



Sunday of the Last Judgement / Meatfare Sunday / New-martyrs and Confessors of Russia 25 January / 7 February

Resurrection Tropar, Tone 2: When Thou didst descend to death, O Life Immortal, Thou didst slay hell with the splendour of Thy Godhead! And when from the depths Thou didst raise the dead, all the powers of Heaven cried out: O Giver of Life, Christ our God, Glory to Thee!

Tropar to the New Martyrs & Confessors of Russia, Tone 4: O ye holy hierarchs, royal passion-bearers and pastors, monks and laymen, ye countless new martyrs and confessors, mean, women and children, flowers of the spiritual meadow of Russia, who blossomed forth wondrously in time of grievous persecutions, bearing good fruit for Christ in your endurance: entreat Him as the One Who planted you, that He deliver His people from godless and evil men, and that the Church of Russia be made steadfast through your blood and suffering unto the salvation of our souls.

Resurrection Kondak, Tone 2: Hell became afraid, O Almighty Saviour, seeing the miracle of Thy resurrection from the tomb! The dead arose! Creation, with Adam, beheld this and rejoiced with Thee! And the world, O My Saviour, praises Thee forever.

Kondak to the New Martyrs & Confessors of Russia, Tone 2: O ye new passion-bearers of Russia, who have with your confession finished the course of this earth, receiving boldness through your sufferings: beseech Christ Who strengthened you, that we also, whenever the hour of trial find us, may receive the gift of courage from God. For ye are a model for us that venerate your struggle, for neither tribulation, prison, nor death could separate you from the love of God.

Kondak to Meat-fare Sunday, Tone 1: When Thou, O God, shalt come to earth with glory, and all things tremble, and the river of fire floweth before the Judgement Seat and the books are opened, and the hidden things made public, then deliver me from the unquenchable fire and deem me worthy to stand at Thy right hand.



Epistle: First Letter of St. Paul To The Corinthians 8: 8 — 9: 2

8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. 9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? 11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? 12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Chapter 9: 1 Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

SHALL THE WEAK BROTHER PERISH, FOR WHOM CHRIST DIED?

If one of you sees something unedifying and so much as goes on to pass it on and put it into the heart of another brother, in doing so you not only harm yourself but you harm your brother by putting one more little bit of knavery into his heart. Even if that brother has his mind set on prayer or some other noble activity, and the first arrives and furnishes him with something to prate about, he not only impedes what he ought to be doing, but brings a temptation to him.

St. Dorotheos of Gaza. Discourses: On the Fear of God. B#45, pp. 114, 115.

Second Epistle I Corinthians 12: 7-11

The Gospel According To St. Matthew 25: 31-46

The Lord said: 31 When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory. 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was ahungered and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in; 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee ahungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. 41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 for I was ahungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: 43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee ahungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. 46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU GAVE ME FOOD

And in return for what do they receive such things? For the covering of a roof, for a garment, for bread, for cold water, for visiting, for going to prison. For indeed in every case it is what is needed, and sometimes not even that. For surely, the sick and one who is in bonds do not seek only for this, but the one to be freed, the other to be delivered from his infirmity. But He, being gracious, requires only what is within our power ...leaving to us to exert our generosity in doing more...For even if they had done ten thousand things, the munificence would be of grace, since in return for services so small and cheap, such a heaven, and a kingdom and such great honour should be given them.

St. John Chrysostom. Homily LXXIX on Matthew XXV, 2. B#54, p. 476.

The two past Sundays spoke to us of God's patience and limitless compassion, of His readiness to accept every sinner who returns to Him. On this third Sunday, we are powerfully reminded of a complementary truth: no one is so patient and so merciful as God, but even He does not forgive those who do not repent. The God of love is also a God of righteousness, and when Christ comes again in glory, He will come as our judge. 'Behold the goodness and severity of God' (Rom. 11:22). Such is the message of Lent to each of us: turn back while there is still time, repent before the end comes. In the words of the Great Canon: The end draws near, my soul, the end draws near; Yet thou dost not care or make ready. The times grows short, rise up: the judge is at the door. The days of our life pass swiftly, as a dream, as a flower. (Canticle Four, Tropar 2). This Sunday sets before us the 'eschatological' dimension of Lent: the Great fast is a preparation for the Second Coming of the Saviour, for the eternal Passover in the Age to Come. (This is a theme that will be taken up in the first three days of Holy Week.) Nor is the judgement merely in the future. Here and now, each day and each hour, in hardening our hearts towards others and in failing to respond to the opportunities we are given of helping them, we are already passing judgement upon ourselves.

Lenten Triodion

Second Gospel John 10: 9-16

Saints of the Week

Cheesefare Week during which all foods except meat may be eaten.

25 January / 7 February — St Gregory the Theologian - Born in Nazianzus of a Greek father (who later became a Christian and a bishop) and a Christian mother, he studied in Athens before his baptism with St Basil the Great and Julian the Apostate. He often foretold to Julian that he would be an apostate and a persecutor of the Church, and so it came to pass. Gregory was especially influenced by his mother, Nonna. He was baptised when he had completed his studies. St Basil consecrated him bishop of Sasima, and the Emperor Theodosius quickly called him to the vacant archiepiscopal throne of Constantinople. His works were manifold, the best-known being his theological writings, for which he received the title 'the Theologian'. He is particularly famed for the depth of his Sermons on the Holy Trinity. He also wrote against the heretic Macedonius, who taught wrongly of the Holy Spirit (that the Spirit was a creature of God), and against Apollinarius who taught that Christ did not have a human soul but that His divinity was in place of His soul. He also wrote against the Emperor Julian the Apostate, his sometime schoolfellow. In the year 381, when a quarrel broke out in the Council concerning his election as archbishop, he withdrew himself, declaring: 'Those who deprive us of the (archiepiscopal) throne cannot deprive us of God.' He then left Constantinople and went to Nazianzus, remaining there in retirement, prayer and the writing of instructive books until his death. And, although he was in weak health all his life, he lived to the age of seventy. His relics were later taken to Rome, and his head to the Cathedral of the Dormition in Moscow. He was, and remains, a great and wonderful light of the Orthodox Church, as much for the meekness and purity of his character as for the unsurpassable depth of his mind. He entered into rest in the Lord in the year 389. Our Holy Father Publius; Our Holy Father Mares; The Holy Martyr Felicitas and her seven sons;

St. Theneva (also known as St Dwyn) - British princess. When she became pregnant before marriage, her family threw her from a cliff. She survived the fall unharmed, and was soon met by an unmanned boat. She knew she had no home to go to, so got into the boat; it sailed her across the Firth of Forth to land at Culross where she was cared for by Saint Serf; he became foster-father of her son, Saint Kentigern.. Born British Isles. Died 7th century.

St. Eochod - Died 597. One of Saint Columba's (f.d. June 9) twelve companions, Saint Eochod was chosen by Columba to evangelize northern Britain. He is called the Apostle of the Picts of Galloway.

Tropar of St Eochod tone 6: The Picts of Galloway honoured thee as their Apostle,/ O righteous Hierarch Eochod,/ for at the behest of Father Columba/ thou didst open to them the Gospel of Salvation./ Wherefore, O Saint, cease not in thy pious labours,/ praying that our souls may be saved.

St. Theoritgitha, virgin, novice-mistress of Barking on the Thames.

Sunday of the Holy New Martyrs & Confessors of Russia (celebrated on the Sunday nearest to January 25 o.s.) — In any case, the world can and must wholeheartedly use for its edification and correction the present suffering by fire of the Russian people. The Russian people undoubtedly will come out of this fire holier, stronger and greater than it ever was before. No good blacksmith throws nails into the fire to be rid of them, he does it to make something better out of them. We think and believe that the Creator of the Russian people allowed this great people to experience this flame of suffering not to punish and kill it, but in order that by its terrible example other peoples may come to their senses and understand that the Russian people will be even more greatly glorified before heaven and earth. Do not cry, but be happy. A great harvest of souls has ripened in Russia. In these days the tortured Russian people fill Paradise more than any other Christian people on earth.

St. Nikolai (Velimirovic) of Ochrid

"Blessed is God! And in our time martyrs have sprung up and we have been vouchsafed to see people slain for Christ, people who have shed their blood which has watered the whole Church" (3rd Homily of St. John Chrysostom on 1 Chronicles)

We also in our times together with the golden-mouthed preacher can say the same of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, who now stand in the choir of the God-pleasers before the throne of the King of Glory and intercede on behalf of our people.

The congregation of the New Martyrs of Russia consists of representatives of all the professions and ranks of the Russian land - beginning from the time of the Tsar-Martyr down to the last homeless wanderer, the finest children of our Fatherland, who were fated to water the whole Russian Church with their holy blood.

The tortures which the holy passion-bearers endured were little different from the Christian martyrdoms of the first centuries, and the refined cruelty of the modern persecutors in no way yields to the cruelty of their predecessors.

Being incited by the devil — the first cause of all persecution against the Church in all ages, the new tormentors subjected their victims to the same kinds of sufferings which the Jews, pagans, and Moslems used in the first and following centuries of persecution.

To these God-pleasers can be ascribed the words of the apostle concerning the first martyrs of the Church of God in the Old Testament ... of them many were "stoned, sawn asunder, were slain with the sword" "not accepting deliverance: that they might obtain a better resurrection" (Heb 11:37, 35)

Tortures for Christ and death itself the new martyrs met fearlessly they rejoiced that in their sufferings they resembled their Redeemer.

Before their deaths many of them prayed for their tormentors, they blessed their murdered, they called them to repentance.

They valour irradiates the Russian Church with a new glory presenting to the world a countless congregation of crowned passion-bearers. And together with them the whole Universal Church is harvesting the fruits of their victories. The New Martyrs have united heaven with the earth in common joy, for both the Church militant together with the Church triumphant now rejoices over them.

The celebration of the glorification of the Holy New-Martyrs and Confessors of Russia took place abroad on October 19/November 1, 1981.

"Orthodox Life" 1/1987

26 January / 8 February — Fast Day - Our Holy Father Xenophon and our Mother Maria, and their sons John and Arcadius - They were rich and respected citizens of Constantinople. Xenophon and Maria lived godly lives, and made every effort to give their sons a Christian upbringing. When the boys were grown, their parents sent them to Beirut to study, but a storm capsized their ship. By God's providence, both John and Arcadius were somehow saved and thrown onto the shore by the waves; in two separate places, however, so that each thought the other had perished. Out of grief for each other, they became monks in two different monasteries. After two years of mourning, their parents travelled to Jerusalem to venerate the holy places. There, helped by the insight of a holy man, the brothers were first united with each other and then with their parents. Out of gratitude to God, Xenophon and Maria gave away all their goods to the poor and both embraced the monastic state. This touching story of these four holy souls demonstrates clearly how the Lord guides most wonderfully the destinies of those who believe in Him; how He looses on them trials and sorrows, that they may later, yet more greatly strengthened in their faith, experience the greater joy. They lived and died in the fifth century. Our Holy Father Simeon the Ancient; St David, King of Georgia;

St. Conan of Iona - Died 648 -A bishop of Ireland, pr possibly from Scotland. It is believed that Conan taught St. Fiacre before going to the Isle of Man, where he served as a missionary and was consecrated bishop;

St. Theofrid - Died c. 690. Saint Theofrid was a monk of Luxeuil who became abbot of Corbie in 622 and a regional bishop

27 January / 9 February - SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, THE GOLDEN TRUMPET OF ORTHODOXY - The memory of this illuminary of the Church is celebrated on November 13 and January 30 but, on this date, the Church celebrates the translation of his honourable relics from the village of Comana, where he died in exile, to Constantinople, where earlier he had governed the Church. Thirty years after his death, Patriarch Proculus delivered a homily in memory of his spiritual father and teacher. He so enflamed the love of the people and Emperor Theodosius the Younger toward this great saint that all of them desired that Chrysostom's relics be translated to Constantinople. It was said that the sarcophagus, containing the relics of St. John Chrysostom, did not allow itself to be moved from its resting place until the emperor wrote a letter to Chrysostom begging him for forgiveness (for Theodosius' mother, Eudoxia, was the culprit responsible for the banishment of this saint) and appealing to him to come to Constantinople, his former residence. When this letter of repentance was placed on the sarcophagus, its weight became extremely light. At the time of the translation of his relics, many who were ill and who touched the sarcophagus were healed. When the relics arrived in the capital, then the emperor in the name of his mother as though she herself was speaking over the relics, again, prayed to the saint for forgiveness. "While I lived in this transient life, I did you malice and, now, when you live the immortal life, be beneficial to my soul. My glory passed away and it helped nothing. Help me, father; in your glory, help me before I am condemned at the Judgment of Christ!" When the saint was brought into the Church of the Twelve Apostles and placed on the patriarchal throne, the masses of people heard the words from St. Chrysostom's mouth saying: "Peace be to you all." The translation of the relics of St. John Chrysostom was accomplished in the year 438 A.D.

28 January / 10 February — Our Holy Father Ephraim the Syrian - Born in Syria of poor parents in the reign of the Emperor Constantine the Great, his early youth was spent somewhat tempestuously, but he suddenly underwent a spiritual crisis and began to burn with love for the Lord Jesus. He was a disciple of St James of Nisibis (Jan. 13th). By the great grace of God, wisdom flowed from his tongue like a stream of honey and from his eyes tears flowed unceasingly. Loving work like a bee, Ephraim was constantly either writing books or teaching the monks in the monastery or the people in the city of Edessa, or was giving himself to prayer and pondering. His books are numerous; his prayers are beautiful. The best-known of the latter is the prayer in the Great Fast: 'O Lord and Master of my life ... ' When they wished to take him by force and make him bishop, he feigned madness and began to run through the city of Edessa, trailing his garments along behind him. Seeing him mad, they left him in peace. He was a contemporary and friend of St Basil the Great. St Ephraim was especially the apostle of repentance. Even today his writings soften many hearts, strengthen them against sin and turn them back to Christ. He entered into rest at a great age in 373. Our Holy Father Isaac the Syrian; Our Holy Father Palladius; Our Holy Father Ephraim of the Kiev Caves;

St. Cannera of Inis Cathaig, virgin - (also known as Cainer, Conaire, Kinnera) Died c. 530. Little is known of Saint Cannera except that which is recorded in the story of Saint Senan, who ruled an abbey on the Shannon River, which ministered to the dying- -but only men. Cannera was an anchorite from Bantry in southern Ireland. When she knew she was dying, she travelled to Senan's abbey without rest and walked upon the water to cross the river because no one would take her to the place forbidden to women. Upon her arrival, the abbot was adamant that no woman could enter his monastic enclosure. Arguing that Christ died for women, too, she convinced the abbot to give her last rites on the island and to bury her at its furthest edge. Against his argument that the waves would wash away her grave, she answered that she would leave that to God. Cannera told the abbot of a vision she had in her Bantry cell of the island and its holiness. Her appearance signalled a change in the attitude of the monks toward women, whose contamination they feared. Cannera charges Senan with this unchristian prejudice. She reminded him that "Christ is no worse than yourself." If He could find comfort in the presence of women, so should the monks. The monks believed that the holier a man, the more he distances himself from Eve. They saw their celibacy as a taboo against women, rather than a sacrifice of love to Christ. They also failed to recognize that Jesus broke the conventions of His time. Again, Cannera said, "Christ came to redeem women no less than to redeem men," and "women gave service and tended to Christ and His Apostles," so why should the monks so distance themselves? Other double (men and women) monasteries already existed in Ireland for Saint Patrick (March 17) and his followers did not reject the fellowship and ministry of women. Probably because Saint Cannera walked across the water, sailors honor their patron by saluting her resting place on Scatterry Island (Inis Chathaigh). They believed that pebbles from her island protected the bearer from shipwreck. A 16th-century Gaelic poem about Cannera prays, "Bless my good ship, protecting power of grace. . . ." St. Anthimus of Brantome, abbot;

St. Glastian of Kinglassie - (also known as Glastian of MacGlastian) Born in County Fife, Scotland; died at Kinglassie (Kinglace), Scotland, in 830. As bishop of Fife, Saint Glastian mediated in the bloody civil war between the Picts and the Scots. When the Picts were subjugated, Glastian did much to alleviate their lot. He is the patron saint of Kinglassie in Fife, and venerated in Kyntire,

29 January / 11 February —The Hieromartyr Ignatius - The chief feast of St Ignatius is in winter, on December 20th. Today we celebrate the translation of his relics from Rome, where he suffered martyrdom, to Antioch, where he had been archbishop. When St Ignatius was summoned to Rome to answer for his faith before the Emperor Trajan (98 - 117) a number of citizens from Antioch accompanied him on this long journey, prompted by their great love for their chief pastor. The saint of God, in no wise willing to deny the faith of Christ and scorning all the flattery and promises of the Emperor, was condemned to death and thrown into the Great Circus before the wild beasts. They tore him to pieces and he gave his soul to God. Then his companions collected his bare bones, took them to Antioch and buried them. When the Persians occupied Antioch in the sixth century, the relics of St Ignatius were again taken from Antioch to Rome; The Holy Martyrs Romanus, James, Philotheus, Hyperechius, Abibus, Julian and Paregorius; Our Holy Father Laurence of the Kiev Caves; New Martyr Demetrius of Chios; St. Andrew (Rublev) of Russia, iconographer;

St. Flora (Blath) of Kildare – virgin. Died 523. Saint Blath was the lay-sister who served as cook at Saint Brigid's convent in Kildare. She earned a reputation for heroic sanctity, and of her cooking it is said that bread and bacon at Brigid's table were better than a banquet elsewhere; **St. Dallan Forgaill the Blind** - (6th.cent.) A kinsman of St. Edan of Ferns, born in Connaught and a great scholar who, through his application to study, became blind. He wrote a poem in honour of St. Columba, called Ambra Choluim Kille which was only published after St. Columba's death. It is said that on its publication Dallan's sight was restored to him. St. Dallan was murdered at Triscoel by pirates (AD 598) and his head thrown into the sea. It was recovered and miraculously reunited to his body.

30 January / 12 February — The Three Great Hierarchs: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John

Chrysostom - Each has his personal feast day in the month of January; Basil on the 1st, Gregory on the 25th and Chrysostom on the 27th. The common feast we celebrate today was instituted in the 11th century, in the time of the Emperor Alexius Comnenus. At one time there was a quarrel among the people about who was the greatest of the three. Some gave Basil the pre-eminence for his purity and courage; others Gregory for the unfathomable depth and height of his theological mind; others still Chrysostom for the wonderful beauty of his speech and the clarity of his presentation of the Faith. So the first were called Basilians, the second Gregorians and the third Johannites. But, by the providence of God, this dispute was resolved to the benefit of the Church and the yet greater glory of the three saints. The Bishop of Euchaita, John (June 14th), had a vision in his sleep, in which each of these saints appeared to him in great glory and indescribable beauty, and then all three together. They then said to him: 'We are one in God, as you see, and there is no dispute among us . . . neither is there among us a first or a second.' The saints also advised Bishop John to compile a common feast for them and to set aside for them a day of common commemoration. The quarrel was settled as indicated by the wonderful vision; January 30th being set aside for the common commemoration of the three hierarchs. The Hieromartyr Hippolytus, Bishop of Rome; The Holy Martyr Theophilus the New; St Peter, King of Bulgaria.

31 January / 13 February — The Holy Unmercenaries and Wonderworkers Cyrus and John

- These compassionate and wonderful saints were not blood-brothers, but were brothers in spirit. Cyrus lived at first in Alexandria, and working as a doctor, healed people by the power of Christ together with medicine for the body. Discovering that illness came upon people mainly through sin, he always told them to cleanse their souls from sin by repentance and prayer, that they might be restored and strengthened in body. When Diocletian began his persecution of Christians, Cyrus went off to Arabia, where he received the monastic habit. But, as he had become known in Alexandria, so he became known also in Arabia, and people went to him for help. John, hearing of him and being at that time a Roman officer in Edessa, came to Arabia to see Cyrus. On seeing each other, they loved each other as brothers and remained together to live in asceticism. At that time, a Christian woman called Athanasia was tortured together with her three daughters in the town of Canopus. Cyrus and John heard of this, and came to Canopus to encourage the mother and daughters not to fall back from the Faith. And, grateful indeed for the counsel of these saints, Athanasia endured all the tortures and, with her daughters, was slain for Christ. The daughters were: Theoctista, aged 15, Theodota aged 13 and Eudocia aged 11. Then the torturers took Cyrus and John and, after torture and imprisonment, slew them with the sword in the year 311. These holy martyrs performed innumerable miracles, both during their lives and after their death. Their relics were translated to Rome in the time of the Emperor Arcadius. They are invoked for help especially for the sleepless and for the blessing of water and food. The Holy Martyr Tryphaena; Our Holy Father Nikita of the Kiev Caves; in Ireland at Ferns, St. Maidoc, bishop & St. Aidan, bishop; at Coldingham, St. Adamnan, priest.

Some Reflections on Fasting for Great Lent

By Dr. John L. Boojamra

FASTING — OR MORE CORRECTLY, the practice of abstinence for certain days and certain periods of the year — has long caused difficulty in the minds of many Orthodox Christians in North America. Every year, as the Easter Lent approaches, Orthodox Christians begin to wonder what, if anything, to do in preparation for the feast. In general, I think it is safe to say that the practice and idea of fasting is largely ignored in this regard. Many people generally dismiss fasting with the rather simple and naive belief that "This is the twentieth century; fasting is an arcane practice that was made for the past and simpler days," or worse, they dismiss fasting because "fasting is a man made discipline" - as if being "man made" by definition makes something worthless.

Nonetheless, in spite its neglect by most people, we must take the practice of fasting seriously, if for no other reason than the fact that other people, throughout Christian history, have taken it seriously. It is valuable here to consider not so much "how" we must fast as "why" we must fast. A deeper understanding of the significance of this practice in Christianity will help us in determine our own fasting practices.

We must first admit that fasting has a firm foundation in the Scriptures and Tradition of the Church, as well as in the practice of the Jewish community which gave birth to the Church. We know, for instance, that Jesus fasted, that the disciples of John the Baptist fasted, and that Jesus said that prayer and fasting were necessary for casting out certain evils. We know also that the early Church picked up its Wednesday and Friday abstinence from the Jewish Monday and Thursday weekly fast.

Fasting and this World

TO THIS EMPHASIS we must add a certain otherworldly emphasis in Jesus' teaching. Perhaps the most realistic treatment of this is in Matthew (6:19-21): Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay 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 will your heart be.

In order to understand the significance of fasting in Christianity, we must look at it in the context of the Christian view of the world. In spite of the great love which Jesus and His Church have demonstrated for the world and for life in it, there is in Christianity a reservation about the world and human life as it is now. The Church calls this a "fallen world," a world which in all its aspects is in some way separated voluntarily from the love and life of God, its Creator. How does this perspective reflect on the practice of fasting? As it turns out, fasting cannot be separated from this realistic appraisal of the world, and from the struggle to find the Kingdom of God. There is something about fasting, something about refusing to make a total investment in the world as it is, that is associated with the struggle to build the Kingdom of God; for insofar as we are occupied with the delusions of this fallen world, we are impeded in our struggle to find the Kingdom. Fasting, therefore, must be seen as a means of turning away from the fallenness of the world so that we can discover another, better world - i.e. the Kingdom. "Seek first the kingdom of God and all else will be added" we are told. As finding the Kingdom of God is a matter of priority, the importance of fasting as a means of helping ourselves in this endeavor cannot be overstated.

Before discussing what fasting is, perhaps it would be beneficial to say a few words about what it is not. This is a valuable approach since there is a great deal of misunderstanding regarding the nature and function of fasting, both as an idea and as a practice.

God, we must admit first, is not simple-minded. He has no need for our fasting. Our efforts do not affect Him in any way. We cannot buy His love or His grace. This immediately takes fasting out of any legalistic framework and puts it on the level of personal spiritual growth and struggle. For instance, because one person fasts more strictly than another does not mean that God loves the first more or gives him more grace. It is as unimaginable that you could get more grace from a greater effort as getting more grace from a larger portion of the Eucharist. Yet, many people think of grace in strictly legalistic terms. God's love is always given freely and the degree of participation in that love is conditioned by our ability to receive it and be changed by it. This is the Orthodox idea of cooperation or synergy—we must open ourselves to the love and strength that God offers freely. Fasting is a way of achieving this openness.

Another view of fasting, which, like the previous one contains an element of distortion, is that which sees it as a means of voluntary suffering, a way of atoning for sins. Indeed, there may very well be an element of this in fasting, but this is not the most important aspect of fasting. If fasting was to be seen primarily as a means of atonement, this would bring the practice to the level of individual pathology. Again, we cannot pay God back for our sins, and fasting as a means of atoning for sins must be seen in the light of trying to direct our spiritual lives in a more positive direction.

A third view of fasting is common among both Christians and non-Christians. This view mistakenly sees fasting in the history of the Church as an expression of a pathological morbidity with regard to the world, which is based on a docetic view—i.e. the idea that the world, the body, sex, and all created and material things are essentially evil, whereas all spiritual things are good. In this context, fasting becomes an effort to disconnect the self from any connection with matter—i.e. from food, sex, bodily functions, etc. There has indeed been a tendency towards this view on a number of occasions throughout Christian history, but whenever it has expressed itself, it has consistently been condemned by the Church. The Church has always affirmed that the created world is essentially good, though suffering from profound distortion and misdirection.

Fasting as Preparation

WHAT FASTING IS will necessarily involve us in a discussion of the nature of man and the nature of the world. Fasting is, as the Church uses it, a preparation. Every time we encounter a fast it is prior to a feast. We all know the fast before the Eucharist as preparation for the Eucharist and the fast before Pascha as preparation for the great feast. Nothing in life just happens; that is obvious. All major events require a variety of preparations. The Church recognizes the fact that part of getting somewhere is the journey, and just as important as the journey is the anticipation. This is a basic human psychological quality. Perhaps children understand this expectation and anticipation best of all. Full participation demands this kind of expectation and preparation. In this context, the nature of Orthodox preparations is no mystery.

The Church has taught that man is a unity - he is not a being which has a body and which has a soul; rather, he is a body and he is a soul. The Christian vision is that of a total and unified personality—body and soul. Hence, the Church calls on the entire being to share in the fast and the feast. As a season changes in Church, as the colors change, the music changes, the services get longer, the icon changes, and so forth. How does our body share in this except through fasting, except through imitating a change in its normal routine? Now this description keeps the nature and degree of fasting open, and this "openness" is important in our personal spiritual direction. It can involve food, entertainment, sex - in fact, any aspect of our daily and routine lives. It is clear that we Orthodox Christians are not spiritualists or intellectualists; we are Christian "materialists." The Church's emphasis on fasting is precisely a reflection of this materialism.

Our Lord says, "lay not up treasures on earth," and fasting is in effect the reminder that our heart cannot be invested like our money in the world. We all know the feeling we have for something when we have made an investment in it. People always try to protect their investment. This is natural. That is what our Lord meant! Here we find a rejection of the world, not in an absolute sense, but in a relative sense. The world in itself is valuable only when it is seen in its relationship to God. Since the world is in effect separated from God, freely, then it cannot be fully normal, and the Church says limit your participation in the life of the world—not because it is evil, but because it in itself is limited.

Food is the most obvious example. Everyone agrees that eating, after breathing, is the most necessary and normal activity of our life. It is in this area which is regarded in a worldly sense as normal that the Church says "Stop! Think! Question everything which the world calls normal and necessary, because the world itself is 'abnormal' - that is, it is abnormal as it now exists, separated from God's love." But fasting is only a beginning, and this questioning must be our approach to all the values that the world regards as necessary and even virtuous—victory, self defense, getting ahead, accumulating wealth and property, competition, popularity, self-aggrandizement, etc. All of these are to be followed with a question mark.

Fasting and a Clear Image of the World

MIND YOU, this is not a rejection of the world; it is a questioning of those values which the world as it now exists -and human societies which inhabit it - hold as valuable. Insofar as the world is treated as normal - because this is in fact the only world we know - whereas in fact it is not normal or truly worldly in the Christian sense, then it is a deception and a lie, and we must recognize it for what it is. In a real sense, the Church, in asking her people to fast, is declaring a moratorium on the world. A moratorium, whether in the context of war or in the context of spiritual discipline, means the same thing - it means "time out." Those of us who remember the war in Vietnam remember the various moratoria that were declared to stop the fighting. Before a final, lasting moratorium was called, the war had dragged on for almost ten years on an incredibly brutal level, characterized by My Lai; in the meantime, everyone here went about his business, and apart from inflation, no one's life was really affected - we bought our food and celebrated all those little occasions; there was no shortage of butter or meat or autos; and yet, the very normalcy of life here at home, at the same time that wholesale death swept Southeast Asia, was a deception - a deception that was recognized only after a final "time out" was declared, allowing us to come out of the delusional mindset that kept us from questioning the war's necessity. In the same way, calling moratorium or "time out" on our "normal" worldly routines allows us to recognize the deception inherent in our preoccupation with this fallen world, and allows us to free ourselves from the delusional mindset that keeps us fettered to its routines.

On a cosmic level, the fast is this effort to put the world and life in the world in its proper perspective. To accept the present state of the world as normal is a deception! There is no hate for the world in this, but there is a recognition that something has happened to the "worldliness" which God created and declared "good."

I think we must then see fasting never as a rejection of food or the world, but as a search for true worldliness - a search which must necessarily pass through the stage of preferring something else to the world. "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all else will be given to you." In the same way, we fast from all food before liturgy so that we might receive the one true food in the Eucharist. It is in the Eucharist that we can get a glimpse of the true nature of food. There is no judgment on food as such. The same is true of the world. As food completed itself in the Eucharist, so the entire created world completes itself in the Kingdom of God.

The world is ours; it belongs to us and, needless to say, we were not meant to be slaves to its pleasures, its categories, and its values. Fasting, then, is a declaration of independence from the world and a proclamation of victory over its limitations and evil. "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). This does not mean that we cannot take pleasure in the world.

It is a recognition that the values of the world are limited and often perverted. Here we are freed, liberated in a real sense, not only from sin but from the fears that characterize life - free to act without fear of criticism, as God wants us to act in our everyday life in politics, business, school, family, and social affairs. Nothing in human society, the first declares, is sacred in itself and can demand our loyalty - no form of government, regime, ideology, or community. We are freed to conform to the patterns of the Kingdom of God here and now— free to practice sacrifice, love, charity, justice, and faith. To those for whom the world is the ultimate reality and the ultimate gain, it is essential to buy the love of the world, and the world will only love those who accept its values. Our Lord assures us that the world will hate us; it has to, because the Christian is the on-going judgment on an on-going corruption that infects human relations and human societies.

For us Christians who live in the world, there a choice: we can consume the world or allow the world to consume us. The first is the only creative approach. The second is psychological and personal disintegration. The fast is what gives us the opportunity to make the better choice.

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