

The Confessor's Tongue for February 27, A. D. 2011

Sunday of the Last Judgment; St. Raphael of Brooklyn

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

Sunday of the Last Judgment

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 judgment 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 Judgment 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 the hymns for this Sunday that they may motivate us to a deeper repentance.

Hymns for the Last Judgment

Vespers, Lord, I Have Cried, tone 6

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.

The books will be opened and the acts of men will be revealed / before the unbearable judgement seat; / and the whole vale of sorrow shall echo with the fearful sound of lamentation, / as all the sinners, weeping in vain, / are sent by Thy just judgment to everlasting torment. / Therefore we beseech Thee, O compassionate and loving Lord: // spare us who sing Thy praise, for Thou alone art rich in mercy.

The trumpets shall sound and the tombs shall be emptied, / and all mankind in trembling shall be raised. / Those that have done good shall rejoice in gladness, awaiting their reward; / those that have sinned shall tremble and bitterly lament, / as they are sent to punishment and parted from the chosen. / O Lord of glory, take pity on us in Thy goodness, // and count us worthy of a place with them that have loved Thee.

I lament and weep when I think of the eternal fire, / the outer darkness and the nether world, / the dread worm and the gnashing of teeth, / and the unceasing anguish that shall befall those who have sinned without measure, / by their wickedness arousing Thee to anger, O Supreme in love. / Among them in my misery I am first: // but O Judge compassionate, in Thy mercy save me.

Glory...tone 8

When the thrones are set up and the books are opened, / and God sitteth in judgment, / O what fear there will be then! / When the angels stand trembling in Thy presence, / and the river of fire floweth before Thee, / what shall we do then guilty of many sins? / When we hear Him call the blessed of His Father into the Kingdom, / but send the sinners to their punishment, / who shall endure His fearful condemnation? / But, Savior, King of the ages, who alone lovest mankind, / before the end cometh // turn me back through repentance and have mercy on me.

Aposticha, Glory...tone 8

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.

Sessional Hymns, tone 6

I think of the dread day and weep over my evil deeds. / How shall I answer the immortal King? / Or how shall a prodigal like me dare to look up at the Judge? / O Compassionate Father, / Only-begotten Son, / and Holy Spirit: // have mercy on me!

In the valley of lamentation, / in the place Thou hast appointed, / when Thou shalt sit, O merciful Lord, to execute just judgement, / publish not my secret sins; / put me not to shame before the Angels, // but spare me, O God, and have mercy on me.

Kontakion, tone 1

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.

Ikos

O Lord, supreme in love, as I think upon Thy fearful judgment seat and the day of judgment, 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.

Exapostilaria, tone 6

As I ponder the fearful day of the judgement and ineffable glory, / I am altogether full of fear, O Lord, / and trembling in terror I cry: / When thou comest in glory upon the earth, O Christ our God, / to judge all things, / then deliver me in my wretchedness from every punishment, / and count me worthy, O Master, // of a place at Thy right hand.

Behold there cometh the day of the Lord Almighty, / and who shall endure the fear of His presence? / For it is a day of wrath; / the furnace shall burn, / and the Judge shall sit // and give to each the due return for his works.

The Praises, Tone 6

I think upon that day and hour / when we shall all stand naked, like men condemned, / before the Judge who accepteth no man's person. / Then shall the trumpet sound aloud, / and the foundations of the earth shall quake, / the dead shall rise from the tombs and all shall be gathered together from every generation. / Then each man's secrets will be manifest before Thee: / and those that have never repented shall weep and lament, / departing to the outer fire; / but with gladness and rejoicing // the company of the righteous shall enter into the heavenly bridal chamber.

How shall it be in that hour and fearful day, / when the Judge shall sit on His dread throne! / The books shall be opened and men's actions shall be examined, / and the secrets of darkness will be made public. / Angels shall hasten to and fro, gathering all the nations. / Come ye and hearken, kings and princes, slaves and free, / sinners and righteous, rich and poor: / for the Judge cometh to pass sentence on the whole inhabited earth. / And who shall bear to stand before His face in the presence of the Angels, / as they call us to account for our actions and our thoughts, whether by night or by day? / How shall it be then in that hour! / But before the end is here, make haste, my soul, and cry: // O God who only art compassionate, turn me back and save me.

Tone 8

Daniel the Prophet, a man greatly belov'd, / when he saw the power of God, cried out: / 'The court sat for judgement, and the books were opened. / Consider well, my soul: dost thou fast? / Then despise not thy neighbor. / Dost thou abstain from food? Condemn not thy brother, / lest thou be sent away into the fire, / there to burn as wax. // But may Christ lead thee without stumbling into His kingdom.

Tone 1

Let us cleanse ourselves brethren with the Queen of the virtues: / for behold, she is come, bringing us a wealth of blessings. / She quelleth the uprising of the passions, / and reconcileth sinners to the Master. / Therefore let us welcome her with gladness / and cry aloud to Christ our God: / O risen from the dead, who art free from sin, // guard us uncondemned as we give Thee glory.

Order of Censing

You may have noticed that the order of censing has changed slightly. Instead of censing the people after censing around the church, the priest is now censing the people from the ambon before censing around the church. Both practices are attested in the Church's service books, but the clergy were encouraged to cense the people before the church at the Diocesan Pastoral Conference this month, so that is what we are now doing. It marks a return to the original practice of this mission, which the priest changed to conform to cathedral practice after he started serving Russian services there to minimize likely confusion resulting from alternating between the two practices.

Spiritual Reading During the Fast

One essential ingredient to a soul-profiting fast is spiritual reading to purify and illumine the mind and nourish the soul. Before the Fast begins, an Orthodox Christian does well to plan for his spiritual reading during the Fast. This may comprise several elements.

The first and most essential element is Holy Scripture. If a man reads nothing else, he should at least wash his mind daily in the pure waters of the Gospel. A worthy, attainable goal for nearly all is to read through the entire New Testament during the Fast by reading something from the Gospels and Epistles each day. A reading plan is available for this.

To go further in Scripture, one might endeavor to read the chapter of Proverbs each day of the Fast that corresponds to the day of the month. Thus on the first day, Monday, March 7, one would read Proverbs chapter 7. During weekday Vespers, readings from Proverbs are appointed throughout the Fast to give all a re-orientation to divine wisdom and righteousness in opposition to folly, ignorance, and sin.

One might also consider reading the Old Testament. Your priest has developed two reading

plans: the first will take you from Genesis to Israel's entrance into the Promised Land and the second will take you from the judges to the fall of Jerusalem. Both plans provide the historical chapters which will allow you to follow the story of God's developing work to save mankind.

If these plans are too much, one may adopt a very simple plan: read one chapter from the Gospels each day, beginning with Matthew; read two chapters from the Epistles, beginning with Acts; read the chapter of Proverbs that corresponds to the day of the month. This modest plan should be attainable by all of us with few exceptions.

Having adopted a plan for consuming Holy Scripture during the Fast, one may consider other Orthodox Christian spiritual reading. Traditionally, many monastics read the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* by St. John Climacus, and, indeed, a selection is appointed to be read each day at the Sixth Hour. The works of St. Theophan the Recluse, St. Silouan of Athos, St. John of Kronstadt, Elder Sophrony, and Elder Zacharias are of great benefit and readily accessible to us who live in the world. St. John Cassian's *Conferences* provide a detailed and fascinating account of the dynamics Christian life and spiritual warfare, as are the works of Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos. One may pick up a volume of the Fathers, and there are many other works from which to choose. Slightly lighter are works such as the lives of the Optina Elders and other saints; a growing number of books are available that detail the lives of various contemporary Athonite elders. One should choose something that will profit one's soul and spur one on to repentance, love, and good deeds, and not merely the acquisition of head knowledge.

In choosing a book, ask God to guide you to the right book, and if you are not sure what may be appropriate for you, ask your priest!

Steps Towards Growing in Fasting

Fasting, especially during the Great Fast can be not only difficult but also intimidating when we consider the full strictness of the fast. One may readily be tempted to think it is not possible to follow and so not try at all. Yet fasting is something we learn to do; we begin simply and, with God's help, we move forward in it year by year.

The following steps are offered to help break down fasting for us so we can both have a sense of where we are in our fasting and how we can make incremental progress in it to approach the Church's norms for fasting as closely as we can.

The Church gives us a norm for fasting in order to combat our self-will and to unite us a common way of fasting. While we should endeavor to follow the norm for fasting, it does represent a rather drastic change from the eating habits of most Americans. Some take right to it, but others may have to work into it gradually. Each year when the Great Fast rolls around, we seek to keep what we

have done in the past and build upon it, taking an additional step forward in our fasting, along with our prayer and almsgiving.

Observing steps 1-7 below represents fasting as many of the faithful practice it today and should be attainable by most of us over time, while steps 8-11 bring us very close to the Church's norm.

The primary purpose of fasting is to make us conscious of our dependence on God, to help us cut off the passions, and to attract God's grace by humbling ourselves. The rules are given to keep us from being arbitrary and self-willed in our fasting, but they are not to be interpreted with a "dour and pedantic legalism", for as St. Paul writes, "the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). So though we should seriously attempt to follow the rules of the Fast, we must realize that the Fast is made for us, not we for the Fast.

It has always been held that the rules of fasting should be relaxed in the case of anyone elderly, in poor health, with child, etc.

As always, if you have any questions, please see your father-confessor. If you feel the norms of the fast are too much for you given your experience, health, age, etc., you should seek counsel to help you discern God's will for you in how you keep the fast rather than granting yourself a dispensation from it.

The steps below do not necessarily have to be followed in order.

Step 1: Quit eating between meals. Instead of snacking, take water or fruit juice.

Step 2: Eliminate alcohol during the Fast except on the days it is permitted (see calendar).

Step 3: Eliminate meat, meat products, and dairy products on Wednesdays and Fridays. (This is what is called for most weeks of the year anyway.)

Step 4: Eliminate meat, meat products, and dairy products on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

Step 5: Eliminate meat, meat products, and dairy products during Clean Week (the first week of the fast) and Holy Week, when the fasting is stricter than during the other weeks of the Fast.

Step 6: Eliminate meat, meat products, and dairy products all days during the Fast. (If eliminating both meat and dairy is too difficult for one in steps 3-6, start with meat and then go back through steps 3-6 with dairy).

Step 7: Eliminate fish all days during the Fast except Palm Sunday and Annunciation (or follow steps 3-6 in regards to fish).

Step 8: Skip breakfast on weekdays during Clean Week and Holy Week.

Step 9: Skip breakfast and lunch on weekdays during Clean Week and Holy Week.

Step 10: Skip breakfast on all weekdays during the Fast.

Step 11: Skip breakfast and lunch on all weekdays during the Fast.

Step 12: Read the introduction on Fasting written by Kallistos Ware in the *Lenten Triodion* to get more details on which days one doesn't eat at all and on which days "dry eating" is practiced.

At Every Step: Remember tithing and almsgiving. If you don't tithe, increase the percentage of your regular giving. Give alms over and above tithes (the money saved from not eating out, not eating meat, etc.) to worthy causes or to our own almsbox to help the needy.

At Every Step: Remember that our physical fasting from food is combined always with prayer. A little bit of consistent prayer every day is better than a lot of prayer occasionally. Prayers before and after Holy Communion are always very important and should be prayed faithfully.

The services of the Church are an essential part of our prayer. While few of us can attend every service offered during the week, all of us can attend at least some of the lenten weekday services. We should Confess and receive Holy Communion as frequently as possible to help sustain us during the Fast.

Do some extra spiritual reading to nourish your soul. Cut out the spiritual junk food of TV, movies, secular music, novels, etc.

Last of all, it is God and His glory that we seek to perceive more clearly and know more intimately. Our hunger pangs and our cravings for the "forbidden" foods remind us of how we need to hunger and thirst after righteous and God Himself so that God can satisfy us.

May God grant us all a blessed and profitable fast!

Gladsome Light

The ancient hymn Gladsome light is a distinctive part of the Church's Vespers service (the daily evening corporate prayer of the Church).

The hymn can be difficult to understand clearly, as the first part of the sentence is convoluted in English: "O Gladsome Light of the holy Glory, of the immortal Father, heavenly, holy, blessed, O Jesus Christ..." Who is the "Gladsome Light" and to whom to the adjectives "heaven, holy, blessed" apply? In the original inflected languages, which have case endings to show which words go together, the matter is clear.

Both "Gladsome Light" and "Jesus Christ" are in the vocative case, the case of direct address, which is often rendered in English by the word "O" before words in the vocative. So we have "O Gladsome Light, Jesus Christ" as the One to whom our hymn is addressed.

The words "holy glory" go together also and modify "Gladsome Light." "Glory" is a feminine noun in the genitive case, and holy modifies it as the case endings show. The Genitive case indicates possession. So we have "O Gladsome Light of the Holy Glory..."

The words of the rest of our phrase "of the immortal Father, heavenly, holy, blessed" go together, as all of them are masculine singular genitive adjectives modifying the masculine singular genitive noun "Father". And "Father" being in the genitive, expresses whose is the "holy Glory"—it is the immortal, heavenly, holy, blessed Father's glory.

So let's see what we have: We address the Gladsome Light, Jesus Christ. This Light that is Christ is of (or from) the "holy glory of the immortal, heavenly, holy, blessed Father." Indeed, Christ is the Light of the Word, the Radiance of the Father, or "Light of Light" as we confess in the Creed. Let us look now at the rest of the hymn.

"Having come to sunset and beholding the evening light..." Vespers is the evening prayer of the Church, appointed to be served at sunset. By the time this hymn is sung, it is dark enough that artificial illumination is required to see. Thus, this is the ancient hymn sung during the lamplighting in the Church. The spiritual significance is clear. Christ is the Light that shines in the darkness of the fallen world. As night falls signifying the fallen world without Christ, the time in which evildoers roam and when man is afraid, we look to Christ, the "evening Light."

"We hymn the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit God..." As night falls, we sing the praise of the true God in three Persons who has revealed Himself to us in Christ

"Meet it is at all times that Thou be hymned with fitting voices, O Son of God, Thou Giver of Life..." Because of who the Gladsome Light Christ is, it is proper that we sing His praises at all times. And our voices should be befitting His glory: not all words, not all means of singing are worthy of Him, so we seek always in our worship to lift "fitting voices" in praise of Him.

"Wherefore the world doth glorify Thee." It is fitting for the creature to glorify the Creator. Indeed, all of creation honors the Creator by doing what it was created to do—except one creature, man, who has rebelled against his Maker thinking to better his lot thereby. Yet even among fallen men there are those who are learning to practice their true vocation of worship and service to the Creator of all, the true God revealed in Jesus Christ, the Gladsome Light of the immortal Father.

Fr. Justin Frederick

Upcoming Events 2011

- 6 March: Sunday, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers (everyone needs to plan on attending this service!)
- 24 April: Holy Pascha: The Feast of Feasts!
- 30 May: Memorial Day Picnic
- 28-31 July: Ten-Year Anniversary Celebration

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!