



HOLY TRINITY

ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



723 N BODINE ST PHILADELPHIA, PA 19123

CHURCH BULLETIN

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Forgiveness Sunday

Gospel Reading Matthew 6: 14– 21

The Lord said, if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. 'And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen

not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store 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 your heart will be also.

Apostle Reading Romans 13: 11 – 14: 4

Brethren, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to

gratify its desires. Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Synaxarion Sunday March 1, 2020
(Forgiveness Sunday. Cheesefare Sunday):
Holy Venerable Martyr Eudoxia of Heliopolis,
Holy Venerable Martyr Domnina of Syria.
Monday March 2: Great Fast begins

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Sermon on Forgiveness Sunday

Tomorrow is Monday. Not just any Monday, but Clean Monday, the first day of Clean Week, the beginning of Great Lent, a time of particular prayer and fasting. Great Lent will take us on a journey through forty days, or six weeks, to Lazarus Saturday, Palm Sunday and then Holy Week. At the end of that Week, God willing, we will celebrate the Resurrection of Christ on Easter Night. For we are now fifty days exactly from Easter Day.



To us, as children of Adam and Eve, God also gives opportunities to ask for forgiveness, as Adam and Eve should have done. He gives us the sacrament of Confession. Confession does not exist because God wants to know what we have done or left undone. He already knows that. Confession exists because God is giving us an opportunity to own up to our mistakes and failings. He wants us to ask for forgiveness, so that we can then take

strength from Him through the prayers of the priest, so as to clean ourselves and strive not to repeat our mistakes.

God does not need our confession, but we do.

Every confession is a repeat, in the New Eden of the Church, of that opportunity given to Adam and Eve in Eden, to ask God for forgiveness.

Unlike human-beings, God always forgives those who sincerely, with repentance, ask Him for forgiveness.

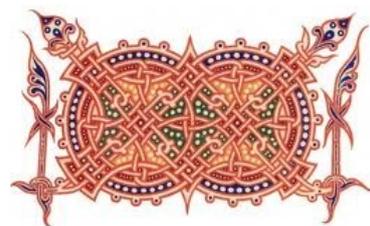
However, before we ask forgiveness of God, we first have to ask forgiveness of each other.

And just at this time, on Forgiveness Sunday and all during Clean Week, it is the custom of Orthodox throughout the world to come to Confession, to ask God for forgiveness, preparing ourselves for Communion next Sunday. First, therefore, we must ask each other for forgiveness. We can ask forgiveness of those who are not here by visiting them or telephoning them. But of those who are here, we can now ask forgiveness directly, for all our errors towards them in thought, word or deed, whether conscious or unconscious.

For if we do not first ask each other for forgiveness, we cannot ask God for forgiveness. And without forgiveness, there is no way back into Paradise for any of us.

Forgive me, brothers and sisters. Amen.

Fr. Andrew Phillips



Fast and Freedom

What can be more absurd than fasting, in a religion that prides itself on restoring man's freedom? How can one call himself free, when he must refrain from the things he likes, and must do what he doesn't want! Fasting means the abstinence not only from food, but from all bodily pleasures. How can one not see in this an attack on freedom – the noblest instinct that man has? If fasting is an obligation, then the Gospel is a masterpiece of the literature of the



absurd. Being aware of this, the Protestants decided to give up fasting. But no matter how many quotes we might get, from the Holy Apostle Paul and even from the words of Our Savior Himself, the exhortation to fasting is like a thorn in the eye of one who has a fair knowledge of the Scriptures. All the righteous until Christ had been fasting. Fasting always preceded a meeting with God or a revelation. After forty days of fasting, Moses went up to the mountain and spoke with God. The New Testament is not different: it starts with a faster, Saint John the Baptist. Our Savior Jesus Christ Himself fasted before beginning His teaching work. We cannot, therefore, set aside fasting, just because we misinterpret a few biblical verses, when even those who spoke them were themselves great fasters. It seems to me that it would be a more decent attitude to rather question our power of understanding those verses.

Christ was asked once why His disciples do not fast (Mt. 9:14). From this passage, many understood that the apostles and the Savior Himself were gluttonous (Mt. 11:19). But this occurrence reveals, in fact, that the apostles and the Savior were always hungry. This is very clear from the conflict they had with the Jews because the disciples had broken wheat ears to eat on the Sabbath (Mt. 12: 1-8). The apostles were so busy with the sermon that they forgot to eat, and the fact that they broke the ears shows how hungry they were and that they used to eat where they were going. But the Savior did not eat with them, the reproach being directed only against the disciples. He was an example of fasting.

The fact that the disciples ate little was also evident from the scene of the multiplication of the bread (Mt. 14: 14-22), from which we learn that they had only five loaves and two fish. Although they were far from any locality, unable to procure their food, they were ready to give this little to the crowds

(not knowing that they would be multiplied!). This clearly reveals that they were used to hunger more than ordinary people. Therefore, the Savior and the apostles fasted. The only thing that distinguished their fasting from the one of their critics was that they did not count the days of fasting as the Pharisees did. At their question, however, Christ tells the Pharisees that, although "the wedding guests" have no reason to fast "while the Bridegroom is with them, the days will come when the Bridegroom is taken

away from them, and then they will fast in those days" (Lk. 5, 34-35). The "those" days, in which the Groom was taken away are Wednesday, the when Christ was betrayed and sold, and Friday, the day of His crucifixion. In the year AD 50, the apostles convene a synod in Jerusalem, where they established that the faithful should fast on those days.

Thus, the Protestants have understood well that the fast is not an obligation. The forced fast, has no motivation as any gratuitous and meaningless thing. This is not, however, a reason to blame the fast. The fast should be understood in all its nobility, as it is the supreme manifestation of the human freedom. This is how the first Christians understood the fast, a meaning that is lost nowadays. "To eat – writes St. Ephrem the Syrian in the IV century – belongs to the laws of the nature, but to fast belongs to the freedom". Who can boast that he eats only because "he wants this"? No, you eat because you need to eat, and your will comes from the natural instinct, not from freedom. Of course there is no evil in this and no sin, but there is no virtue either. Virtue is the fruit of freedom alone. "Any work which is not done with complete freedom – farther Sofronie Saharov (+ 1993) said – cannot have eternal value". Fasting is the man's free choice of a nobler life, which has something in it from the realities of eternal life, where there is no corruption anymore.

Hieromonk Savatie Baştovoi

(Sursa: <http://www.credo.ro/>)

English translation by Fr. Nicolai Buga

Sermon on Forgiveness Sunday

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, says the Lord (Matt. 6, 14-15).

This Sunday is called Forgiveness Sunday, because today the Church directs us to read the Gospel teaching us to forgive the transgressions of others so that our heavenly Father might also forgive us our innumerable transgressions. For that reason, from the ancient times, among the pious Christians there has been a custom, in this day, and during any day of the Cheese-fare week, to ask forgiveness from each other, in those things in which they may have sinned one against another. This is a beautiful, truly Christian custom, for who does not sin against his neighbor in word, deed, or thought; and asking forgiveness from another person proves our faith in Gospel, our humility, our meekness and love of peace; on the contrary, the unwillingness to ask forgiveness from those, before whom we are really guilty, reveals in the one who is unwilling to make peace, a lack of faith, pride, conceit, remembrance of evil, disobedience to the Gospel, resistance to God, agreement with the devil. Whereas we all are children of our heavenly Father by grace, members of Christ God, members of one body of the Church, which is His body, and members of one another; *God is love* 1), and more than any whole-burnt offerings and sacrifices, requires from us mutual love, that love, which *is long-suffering and kind, does not envy, does not make a vain display of itself, does not boast, does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil, rejoices not over iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things and never fails* 2). The entire Law of God consists of two words: love God and love your neighbor. With all that, the human heart is extremely selfish, impatient, self-willed, malicious and remembering of evil: it is ready to get angry at its neighbor not only for a direct evil, but also for an imaginary one, not only for an offensive word, but also for an unpleasant, or a harsh one, or even for a look, which appeared bad, or ambiguous, malicious, prideful, it almost gets angry even at the imagined thoughts of those around it. The Lord, Who sees the hearts, thus says of a human heart: *from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness,*



deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness 3).

But against a strong malady there should also exist strong remedies; for the great maliciousness of men is countered by infinite benevolence and all-powerful grace of God: with its help, every evil in oneself and in others is conveniently defeated – by meekness, absence of malice, acts of concession, patience and longsuffering. *But I say unto you, preaches the Savior, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also* 4)... For forgiveness

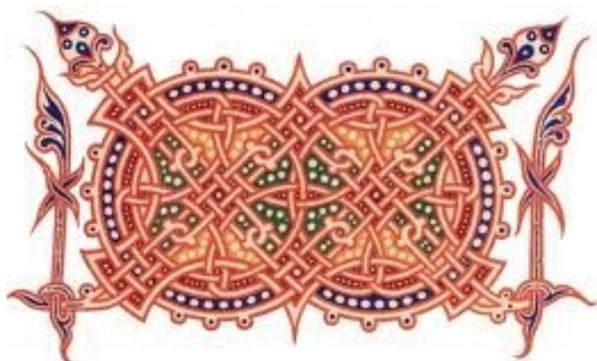
of our neighbors' sins, we are likewise promised the forgiveness of sins by our Heavenly Father, mercy at the Great Judgment, – and the eternal blessedness: *the meek shall inherit the earth* 5). But the irreconcilable malice is threatened with the just judgment of God and eternal torment. Hear now one story, which makes it evident how God punishes, even here, those men who are malicious and irreconcilable with each other. In the Lavra monastery of Kiev Caves, in ancient times there were two monks, a priest-monk Titus and a deacon, Evagrius. Having lived for a few years in peace and friendship they, because of some things, have then acquired enmity and hatred toward each other; their mutual malice has lasted for a long time; and they, without having reconciled with each other, even dared to offer the bloodless sacrifice before God. No matter how much the brethren advised them to put away the anger and live with each other in peace and harmony, it was all in vain. Once, the priest-monk Titus became gravely ill. Having lost all hope in life, he started to cry bitterly over his sin and have sent to his enemy to ask for forgiveness; but Evagrius didn't even want to hear of that and started to curse him harshly. The brethren, regretting such a great delusion, brought him to the dying man by force. Titus, seeing his enemy, rose, with the help of others, from his bed, and fell before him to the ground, imploring with tears to forgive him; but Evagrius was so inhumane, that he turned away from him and furiously cried out: not in this life, not in the future one, I do not want to be reconciled with him! He then has torn himself away from the hands of the brethren, and fell to the ground. The monks wanted to raise him up, but were astonished to find him dead and

already so cold, as if he had been dead before that for a long time! Their astonishment grew even more, when the priest-monk Titus, at the same time, rose from his deathbed healthy, as if he had never been ill. In fear of such an unusual event, they surrounded Titus and, one before another, were asking, what did all of that mean. He answered: being in grave illness, while I, the sinner, was angry at my brother, I saw the Angels who stepped away from me, crying about the perdition of my soul, and the unclean spirits rejoicing, – that was the reason why I, more than anything, desired to be reconciled with him. But no sooner than he was brought in here, and I bowed down before him, and he started to curse me, – I saw a certain terrible Angel smite him with his spear, and the hapless one tumbled the ground dead; then the same Angel stretched to me his hand and raised me up from the deathbed. The monks cried over the dreadful death of Evagrius and, from that time, started to watch over themselves even more, that the sun would never set in their anger.

Brothers and sisters! The remembrance of evil is a vice most horrible, and as much as it's loathsome to God, it is also pernicious to society. We are created in the image and likeness of God: meekness and benevolence 6) should be our unchanging attributes; for God also, always acts toward us according to His mercy, longsuffering and forgives us without count. And we must forgive as well. – But he, who remembers evil, has not in himself the image and likeness of God: he is more a beast rather than a man.

Amen.

Saint John of Kronstadt



HOLY TRINITY'S Liturgical Schedule from March 1 to March 8, 2020

Sunday March 1 (Forgiveness Sunday. Cheesefare Sunday):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy
11:30 pm - Memorial Service -
the Dimofte Family
12:00 pm - Cheesefare Lunch

Monday March 2 - Beginning of the Easter Lent:

5:00 pm - Great Canon of
St. Andrew of Crete

Tuesday March 3 - Beginning of the Easter Lent:

5:00 pm - Great Canon of
St. Andrew of Crete

Wednesday March 4:

5:00 pm - Great Canon of
St. Andrew of Crete

Friday March 6:

5:00 pm - Akathist

Saturday March 7: (St Theodore's Saturday):

9:00 am - Matins
9:30 am - Divine Liturgy
11:00 am - Memorial Service
12:00 pm - Sacrament of
Confession
5:00 pm - HOLY UNCTION

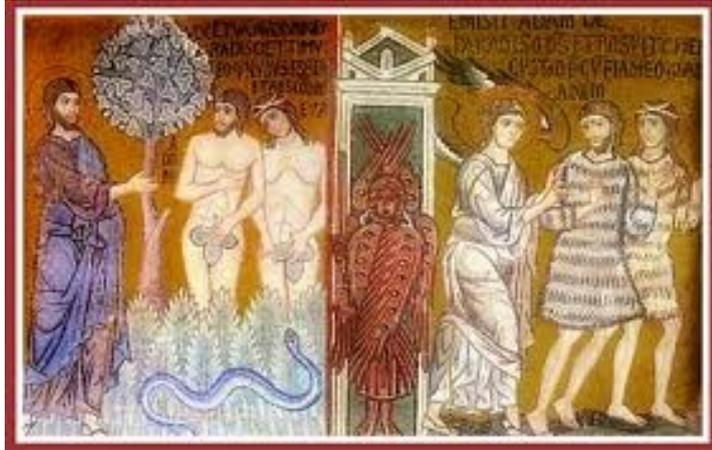
Sunday March 8 - Orthodoxy Sunday:

9:00 am - Matins
10:30 am - Divine Liturgy
11:00 pm - Sunday School
12:00 pm - Coffee hour



Forgiveness and the Beginning of Lent

Several decades ago under communism, there was a 70 year old Romanian priest who was thrown into prison because of his faith. Before he was thrown into prison, however, he was tortured and beaten so badly that he was close to death. As he laid in the prison dying, it so happened that his torturer, the



man who had beaten him almost to death, had himself found disfavor with his superiors, was beaten very badly and then thrown into prison. The witness of this story relates how he was sitting in this prison cell with the half-dead priest on his right side, and the half-dead torturer on his left. As the hours went by and the torturer came closer to death, he kept crying out from his physical pain, but also loudly lamenting over all the evil which he had committed in his life. He said that no one could forgive him for the terrible things he had done.

As the priest heard this man's torment, he called several young men to lift him up, since he himself was too weak to even walk. They carried him over to the man. The priest sat beside his own torturer, hugged him, caressed his deformed face, and started to tell him about the love and mercy of God. He told the man that He forgave him, even though the torturer had done such evil to the priest and many others. He assured him that all the Christians this man tortured had forgiven him and even now loved him. And then he said, "Imagine, if we love you and forgive you, how much more does God love you and long to hug you and comfort you."

+ + +

The incredible and unbelievable power of divine love, mercy and forgiveness. We see it first and foremost in the example of God Himself becoming man. The perfect and sinless person, Jesus Christ, suffers at the hands of evil men, yet lovingly says while dying on the Cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

The saints of God, like the first martyr Stephen, accepted that grace of God in their lives, and imitated Christ in their own suffering. As people threw stones at St. Stephen, killing him in a most brutal manner, Stephen looked up at heaven and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this

sin against them."

Divine love and mercy obviously imply our willingness to forgive others, even our worst enemy, and even when they don't deserve it. In today's Gospel lesson, we hear Jesus teach his disciples, "If you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Love, mercy and forgiveness – these are at the center of our Orthodox Christian faith. And yet, how difficult do we find it to forgive others. Our pride, our anger, our hurt, our fear of rejection, only make up some of the reasons why we justify not forgiving others. How many in this Church today continue to hold a grudge against someone who has hurt them.

Love, mercy and forgiveness. We must open up our hearts to receive these virtues and cultivate their spirit within our lives. As a reminder of this necessity, the Church has established the Sunday before Great Lent begins as the Sunday of Forgiveness. The Church is basically saying to us, "We cannot begin our journey towards Easter, the greatest celebration in the year, if we do not have forgiveness in our hearts. If we allow a grudge, or our anger, or our pride, to remain in our hearts, then we are allowing a barrier to remain between us and God.

Last week we heard that love for God cannot be separated from our concrete love for the other? If we are angry at someone, or if we aren't on speaking terms with someone, then today is the day the Church reminds us to forgive! We cannot be serious and authentic in our Lenten journey if we do not have love, mercy and forgiveness in our hearts. Therefore, the Church challenges us to make a phone call, send a letter, or try to contact whoever you are at odds with, and reconcile with them.

To begin our Lenten Journey without asking for forgiveness from God and from one another is like trying to build a house without first building a strong foundation. We all begin fasting tomorrow, but fasting without forgiveness and mercy is a fast of demons. It is a useless, or even dangerous fast, because it is a fast of hypocrites! Such a fast will not help us draw closer to God, and ultimately, that is the goal of Great Lent.

So forgiveness is the starting point for our fast to begin tomorrow. But what else do we need to understand, in order to have a fruitful and blessed Lent. Well, let us also understand exactly why we fast. Why is there such a focus for us to go 40 days without eating meat and dairy products?

The primary aim of fasting is first to make us conscious of God. True fasting involves real hunger and physical exhaustion. It means denying ourselves food during times of want. The Fathers of the Church recommended that we should always rise from the table feeling that we could have eaten more. When our bodies are weak and tired, we remember our human mortality. During these times of sacrifice and struggle, we turn our minds toward

God and remind ourselves of our utter dependence on Him. All the blessings of life -- food, drink, and health -- come from Him. He is our provider, our sustainer, and our source of life. Thus, fasting make us aware of our dependence on Him.

Another purpose of fasting is to help us develop self-discipline in our lives. The mentality of the world is to satisfy our desires whenever we can. Too often we have allowed our evil habits, our sinful desires, and our deepest passions to control and direct our lives. The Christian life, however, presents a radical reversal of such thinking. The Church calls us to discipline our minds, bodies and spirits. Until we learn to control all our habits, our actions and our thoughts, and place our whole being under the power of Christ, we can never properly grow in the Christian life. Christ created us to be free beings, slaves of nobody or nothing. Thus, fasting is a tool in helping us develop such self-discipline and regain our freedom.

A third purpose of fasting is to act as a source of illumination in our lives. If fasting is combined with increased prayer and acts of mercy, then Lent becomes a period of divine revelation and discovery. Throughout history, periods of fasting have been times when faithful people have met God. For example, Moses received the Law of God while he fasted for 40 days on Mount Sinai. Elijah heard God's voice during his times of fasting. The Apostle Peter had a vision which gave the early church a new direction while he was fasting. Saint Augustine wrote, "Do you wish your prayer to fly toward God? Give it two wings - fasting and almsgiving."

Be careful not to look at fasting as something negative, like a personal punishment. Fasting is something positive if the Holy Spirit guides our efforts. Fasting should

produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which involves most notably the gift of JOY! This is why we say in one of the hymns today, *"There are 40 days in the Fast and let us keep them all with joy."*

Of utmost importance, however, is to practice a holistic fast -- fasting not only from food but especially from our sins. Let us not focus on 40 days without meat or dairy products, but let us focus on 40 days without gossip, without anger, without hatred, without self-righteousness, and without sin. "True fasting is to put away all evil, to control the tongue, to forbear from anger, to abstain from lust, slander, falsehood and perjury. If we renounce these things, then is our fasting true and acceptable to God."

True fasting, to be fruitful, demands something else -- an increase in our prayer life. During Lent, let us come to church more often for the weekday services. This week we will have services on Sunday night, Monday night, Wednesday night, and Friday night. Let us increase our own personal prayer time at home. Let us begin reading the Bible every day. Let us go to confession with a priest, and receive Holy Communion frequently. Let us struggle to grow in our knowledge of the faith, and in our commitment to practice the faith in our everyday life!

Also, let us combine almsgiving with our fast. The prophet Isaiah tells us that a true fast is to feed the poor, care for the sick, help those in need (Isa 58:6). Concrete love always needs to be part of a sincere fast! Fasting should make us more compassionate to those in need. When we feel hungry, we should think of those poor people who are continuously hungry. When we don't eat a certain meal, let us save the money from that meal and give it to the poor. Let our fast unite us with the poor, and through our fast may we help draw them closer to God.

Great Lent is a journey to paradise, and our fast is an instrument to help us get there. Let us begin this journey with love, mercy and forgiveness abiding in our hearts, and then our fast will be the wings needed to lift us into heaven. A most blessed Lenten journey to all!!

Fr. Luke A. Veronis

(Source: <http://www.schwebster.org/sermons/>)

