with this. This is the very first thing.

Secondly, “moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast.... But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret” (Mt. 6:16-18). And so let us fast, but not for the sake of people, but before God, and not despondently, but in spiritual happiness.

And thirdly, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth. . .but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Mt. 6:19-20). This determines all our activities, gives direction to our whole life.

And finally, the last thing: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt. 6:21). Here is the purpose of our life! That our heart be in God, filled with God, so that God will become our treasure. But to learn this is possible only in the Church. And this is so important for us that it is worth the labour, and the fasting, and standing longer in church, and praying more at home. For only then will we be able to cry out with joy: “Christ is Risen!” and to answer those greeting us: “In Truth He is Risen!”

THE RITE OF FORGIVENESS

Brothers and sisters! What the Holy Church asks us to perform right now is no longer a thought or a feeling, but an action, a deed. Thoughts and feelings have been cultivated in us for the past weeks. In fact this is the way it always happens: thought gives birth to feeling, and feeling gives birth to action. And this action is of special importance. Listen: “If ye forgive not men...neither will your [Heavenly] Father forgive you” (Mt. 6:15). This means that our fasting and going to church and prostrations, in fact all our devotions, will be in vain.

That's how important this first step is. But it is not easy. To do it in words only, just for the sake of decency, for the sake of formality, might not be difficult. But what is the good of that? However, really to make this step, to recognise that we are worse than others, worse than everyone, truly guilty before everyone (and after all, this is how it is: each of us is guilty before everyone, in everything, and for everything), to come to this realisation is very, very difficult. And to consider the guilt of another before us as nothing, as if it did not exist, and maybe was even provoked by us—this is still more difficult. Even in the Lives of the

Saints we read examples of how great strivers and confessors were not able to do this, and thereby ruined everything. And even more for us sinners is the special help of God needed to forgive and to ask forgiveness sincerely, from our whole heart, to draw out of it our self-love, our self-justifying “I.” But we have to do this, the Lord requires it of us, the Lord is waiting. Without this effort within ourselves we cannot begin Lent. So let us ask for forgiveness and forgive from our whole heart. And here, as the first one, I ask you: Forgive me!

The One Thing Needful - Archbishop Andrei.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you (*Matt. 6:14*)

Dear brothers and sisters, in the Gospel read on the last Sunday before Great Lent, the Holy Church reminds us all of the great and saving command of Christ that we be reconciled with our neighbour and repent before God. Each of us knows from his own experience and accepts humbly, together with St. James that *we all stumble in many things* (James 3:2). We all offend God, break His holy commandments, and it often happens in our lives that we make these saving commandments a reason for sin and transgression against God's commandments.

Our first parents, Adam and Eve, once found in God's commandment not to eat *of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, a cause to heed the devil's temptation; they broke this commandment and, since they did not repent sincerely before God, they were driven out of the beautiful Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:17; 3:6,23).

What do we see in the lives of men on earth and in our own life? Just like our first parents, we all reach out fearlessly to *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil* forbidden to us by God, that is to say, to sin, thereby breaking Christ's saving commandments. And through our sin we become, just like our first parents, the adversaries of God's commandments, unworthy of the heavenly paradise. Only God's mercy can turn us back again from the way of sin onto the way of saving faith and virtue.

However, our return to the way of salvation can only come about through our sincere and heartfelt repentance before God. For this reason, the first commandment made by Christ our Saviour was on penitence: *Repent, and believe in the Gospel* (Mark 1:15). Repenting sincerely for our sins before God, we must strive with all our will always to act in the future according to the commandments of the Gospel of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, just as we often sin against God, so we often sin against other people—our neighbours. Love for one's neighbour is the second commandment of God. The Lord saw fit to link these two commandments—love of God and love of our neighbour—so closely, that breaking one of them makes a man break the other as well. *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen* (1 John 4:20)?

Without love of our neighbour we can never love God and live a beneficial life, pleasing to God on earth. *And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also* (1 John 4:21).

Before Great Lent, brothers and sisters, the Holy Orthodox Church commands us to restore peaceful relations with those of our neighbours whom we have offended or saddened in any way, in thought, word or deed. Christian humility demands that we make our peace not only with those whom we have offended, but also with those who have offended us in any way, and forgive them. And only through reconciliation with our neighbour and forgiving him when he has offended or saddened us can we with a clear conscience fast successfully, praying and sincerely repenting before God, throughout the holy days of Great Lent. And only through completely forgiving others can we, according to Christ's commandment, expect in faith the forgiveness of our sins. *For if you forgive men their trespasses, says the Lord, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses* (Matt. 6:14-15).

Let us forgive, dear brothers and sisters, all sorrow that others have caused us; let us put out of our minds all thought of who was right and who was wrong in any quarrel or offence, and forget it completely. Let us sincerely and wholeheartedly forgive one another our sins and in peace with our neighbour search the inner recesses of our souls to wash clean our hearts with tears of repentance before God.

Having made our peace with our neighbour and having wept sincerely for our sins before God, through sincere repentance we will become worthy to partake, without condemnation, of the saving and Holy Gifts of Christ—His Most-pure Body and Blood. And on the day of the Last Judgment, may we all be found worthy, brothers and sisters, to hear from our God and Saviour, the joyful words: "Your Heavenly Father forgives you your sins!" Amen.

The Living Word

F.I.S.

Saints of the Week **Beginning of Great Lent**

17 February / 1 March — St. Theodore the Tyro - 'Tyro' means 'Recruit'. No sooner had St Theodore entered the Marmarite regiment of the army in the town of Amasea than a persecution of Christians broke out under the Emperors Maximian and Maximinus. Theodore did not attempt to conceal that he was a Christian, and was brought to trial and imprisoned in a prison that was then locked and sealed. The wicked judge intended him to die of hunger, but the Lord Christ Himself appeared to Theodore in the prison and encouraged His martyr with these words: 'Fear not, Theodore; I am with thee. Take no more earthly food and drink, for thou shalt be in the other life, eternal and unending, with Me in heaven.' Then a multitude of angels appeared in the prison, and the whole place shone with light. The warders on duty saw the angels in white apparel and were filled with fear. Then St Theodore was taken out, tortured and condemned to death. He was thrown into fire, and gave his soul to the most high God. He suffered in 306. Our Holy Fathers Theodosius the Bulgarian and Romanus; St Mariamna (Maria); **St. Finan, bishop of Lindisfarne** - Irish by birth, St. Finan of Lindisfarne became a monk at Iona and upheld the Celtic traditions against the encroachment of Roman usage. Finan baptised Penda, ruler of the Middle Angles, and Sigebert, ruler of Essex. Elected bishop of Lindisfarne in 651, Finan sent missionaries to Mercia and to Essex. He also debated Ronan, an Englishman, about the correct way to calculate the date of Easter. On the Holy Island, he built a wooden cathedral, the roof of which was thatched with seagrass. (A later abbot removed the thatching and covered the building with lead). Finan died in 661, and St. Cuthbert succeeded him as abbot.

18 February / 2 March — The "Holy Night" of Russian Monasticism. The 'Holy Night', so called by the people, was on the night of the 17-18 February, 1932. It is a radiant yet terrible date, the Passion Friday of Russian Monasticism - ignored by all and almost unknown to the whole world - when all of Russian monasticism in a single night disappeared in to the concentration camps. It was all done in the dead of night and with the full knowledge of Metropolitan Alexis (later appointed Patriarch Alexis I of Moscow under the Communists) - about which there is sufficient evidence. In Leningrad there were arrested: 40 monks of the St Alexander Nevsky Lavra; 12 monks of the Kiev metochion (the other monks had all been arrested in 1930); 10 monks from the Valaam metochion; 90 nuns of the Novodevichi Convent; 16 nuns of Abbess Taisia's Leushinsky metochion; 12 monks from St Theodore's Cathedral; 8 monks from the "Kinovia" of the St Alexander Nevsky Lavra's "Big Okhotko"; a hundred or so monastics from various other Leningrad churches. In all - 318 people. That same night all the monks and brethren of the St Macarius the Roman Monastery were arrested and brought to Leningrad as vicious criminals whose very presence was a threat to society; they were treated as deadly insects whose presence must be stamped out. The wave of arrests, like thunder, rolled over the Russian land, striking chiefly the monastic population which so recently had been the glorious guardian of the nation's morals and values. It also struck many of the white (parish) clergy and laymen who, in one way or another, were close in spirit to monasticism. For example, the flaming sermons of the parish priest Father

Alexander Medvedsky were the cause of his arrest. All were sent to the Kazakhstan region from where almost no one ever returned.

Papa-Nicholas Planas - was born on the island of Naxos, the only son of a well-to-do family. He moved to Athens with his mother and sister at the age of 14 following the death of his father. He married at the age of 17, but his wife died giving birth to their first child. Soon afterwards, in 1879, he was ordained a deacon, and five years later, a priest. For fifty years without a break he celebrated liturgy daily from eight in the morning till three in the afternoon. His joy and his life was to celebrate Liturgies, Vigils, Vespers, Canons, Blessings of the Waters, Holy Unction, and Memorial Services. Many times he would say with simplicity, "I will chant unto the Lord for as long as I have my being". He was a great faster, eating only once a day, in the evenings. He would commemorate names for hours on end - sometimes 2000 at a time. First deceased patriarchs, metropolitans, priests, deacons, monastics, and the people of Naxos & Athens. He would tie the lists of names into a big bundle and carry them close to his heart. He was patient & long-suffering, enduring all manner of trials and insults. He quietly observed the Old Calendar and the ways of True Orthodox Christianity. He had no attachment to earthly things, and passed his whole life without acquiring anything. There were many miraculous occurrences during his life, as those close to him have testified, and there are many reports of healings through his prayers and contact with his relics after his repose. He reposed in February 1932 at the age of 81, following a short illness. He shines forth as one of the great saints of the 20th Century. Holy Papa-Nicholas, pray for us!

Tropar of Papa-Nicholas Planas, Tone 5: Let us praise our protector, the godly Nicholas; as one endowed with blest virtue, he shone forth as a true priest of the Most High God, and was his fervent worshipper. For, by his holy life on earth, he hath left us most sublime, divine and unfailing teachings of long suffering, meekness, patience, unfeigned humility and true God-like love.

Kondak of Papa-Nicholas Planas, Tone 3: Humble of spirit and pure of heart, illustrious in life and dispassionate of a truth, wast thou, O wise one. Thou didst illumine all by thy virtues and dost grant grace unto them that draw nigh unto thee; and by thine intercessions, thou dost heal them that call upon thee, O Father Nicholas. St Leo the First, Pope of Rome; St Flavian; **St. Colman, bishop of Lindisfarne** - An Irish bishop of Lindisfarne, England, a disciple of St. Columba. He was born in Connaught, Ireland. At the Synod of Whitby Colman defended the Celtic ecclesiastical practices against St. Wilfrid and St. Agilbert.

19 February / 3 March — Commemoration of all the holy and God-bearing Fathers who shone forth in the ascetic life — there is a general commemoration of all the ascetic saints of the Church, both men and women. As we set out on the journey of the Lenten fast, we are reminded that we do not travel alone but as members of a family, supported by the intercessions of many invisible helpers.

The Holy Apostles Archippus, Philemon and Apphia. Archippus was one of the Seventy. The Apostle Paul mentions him in his Epistles to the Colossians (4:17) and to Philemon (2), calling him his fellow-soldier in the battle. The Christians' gathering-place for prayer in the town of Colossae was in the house of Philemon. The Apostle Paul, writing to Philemon, calls this 'the Church in thy house'. This was in the time when the apostles were consecrating their disciples to the episcopate—some to permanent sees and others as missionaries, travelling to various places. Philemon was one of these latter. Apphia, Philemon's wife, remained to serve the house-church with fasting. At the time of a feast of the pagan goddess Artemis, all the faithful in Colossae were, as was their custom, gathered at prayer in the house of Philemon. The pagans came to hear of this gathering, rushed in on them and seized all the Christians. They flogged Archippus, Philemon and Apphia as their leaders, then buried them up to the waist in the ground and stoned them. Philemon and Apphia died of this, but they took Archippus out of the hole barely alive and left him for the children to play with. They took knives and stabbed him all over, and thus this fellow-soldier of Paul's in the battle made a good end of his earthly road. Our Holy Father Dositheus.

20 February / 4 March — St Leo, Bishop of Catania - beneath Mount Etna the volcano, in the town of Catania, St Leo was a good shepherd and compassionate teacher of the people. He had great care for the sick and poor, and both his zeal for the Faith and his compassion for the needy were great. There appeared one day in that town a magician called Heliodorus, who deluded the people with many illusions and greatly seduced the young. He once entered a church during divine service and began his tricks. St Leo came up to him, bound him with one end of his pallium and led him out to the market place. There he ordered that a great fire be kindled. When it was burning fiercely he stood among the flames and pulled Heliodorus to him. Heliodorus was completely burned up, but Leo remained alive and unharmed. All who had been taken in by Heliodorus, and who had regarded him as in some way divine, were put to shame by this. The compassionate and zealous Leo became known throughout the whole kingdom as a wonder-worker, helping people by his miracles. When he had finished his course, some time in the 8th century, his soul went to the Lord and healing myrrh flowed from his relics.

The Hieromartyr Sadok, bishop Persia and the 128 martyrs with him - Sadok was a bishop in Persia, following St. Simeon. At one time, St. Simeon appeared to him in a dream and said: "Yesterday, I - today, you!" Sadok interpreted these words to his flock as meaning: Last year I [St. Simeon] suffered, this year you [Sadok] will suffer. Indeed that year the Emperor Sapor arrested him with many of the clergy and people and brought them to trial. Sapor first ordered them to worship fire and sun as divinity. Sadok replied: "We are eagerly prepared to die for our God, but we cannot worship the sun nor fire." After that, they were tortured and sentenced to death by beheading. Before being beheaded, Sadok uplifted a prayer to God: "Wash us, O Lord, from our sins in our blood!" Sadok, with his priests and faithful gloriously gave up their bodies to death and their souls to the immortal God. They suffered in the year 342 A.D. or 344 A.D.

21 February / 5 March — St Zacharias, Patriarch of Jerusalem - the Persian King Chozroes attacked Jerusalem, ransacking the city, in the time of the Greek Emperor Heraclius, in 614. He took the Precious Cross off to Persia and enslaved an enormous number of Christians, including Patriarch Zacharias. The Jews supported him in his wickedness towards the Christians. It is recorded, among further malice on the part of the Jews, that they bought 90,000 Christian slaves from Chozroes and killed them all. The aged Patriarch spent fourteen years in slavery. Many marvels were wrought in Persia by the

Precious Cross, and the Persians exclaimed: "The Christian God has come to Persia!" The Emperor Heraclius later compelled King Chozroes to return the Precious Cross to Jerusalem, together with the Patriarch and the remaining slaves. The Emperor himself carried the Cross into the Holy City on his back. St Zacharias spent his remaining days in peace, and went to the Lord in 632. Patriarch Modestus deputised for him on the patriarchal throne, and after him came St Sophronius.

Our Holy Father Timothy - Timothy was a recluse in a place called Symbola on the Asiatic side of Mount Olympus. In his youth, Timothy entered a monastery, was tonsured a monk and until old age spent his earthly time in fasting, prayer, vigils and ceaseless labour. He remained pure and chaste throughout his entire life. To the pure and chaste God gives authority over evil spirits and He gave this to Timothy. Though his labours for the salvation of his soul, St. Timothy succeeded to build in himself a beautiful home for the Holy Spirit. This holy man died in the year 795 A.D.;

St Eustathius (Eustace), Archbishop of Antioch - a great zealot and protector of Orthodoxy. As such, he was especially prominent at the First Ecumenical Council [Nicaea 325 A.D.], where he intellectually and systematically refuted the teaching of Arius. With the other Holy Fathers, Eustathius confessed correctly that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit according to divine Hypostasis [natures]. Following the death of Emperor Constantine, the Arians somehow again gained prevalence and began to bitterly persecute Orthodoxy. St. Eustathius was ousted from his throne and exiled, at first to Thrace and after that to Macedonia. Eustathius suffered much and long until, in the end, he gave up his holy soul to God in the year 345 A.D.;

St John III Scholasticus, Patriarch of Constantinople - As an advocate, John was ordained a priest and after that became patriarch in the year 565 A.D. He compiled canons, which were included in the Nomo-Canon.

22 February / 6 March — Blessed Theoktista the Fool for Christ - when Archbishop Peter (Zverev) & Bishop Alexis (Bui) were in Voronezh, a remarkable holy woman lived there, a fool for Christ, the blessed Theoktista Michaelovna. Who she was or where she came from - no one knew. It was said that she had been the wife of a high-ranking naval officer who had died during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), and that after this tragedy, becoming disillusioned with the solidity of earthly life, she directed the gaze of her heart on high and took upon herself the exploit of foolishness for the sake of Christ. God rewarded her with a gift of clairvoyance with which she helped her suffering neighbours. She was small of stature, skinny, worn out, with noble features in her face. She lived in the Voronezh Monastery until it closed in 1931 and then took shelter with various people. She had literally "nowhere to lay her head". She did not sleep at nights, but would spend them in prayer and vigil. She had a remarkable mind and a refined way of expressing her thoughts and feelings. It was apparent that she was well bred. The righteous Theoktista saw the rapid liquidation of the Orthodox Churches and monuments of Voronezh in the 1930's, which was only a part of the satanic program that was conducted all over the much suffering Russian land, to the appalled outrage of almost the whole Russian people.. By the mid-1930's all the churches were closed, levelled by dynamite, or turned in to factory storehouses. The heart of the blessed one, which inspired so many good deeds for her neighbours, could not endure any longer. One day blood rushed to her throat, and on February 22, 1936 (OS), she died. It was said that before her death she dressed all in white to meet her bridegroom, Christ. She was buried in the cemetery outside the city and her memory was erased from Voronezh. But the Christian conscience bears her image in loving hearts throughout the world, wherever there is knowledge and understanding of Russia's Catacomb Saints.

The Holy Martyr Maurice and the Seventy Soldiers with him - During the reign of Emperor Maximian there was a great persecution of Christians. In the Syrian town of Apamsea, Maurice was superior of the local army. The pagans reported him to the emperor as being a Christian and a sower of the Christian Faith among the soldiers. The emperor himself came and conducted an investigation. Along with Maurice seventy Christian soldiers were also brought before the emperor among whom was Photinus, the son of Maurice. Neither the emperor's flattery nor threats could sway these heroes. To the threats of the emperor, they replied: "O Emperor, there is no fear in the sound and powerful souls of those who love the Lord!" When the emperor ordered and removed their military belts and garments, they said to him: "Our God will clothe us with incorruptible garments and belts and eternal glory!" When the emperor rebuked them because they despised the military honor given to them by him, they replied: "Your honor is without honor, for you have forgotten God Who gave you imperial authority!" Then the emperor commanded and the executioner beheaded Maurice's son Photinus before his eyes to instil fear in the father and in the others. But, Maurice said: "You have fulfilled our wish O torturer and have sent Photinus, the soldier of Christ before us." Then the emperor sentenced them to a most inhuman death: they were brought to a muddy place, stripped, bound to trees and rubbed them with honey, in order to be bitten by mosquitoes, wasps and hornets. After ten days under the most painful sufferings, they gave up their souls to God and departed to rejoice eternally with the holy angels in heaven. Christians secretly removed their bodies and honourably buried them. These courageous soldiers of Christ suffered about the year 305 A.D.;

The Many Martyrs of Eugenius - During the reign of Emperor Arcadius, the relics of many martyrs of Christ were unearthed, among whom was the Apostle Andronicus and his female assistant Junia. "Great Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners; they are prominent among the apostles and they were in Christ before me." (Romans 16:7). These relics were discovered according to a revelation from God to a cleric Nicholas Calligraphus. "Their names are known only to God Who has written their names in the Book of Life in the heavens." In the twelfth century, Emperor Andronicus II built a beautiful church over the relics of the Apostle Andronicus;

Our Holy Fathers Thalassius and Limnaeus - Both Thalassius and Limnaeus were Syrian ascetics. One of their unique forms of asceticism was "silence." Following the death of St. Thalassius in 440 A.D., Limnaeus joined St. Maron (February 14) and with him lived a life of mortification on top of a mountain under the open sky.;

St Papias of Hierapolis - a disciple of the holy apostles and a patristic author. From Papius we have testimony of the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, the four Marys and the brothers of our Lord as well as an incomplete but preserved manuscript: "An Interpretation of the Words of our Lord."

23 February / 7 March — The Hieromartyr Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna - born a pagan. St John the Theologian brought him to the Christian faith and baptised him. Polycarp was left an orphan in early childhood and a noble widow, Callista, after a vision in a dream, took him in, rearing and educating him as her own son. Polycarp was God-fearing and compassionate from his early years. He made great efforts to emulate the life of St Bucolus, the then Bishop of Smyrna, and of the Holy Apostles John and Paul, whom he had met and heard. St Bucolus ordained him priest and, at the time of his death, proclaimed him his heir in Smyrna. The apostolic bishops, who had gathered for Bucolus's funeral, consecrated Polycarp bishop. From the very beginning he was endowed with the power of wonder-working. He cast out the evil spirit from a servant of some prince and put out a great conflagration in Smyrna by his prayers. Seeing these things, many pagans regarded him as one of the gods. He brought rain in a drought, healed sickness, had the gifts of insight and prophecy, and so forth. He suffered in the time of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Three days before his death, he prophesied: 'In three days I shall be consumed by fire for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ!' When, on the third day, the soldiers arrested him and took him for trial, he cried out: 'May this be the will of the Lord my God!' When the judge urged him to deny Christ and recognise the Roman gods, Polycarp said: 'I cannot exchange the better for the worse.' The Jews especially hated Polycarp and endeavoured to have him burned. When they placed him, bound, on the pyre, he prayed long to God. He was very old and grey, and he shone like an angel of God. All the people saw how the flames licked around him but did not touch him. Frightened by such a phenomenon, the pagan judge ordered the executioner to stab him with a lance through the flames. When this was done, a vast flow of blood gushed out and extinguished the whole fire, and his body remained whole and unburned. At the Jews' persuasion, the judge ordered that Polycarp's dead body be burned according to the Greek custom, and so they dishonourably burned dead him whom they had failed to burn alive, St. Polycarp suffered in the year 167, on Holy Saturday;

Our Holy Father Damian - a monk of the Monastery of Esphigmenou on Mt. Athos, was a contemporary and companion of the great Cosmos of Zographou. He lived a life of asceticism on Mount Samareia between Esphigmenou and Hilendar. He died peacefully in the year 1280 A.D. When he died, a pleasant and sweet-smelling aroma emitted from his body for forty days; St. Mildburga (Mildred), abbess of Much Wenlock; St. Jurmin, prince of East Anglia.

Some Reflections on Fasting for Great Lent

By Dr. John L. Boojamra

FASTING — OR MORE CORRECTLY, the practice of abstinence for certain days and certain periods of the year — has long caused difficulty in the minds of many Orthodox Christians in North America. Every year, as the Easter Lent approaches, Orthodox Christians begin to wonder what, if anything, to do in preparation for the feast. In general, I think it is safe to say that the practice and idea of fasting is largely ignored in this regard. Many people generally dismiss fasting with the rather simple and naive belief that "This is the twentieth century; fasting is an arcane practice that was made for the past and simpler days," or worse, they dismiss fasting because "fasting is a man made discipline" - as if being "man made" by definition makes something worthless.

Nonetheless, in spite its neglect by most people, we must take the practice of fasting seriously, if for no other reason than the fact that other people, throughout Christian history, have taken it seriously. It is valuable here to consider not so much "how" we must fast as "why" we must fast. A deeper understanding of the significance of this practice in Christianity will help us in determine our own fasting practices.

We must first admit that fasting has a firm foundation in the Scriptures and Tradition of the Church, as well as in the practice of the Jewish community which gave birth to the Church. We know, for instance, that Jesus fasted, that the disciples of John the Baptist fasted, and that Jesus said that prayer and fasting were necessary for casting out certain evils. We know also that the early Church picked up its Wednesday and Friday abstinence from the Jewish Monday and Thursday weekly fast.

Fasting and this World

TO THIS EMPHASIS we must add a certain otherworldly emphasis in Jesus' teaching. Perhaps the most realistic treatment of this is in Matthew (6:19-21): Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be.

In order to understand the significance of fasting in Christianity, we must look at it in the context of the Christian view of the world. In spite of the great love which Jesus and His Church have demonstrated for the world and for life in it, there is in Christianity a reservation about the world and human life as it is now. The Church calls this a "fallen world," a world which in all its aspects is in some way separated voluntarily from the love and life of God, its Creator. How does this perspective reflect on the practice of fasting? As it turns out, fasting cannot be separated from this realistic appraisal of the world, and from the struggle to find the Kingdom of God. There is something about fasting, something about refusing to make a total investment in the world as it is, that is associated with the struggle to build the Kingdom of God; for insofar as we are occupied with the delusions of this fallen world, we are impeded in our struggle to find the Kingdom. Fasting, therefore, must be seen as a means of turning away from the fallenness of the world so that we can discover another, better world - i.e. the Kingdom. "Seek first the kingdom of God and all else will be added" we are told. As finding the Kingdom of God is a matter of priority, the importance of fasting as a means of helping ourselves in this endeavor cannot be overstated.

Before discussing what fasting is, perhaps it would be beneficial to say a few words about what it is not. This is a valuable approach since there is a great deal of misunderstanding regarding the nature and function of fasting, both as an idea and as a practice.

God, we must admit first, is not simple-minded. He has no need for our fasting. Our efforts do not affect Him in any way. We cannot buy His love or His grace. This immediately takes fasting out of any legalistic framework and puts it on the level of personal spiritual growth and struggle. For instance, because one person fasts more strictly than another does not mean that God loves the first more or gives him more grace. It is as unimaginable that you could get more grace from a greater effort as getting more grace from a larger portion of the Eucharist. Yet, many people think of grace in strictly legalistic terms. God's love is always given freely and the degree of participation in that love is conditioned by our ability to receive it and be changed by it. This is the Orthodox idea of cooperation or synergy—we must open ourselves to the love and strength that God offers freely. Fasting is a way of achieving this openness.

Another view of fasting, which, like the previous one contains an element of distortion, is that which sees it as a means of voluntary suffering, a way of atoning for sins. Indeed, there may very well be an element of this in fasting, but this is not the most important aspect of fasting. If fasting was to be seen primarily as a means of atonement, this would bring the practice to the level of individual pathology. Again, we cannot pay God back for our sins, and fasting as a means of atoning for sins must be seen in the light of trying to direct our spiritual lives in a more positive direction.

A third view of fasting is common among both Christians and non-Christians. This view mistakenly sees fasting in the history of the Church as an expression of a pathological morbidity with regard to the world, which is based on a docetic view—i.e. the idea that the world, the body, sex, and all created and material things are essentially evil, whereas all spiritual things are good. In this context, fasting becomes an effort to disconnect the self from any connection with matter—i.e. from food, sex, bodily functions, etc. There has indeed been a tendency towards this view on a number of occasions throughout Christian history, but whenever it has expressed itself, it has consistently been condemned by the Church. The Church has always affirmed that the created world is essentially good, though suffering from profound distortion and misdirection.

Fasting as Preparation

WHAT FASTING IS will necessarily involve us in a discussion of the nature of man and the nature of the world. Fasting is, as the Church uses it, a preparation. Every time we encounter a fast it is prior to a feast. We all know the fast before the Eucharist as preparation for the Eucharist and the fast before Pascha as preparation for the great feast. Nothing in life just happens; that is obvious. All major events require a variety of preparations. The Church recognizes the fact that part of getting somewhere is the journey, and just as important as the journey is the anticipation. This is a basic human psychological quality. Perhaps children understand this expectation and anticipation best of all. Full participation demands this kind of expectation and preparation. In this context, the nature of Orthodox preparations is no mystery.

The Church has taught that man is a unity - he is not a being which has a body and which has a soul; rather, he is a body and he is a soul. The Christian vision is that of a total and unified personality—body and soul. Hence, the Church calls on the entire being to share in the fast and the feast. As a season changes in Church, as the colors change, the music changes, the services get longer, the icon changes, and so forth. How does our body share in this except through fasting, except through imitating a change in its normal routine? Now this description keeps the nature and degree of fasting open, and this "openness" is important in our personal spiritual direction. It can involve food, entertainment, sex - in fact, any aspect of our daily and routine lives. It is clear that we Orthodox Christians are not spiritualists or intellectualists; we are Christian "materialists." The Church's emphasis on fasting is precisely a reflection of this materialism.

Our Lord says, "lay not up treasures on earth," and fasting is in effect the reminder that our heart cannot be invested like our money in the world. We all know the feeling we have for something when we have made an investment in it. People always try to protect their investment. This is natural. That is what our Lord meant! Here we find a rejection of the world, not in an absolute sense, but in a relative sense. The world in itself is valuable only when it is seen in its relationship to God. Since the world is in effect separated from God, freely, then it cannot be fully normal, and the Church says limit your participation in the life of the world—not because it is evil, but because it in itself is limited.

Food is the most obvious example. Everyone agrees that eating, after breathing, is the most necessary and normal activity of our life. It is in this area which is regarded in a worldly sense as normal that the Church says "Stop! Think! Question everything which the world calls normal and necessary, because the world itself is 'abnormal' - that is, it is abnormal as it now exists, separated from God's love." But fasting is only a beginning, and this questioning must be our approach to all the values that the world regards as necessary and even virtuous—victory, self defense, getting ahead, accumulating wealth and property, competition, popularity, self-aggrandizement, etc. All of these are to be followed with a question mark.

Fasting and a Clear Image of the World

MIND YOU, this is not a rejection of the world; it is a questioning of those values which the world as it now exists -and human societies which inhabit it - hold as valuable. Insofar as the world is treated as normal - because this is in fact the only world we know - whereas in fact it is not normal or truly worldly in the Christian sense, then it is a deception and a lie, and we must recognize it for what it is. In a real sense, the Church, in asking her people to fast, is declaring a moratorium on the world. A moratorium, whether in the context of war or in the context of spiritual discipline, means the same thing - it means "time out." Those of us who remember the war in Vietnam remember the various moratoria that were declared to stop the fighting. Before a final, lasting moratorium was called, the war had dragged on for almost ten years on an incredibly brutal level, characterized by My Lai; in the meantime, everyone here went about his business, and apart from inflation, no one's life was really affected - we bought our food and celebrated all those little occasions; there was no shortage of butter or meat or autos; and yet, the very normalcy of life here at home, at the same time that wholesale death swept Southeast Asia, was a deception - a deception that was recognized only after a final "time out" was declared, allowing us to come out of the delusional mindset

that kept us from questioning the war's necessity. In the same way, calling moratorium or "time out" on our "normal" worldly routines allows us to recognize the deception inherent in our preoccupation with this fallen world, and allows us to free ourselves from the delusional mindset that keeps us fettered to its routines.

On a cosmic level, the fast is this effort to put the world and life in the world in its proper perspective. To accept the present state of the world as normal is a deception! There is no hate for the world in this, but there is a recognition that something has happened to the "worldliness" which God created and declared "good."

I think we must then see fasting never as a rejection of food or the world, but as a search for true worldliness - a search which must necessarily pass through the stage of preferring something else to the world. "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all else will be given to you." In the same way, we fast from all food before liturgy so that we might receive the one true food in the Eucharist. It is in the Eucharist that we can get a glimpse of the true nature of food. There is no judgment on food as such. The same is true of the world. As food completed itself in the Eucharist, so the entire created world completes itself in the Kingdom of God.

The world is ours; it belongs to us and, needless to say, we were not meant to be slaves to its pleasures, its categories, and its values. Fasting, then, is a declaration of independence from the world and a proclamation of victory over its limitations and evil. "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). This does not mean that we cannot take pleasure in the world.

It is a recognition that the values of the world are limited and often perverted. Here we are freed, liberated in a real sense, not only from sin but from the fears that characterize life - free to act without fear of criticism, as God wants us to act in our everyday life in politics, business, school, family, and social affairs. Nothing in human society, the first declares, is sacred in itself and can demand our loyalty - no form of government, regime, ideology, or community. We are freed to conform to the patterns of the Kingdom of God here and now— free to practice sacrifice, love, charity, justice, and faith. To those for whom the world is the ultimate reality and the ultimate gain, it is essential to buy the love of the world, and the world will only love those who accept its values. Our Lord assures us that the world will hate us; it has to, because the Christian is the on-going judgment on an on-going corruption that infects human relations and human societies.

For us Christians who live in the world, there a choice: we can consume the world or allow the world to consume us. The first is the only creative approach. The second is psychological and personal disintegration. The fast is what gives us the opportunity to make the better choice.

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