

The Confessor's Tongue for March 6, A. D. 2011

Cheesefare Sunday; Forgiveness Sunday; Expulsion of Adam from Paradise

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

The Fast

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

Aposticha of Wednesday Matins of Cheese Week

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

The hymn above from Wednesday Matins sets forward the priority for the Fast. While we are to abstain from certain foods and generally to eat less so that we may increase our almsgiving, the deeper purpose the Fast is "amendment of life", being changed by turning away from our sins and putting on the virtues which are found in the keeping of Christ's commandments. The demons, indeed, do not eat at all; they keep a stricter fast than we do! We resemble them in our fasting when we are strict about food but freely indulge in sin. Such fasting hold not benefit for us.

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

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

Sunday of the 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.

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

Homily on How Men Must Be as Children to Be the Sons of God

St. Nicholas of Zicha (+1956)

"Verily I say unto you; except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 18:3).

Thus speaks the Lord, and His word is holy and true. What sort of primacy to children have over adults? They have a threefold primacy: in faith, in obedience, and in purity. Children question their parents about everything, and believe whatever reply their parents give. A child is obedient to his parents and easily subjects his will to theirs. A child is pure and, although he quickly becomes angry, he quickly forgives. The Lord demands these three things of all men: faith, obedience, and purity. He seeks that men should believe in Him unconditionally, that they should be pure in their bearing towards another, not remember evil and not returning evil for evil.

Faith, obedience, and purity are the chief characteristics of a child's soul. Added to these are also passionlessness and joy. A child is not greedy, nor lascivious, nor ambitious; he has an eye untroubled by vice and a joy undisturbed by cares.

O my brethren! Who can make us children again? None but the one Christ. He is able to make us children once more, and to aid our rebirth by His example, His wisdom, and the power of His Holy Spirit.

O Lord Jesus, perfect in obedience and purity, the eternal Child of the heavenly Father: help us to be as infants by faith in Thee, by obedience to Thee, and by purity towards one another. To Thee be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

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.

The Prayer of St. Ephrem

As we used this prayer during the weekday services of the Fast, we are advised to use it daily at home as part of our rule of prayer. Here is the version we use at St. Maximus:

O Lord and Master of my life: the spirit of idleness, of despondency, of love of power, and of idles words, grant me not. *prostration*

But the spirit of continence, of humility, of patience, and of love do Thou grant unto me Thy servant. *prostration*

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to perceive mine own offenses and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen. *prostration*

Then twelve full bows to the waist with the prayer, "O God have mercy on me a sinner", and then repeat the whole prayer with one prostration at the end.

Forgiveness Vespers Rite of Forgiveness

Following Vespers tonight, we shall observe the rite of mutual forgiveness. Each person will do a prostration (or bow if not able to prostrate) to each other person, asking forgiveness of one another "Forgive me!" and responding "God forgives, and I forgive." Please be sure to ask and extend forgiveness audibly to each person you face.

Upcoming Events 2011

- 6 March: Sunday, 6:00 p.m. Forgiveness Vespers (everyone needs to plan on attending this service!)
- 13 March: Daylight "Savings" Time Begins: clocks spring forward.
- 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!