

Arise, my soul, and review your deeds which have proceeded from you. Scrutinize them closely, and shed the rain of your tears, declaring openly to Christ your thoughts and deeds, so you may be justified. There has never been a sin in the world, O Saviour, no deed of iniquity that I have not committed, sinning in thought, word, and intention; in plan, determination, and action, as no one else has done ... I have erred, O Saviour; have mercy upon me, as I cry to You. Against you only have I sinned and done evil. Have mercy on me and save me.

Saint Andrew of Crete



19 February is Judgment Sunday

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 8:8-13; 9:1-2

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

When Thou didst descend unto death, O Life Immortal, then didst Thou slay Hades with the lightning of Thy Divinity. And when Thou didst also raise the dead out of the nethermost depths, all the powers in the Heavens cried out: O Life-giver, Christ our God, glory be to Thee.

Seasonal Kontakion:

O God, when You come upon the earth in glory, the whole world will tremble. A river of fire will bring all before Your Judgment Seat and the books will be opened, and everything in secret will become public. At that time, deliver me from the fire which never dies, and enable me to stand by Your right hand, O Judge most just.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 20 February: 3 John 1:1-15; Luke 19:29-40; 22:7-39
Leo, Bp. of Catania; Agathus of Rome

Tuesday, 21 February: Jude 1:1-10; Luke 22:39-42, 45-71; 23:1
Timothy the Righteous; John, Pat. of Constantinople

Wednesday, 22 February: Joel 3:12-21; Joel 2:12-26
Uncovering of Relics at Eugenius; Righteous Thalassius & Baradatus

Thursday, 23 February: Jude 1:11-25; Luke 23:1-31, 33, 44-56
Hieromartyr Polycarp; Proterius, Abp. of Alexandria

Friday, 24 February: Luke 7:17-30; 2 Corinthians 4:6-15; Matthew 11:2-15
1st & 2nd Finding of the Head of the Forerunner

Saturday, 25 February: Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2; Matthew 6:1-13
Tarasius, Pat. of Constantinople; Martyrs Reginus & Lebadheus



Evangelion

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The Final Judgment

Today, as we draw closer to Great Lent, we are reminded of the awesome reality of the coming judgment, in which Jesus Christ comes in glory, together with all His angels. And He comes for the final judgment. Judgment is not only something that will happen at the end of time, for we are being judged at each moment of our lives. But there is a certain finality to the judgment that we hear of today, for it comes at the end of history and has a definitive character.

This judgment has a frightening quality, and we should not domesticate it too easily. It reminds us that life is serious and that what we do has consequences. But what we are judged on is not simply a list of actions that we may or may not have done, or rules that we may or may not have kept. Rather, the judgment involved here is directly concerned with our relationship with God and with one another. We will be judged on whether or not we recognised Jesus Christ in our neighbours, and especially in those in need.



Saint John Chrysostom notes that the rewards that await the blessed are those that the Father has prepared for them, while the curses that await the damned are not prepared for them by God, but rather by their own actions. God longs for us to be among the blessed, which is why He constantly reaches out to us, seeking to draw us to Himself. And what we will be judged on – or rather, what we judge ourselves on, for it is our own actions that judge us – is whether we respond to this love by recognising Him in those around us.

How easy are the things the Savior requires at our hands! He will not say on the Day of Judgment: 'I was in prison, and you delivered me. I was sick, and you healed me'; but only this: that you visited me, that you came to me.

Saint John Chrysostom

Death, Dying, and Eternal Life

A Series on the Orthodox Understanding of the Life of the Age to Come

We have seen that death is not part of God's original intention, but comes through the fall. Jesus Christ has conquered death through His cross and resurrection, and we enter into His victory over death through our baptism. The reality is that we still have to die, but, by dying as a human being, Jesus Christ has shown us how to die and He has made it possible for death to become not a curse, but a gateway to life. In the words of Saint Maximus the Confessor, Jesus Christ has "changed the use of death." And He has given us the opportunity in this life to prepare ourselves for death.



The Remembrance of Death

Many of the Fathers of the Church teach us to "keep death daily before our eyes." Saint Athanasius writes:

Recall your exodus every hour; keep death before your eyes on a daily basis. Remember before whom you must appear.

This may sound rather gruesome to us, making us think that we should live constantly in fear of God's judgment. This is also sometimes taken to suggest that our earthly life does not matter and that it is only the hereafter that counts. But this is a distortion of the truth – God clearly does care about our earthly life, and He does not want us to live in fear. But it is very easy to

get so caught up in superficial things that we forget what our life is really about.

The practice of remembering that we will die is really a way of bringing us back to reality, and reminding us of the ultimate things in life. And it is, ironically, a way of pointing us to the importance of this life, so that we use the time that we are given in it well.

Dying to Ourselves

The whole of our life is a preparation for death, because it is in the whole of our life that we learn to die to ourselves. Jesus teaches us how to die by His total surrender to the will of the Father and the way He gave Himself up for others. He did not grasp at life, but offered Himself for the life of all. And He teaches us to do the same when He says:

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16:25)

This dying to ourselves is usually the work of a lifetime and occurs in the nitty-gritty details of our lives and our relationships. The sin that has entered the world as a result of the fall makes us want to grasp things and people, propping up our own egos and using others for our own designs. But the Gospel offers us another way, which is the way of finding ourselves in true service of others. And it is the ongoing practice of letting go of the desires of our false selves and discovering who we truly are in God that will prepare us for the final surrender of death.

Human life is but of brief duration. 'All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God shall stand forever'. Let us hold fast to the commandment that abides, and despise the unreality that passes away."

Saint Basil the Great

Fasting from Sin

Today, as Great Lent draws near, we keep what is known as Meatfare Sunday: Today is the last day on which we eat meat products and in the coming week we begin a period of limited fasting as we prepare for Lent. This coming week is given to us to ease us into the fast and to prepare us for it.

Fasting is a serious business, and we called to fast as we are able and depending on our circumstances and the advice of our spiritual father. However, the texts of the Church remind us that fasting from food is not the most crucial aspect of the fast. The purpose of fasting to open us to spiritual transformation:

In vain do you rejoice in not eating, O soul! For you abstain from food, but from passions you are not purified. If you have no desire for improvement, you will be despised as a lie in the eyes of God, you will be likened to evil demons who never eat! If you persevere in sin, you will perform a useless fast; therefore, remain in constant striving so as to stand before the Crucified Saviour, or rather, to be crucified with the One who was crucified for your sake. (First hymn of the aposticha of the Praises, Matins of Cheesefare Wednesday)



The liturgical texts of the Church are well aware of the dangers of fasting, and they warn us against the dangers of pride, of judging others, and of self-sufficiency. Fasting is not simply fasting from food, but is also refraining from criticising others, slandering others, gossiping, and pride.

Let us observe a fast acceptable and pleasing to the Lord. True fasting is to put away all evil, to control the tongue, to forbear from anger, to abstain from lust, slander, falsehood, and perjury. If we renounce these things, then is our fasting true and acceptable to God. (First hymn of the aposticha, Vespers of Clean Monday)

Physical fasting is there to help us to enter more deeply into our own hearts – to recognise who we truly are when our comfort zones are threatened, to recognise our own need for God, and to allow God gradually break open our hardened hearts so that we may be able to turn to Him in genuine repentance.

When a trial comes upon you unexpectedly, do not blame the person through whom it came but try to discover the reason why it came, and then you will find a way of dealing with it. For whether through this person or through someone else you had in any case to drink the wormwood of God's judgments.

Saint Maximus the Confessor