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Jan 20. Feb 2 – St Euthemius the Great.

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Dear in Christ Brethren:

As promised, I am attempting to write to you a second letter in the month. I will usually be concentrating on scripture commentary – THE SCRIPTURES YOU SHOULD BE READING! Use your calendar, or sometimes, I will provide the reading references here, such as I will do in this letter. Please READ THE FOOTNOTES. They are there for a reason. Sometimes they might seem simple and obvious to you, but is cannot be a waste of time to read more scripture!

Cheesefare Monday Feb 7/20 2012 3Jn .1-14 Luke 19.29-40; 22.7-39

The last week before Great Lent starts. We can eat anything on any day except meat.

3 John 1:1-15

I love St John's first epistle so much that I would rank it in my top 5 epistles. His other 2 epistles are not as well known, but they do contain some gems. His incredible love comes through in all of them. He was one half of "Boanerges" – the "sons of thunder"¹, and the Lord so named him because he was young, brash, and prone to make snap judgments, such as when after some people were rude, he and his brother James asked the lord: "... wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" (Luke 9:54). He surely changed a great deal under the influence of the grace of God. We can too. We will too.

The main point of this selection is the Evangelist's joyful, and DOGMATIC statement: **"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."** (3John 1:4). Life is all about truth, because, as John said elsewhere: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24). Our lives must be about seeking truth – we do this in the way we live, how we think, our priorities. Everything is important. There is not time when it is "okay" to not be "in the truth". We must "let our yea be yea, and our nay be nay" (Mat 5:37). I taught my children that when they lied they were acting like a demon, because demons lie. We lie more in the way we act than in the things we say. Always look carefully at the inner movements of your heart. This is an acquired skill – God will give you this ability if you commit yourself to the truth.

My ardent prayer for you is that you walk in the truth, because this is the only path in which God may be found.

John also mentions charity to "strangers". (Vs. 6-8) In his context, this strictly refers to people not in the church. We must remember that we were formerly strangers, far away from God, as the Prodigal Son, whom we just read about recently, was. If we have come to God somewhat, we should rejoice, but always as a man who knows where he came from and what he has done, and not like the fool who looks at himself in a mirror, and upon walking away, does not remember who he is². **Gratitude** is one of the most important Christian virtues. It comes about in a soft heart, which remembers all that God has done for him, and one of its many fruits is kindness to the stranger. Take stranger here to mean the blasphemer, sinner, difficult person, persecutor, nay-sayer, and enemy – anyone who is not exhibiting Christian virtue in some way – especially if he is directing his sinfulness towards you. By this definition, we are sometimes strangers! We are guilty of many sins, and there is nothing that will cause God to help us with our sins so much as kindness to the stranger.

An important note about kindness to strangers. It is not about the false "law of attraction". Some people think that if they are kind to someone, that person will change in their demeanor – this is the main purpose for their behavior – it is a kind of manipulation. Those who believe in the "law of attraction" (not a Christian idea), are actually indulging in their own self-will. Be kind to people because it is the right thing to do – it is fulfilling the "golden rule"³, and therefore the second commandment, by which we show our fulfillment of the greatest commandment: love of God.

Note also that the Apostle of Love was not afraid to rebuke those who did not follow the way of truth. (Vs. 9-10) He had the moral authority to do this; we rarely do. There is a "procedure" for this: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. (16) But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be

¹ Mar 3:17 KJV And James the *son* of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder:

² James 1:23-24 KJV For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: (24) For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

³ Mat 7:12 KJV Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Luke 6:31 KJV And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

For your edification, here are similar commands from the OT that are analogous to the "Golden Rule":

- "Do to no one what you yourself dislike." (Tobit 4:15)
- "Recognize that your neighbor feels as you do, and keep in mind your own dislikes." (Sirach 31:15)
- "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18 – this of course, is also the basis for the "second greatest Commandment of the Lord – "... Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. (38) This is the first and great commandment. (39) And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. (40) On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Mat 22:37-40 KJV))
- "But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:34)

established. (17) And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. ” (Mat 18:15-17 KJV). Be VERY CAREFUL applying this maxim, and always with counsel. If you err, always err on the side of mercy and long-suffering.

Luke 19:29-40; 22:7-39

This is one of those mysterious passages. The Lord was preparing for His passion, and evidently had disciples in the city to help him do this. We have no idea who the man who had the colt was, not the man with the pitcher.

There was a reason why the colt was one “whereon yet never man sat” (vs. 30). This untrained colt represents the Gentiles, whom the Lord was bringing into the church. It also represents our wild and unruly nature, which will only be tamed if we accept the direction of the Lord, signified by His sitting on the colt and riding it (making its will submit to His).

This passage will be repeated on Palm Sunday. We are “previewing” the Lord’s passion, as we are on the threshold of Great Lent. There is much to be said about this passage, and God willing, I will say it, or send you previous Palm Sunday sermons, when the time is right.

For now, a few important notes. The text indicates that Judas partook of the Eucharist – the Lord’s body and blood. This did not help him, as St John’s gospel indicates that Judas left their company to betray his Lord shortly thereafter, missing our Lord’s great teaching to his disciples. Judas partook of the truth, but did not live according to the truth, and he perished. This is an important lesson for us.

I am at a loss to understand those who partake of communion, and then leave the church, or perhaps stay till the end of the service, but do not bother with the thanksgiving prayers. I would not say that such people are Judases, but in their leaving the Lord’s Table before the end of the teaching, they are imitating him. We should not do this.

Cheesefare Tuesday Feb 8/21 2012 Jude .1-10 Luke 22.39-42, 45-23.1

Jude 1-10

This first thing to notice is how Jude addresses himself. He was the son of Joseph the Betrothed, who, you will remember, was a widower when he was called to be betrothed to the Theotokos and be her protector. He always referred to himself as “the brother of James”, who was known as the “brother of the Lord”. The story of how he gained this appellation also tells us why Jude, with his great humility, referred to himself as subordinate to his brother.

Note that Jude was one of the 12 apostles, but James was not – he was of the Seventy. The Brother of the Lord, however, was also with the Lord during his earthly ministry, and, like James, grew up with him. After the resurrection, he was appointed Bishop of Jerusalem – at a time when Jerusalem was filled with the twelve Apostles! He was well respected and loved, and wrote one of the most important epistles of the NT (and most maligned, because it says in plain “English” that we cannot be saved without works (“faith without works is dead”, and this dogma does not set well with those who are in thrall to the new doctrines promulgated since Luther and the reformers). It was said that his knees looked like those of a camel, because of his many prostrations, and he was a lifelong virgin. He died a martyr, and quite early, being thrown off a building by the (unbelieving) Jews, and having his head crushed by a blow.

Here is the story. When Joseph was old, he wished to divide his property to his four sons – Rueben, James and Jude, and also Jesus, whom he counted as a son, although he knew (and his family too) that He was not his natural father. Jude protested, and James offered to give Jesus his portion. For this one act of kindness and love, James is remembered as the “brother of the Lord”, and Jude forever remembering his sin, referred to himself humbly as the “brother of James”.

Do not be afraid to let your past sins humble you. If you forget where you came from, you will lose your way. We should not wallow in our sins, and “forgiving ourselves” can be difficult, but we must remember that we have sinned grievously in the past, and this knowledge will help keep us humble. If we gain true humility, we will “forgive ourselves” too, but we will never forget who we were before.

The Apostle Peter also remembered his denial of the Lord, and when he was crucified, considered himself unworthy to be crucified in the same way his Lord was, and asked to be crucified upside down. There is no doubt that these great apostles, Jude and Peter, repented fully of their sins, but in their humility they remembered them.

It is clear that heresies began to assail the church very early, and Jude makes a general reference to them, and in so doing describes the basic content of most heresies: “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4)

There is more here, and in time we can discuss it, but we must move on.

Luke 22:39-42, 45-23:1

Our Lord's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane shows His divine and human will. He was not a madman – His human flesh did not want to suffer, but He gave His human will over to the will of God, as an example of what we must do: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." (Vs. 42). May God help us to emulate this. It is always best to seek the will of God and do it. Our will, when separated from God, will ALWAYS be wrong.

A little historical note. The one who stuck the servant of the high priest was Peter. (Vs. 50) He was identified in St John's Gospel⁴. When St John's gospel was written, the need for secrecy (to protect Peter) has ceased.

This passage also talks about Peter's denial of the Lord. He denied him because he was afraid. Fear has overtaken great men before. Remember that Elias, after killing all the prophets of Baal, ran away because he was afraid of Jezebel. Since Peter has great love for the Lord, and was true to His teaching, he overcame this great sin. This was because of his courage. He went out and wept, but he did not run away and hang himself as Judas did. Like any man, Peter was a mixed up combination of fear and courage, sin and sanctity. We are like him as regards sin and fear, but will we emulate his courage?

"70 Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am."

The Jews considered the Lord to have committed blasphemy because He unambiguously called himself God. The words "I am" are the way God describes himself – He is. He did not begin, He will not end, He is. Jesus' assertion concerning himself directly refers to the verse in Exodus that any Jew would know: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." (Exodus 3:14 KJV). The pre-incarnate Jesus was the one who spoke to Moses, according to our tradition.

Cheesefare Wednesday Feb 9/22 2012 Joel 2.12-16; Joel 3.12-21

There is no Divine Liturgy on this day. We are getting very close to Great Lent now.

Joel 2.12-16 at the Sixth Hour

The time of Great Lent should be a period of repentance and change. This reading from Joel sums it up quite well: "Now therefore saith the Lord: Be converted to me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning. 13 And rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil." (Vs 12,13)

This explains the purpose of fasting – to be converted. Fasting helps us to "turn to the Lord ... God", for various physical and spiritual reasons. Of course, fasting must be coupled with prayer and repentance, or else the faster will only be hungry. Try fasting with seriousness and vigor, and you will understand.

How do we "rend our hearts"? The text tells us to do this instead of rending (tearing) our garments. The Jews would rend their garments when they heard blasphemy. We must rend our hearts when we fall from the way of truth, because of our sins, passions, habits, stupidity. We must develop a soft and emotive heart, which feels the blackness and coldness of sin. This is not an exercise in self-loathing, as the West misunderstands (and either focuses too much on depravity or ignores sin because it is too difficult to emotionally bear), but the ability to feel pain in the heart because of sin, whether it be one's own or that of others. This pain in our heart should lead us towards the Great Physician, the Only One who can assuage our pain, and it should motivate and help us to in some small way emulate the Great Physician in helping others wounded like ourselves.

"23 And you, O children of Sion, rejoice, and be joyful in the Lord your God: because he hath given you a teacher of justice, and he will make the early and the latter rain to come down to you as in the beginning. 24 And the floors shall be filled with wheat, and the presses shall overflow with wine and oil."

The preceding refers to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The "latter rain" is the Holy Spirit.

⁴ John 18:10 KJV Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.

“And I will restore to you the ears which the locust, and the bruchus, and the mildew, and the palmerworm have eaten; my great host which I sent upon you. 26 And you shall eat in plenty, and shall be filled: and you shall praise the name of the Lord your God, who hath done wonders with you, and my people shall not be confounded for ever.”

Here is the outlook we should have in Lent. There must be expectation. The passage is describing the restoration of Israel, but for we Christians, this is the restoration and healing of the human soul. We must feel the pain to see the gain.

Joel 3:12-21 VESPERS

Joel tells his people to “Put ye in the sickles, for the harvest is ripe” (13), and I cannot help but read this in the context of being on the threshold of Great Lent. Truly, this is a time to “put in the sickle” and harvest the virtues. God will help them grow, but we must put in the time and effort. The beginning of Lent should be a time of excitement, expectation. It is a time to work. May God “cause the growth”.

Cheesefare Thursday Feb 10/23 2012 Jude 11-25 Luke 23.2-34, 44-56

Jude 1:11-25

Our time is well described by Holy Apostle Jude’s words:

“17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; 18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. 19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. 20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, 21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

He gives us the ONLY solution for the darkness and immorality of the age. Holiness! We must dig deeply into the Gospel (I use the word here to mean “good news”, and all of the scripture has the good news), and listen to the words of our Lord. There is no substitute for “praying in the Holy Spirit”. May God help us to pray more, and better.

Cain killed Abel because his offering was not accepted by the Lord. We will, God willing discuss him at length with a commentary for the [2nd Week of Great Lent – MONDAY, SIXTH HOUR. Gen 3:21 - 4:7](#)⁵ The way of Cain is therefore to give a tainted offering to the Lord. The only thing we can really offer to the Lord is ourselves – the Lord commands us to give him our heart.⁶ He will only accept our whole heart. If we mix our offering with sin, we are going the way of Cain.

Balaam was the prophet, who was counseled by an ass who the Lord caused to speak. Read about him in Numbers 22-24. He was a disobedient man, and Revelation indicts him here: “But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. (Rev 2:14).

Korah (Core) opposed the authority of Moses (Numbers 16).

Enoch was a righteous man who was translated, and the prophesy referred to is from the Apocryphal “Book of Enoch”, which is not in the canon of scripture (except in the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox churches)⁷, but nonetheless is valuable, since The Holy Apostle accepts it.

Luke 23:2-34, 44-56

Of course, there is much in this passage, and every time I read it something new “hits” me. You must read it often to absorb it.

A few things. When Christ said to Pilate: “Thou sayest it” (Vs 2), this was not a weak answer. According to the idiom, it means “thou sayest right”, or “thou sayest the truth”.

Pilate and Herod became friends on this great day of tragedy. Often people become friends because of evil. We have the saying “politics makes strange bedfellows”, and this statement certainly applies here.

⁵ http://www.orthodox.net/dailylent/great-lent-week-02-monday_2009+sixth-hour+the-first-sin-of-cain.html

⁶ Proverbs 23:26 KJV My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Enoch

“34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Such must be our words when anyone hurts us in ANY way. Jesus is not commanding us to do anything He did not do.

Pilate appears to not be a particularly bad man, but a weak one. He wanted to release Jesus, but was afraid to. He later fell out of favor and died in obscurity.

This account does not have Pilate’s famous word which occurred in this incident: “What is truth?” They occur in John 18:38 We must be able to answer this question. How would you? I would answer it this: “This is not the right question. It should be ‘Who is truth.’ All truth is found in Jesus Christ”.

Cheesefare Friday Feb 11/24 2012 Zech 8.7-14 Zech 8.19-23

Zechariah 8:7-17 SIXTH HOUR

Here are your marching orders for Great Lent. This is especially the time to learn this:

“These then are the things, which you shall do: Speak ye truth every one to his neighbor: judge ye truth and judgment of peace in your gates. 17 And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his friend: and love not a false oath: for all these are the things that I hate, saith the Lord.” (Zechariah 8:16-17)

There is a glimpse here of the inner life of man, and how everything begins with thought. If you change the way you think you will change and rise to perfection.

Zechariah 8:19-23 VESPERS

Here is explained the purpose of fasting – to change, and love truth and peace. Without struggle for righteousness, fasting means nothing

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Juda, joy, and gladness, and great solemnities: only love ye truth and peace.” (Zech 8:19)

Here also is the one of the MANY prophesies in the OT of the calling of the Gentiles.

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts : In those days, wherein ten men of all languages of the Gentiles shall take hold, and shall hold fast the shirt of one that is a Jew, saying: We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.” (Zech 8:23)

Cheesefare Saturday Feb 12/25 2012 Rom 14.19-23; 16.25-27 Mt 6.1-13 Gal 5.22-6.2 Mt 11.27-30

We commemorate all the Holy and God-bearing Fathers Who Shone Forth in the Ascetic Life on this day.

Romans 14:19-23; 16:25-27

A good definition of sin to check yourself by: “for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” (Romans 14:23)

Here is another goal for Great Lent: “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.” (Romans 14:19)

Commemoration of all the holy and God-bearing Fathers who shone forth in the ascetic life.

Galatians 5:22-6:2

This is the typical reading for ascetic saints. It is read many times in the year.

The last line basically restates the second Greatest commandment:

“Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

Matthew 11:27-30

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt 11:29-30)

I think this excerpt from a homily I gave⁸ well applies here:

We must understand that there is a law, a fundamental law of human nature, which is built into our character. Man acts as he believes. It is very important to understand this law, because there is a very great heresy in our day, that a man can believe one way and act another, and a man's beliefs and his actions are not bound to one another. This idea is expressed in various ways, in various heresies, and it is terrible, perhaps the worse heresy ever to beset mankind -- that a man's works and his faith are not connected, completely connected. In fact, they are one and the same! If a man does not have faith, he will not act in a way that is pleasing to God, even if externally he appears to be pleasing to man. If a man knows Christ, and knows His sweet commandments, he will act in such a way that shows this. This is all over the pages of the scriptures, it is all over our prayers, it is in the very mind of the church, which is Christ's.

Take a look at how our Savior lived. Take a look at the works that He did. Look at the effort that He expended. We are to be the same. Christianity is labor, brothers and sisters. I don't know how such a heresy, that Christianity is not labor, has fallen upon so many, for such a long period of time. Christianity is labor, and yet, there is a paradox in our labor. Our Lord said "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. " This is true! A yoke is easy upon the oxen when they do not strain against it, but they pull as they are told to do by their master. Then the yoke rides easily on their shoulders, and because it has been carefully sanded and fitted to their shoulders, it does not chafe them, and cause sores on them. If they strain against the yoke, it causes great sores on their shoulders, and then they don't want to pull at all, because it hurts. Their master must then give them the whip to make them do their work. We are not to be like oxen that are stubborn and stupid. We are to bear his yoke with dignity, and His yoke is truly easy, and we are just to follow what He says.

Forgiveness Sunday Feb 13/26 2012 Rom 13.11-14.4 Mt 6.14-21

We are going to do violence now.

In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.¹

Today is the Sunday of Forgiveness, and it is also the day we enter Great Lent. After we pray the Vespers service of Forgiveness early this afternoon, we will then be in the Holy Fast. **Why is it that we fast?** We have a blueprint for our life, and why we fast, in the Gospel today.

Today is also interesting, because we are also commemorating the Finding of the Head of the Forerunner, and so we have this additional Gospel reading that has much richness in it. I want to quickly focus on one thing that it said:

"... the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."²

We are going to do violence now. We are setting out on a path of doing violence to the violent one. We are casting that which is corrupt within us, and the Church has given us a path to do so.

Our Lord said, first of all, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will forgive you."³

First and foremost in the Christian life is to forgive. To forgive is to be like God - because God forgives all. God loves all, without any respect for persons. So when we forgive, we are participating in the energy of God. We are acting like God! And indeed, that is what we are to do. In the scripture it says, "Ye are gods"⁴. We are to act like gods. We are to acquire virtue, compassion, holiness, yea, even perfection, because the scriptures also say, "Be ye perfect, as my heavenly Father is perfect"⁵.

So one must become like unto God, and the first step is to forgive.

And He says, "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."⁶

This is actually a promise and a threat, but the promise is so much more powerful than the threat. **Oh, yes, if you do not**

⁸ [The 19th Sunday after Pentecost - As ye would have that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise – http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pentecost-sunday-19.html](http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/pentecost-sunday-19.html)

forgive, you won't be saved. If you hold grudges, even though someone has harmed you greatly in this life, you won't be saved, because, over and over, the Church says, the Holy Scripture says, the saints say, the Holy Spirit says: forgive, forgive, forgive.

And if you do forgive, what will happen? You will see Christ. You won't be corrupt anymore. You'll have peace, you'll have rest. The promise is greater than the threat. Absolutely.

And then He gives us some counsel about fasting.

"Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward."⁷

These are among the most terrible words in all of scripture: "**They have their reward.**" This life, this life of corruption, and foul odors, and difficulties, and sadness and strife, and tempests - that is where they have their reward. These are terrible words. So if you want your reward now, God will give it to you. You can be as a hypocrite, you can make it appear that you are holy, and some people will say, "Isn't that remarkable what he is doing. I could not do that. He must be filled with the Holy Spirit." But if you have the reward only now, your life is a *total waste*.

Then He tells us, in a figure through the glass darkly, as it were, what our reward will be. He says,

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: {20} But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: {21} For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."⁸

Do you know what we have been promised? The entire world tells us a story of death, dying, difficulties, passions and sadness - all the world. No matter how rich a man becomes, the world is a difficult place because within, there is a pitched battle. And **a man with a conscience is not at peace with who he is.** He wants to become better. The whole world is corrupt, all we ever see.

But what does He say? "If you lay up treasures for yourselves in heaven, they do not corrupt. They will last forever." These are amazing thoughts here: Forever. No corruption. Full of satisfaction, peace, rest.

I do not have a day that I am at rest. There is not a day that I do not endure sadness. There is not a day that I do not sin. But there will be a day, in the eighth day, if I struggle now, and also, if you struggle, that we will be in the presence of God. The mind cannot conceive and understand what this means, because all we see is corruption, and everything changes. It is so hard to stay good. Things change all the time, and so often, it seems, for the worse. But our Lord and Savior is telling us, If we lay up treasures for ourselves now, in heaven they will not corrupt. We won't corrupt!"

In the other reading, John, a great man, greatest born of woman, could not understand. It was so incomprehensible to him that the Messiah had actually come. He believed, but he was full of wonderment, so he sent his disciples to Christ, and our Lord said, "Look at the evidence. The blind see, the lame walk, the dead are raised, the poor have the Gospel preached to them."⁹ That is the greatest miracle. It gives people hope. It makes people know what they are alive for. We know what our Lord can do.

The evidence is all there, even though the world constantly countermands and slanders that evidence, every single day of our life, but we know the truth! And this is why we are entering upon the Fast. Because we want to lay up treasures in heaven, and we want to win the kingdom of Heaven by violence - violence against our passions, violence against that which saddens us - that part of us which is incomplete. We want to cast it out, so that we can be filled. **That's why we fast.**

The reason one must forgive is because the task in our life is to become like God, to be filled with Him, and to become like Him morally - to share in the energies of God. His love for us will transfigure us and make us incorrupt. And a man cannot become incorrupt, he cannot become like God, if fundamentally he disavows himself from that most fundamental aspect of God: God is love. Love forgives. Love forgives seventy times seven times; love forgives infinite times. No matter how great the transgression, the forgiveness is greater.

This is why we begin Great Fast with Forgiveness ceremony. No, it is not just a ceremony. Every man who looks into his heart sees that he falls short with every breath he takes, and that he wrongs every man. If you see one of your brothers or sisters, and they have a difficulty, some conflict in their marriage, or with their children or with some substance or some other such thing - we all fall into difficulties - you should berate yourself and say, "Have I prayed for my brother? Have I

done something to help my brother? Is it possible that he or she is in peril because of my incompetence?" That's why we ask forgiveness of one another, even if we have not exactly offended everyone specifically. But then again there might be grudges that need to be settled today, too, and we must do this if we wish to enter into the Fast.

The Apostle says,

"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. "¹⁰

This is the time. The church sets aside this time, this tithing, or tenth, of the year, so that we would be able to intensify and remember who we are, and who God is, and change. The first step is to forgive, and then we proceed with the Fast. And I tell you it will be difficult. I have been through seventeen of them, and all of them were difficult.

We all have our different temptations. One is tempted to eat meat. Another is tempted to be angry. Another is tempted to fall into despondency. Another is tempted in another way. As many souls as there are, so many temptations are there. But we struggle together as a community praying for one another and fasting and believing that there is a reward and that it is permanent.

Nothing in this life - nothing - is permanent, and we are living for permanence. And when I think of these thoughts, it makes it a bit easier to abstain from this food or that, or to make more prostrations, or to forgive my brother, even when he has harmed me, even when he has hurt me purposefully, because everything in this life is going away, except for how we have lived. The way we have lived, if it is holy, is going to endure

There is something else during this great fast all of you should do. It is very important for us to pray for one another, and also to pray for Paul, Susan and Seth. They are going to be made catechumens next week. We are going to have the service to make them catechumens, and the exorcism part of the service, just before Liturgy next Sunday. I would ask you and admonish you, as ones who love, because He loved us, that you will be here to support them in prayer, and not just on Sunday, but during the whole time of their catechuminate, that they would learn of sweetness, learn about faith, about the sweetness you can never have enough of. And yet indeed there will come a time when we will have enough, but not in this life; in the next life. We will be completely filled with Him if we live now according to Who He is. Amen

The Great Canon, Monday of Clean Week

All the demon chiefs of the passions have plowed on my back, and long has their tyranny over me lasted (Great Canon, Ode 2, Troparion 12, Clean Monday)

We read this troparion Monday evening in Clean week, the first of four days in which we serve Great Compline and serialize the Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete. In the fifth week, we will sing the entire canon.

This is one of many poetic and powerfully brutal representations of sin which St Andrew uses, and it has always particularly moved me.

I suppose it is because we are not able to easily protect our back, and it is on our "blind side". How many sins do I commit and not see them? How easily the demons punch through my weak defenses – often without me even knowing they are there!

I also always think of the "good ground" from the parable of the Sower when I hear this troparion. We should be "good ground" and yet we grow so many tares from our passions in this ground, which is our soul. St. Andrew likens his soul here to "ground" on his back, over which the demons sow their tyranny over us.

Can you feel how tired he is here? We should be this tired!

"LONG HAS THEIR TYRANNY OVER ME LASTED!".

This is the plaintive cry of a man who has had enough. He, like the Apostle Paul, is saying

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." (Romans 13:12, read on the Sunday of Forgiveness, 1 day before this troparion, from the Great Canon of St Andrew, is sung on Clean Monday)

Oh! if only our soul felt the full weight of our sins, and was truly tired and disgusted with our condition! We would change

The First Week of Great Lent – Clean Monday

SIXTH HOUR *Isaiah 1:1-20 An Anthem for Great Lent and all of Life.*

Wash yourselves, and ye shall be clean; put away the wicked ways from your souls before mine eyes; cease to do evil; 17. learn to do well; diligently seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, consider the fatherless, and plead for the widow. 18. Come then, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: and though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white as snow; and though they red like crimson, I will make them white as wool. 19. If then ye be willing, and obedient unto Me, ye shall eat the good of the land; 20. but if ye desire not, nor will obey me, the sword shall devour you, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. (Is 1:1-20, First Monday of Great Lent, the Sixth Hour)

Everyone needs to frequently wash. The accumulated grime of the day is unsightly, unpleasant and unhealthy. If we wash carefully, and ignore no dirty place, then we will be invigorated, and healthy, but if we ignore some place for a long time, that place will fester and cause us to be ill.

Great Lent is especially a time for careful washing. In us there may be wicked ways: thoughts, feelings, priorities and habits that are not immediately apparent, and are all displeasing to God.

This time is a time to consciously attempt to put away wicked ways from ourselves just as we put away from ourselves certain foods. How to do this? By listening and seeking, with diligence and proper priorities. This will lead to actions accomplished with a merciful heart, that is:

“learn to do well; diligently seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, consider the fatherless, and plead for the widow”.

Why should we make all this effort? Because some stains are so dark and embedded that we cannot of our own effort wash them out, and their ugliness and stench will always be with us, but if the Lord sees our resolve and or effort, He will wash us so that the scarlet and crimson of our sins, and even of our sinful nature and predilections will be annihilated and forgotten, and will not return to infect us again.

18 “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

And those who struggle, with an honest and good heart, will inherit the good of the land, and know the Lord.

http://www.orthodox.net/dailylent/great-lent-week-01-monday_2009+sixth-hour.doc

Clean Wednesday. Thou knowest our frame

Thou knowest our frame, thou knowest our weakness, O Lover of mankind; we have sinned, but have not turned away from Thee, O God, nor have we stretched out our hands to a strange god.

Spare us in Thy goodness, O Compassionate One.

Wednesday in the First Week, Sixth Hour: Troparion of the Prophecy, 4th Tone

In the course of life, a Christian may feel joy and sadness, grief and exultation, compunction and fervent desire, but he should never feel alone. How can we be alone, when the Lord has already walked the difficult path of human life and fulfilled all righteousness for us?

"For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of

Abraham. (17) **Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren**, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. (18) For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, **he is able to succour them that are tempted.**" (Heb 2:16-18 KJVA)

A fundamental aspect of human nature is that it is difficult to do something onerous alone, but easier when one feels the support of his brethren, whether materially, or by a word of encouragement and advice. The Lord Jesus Christ, God and man, provides us both. Whatever our flesh is going through, He has already successfully negotiated. Even human feelings He has already felt, and yet even in the midst of these difficult emotions, He did not sin.

Christian! You are not alone!

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (16) Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb 4:15-16 KJVA)

Do we ever feel alone? Let us call this feeling what it really is, and be courageous and honest with ourselves. This is because of lack of faith.

"Lord increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5)

Clean Thursday.

Wisdom is a person. Proverbs: Trusting in ourselves.

"Trust in God with all thine heart; and be not exalted in thine own wisdom. 6. In all thy ways acquaint thyself with her, that she may rightly direct thy paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6, *Thursday in the First Week At Vespers, Proverbs 3:1-18*)

Man's wisdom is nothing; it is foolishness before God. The fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom, that is, of fulfilling the injunction: **"In all thy ways acquaint thyself with (wisdom)."**

The Lord Jesus Christ is here called "wisdom", it is one of His many titles. This is why we are told: **"In all thy ways acquaint thyself with her."** Wisdom is not an attribute, but a person; one becomes acquainted with a person.

It is not coincidental that we are told in one breath to **"trust in God with all thine heart"**, and then with the next, to **"be not exalted in thine own wisdom"**.

Man's wisdom does not trust the Lord with all its heart, it is "wise in its own conceit". To trust someone is not just intellectually believing they are reliable; *it is also willful submission to the person as a reliable guide and a strong protector.* The flesh wants to go its own way; the proverb calls this *"being exalted in (its) own wisdom."*

The way of life is not only belief; it is the **forcing of oneself** to trust in God. The adversary of trust in God is ourselves. We lie to ourselves if we say we trust God while also trusting ourselves.

How are we to trust in the Lord? It is from His revelation to us. No wisdom can come from ourselves, but knowledge grows in us as we cultivate a relationship with wisdom. This is the only way.

Trusting God takes effort and involves everything in our life! **"In all thy ways acquaint thyself with her, that she may rightly direct thy paths. "**

1Co 1:20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

1Co 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Psa 25:14 The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.

Pro 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Pro 18:11 The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit.

Pro 26:5 Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

Pro 26:12 Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.

Pro 26:16 The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.

Pro 28:11 The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.

Great Lent, the first week, Clean Friday.

The Spoil of the Poor - Isaiah 3:1-14

The Lord himself shall enter into judgment with the elders of the people, and with their rulers: but why have ye set my vineyard on fire, and why is the spoil of the poor in your houses?

Friday in the First Week - At the Sixth Hour - Is 3:1-14

Why is the spoil of the poor in your houses?

The Lord asks a question of the Jews through the prophet. Does this question apply to us?

The answer is quite simply, "Of course!" All that is written in the scripture applies to us – we are to answer the questions, test ourselves in relation to the examples, and take to heart all the admonitions.

It is too easy for us poor conceited ones to pass over such a stinging admonition as the prophet gives to the Jews of his time, with nary a shudder, nary a compunctionate thought. So much of what the prophet says is so extreme, and we confidently feel that his rebukes are about someone else.

May it be so that the prophet's rebukes do not apply to us! In order to be certain *that we are exempt* from his rebuke, we must read the scripture spiritually. We are not people of the prophet's time, and much of the historical context does not apply to us, but

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2Ti 3:16)

If we do not give alms, *the spoil of the poor is in our houses!*

If we spend more on our own comfort than that of others, *the spoil of the poor is in our houses!*

The poor are not only those lacking the means for the physical life, but also those who are ignorant, or lost, or staggering under any burden. If we have any strength, and do not reach out in compassion, *the spoil of the poor is in our houses!*

If we are well, and do not visit the sick, then *the spoil of the poor is in our houses!*

If we have been blessed, and do not bless, then *the spoil of the poor is in our houses!*

http://www.orthodox.net/dailylent/great-lent-week-01-friday_2008+the-spoil-of-the-poor_isaiah3:1-14.html

¹ This homily was transcribed from one given in 1999, on the Sunday of Forgiveness, the last Sunday before Great Lent. There are some stylistic changes and minor corrections made and several footnotes have been added, but otherwise, it is essentially in a colloquial, "spoken" style.

It is hoped that something in these words will help and edify the reader, but a sermon read from a page cannot enlighten a soul as much as attendance and reverent worship at the Vigil service, which prepares the soul for the Holy Liturgy, and the hearing of the scriptures and the preaching of them in the context of the Holy Divine Liturgy. In such circumstances the

soul is enlightened much more than when words are read on a page.

² Mat 11:12, partial

³ Mat 6:14

⁴ Psalm 82:6, Isaiah 41:23, John 10:34

⁵ (Mat 5:48) Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

⁶ Mat 6:15

⁷ Mat 6:16

⁸ Mat 6:19-21

⁹ (Mat 11:5) "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

¹⁰ Romans 13:11

This document is at

<http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-pastoral-letter-2012-02-14+readings-for-cheesefare-and-clean-week.html>

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