



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.

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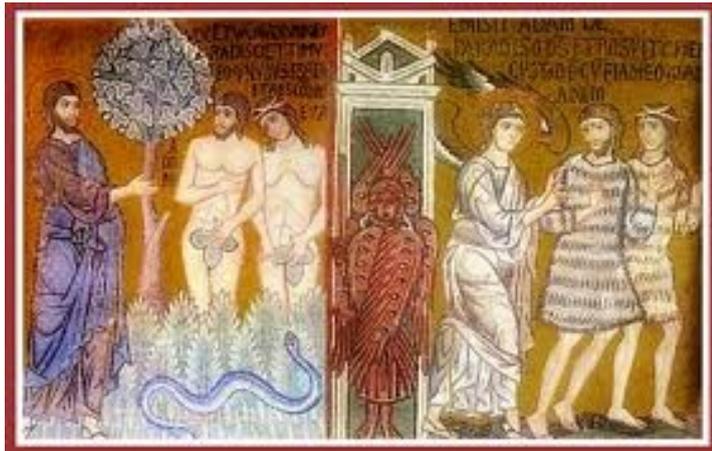
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Synaxarion Sunday March 14, 2021 (Forgiveness Sunday. Cheesefare Sunday):
Holy Venerable Benedict of Nursia,
Holy Hieromartyr Alexander the Priest.
Monday March 15: Great Lent begins

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."

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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/>)



Sermon on Forgiveness Sunday

“It is a lie, any talk of God that does not comfort you.”

That is one of my favorite quotations from the great Western mystic Meister Eckhart. Growing up as a Southern Baptist kid in Tennessee, I heard many things said about God that did not comfort me. In fact, I was often quite frightened of him. Sometimes in Orthodoxy there ap-



-pears a very negative view of humanity quite the opposite of what our theology teaches. It is easy to fall into the trap of holding a dim view of human nature, since there seems to be so much evidence for it.

Because we do we often project negativity on to Great Lent, seeing it as some kind of dark and dismal and impossible requirement, even as a punishment, to make us worthy to be accepted by God. Nothing could be further from the truth. I think we must resist the temptation to see Lent in a dark and negative light. Lent may be the time of “bright sadness,” as Fr. Schmemmann said, but remember, its brightness is the illumination of God’s unlimited and unconditional love and its sadness is not because we are rejected by him, but because we come to see how our rejection of him robs us of the experience of the fullness of his love.

Lent is an invitation to enter into a journey within. “And you?” writes the poet Rumi, “When will you begin that long journey into yourself?” That journey to the heart, to the kingdom is what Great Lent is all about. It is a pilgrimage to the truth of who we are and who God is.

The truth, of course, is that we are by nature good and endowed with dignity as the image of God. Our fallenness is an aberration and our sin a virus and a parasite. The sin we do is not who we are for nothing can destroy the divine image in which we were made. We are his children, loved most tenderly in a radical and reckless love; a love that brought the Son of God to crucifixion in a sublime demonstration of Divine Love in real time and

in living color.

All of the Lord’s life reflected the Father’s compassion. When Jesus stood at the tomb of his dear friend Lazarus he wept. He was moved with compassion. Let me quote from a sermon being delivered this morning by a brilliant seminarian by the name of Kevin Mellis. He puts it so well.

“When you read in the Gospels that Jesus was ‘ moved

with compassion’ it means that his gut was wrenched, his heart torn open, and the most vulnerable part of his being laid bare.”

There is no reason to believe that God loves us less than he loved Lazarus. That when we are hurt, when our suffering overcomes us, he doesn’t weep for us as he did for his friend.

The truth is that God loves us with tenderness beyond our ability to comprehend. We are precious in his sight. When he sees us, he sees his children, not adversaries, not enemies. He sees his children. Kevin Mellis rightly and beautifully calls the Lord’s Compassion “relentless tenderness.” I like that a lot.

On this Forgiveness Sunday I want you to leave with this message. We are forgiven. There are no hoops to jump through, no tests to take, nothing to prove, no worthiness to conjure up, no prostrations to make, no akathists that have to be prayed before God forgives us because he already has. “Even while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

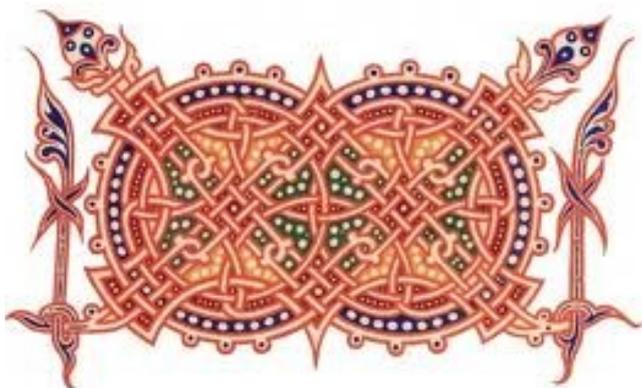
All that is needed now is to let go of our resistance to his too-good-to-be-true salvation. How does our resistance manifest itself most often? Guilt and shame and fear. What if we were to let go of all that and open our hearts to him, as St. Simeon wrote, “the One who loves us so completely?” We would discover the truth that it is God’s mercy that endures forever.

I noticed in our baptismal service a theological note that probably goes unnoticed most of the time. Here it is. "It is God's will that all should be saved..." We know this, don't we? For God in Christ has saved the entire human race. But there is more. "It is God's will that all should be saved AND come to the knowledge of the truth."

It is not our choice whether to be saved or not. It is done. It is finished. However, it is our choice whether or not we will choose to come to a knowledge of the truth. In other words, whether or not we will dive deliberately into the experience of what it means to be loved, forgiven, and saved and that comes only through an internal pilgrimage. Lent is a quiet time, a much slower time than is normal for most people. If we choose to acknowledge it, everything that happens directs us to look deeper and to live more deliberately and consciously.

Tonight as the service comes to an end and the rite of "Tonight as the service comes to an end and the rite of forgiveness begins, when the lights dim and darkness falls, listen carefully. There are some beautiful hymns that will be chanted for the first time. Unbelievably, paradoxically, mysteriously and wondrously, the bright and joyful Paschal Canon, filled with light and hope and resurrection will be heard, chanted reverently and quietly in the dark stillness. If nothing else, this confirms that Lent is filled with light and joy and hope.

Fr. Antony Hughes



HOLY TRINITY'S Liturgical Schedule from March 14 to March 21, 2021

Sunday March 14 (Forgiveness Sunday. Cheesefare Sunday):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy
11:30 pm - Sunday School
12:00 pm - Cheesefare Lunch
1:00 pm—Baptism Sophia Alexandra
Păduraru

Monday March 15- Beginning of the Easter Lent

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

Tuesday March 16:

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

Wednesday March 17:

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

Thursday March 18:

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

Saturday March 20: (St Theodore's Saturday):

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

Sunday March 21 - Orthodoxy Sunday:

9:00 am - Matins
10:0 am - Divine Liturgy
11:00 pm - Sunday School
11:30 am - Memorial Service for the
Pasc Family
12:00 pm - Coffee hour



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