

Christ prayed for those that crucified Him: 'Father, count not this sin against them; they know not what they do.' Archdeacon Stephen prayed for those who stoned him so that the Lord would not judge this sin against them. And so we, if we wish to retain grace, must pray for our enemies. If you do not find pity on a sinner who will suffer in flames, then you do not carry the grace of the Holy Spirit, but rather an evil spirit; and while you yet live, you must free yourself from his clutches through repentance.

Saint Silouan the Athonite



26 February is Forgiveness Sunday

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:9-20

Epistle: Romans 13:11-14; 14:1-4

Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Let the Heavens rejoice; let earthly things be glad; for the Lord hath wrought might with His arm, He hath trampled upon death by death. The first-born of the dead hath He become. From the belly of Hades hath He delivered us, and hath granted great mercy to the world.

Seasonal Kontakion:

O Master, Prudence, Guide of Wisdom, Instruction to the foolish and Defender of the poor, strengthen my heart and grant it discernment. Give me words, Word of the Father, for behold, I shall not keep my lips from crying out to You, "O Merciful One, have mercy on me who has fallen."

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 27 February: Isaiah 1:1-20; Genesis 1:1-13; Proverbs 1:1-20
Procopius the Confessor

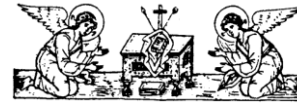
Tuesday, 28 February: Isaiah 1:19-2:3; Genesis 1:14-23; Proverbs 1:20-33
Righteous John Cassian the Confessor; Basil the Confessor

Wednesday, 1 March: Isaiah 2:3-11; Genesis 1:24-2:3; Proverbs 2:1-22
Martyr Eudocia; Andonina the New Martyr

Thursday, 2 March: Isaiah 2:11-21; Genesis 2:4-19; Proverbs 3:1-18
Martyr Hesychius; Nicholas Planas

Friday, 3 March: Isaiah 3:1-14; Genesis 2:20-3:20; Proverbs 3:19-34
Martyrs Eutropius, Cleonicus & Basiliscus; Theodoretos the Holy Martyr of Antioch

Saturday, 4 March: 2 Timothy 2:1-10; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-5
Commemoration of the Miracle of Kollyva wrought by Saint Theodore the Tyro; Gerasimus of the Jordan; Martyrs Paul & Julianna



Evangelion

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26 February 2017

Forgiveness Sunday

Today, on the eve of Great Lent, we find an interesting juxtaposition of fasting and forgiveness. Jesus gives us instructions on fasting, admonishing us to focus on our inner life rather than on outward displays of piety, warning us of the dangers of riches, and pointing to the need to guard our hearts, for "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Yet these remarks are prefaced by His teaching on the importance of forgiveness, and we are told that our forgiveness by the Father depends on our willingness to forgive others.

Lent is a time for repentance and for returning to God. In today's liturgical texts we hear of Adam's expulsion from Paradise, which reflects our own alienation from God. Like Adam, we are called to return to the Father, and Jesus Christ provides us with the way for doing so. We are called to identify ourselves with Adam in realizing and seeking to overcome our separation from God.

However, this journey back to God is not simply an individual affair. We are not saved as isolated individuals, but as members of Christ's Body. As Saint Anthony the Great tells us, "Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ."

This is why the Church calls us to forgiveness at the very beginning of Great Lent. We start this journey back to God by being reconciled with our brothers and sisters, for as the Apostle John tells us, "If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."



A soldier asked Abba Mina if God accepted repentance. After the old man had taught him many things he said, 'Tell me, my dear, if your cloak is torn, do you throw it away?' He replied, 'No, I mend it and use it again.' The old man said to him, 'If you are so careful about your cloak, will not God be equally careful about His creature?'

From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Church Services during Lent

If one looks at the calendar of most Orthodox parishes, one soon sees that Great Lent is a very special time in the Christian year. This is a time when the Church encourages us to make a greater spiritual effort. Let us look briefly at some of these Lenten services.



Forgiveness Vespers

This service this afternoon marks the real beginning of Lent. It begins joyfully, but with the evening Prokeimenon the tone changes: "Turn not away Thy face from Thy servant for I am afflicted! Hear me speedily. Attend to my soul and deliver it." After this is sung five times, the bright vestments are set aside, the choir responds in a different "key," and the Prayer of St Ephrem is said, accompanied by prostrations. The service ends with all present asking forgiveness of one another.

Great Compline

On Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays Great Compline is often prayed in the evening. Ordinary Compline is a fairly short service that forms part of the Church's daily cycle of prayers. However, in Lent it is replaced by Great Compline which is a fairly long service of psalms and hymns that teach us the real meaning of this season.

The Canon of St Andrew of Crete

On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings of the first week of Lent, the Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete is chanted, together with Great Compline, with a different section being read each evening. The Canon is a long hymn that was written in the seventh century and that focuses on repentance. It takes the form of a dialogue between a penitent and his own soul. It offers a richly biblical meditation on the theme of repentance and forgiveness, providing many examples from the Scriptures which we are called to identify with as we repeat: "Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me."

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

We do not normally celebrate the Liturgy during the week in Lent. However, on Wednesdays and Fridays there may be a Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. This is not a Eucharistic Liturgy in the full sense, but a Liturgy in which the priest distributes Holy Communion from the Gifts that have been consecrated at a previous Liturgy. The service for this Liturgy is combined with Vespers and so should strictly speaking be held in the evening although it is often anticipated in the morning.

The Akathist to the Holy Theotokos

This is a profound devotional poem of praise to the Holy Mother of God that was composed by St Romanus the Melodist in the sixth century. It is usually recited or sung on Friday afternoons or evenings during Lent. It is divided into four parts, with each of these parts being used for each of the first four Fridays of Lent. They are then all repeated on the fifth Friday.

The Liturgy of St Basil the Great

On Sundays during Lent the Liturgy of St Basil the Great is used. This is somewhat longer than the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom that is used for most of the rest of the year, although it is really only the priest's prayers that are noticeably different.

Abba Moses asked Abba Silvanus, "Can a man lay a new foundation every day?" The old man said, "If he works hard he can lay a new foundation at every moment."

From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers

Our Expulsion from Paradise

Today is not only known as Forgiveness Sunday, but its other liturgical name is "The casting out of Adam from Paradise." On the eve of Great Lent, the Church calls us to identify with Adam and Eve, whose sin caused them to be cast out of Paradise.

Like Adam and Eve, we are in a state of exile. Like them, we were created in God's Image and Likeness, yet that Image in us has become corrupted through our enslavement to sin. We have lost the freedom of our original creation, and are no longer able to act as we would like to do.

Yet we also know that Jesus Christ has opened up the way for us to return to Paradise, to our true home and to the condition that God intended for us. Lent, and the way of repentance that it represents, is the gateway through which we can return to God. It is the way in which we can work together with God's grace to regain the freedom and the dignity for which we were created.



Lent looks towards the great events of Pascha in which Jesus Christ as the Second Adam took all of our human reality on Himself. In His crucifixion He conquered the power of death, and in descending to the dead He went in search of Adam and Eve, raising them (and us) up with Him in His glorious Resurrection and giving us the power to live transformed lives.

As we begin this period of repentance we are called to identify ourselves with Adam, for Adam represents all of humanity that longs for liberation in Christ, the New Adam.

Adam was cast out of Paradise through eating from the tree. Seated before the gates he wept, lamenting with a pitiful voice and saying: 'Woe is me, what have I suffered in my misery! I transgressed one commandment of the Master, and now I am deprived of every blessing. O most holy Paradise, planted for my sake and shut because of Eve, pray to Him that made thee and fashioned me, that once more I may take pleasure in thy flowers.' Then the Saviour said to him: 'I desire not the loss of the creature that I fashioned, but that he should be saved and come to knowledge of the truth; and when he comes to me I will not cast him out.' (From Vespers of Forgiveness Sunday)