

The Pre-Lenten Sundays (2016)

I Seek the One Seeking Me

ON [FEBRUARY 12, 2016](#) BY [FR. TEDIN](#) [ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY](#)



*You said, "Seek My face,"
My heart said to You, "Your face, LORD, I will seek."
Do not hide Your face from me... (Psalm 27:8-9)*

← Conversion of St. Paul

*"My soul yearns after the Lord and I seek Him in tears.
How could I do other than seek Thee, for Thou first
didst seek and find me, and gavest me to delight in Thy
Holy Spirit, and my soul fell to loving Thee. Thou seest,
O Lord, my grief and my tears...Hadst Thou not drawn
me with Thy love, I could not seek Thee as I seek Thee
now; but Thy spirit gave me to know Thee, and my soul*

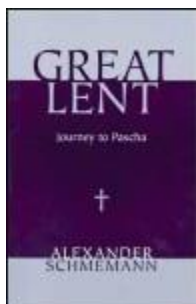
*rejoices that Thou art my God and my Lord, and I yearn after Thee even to tears." (St. Silouan the
[Athonite](#), p 269)*

"My heart speaks to You; My face seeks You;

Your face, O Lord, I will seek.

Do not turn Your face away from me."

(Psalm 26:8-9, Orthodox Study Bible)



Becoming Zacchaeus ON [FEBRUARY 13, 2016](#)

The Gospel lesson of Luke 19:1-10 is about a very short man, [Zacchaeus](#), who wanted to see Jesus. In the current lectionary of the Russian Orthodox tradition, this is the last Sunday Gospel lesson before the pre-Lenten Sundays (and the [Lenten triodion](#)) begin their cycle of scripture pericopes. (This is one point at which the Russian and Greek Orthodox lectionaries differ resulting in the fact that during the course of the year not all Orthodox read liturgically the same Scriptures every Sunday). In current practice for those who read the Zacchaeus pericope it has become already associated with the beginning of [Great Lent](#). This was made certain due to the popular writings of the liturgical theologian, [Fr. Alexander Schmemmann](#).

Then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully.

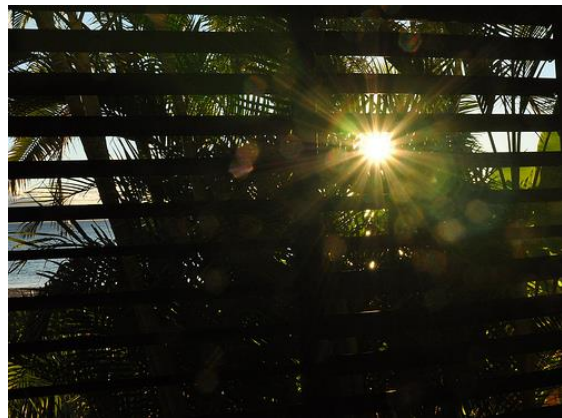


But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner." Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Archimandrite Zacharias in one of his books offers these thoughts on the Gospel lesson of Zacchaeus:

"According to [Cyril of Alexandria](#), Zacchaeus was consumed with the desire to know God the Saviour in person and to see His kind. This is the seed of salvation and when this seed falls into the heart of man, he has a great longing to see Who the Lord is. Once he is possessed by this longing he will do certain things which will seem mad in the eyes of the world, but which will in fact prepare the way for his first meeting with the Saviour. Such was the case of Zacchaeus when he began to seek the Lord.

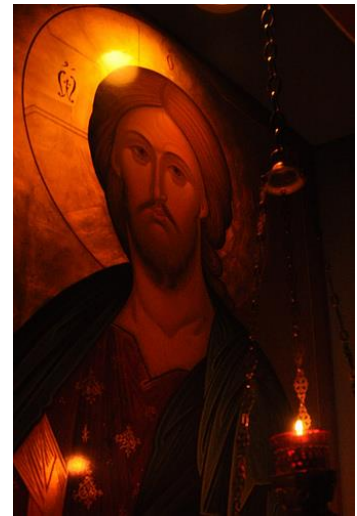
And this was the Lord's desire, for the Son of God came to save sinners. It is hardly astonishing that He should want to save a chief publican: in every time and place, the Lord seeks out His own. Zacchaeus' desire made him run ahead and climb a sycamore tree so that he could see the Lord, But what was happening in his heart was visible only to Him Who is both God and Man. The crowd could not see the transformation of his heart, nor could they understand the nature of his desire. But even before Zacchaeus had seen Him, the Lord had perceived the movement of Zacchaeus' heart in a supernatural way, with the eyes of His divinity. He saw that the wild and greedy heart of the chief publican had now begun to soften and, melting with desire, had become transfigured so that he was ready to bear within himself the image of Christ.





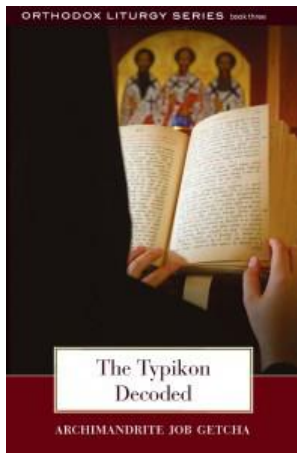
Zacchaeus has ignored his reputation and esteem, which hinder man's approach to God, and he now attracts public scorn. In his shame he becomes kin to the Lord Jesus Who, at this point in the Gospel, is on His way to be crucified on the Cross of shame in order to deliver the world from the shame of sin. In our desire to see the Lord we too will make fools of ourselves, bearing as much shame as possible in order to achieve our goal: to find our Lord and Saviour. We are indifferent to the opinion of men and any fear of becoming a laughing-stock fades away.

For we know that the Lord will grant us the honor of seeing His Face – which is far more beautiful than we can ever imagine – and our souls will be truly satisfied with His glory. On account of his burning desire, then, Zacchaeus despised all his worldly honors and was pleased to look ridiculous in the eyes of the people, if he could only gain a different kind of honor: that of finding favor with the Lord and being visited by Him.” ([Remember Thy First Love](#), pp 70-72)



Sunday Themes for Great Lent

ON FEBRUARY 18, 2016 BY FR. TEDIN EVANGELISM, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, UNCATEGORIZED EDIT



While there is a popular notion about the unchanging nature of Orthodox liturgical practices, any study of history shows that Orthodox liturgical practice has undergone numerous and significant changes over history. One area where we can note significant change is the themes assigned to the Sundays of [Great Lent](#).

The big change in Sunday lenten themes begins in the 12th Century when Sundays of preparation were introduced into the liturgical practice. This somewhat further lengthened the time of Great Lent and these additional pre-Lenten Sundays found their way into the [Triodion](#), the Liturgical book guiding Great Lent. According to Archimandrite Job Getcha in his book, [THE TYPICON DECODED](#) (p 38), The Ancient Triodia of the Orthodox Church had the following themes for the Sundays of Great Lent:

- 1] *Sunday of the Holy Prophets*
- 2] *Sunday of the Prodigal Son*
- 3] *Publican and Pharisee*
- 4] *Good Samaritan*

5] Rich man and Lazarus

6] Palm Sunday

The themes were all based in Scripture. At some point, maybe about the 12th Century, the Gospel lessons associate with these themes were moved, some to the Sundays before Great Lent. In their place, a lectionary taken from Mark's Gospel became the determining factor for the Gospel lessons each Sunday of Lent.

The [Lenten Triodia](#) apparently underwent further change so that by the 14th Century new themes emerged to form the Contemporary Triodia. For one thing a pre-Lenten Preparatory Period was added to the Church Calendar. These are, for those in the Orthodox Church, the now familiar pre-Lenten Sunday themes:

1] Sunday of the Publican & Pharisee

2] Sunday of the Prodigal Son

3] Meatfare Sunday

4] Cheesefare Sunday

The Meatfare and Cheesefare themes are not Gospel themes, but, of course, there are Gospel lessons on these Sundays (Last Judgment and fasting). The themes seem to reflect a more monastic development. One might say the Church began emphasizing more Lent and fasting as themes in their own right. Some modern critics would say the emphasis moves away from Christianity to churchianity. The practice of the religion is being emphasized more in the Church's message.

The ancient themes of the Lenten Sundays which were displaced to before Lent, were replaced by the following themes in the contemporary Triodia:

1] Sunday of Orthodoxy

2] St. Gregory Palamas

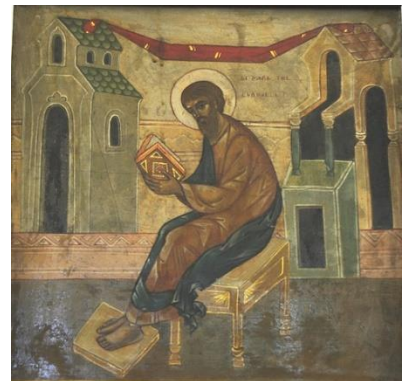
3] Veneration of the Cross

4] St. John Climacus

5] St. Mary of Egypt

6] Palm Sunday

One can see what is happening: the expansion of Great Lent by creating the Preparatory Sundays, and then transferring what were the original and ancient Lenten themes to the Preparatory Sundays. What in the ancient church were the main themes and emphases of Great Lent get moved to before Lent, as they are seen as really only preparing the faithful for Lent. Lent is about something else which the



ancient themes no longer reflected. Scriptural/ Gospel themes for Great Lent are replaced by new Lenten themes which are mostly monastic.

It could be argued that the first two themes (Sunday of Orthodoxy/ Icons and Gregory Palamas) represent theological issues/ triumphs, but these were theological issues which had heavy monastic support. The replacement of the original Scriptural themes after the 12th Century with monastic themes is consistent with other liturgical changes that take place at the same time in Orthodoxy reflecting the ever increasing monastic influence over Orthodox liturgical practice.



The use of the Markan lectionary in Great Lent strikes me as in some ways being more catechetical. The focus of them is on teaching, “who is Jesus?” That seems to me to be what the Epistle and Gospel lessons is answering. But the monastic Sunday themes reflect the dominance monasticism had over Orthodox liturgical life, Orthodoxy spirituality and the Church itself at this point in Orthodoxy’s history. The ancient “cathedral” rite and the liturgical practice which governed the non-monastic churches will disappear, and monastic practice will come to dominate the Orthodox Church.



There may be pastoral reasons why this occurred, but I don’t know exactly why the changes occurred. Archimandrite Job’s book explains the changes but doesn’t tell us completely why the changes occurred. What is clear is that the unchanging nature of the Orthodox Church isn’t its liturgical practice. One would hope the liturgical changes were done to try to preserve the unchanging theology and Gospel of the Church. What might be interesting for some future Great Council of the Church is to discuss the reasoning behind all of the liturgical changes which occurred beginning in the 12th Century that led in the next couple of centuries to the monastic take over of

church life and practice. It would be good to discuss the disappeared cathedral rite and the “secular” parishes which once predominated in Orthodoxy. How can we best serve the contemporary membership of our Church? The Church’s liturgical life has undergone great changes over time so there should be no reason why we can’t discuss today what liturgical practice is best for the catechetical and evangelical work of the church in the 21st Century.



The Pharisee and the Publican ON [FEBRUARY 20, 2016](#) BY [FR. TEDIN FASTING](#), [GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH](#)

The Gospel Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee is found in Luke 18:10-14.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.



[St. Nikolai Velimirovic](#) comments on the Parable reminding us that the Pharisee fasted perfectly, yet it did him no good, for his heart remained hardened. This is a good lesson to all of us Orthodox as we prepare to enter Great Lent: the goal is to change our hearts not our stomachs.

“Ah, what an easy way of salvation has this Pharisee chosen for himself, easier than the easiest way to destruction! Of all the commandments that God gave people through Moses, he chose only the two easiest. But he did not really fulfil these two, for these two commandments were not given by God because it was necessary to Him that men fast and give a tithe of their possessions. This is not in the least necessary to God. Neither did God give these commandments to men to be some end in themselves but

– as with all His other commandments – to bring forth the fruit of humility before God, obedience to God and love for God and man; in brief: to arouse, soften and illumine men’s hearts. However, the Pharisee aimlessly fulfilled these two commandments. He fasted and gave a tithe of his possessions, but he hated and scorned others, and was arrogant before God. And so he remained an unfruitful tree. The fruit is not in fasting, but in the heart; the fruit is not in a commandment, but in the heart. All commandments and all laws are of service to the heart: they warm the heart, enlighten the heart, water the heart, fence the heart round, weed it and plant it – only that the fruit in the field of the heart should set, grow and ripen. All good works are a means and not an end, the method and not the fruit. The end is in the heart, where the fruit is.” (Homilies, pp 98-99)





Pride and Humility and Prayer

ON FEBRUARY 21, 2016 BY FR. TEDIN GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, UNCATEGORIZED EDIT

“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself” (Luke 18:10).

The Pharisee is an interesting study in psychology. He doesn't pray aloud, but only within himself. Why? He doesn't want to appear proud. The proud are concerned about appearances and what others might think of them. They act for show, carefully orchestrating every move.

The humble on the other hand, openly confess their sins. The Publican confesses his sin to God and beats his breast. He isn't worried about what others might think of him. He is fearful of how God will judge him. He isn't trying to hide anything from God or neighbor. They all know him and his sins. He is quite aware of how others judge him, so he doesn't have to pretend, doesn't have to put on a show. His sins are exposed before all, and he humbly acknowledges them asking forgiveness.



The Folly of Pride

ON FEBRUARY 23, 2016 BY FR. TEDIN GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, UNCATEGORIZED EDIT

“It is not necessary to fear weakness, for the Lord came down from Heaven for the weak. If a man recognizes his weakness and repents, the Lord in his mercy will not remember his weaknesses and sins.



The most necessary things to fear are devilish pride, vainglory, hostility, and condemnation, but weaknesses serve to humble our imagined piety. Do not be surprised that good people who are close to the Church and are deep believers are always heaping abuse when they are wounded. These people are superficial, they have no understanding of the one thing needful, and so outward piety does them no good. But it is necessary to pray for N and have sympathy for her heavy cross. Recently a monk said to me: ‘I am tired of living; if only I would die! I would like to be turned into nothingness.’ But I kept silent; I know that he will not accept my advice. You see, all monks are well read and each understands theology and the teaching of the Holy Fathers in his own way, rightly or wrongly, and they hold to their convictions. For such people, advice from the outside is inappropriate; they themselves are keen to teach others.



Oh, how well the holy Abba Dorotheos expressed it: 'Each is careless and does not keep a single commandment, yet he holds his neighbor accountable for the commandments'. How many examples of this one sees in the course of a day! Of course I do not pay attention to them, for this is an ordinary phenomenon. If we observe ourselves we see utter chaos in our heart, and phenomena like this do not touch our heart."

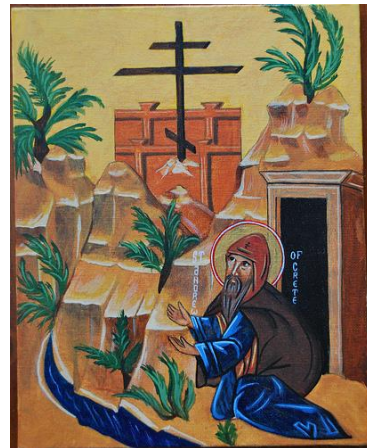
(Father John, [Christ is in Our Midst: Letters from a Russian Monk](#), pp 72-73)

Fasting and Orthodoxy: Longevity in Life

[ON FEBRUARY 24, 2016 BY FR. TEDIN FASTING, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY, UNCATEGORIZED EDIT](#)

Sometimes we Orthodox need a little extra push to get into the Lenten Spirit.

I saw a few items in an article in the 22 February 2016 edition of [TIME](#), "[Longevity: It's the Little Things That Keep Us Young](#)" written by Alexandra Sifferlin which might help jump start our leap into Lent. Of course these aren't the spiritual reasons we fast in the Orthodox Church, but maybe they can help convince us the benefits of Great Lent outweigh the risks. As we can see below there are several reasons why Great Lent may have long term benefits to our bodies and souls.



1] "In other new research, Valter Longo, director of the University of Southern California's Longevity Institute, showed that when people occasionally fasted, they lowered their risk factors for age-related diseases."



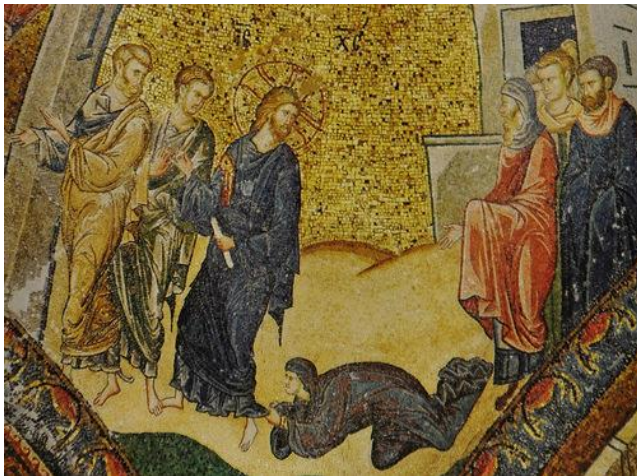
Even only occasionally fasting showed health benefits to people in the study. Those who start off Great Lent zealously and then falter on the way should remind themselves of this. One doesn't have to keep Lent perfectly to reap benefits from it. If one falters, one doesn't have to give up. All is not lost! If you have broken the fast, repent (it is the season for it!), and get back to the Lenten discipline.

2] *“But some experts speculate that fasting also makes the body more resistant to stress, which can have beneficial effects at the cellular level. Longo’s suspicion, based on his research, is that fasting kills a variety of organ and blood cells while spurring the generation of stem cells. These new cells appear to regenerate the lost cells and rejuvenate the body.”*

Fasting is not meant to kill the body, but rather aims to kill sinful desires. Fasting is heart friendly and as science shows it actually is renewing the physical body.

And speaking of the physical body, attending services, doing prostrations, even standing and fidgeting during long services have health benefits!

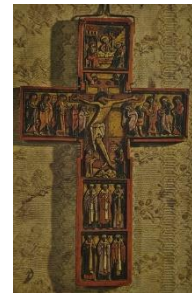
3] *“In other words, you can’t exercise away all the bad effects of sitting too much. But the good news is that doing anything but sitting still—even fidgeting counts—can add up.”*



4] *“Your mind-set can affect how you age. By now it’s clear to scientists that our emotions affect our biology. Studies have shown for years that anger and stress can release stress hormones like adrenaline into our blood, which trigger the heart to beat faster and harder. The new research suggests the stakes are even higher than that: stress may even have an effect on how well our brains hold up against Alzheimer’s disease.”*

Repenting, asking forgiveness and forgiving can all be stress reducers. Prayer, quiet time, meditation, all can help reduce stress. So attending Lenten services, even if your mind wanders can have positive benefits on calming your body, getting rid of anger, and letting go of those unhealthy bad passions and desires.

Joyous Lent!



Flee Sexual Immorality

ON [FEBRUARY 26, 2016](#) BY [FR. TEDIN CHRISTIANITY, CONFESSION, ORTHODOX CHURCH, PATRISTIC](#)

On the second of the three [Pre-Lenten Sundays](#) (the [Sunday of the Prodigal Son](#)), we read the following Epistle from [St. Paul](#), 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot?



Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God,

and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

[Saint Gregory Palamas](#) (d. 1359) comments:

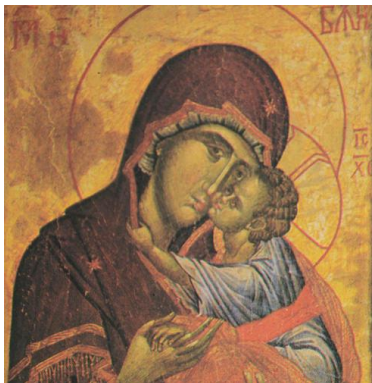
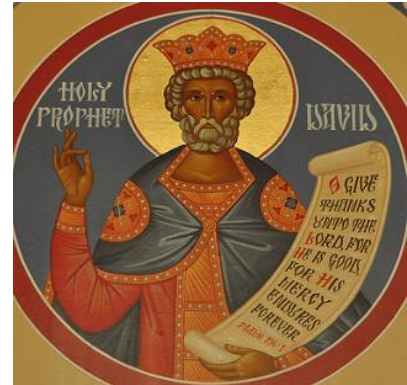
“[The apostle](#) urges us once more, brethren, to flee fornication (1 Cor. 6:18). If Samsom had fled from it, he would not have fallen into Delilah’s hands after being deprived of the hair of his head and his strength. He would not have been blinded nor lost his life in such an unfortunate way alongside his enemies (Judg. 14:1). If they who were led by Moses and to whom he had given the law had fled from fornication they would not have made sacrifices to Baal-peor (Num. 25:3), nor eaten sacrifices of the dead (Num. 25:2-3, and cf Ps. 106:28, Hosea 9:10), nor fallen as often as they did. If Solomon had fled from it he would not have deserted God who made him king and gave him wisdom, nor would he have erected temples for idols (1 Kgs. 11:2-4).



You will observe that the passion of fornication pushes a person towards ungodliness. Susanna’s beauty would not have beguiled the senior judges in Babylon, triumphed over them and resulted in their being stoned, if from the beginning they had fled from defilement and had not watched her every day lasciviously beforehand (Sus. 5-62). The wretched Holofernes would not have died with his neck severed if Judith’s sandal had not previously, according to the Scripture, caught his eye and her beauty ensnared his soul (Judith 16:9). Job says, ‘I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid’ (Job 31:1), how much less upon a corrupt woman either divorced or married. Practice the single life as dear to God, or the married life as God’s gift. Drink water from

your own wells or rather, chastely from your one well. Keep away completely from the adulterated draught, which is the water of the Styx, the stream of the river Acheron. It is full of murderous venom and has poisonous powers, and invariably drags those who drink it down through the trapdoor of hell into its innermost recesses. Flee from the honeyed lips of prostitutes which are skilled in spreading shameful death, namely, separation from God.

David said on the subject, ‘They that wantonly desert thee shall perish’ (Ps. 72:27 Lxx). We, whose bodies have become the temple of God through the Spirit, and in whom the Spirit dwells, must be clean, or at least be in the process of being cleansed, and remain always undefiled, contenting ourselves with permissible pleasures. We must make haste to attain purity and chastity and avoid fornication and every uncleanness, in order to rejoice throughout all ages with the pure bridegroom in the unsullied bridechambers. By the prayers of the ever-virgin, most pure, all-glorious Mother who bore Him in virginity for our salvation, now and for ever and unto the ages or ages. Amen.” ([The Homilies](#), pp 40-41)



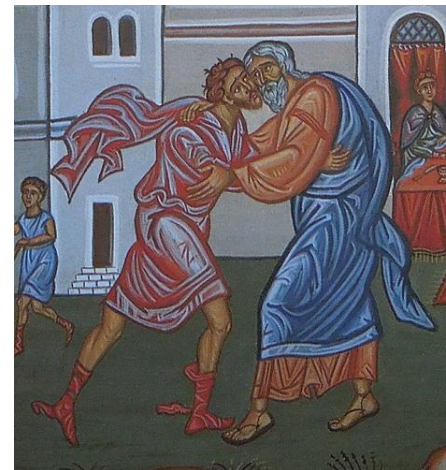
The Prodigal Son's Dependency

ON [FEBRUARY 27, 2016](#) BY [FR. TEDIN GOD, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, REPENTANCE, UNCATEGORIZED EDIT](#)

The second of the three [Pre-Lenten Sundays](#) takes its theme from Christ's Gospel parable as recorded by St. Luke (15:11-32), the [Prodigal Son](#). Our Lord Jesus taught:

Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood.

And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.





But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry. Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.' But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. 'But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'



And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.' "

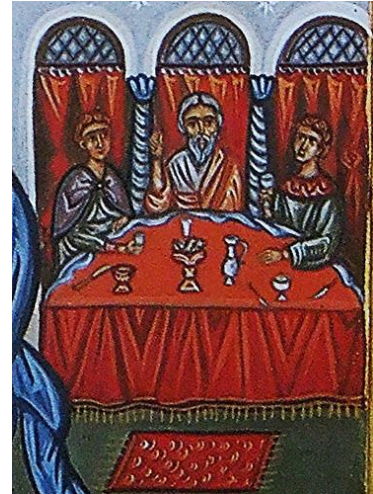
Archbishop Dmitri comments on our Lord's parable:

"And He said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of good that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living (vv 11-12).

The younger son judges himself capable of independence, and, like many young people, he wants to leave home and live on his own. Strangely, he sees no inconsistency between his desire to be independent of his father and his request for his inheritance. Even in the new way of life he proposes for himself, he must begin with his father's endowment. His words betray profound self-centeredness: Give me the portion...that falleth to me. Just as children often do not realize what a great debt they owe their parents – their birth, their nurture, their training, their knowledge, their health, and

many other things – so the human being often thinks nothing of all he owes to God, Who has brought him into being, crowned him with glory and honor, endowed him with talents and abilities and brought him to adulthood by His Providence. The son asks his father for what is his, failing to see that what is 'his' is the father's gift. Human beings often take for granted that God owes them something. And, just as the father in the parable, despite his son's youth and inexperience, gives him what he asks for, so also God gives freely to those who ask of Him, even though this recipient may misuse the gifts.[...]

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him (vv 14-16).



The son has been reckless; rather than use his gifts to build an admirable life consistent with his upbringing, he has wasted them in self-indulgence. Having spent everything on an illusion of happiness, he wakes to find he has nothing. 'Mighty famine' really describes the state of his soul. Empty spiritually and morally, he has nothing to sustain him. He adopts a kind of substitute father, and this 'citizen of that country' indeed takes him in, but he sends him to the fields to feed swine, no doubt the most despicable task on the farm. How sharply this picture contrasts with the relationship he had with his loving father! The emptiness and

meaninglessness of his life are brought out by the statement that he would have gladly filled his belly with the husks he fed the swine. Every attempt to satisfy his real needs leave him unfulfilled. No man can replace what he has lost." (Archbishop Dmitri, *The Parables*, pp 80-82)



The Sin of Bread Alone

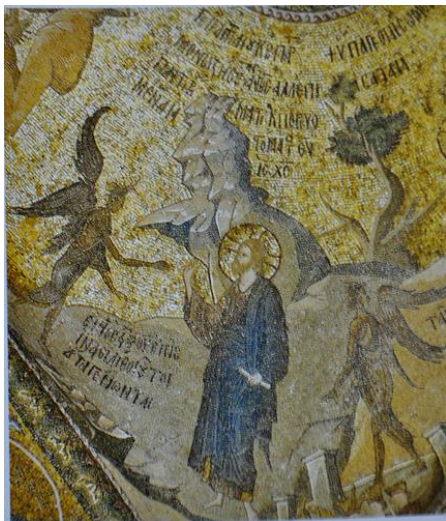
ON MARCH 3, 2016 BY FR. TEDIN FASTING, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, UNCATEGORIZED EDIT

Jesus said: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4, Deuteronomy 8:3)



“Fasting or abstinence from food is not exclusively a Christian practice. It existed and still exists in other religions and even outside religion, as for example in some specific therapies. Today people fast (or abstain) for all kinds of reasons, including sometimes political reasons. It is important, therefore, to discern the uniquely Christian content of fasting. It is first of all revealed to us in the interdependence between two events which we find in the Bible: one at the beginning of the Old Testament and the other at the beginning of the New Testament. The first event is the ‘breaking of the fast’ by Adam in Paradise.

He ate of the forbidden fruit. This is how man’s original sin is revealed to us. Christ, the New Adam – and this is the second event – begins by fasting. Adam was tempted and he succumbed to temptation; Christ was tempted and He overcame that temptation. The results of Adam’s failure are expulsion from Paradise and death. The fruits of Christ’s victory are the destruction of death and our return to Paradise. The lack of space prevents us from giving a detailed explanation of the meaning of this parallelism.



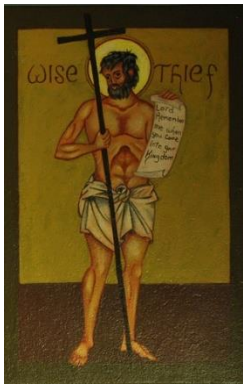
← Satan tempts Christ in the wilderness

It is clear, however, that in this perspective fasting is revealed to us as something decisive and ultimate in its importance. It is not a mere ‘obligation’, a custom; it is disconnected with the very mystery of life and death, of salvation and damnation. In the Orthodox teaching, sin is not only the transgression of a rule leading to punishment; it is always a mutilation of life given to us by God. It is for this reason that the story of the original sin is presented to us as an act of eating. For food is means of life; it is that which keeps us alive.



But here lies the whole question: what does it mean to be alive and what does ‘life’ mean? For us today this term has a primarily biological meaning: life is precisely that which entirely depends on food, and more generally, on the physical world. But for the Holy Scripture and for Christian Tradition, this life ‘by bread alone’ is identified with death because it is mortal life, because death is a principle always at work in it. God, we are told, ‘created no death.’ He is the Giver of Life. How then did life become mortal? Why is death and death alone the only absolute condition of that which exists? The Church answers: because man

rejected life as it was offered and given to him by God and preferred a life depending not on God alone but on ‘bread alone.’” (Alexander Schmemmann, [Great Lent](#), pp 93-94)



Approaching God in the True Lenten Spirit ON [MARCH 4, 2016](#) BY [FR. TED IN GREAT LENT, HUMILITY, ORTHODOXYEDIT](#)

During the Matins for the [Sunday of the Prodigal Son](#), we sing the following hymn which reminds us what keeping Lent and having a true lenten attitude means.

As the Thief I cry to You: Remember me!

say: Be merciful!

As the Publican, with downcast eyes, I beat my breast and



As the Prodigal, deliver me from every evil, O King who pities all,



that I may sing the praises of Your boundless compassion.

[Great Lent](#) is given to us as a school to teach us the humility we need to serve God and our fellow Christians. We need to embody in our spiritual lives the humility, repentance and honesty of the Wise Thief, the repentant Publican and the Prodigal Son. The very purpose of any [fasting, abstinence and self-denial in Lent](#) is to bring us to the attitude of these three penitents. If we don't see ourselves in them, and learn to be them in our repentance, our fasting is of little value. If we fast and then feel righteous, or fast and then criticize and condemn others, or fast but fail to be humbled or to repent, then we have fasted wrongly no matter how rigorously we kept every jot and tittle of the fasting rules. Lent is about changing our hearts not our stomachs.

Here is another hymn from the Matins of the Prodigal Son:

SAVIOR, I SET OFF ON A FOOLISH JOURNEY;
I WASTED ALL YOUR PRECIOUS GIFTS OF GRACE.
I LIVED IN LUXURY, AND THE DEVILS WERE MY FRIENDS;
I RETURN TO YOU EMPTY HANDED, LOVING FATHER.

*RECEIVE ME IN REPENTANCE, AS YOU ACCEPTED THE PRODIGAL;
RESTORE TO ME MY BAPTISMAL ROBE OF PURITY, AND SAVE ME!*

We do not want to go through Lent, even with zeal and rigor, but then approach God with “empty hands” as the Prodigal did. He had nothing to show for his affluent life. He could only approach his father with empty hands, revealing the wastefulness of his life choices.

For us, it is not the rigor of the fast which matters, but the spiritual fruit which it produces in our lives. If we focus only on the foods, we lose sight of the fruits of our labor. We fast in order to approach God bearing an offering of our spiritual labors.

“Then the King will say to those at his right hand,

‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;

for I was hungry and you gave me food,

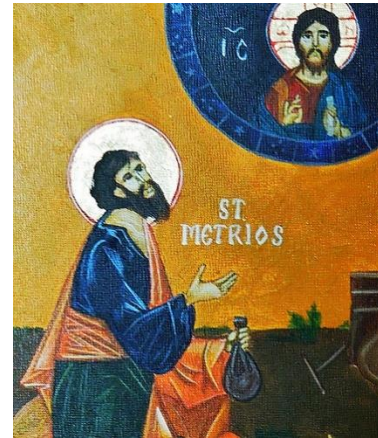
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,

I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

I was naked and you clothed me,

I was sick and you visited me,

I was in prison and you came to me.’” (Matthew 25:34-36)



The Good Defense Before the Dread Judgment Seat: Hospitality

ON MARCH 5, 2016 BY [FR. TEDIN FASTING](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [JUDGMENT](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [UNCATEGORIZEDEDIT](#)

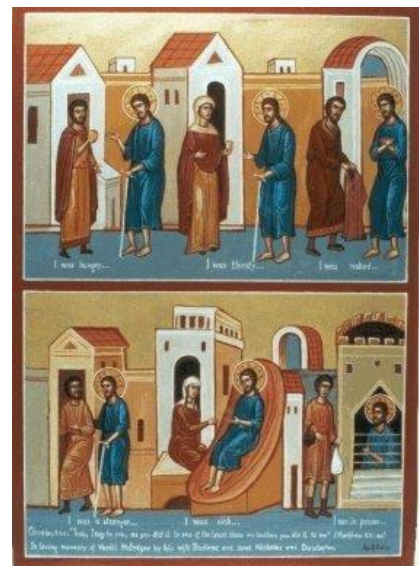
On the 3rd of the [Pre-Lenten Sundays](#), we read the Gospel lesson of Matthew 25:31-46, the [Last Judgment](#). It is a surprising description of the Last Judgment – no mention of sins. The Judgment is based on our having been charitable to others, or having failed to do so. No mention of keeping Torah or Tradition; nothing said about keeping [Lent](#) strictly or any spiritual discipline. We are judged on whether we loved Christ's least brothers and sisters, and through them loved Christ. The Judgment according to Christ is not based on our adherence to religious practices, but rather on our willingness to love others in whom we don't see Christ.



Jesus taught this parable: “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I

was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”





[St. Gregory the Great](#) comments:

“The gospel tells us that the Lord appeared to two disciples while they were walking on the road. Even though they did not believe in him, they were talking about him. He did not appear to them in a form they could recognize: as he was to the eyes of their hearts, a stranger, so was he to their bodily eyes, inwardly they were full of love and of doubt. The Lord was outwardly present to them, but he did not reveal to them who he was. He showed himself to them as they were talking about him, but because of their doubts he hid the appearance that would allow them to recognize him. As they walked along, he did indeed talk with them, proving the hardness of their

understanding, and opening to them the mysteries of the Scriptures concerning himself. Yet, because as an object of faith he was still a stranger to their hearts, he made a pretence of going on farther. Truth was not acting deceitfully here. He was only showing himself to them in accordance with their thoughts about him. They had to be tested as to whether those who did not as yet love him as God were at least able to love him as a stranger. Because those with whom Truth was walking couldn't be completely alien to love, they invited him, a stranger, to be their guest. They set the table, brought food, and in the breaking of bread they recognized the God they did not know when he was explaining the Scriptures to them.

They were not enlightened by hearing God's commandments, but by their own actions, for it is written: It is not hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but doers of the law will be made righteous. Let those who want to understand what they have heard be quick to fulfill in action what they have already been able to understand. The disciples did not recognize their Lord when he was speaking; the Lord allowed himself to be recognized as he was being fed.



My friends, love hospitality, love the works of mercy. Paul said: Let the love of the brotherhood remain, and do not forget hospitality; it was by this that some have been made acceptable, having entertained angels hospitably; and Peter told us to be hospitable to one another, without complaints; and Truth



himself said: I needed hospitality, and you welcomed me. And yet often we feel no inclination to offer the gift of hospitality. But consider, my friends, how great this virtue of hospitality is! Receive Christ at your tables, so that he will receive you at the eternal banquet. Offer hospitality now to Christ the stranger, so that at the judgement you will not be a stranger but he will accept you into his kingdom as one he knows.” ([Gregory the Great, Be Friends of God](#), pp 62-64)

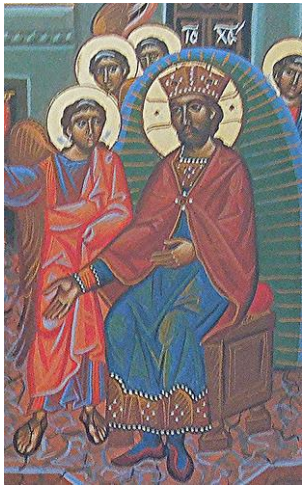
Whatever we may be eating or fasting from, it is always the season for hospitality and charity. Whether we are eating or fasting, it is always the time to be generously charitable and hospitable to others. Without hospitality and charity, our fasting from food is vapid and void. Filling our hearts with God's love is the goal of Lent, not just emptying our plates of food.

The Blessed, the Cursed and the Stranger

ON MARCH 7, 2016 BY FR. TEDIN GREAT LENT, JUDGMENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH EDIT

In the parable of the last Judgment ([Matthew 25:31-46](#)), we read these words:

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'



In the Gospel text, the king speaks to both those on his right hand (the sheep, the blessed, the righteous) and to those on his left (the goats, the cursed, the unrighteous) in the 2nd person, familiar. Both those judged blessed and those judged cursed also speak to the king in the 2nd person, familiar [using the more informal, "thee" instead of the more formal "you" – this distinction exists in the Greek but is no longer used in modern English]. This does suggest that not only are the king and his subjects on familiar/ friendly terms, but almost equal terms. They speak to each other not in respectful formal language, but in the language of equals and people who recognize each other as familiar acquaintances.

This of course adds to the parable, because both the blessed and the cursed cannot recall ever having ministered or failed to minister to the king. They both seem to be saying that if we had seen you or recognized you we would have ministered to you, but we don't remember ever seeing you at all. The one denies having seen and ministered to the king, the other denies having seen and failed to minister to the king.

And what the parable appears to be getting at is that the judgment is based upon not how everyone served the king or the king's representatives, but how they treated people whom they did not recognize. It is how they treated people who did not remind them of their king for whom they are called into judgment. It is how they treat the stranger, the foreigner and the alien which is essential to the king in his forming judgment of his subjects.



If the subjects speak to the king on such familiar terms (and he to them as well), how is it possible they didn't recognize the king in their neighbors or in strangers?

The blessed, even though they don't see their king in the poor and needy, treat these downtrodden with love and respect. They don't withhold what is in their power to give because they don't recognize the people in need. They act toward them honorable, morally and generously, rather than reacting to them

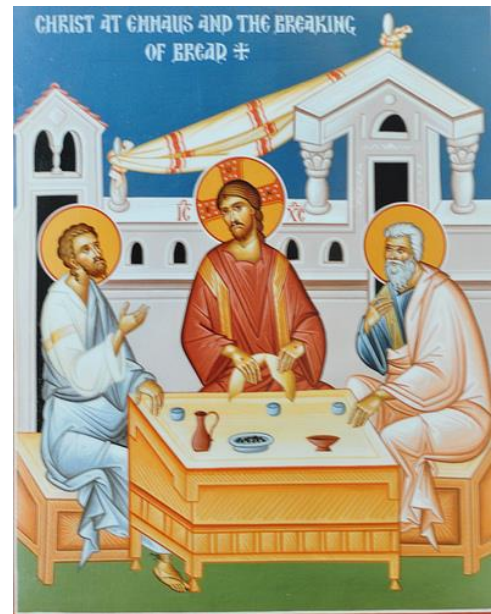


as unknowns to be feared or hated. They treat the unknown strangers as they would treat their king if they found him in need. (see also yesterday's blog, [Love as an Action Verb, Not a Feeling Noun](#))

The cursed on the other hand because they don't recognize the poor and needy withhold from them charity and what they are capable of giving to them or doing for them. Simply because those downtrodden are strangers or unrecognizable, the cursed react to them with indifference or perhaps even hostility. The cursed never move beyond their initial reaction – they never chose to act toward the needy to meet their desperate needs because they had reacted negatively to them.

Neither the blessed or the cursed are judged for failing to have recognized their king. The judgment falls on them both for the way they treated those they didn't recognize – those not familiar to them.

[See also my blog of 2 days ago, [The Good Defense Before the Dread Judgment Seat: Hospitality](#), in which St. Gregory the Great connects the parable of the Last Judgment to the 2 disciples walking to Emmaus after the resurrection. Though disciples of Jesus, they fail to recognize him as He walks with them and talks to them. It is in their showing charity to Him by inviting Him to eat with them that they suddenly recognize Him.]



Facing Death With Detachment and Peace

**ON [MARCH 8, 2016](#) BY [FR. TEDIN GREAT](#)
[LENT, ORTHODOX](#)
[CHURCH, PASCHA, UNCATEGORIZED](#)[EDIT](#)**

“Everything in life is vain and futile, and life itself is like a dream, like a fleeting shadow! We mortals toil and sweat, for nothing, striving against all odds to gain even the smallest possession. And if they do attain any of their desires here on earth, yet must they lie in stillness in the tomb, stripped of

everything, be they king or pauper. Therefore, O Christ our God, grant Your departed servants eternal rest, in Your love for mankind.” (Saturday Hymn from Matins)

The above hymn is a sober reflection on life and its terminal limit, and calls to mind the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal.” (John 6:27)

Even when we remember death, we do not always think about eternity. Sometimes we work even harder to accumulate the things of this earth while still on earth to enjoy them.

I do appreciate reading articles from non-Orthodox sources when they make a point that is consistent with or supportive of Orthodox ideas. Jeffrey Klugger wrote in the February 22 2016 issue of [TIME](#) an interesting short article titled, “Why Are Old People Less Scared of Dying.” For some people the fear of dying declines as they age and get closer to death. Their attitude toward death changes, and some even look forward to the rest they believe will be given them at death. Klugger offers an explanation for why aging people become more accepting of death.



“Studies show there can be a powerful perspective shift later in life when we come to understand that what we’ve always thought of as ownership is really just a long-term lease. ‘A lot of our fear of death is about losing the things we’ve built up,’ says Steve Taylor, a lecturer in psychology at Leeds Beckett University in Leeds,

England... ‘But elderly people let go of their attachment to these things, and in the process they let go of some of their fear.’”

Aging perhaps makes us more realistic about our temporary sojourn on earth. We are God’s guests here, not the permanent residents. All that we accumulate in life is lent to us for our use while we sojourn on earth. But we can’t take it with us when we die. That peace comes with faith and hope. It is available not just to the aged, but to anyone who is willing to do as Christ taught: “Deny yourself. Take up your cross and follow me.” It is what enables some Christians to tithe and practice generous charity. We understand wealth is a gift from God to be shared with others. We understand we owe God for everything and so are willing to be generous in charity in this lifetime.

Thinking about death is not morbidity. It is thinking about reality – we are mortal beings after all. As Orthodox we think about death frequently. Every year we celebrate the death of Jesus Christ as the death of death! We do memorials throughout the year, reminding ourselves of deceased loved ones. We prepare ourselves consciously for death as a passage from this world to the world which is to come.

Klugger in his article concludes:

“The certainty of a journey’s end might make better travelers of us all.”



Certainly, this should be true of those of us who follow Christ and who sing every year:

“Christ is risen from the dead,
trampling down death by death,
and upon those in the tombs
bestowing life!”



Learning to let go of things is a spiritual lesson for us, not just something learned through aging. C.S. Lewis has the demon Screwtape analyze humans in this way:

“They will find out in the end, never fear, to whom their time, their souls, and their bodies really belong – certainly not to **them**, whatever happens.” ([THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS](#), Letter XXI)

The Medicine of Repentance

ON MARCH 9, 2016 BY FR. TEDIN CONFESSION, ORTHODOX CHURCH, REPENTANCE, UNCATEGORIZED EDIT

“Once we regard Confession as fundamentally Christ’s action rather than our own, then we shall begin to understand the sacrament of repentance in a far more positive way. It is an experience of God’s healing love and pardon, not merely of our own disintegration and weakness.

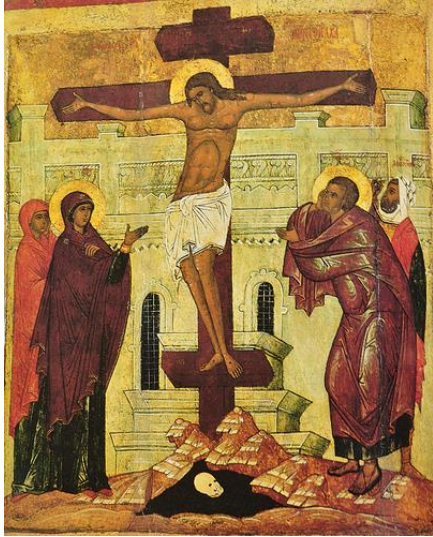
We are to see, not just the prodigal son, plodding slowly and painfully upon the long road home, but also the father, catching sight of him when he is still a long way off and running out to meet him (Lk 15:20). As Tito Colliander puts it, ‘If we take one step toward the Lord, He takes ten steps toward us.’ That is precisely what we experience in Confession. In common



with all the sacraments, Confession involves a joint divine-human action, in which there is found a convergence and ‘cooperation’ (synergeia) between God’s grace and our free will. Both are necessary; but what God does is incomparably the more important.

Repentance and confession, then, are not just something that we do by ourselves or with the help of the priest, but above all something that God is doing with and in both of us. In the words of St. John Chrysostom, ‘Let us apply to





ourselves the saving remedy (pharmakon) of repentance; let us accept from God the repentance that heals us. For it is not we who offer it to Him, be He who bestows it upon us.' It should be remembered that in Greek the same word *exomologesis* means both confession of sins and thanksgiving for gifts received. [...] Not that the penance should be regarded as a punishment; still less should it be viewed as a way of expiating an offence. Salvation is a free gift of grace. By our own efforts we can never wipe out our guilt; Christ the one mediator is our only atonement, and either we are freely forgiven by Him, or else we are not forgiven at all.

We do not acquire 'merit' by fulfilling a penance, for in our relation to God we can never claim any merit of our own. Here, as always, we

should think primarily in therapeutic rather than juridical terms. A penance is not a punishment, nor yet a form of expiation, but a means of healing. It is *apharmakon* or medicine." (Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*, pp 51-53)



The Flood, Food and Fasting

ON MARCH 11, 2016 BY FR. TEDIN [FASTING](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [UNCATEGORIZED EDIT](#)

"But our homily should be proceeding through the historical narrative, discussing in detail the antiquity of fasting. All the saints received fasting as a kind of paternal inheritance, observed it as such, and handed it on, father to child. And so, through a chain of succession, this asset has been preserved even for us.

In paradise there was no wine;



there were still no animal sacrifices,



still no eating of meat.



After the flood: wine; after the flood: [God said] eat everything, as you eat green plants. The enjoyment of meat was conceded only when the hope of perfection was lost.” ([Saint Basil the Great, On Fasting and Feasts](#), p 59)

There were no barbecues or wine tasting in Paradise. No gourmet meals or vintage drinks. Lenten food is the food of Paradise. No wonder we have so little desire to be there! We really are in love with the fallen world and prefer to stay in it. Great Lent challenges us to embrace Paradise when we don't want to let go of this world. Adam lamented the loss of Paradise, but if a return to Paradise means giving up what we love to consume in this world, will we abandon Paradise for this world? The Kingdom is often imaged in terms of a banquet, but we might wonder what kind of banquet can it be without beef, salmon or wine? Or do we love and value things of this world so much that we don't want to give them up and will chose to love this world and its steaks, filets and goblets rather than live for the Kingdom of God?



Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever. (1 John 2:15-17)

The Expulsion of Adam from Paradise

ON [MARCH 12, 2016](#) BY [FR. TEDIN](#) [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [UNCATEGORIZEDEDIT](#)

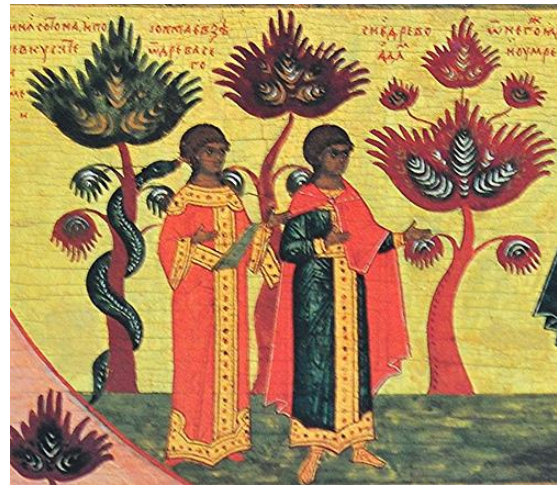


In the long history of Christianity, many insightful meditations have been offered giving Adam voice to explain his free choice and to lament the loss of Paradise after sinning against God and being expelled from God's hand-planted Garden of Eden. Below is a modern meditation from [Archimandrite Aimilianos](#) who has Adam fearfully explaining himself, ignoring the merciful nature of the God whom Adam knew from the beginning.

“And so it was with Adam: ‘I’m over here, hiding, because I was afraid to see you, because I have sinned. I’m afraid

that you wouldn’t accept my excuses; that You’d say it was all my fault. I was afraid that you would no longer acknowledge me as Your child.’

To be sure, Adam’s desire to justify himself, the various excuses he contemplated, were the signs of certain death. And this is why St. Makarios says: ‘When Adam fell away from God, he died spiritually,’ Seeking to justify himself, Adam condemned himself to life without God. Until then, the damage wasn’t fully done; the blow could have been blunted, the tragedy



averted. This was the critical moment which we all must face, when it becomes clear

whether we’ll choose God or our self. As a general rule, we choose our self. Every day we repeat the sin of Adam. He fell when he opened his soul to the poison of the serpent, but there was still hope that he might turn and embrace God.



He could have raised his arms to God and cried: ‘God, I am your voice, your self-expression; I am your creation, your child, and I have sinned. Bend down and hold me; save me before I perish completely!’ Instead, he said, in effect: ‘What do You want, God? Have you come here to judge me?’” ([Archimandrite Aimilianos, The Way of the Spirit](#), p 239)



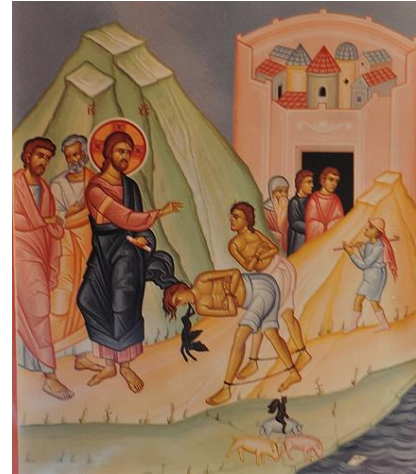
Interestingly in the Gospels, it is the demons who have nothing but fear for Christ; they are terrified that He is there to judge them, yet they do not repent. For example in Mark 1:24, the demons possessing the man cry out:

“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”

Adam feared God and God's judgment, yet it did not bring him to repentance, to seek reconciliation with God. Instead, Adam blames Eve and God for his sin and fails to ask the merciful God for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Also in the various versions of the Gospel lesson of the Gadarene swine and the demoniacs (Mt 8:28-34; Mk 5:1-20; Lk 8:26-39), the demons squeal in fear that Christ is there to torment them before the Judgment Day, yet they do not seek to be reconciled to God. So too in Archimandrite Aimilianos' meditation, Adam fears God's judgment, yet fails to seek reconciliation with the merciful Lord.

So often many want a just God who punishes sinners, yet so seldom do we willingly seek God in [confession](#). We believe sinners should fear God like the demons, yet what we should be doing is offering all an example by our own repentance.



In the next post we will consider words from [St Silouan](#) as he too gives Adam a voice of lament for sinning against his Creator: [Adam Laments His Exile](#).

Adam Laments His Exile

ON [MARCH 13, 2016](#) BY [FR. TEDIN GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, UNCATEGORIZEDEDIT](#)



← Adam

In the previous blog, [The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise](#), we read the words of Archimandrite Aimilianos reflecting on what Adam might have thought and said to God when God questioned him as to why he was trying to hide from His Creator. In the meditation below, [St Silouan](#) puts in Adam's mouth words lamenting what he lost in being exiled from Paradise. Though the earth has beautiful landscapes, he cannot find joy in them knowing what exists in Paradise, yet which is no longer attainable for him.

"Adam wept:

'The desert cannot pleasure me;



nor the high mountains,



nor meadow nor forest,



nor the singing of birds.



I have no pleasure in any thing.

My soul sorrows with a great sorrow: I have grieved God. And were the Lord to set me down in paradise again, there, too, would I sorrow and weep – ‘O, why did I grieve my beloved God?’”

(St Silouan in [Remember Thy First Love](#) by Archimandrite Zacharias, p 200)



← Adam & Eve worship at the heavenly altar

Adam sees the magnificent beauty in God’s created world, and yet he agonizes over what he lost in being exiled from Paradise. The pleasures of this world are nothing compared to Paradise Adam tells us. The entire world was his – a vacation paradise. Yet, he finds nothing on earth comparable to the Paradise lost.

Great Lent is trying to help us believe Adam’s lament – what we humans have lost is far greater than anything we might experience on earth. We may be quite attached to this world, yet Great Lent calls us to yearn for something greater,

something we’ve never known. Can we feel Adam’s exile and believe there is something even more glorious awaiting us, if only we will let go of the things we value so highly on earth?

