



The Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA AND EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
The Most Rev. Mark, Archbishop of Philadelphia

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Anastasia of Alexandria

Forgiveness Sunday

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matt. 6:14f)

Dear to God,

Christ is in our midst! As we enter Great Lent, I ask your forgiveness for my sins, known and unknown. Embracing bodily fasting, let us remember that the intent of the fast is to gain control of our bodies and offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to our Lord. We are to consider the members of our bodies dead to sin, yet alive unto God. Please read the homily of Metropolitan Anthony Bloom below and hide his words deep in your heart. Read them weekly, as a reminder of why we fast. Our salvation, our forgiveness is dependant upon our ability to forgive others.

*Metropolitan Anthony Sourozh
Forgiveness Sunday
February 25, 1996*

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

To-day two themes dominate the readings of the Holy Scriptures. St Paul speaks to us about fasting and the Lord about forgiveness, and St Paul insists on the fact that fasting does not consist simply of depriving oneself of one form of food or another, neither does it, if it is kept strictly, obediently, worshipfully, give us any ground to be proud of ourselves, satisfied and secure, because the aim of fasting is not to deprive our body of the one form of food rather than the other, the aim of fasting is to acquire mastery over our body and make it a perfect instrument of the spirit. Most of the time we are slaves of our bodies, we are attracted by all our senses to one form or another of enjoyment, but of an enjoyment which goes far beyond the purity which God expects of us.

And so, the period of fasting offers us a time during which we can say not that I will torment my body, limit myself in things material, but a time when I will re-acquire mastery of my body, make it a perfect instrument. The comparison that comes to my mind is that of tuning a musical instrument; this is what fasting is, to acquire the power not only to command our body, but also to give our body the possibility to respond to all the promptings of the spirit.

Let us therefore go into fasting with this understanding, not measuring our fasting by what we eat and how much, but of the effect it has on us, whether our fasting makes us free or whether we become slaves of fasting itself.

If we fast let us not be proud of it, because it proves simply that we need more perhaps than another person to conquer something in our nature. And if around us other people are not fasting

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let us not judge them, because God has received the ones as He receives the others, because it is into the heart of men that He looks.

And then there is the theme of forgiveness, of which I will say only one short thing. We think always of forgiveness as a way in which we would say to a person who has offended, hurt, humiliated us, that the past is past and that we do not any more hold a grudge against this person. But what forgiveness means more deeply than this is that if we can say to a person: let us no longer make the past into a destructive present, let me trust you, make an act of faith in you, if I forgive you it means in my eyes you are not lost, in my eyes there is a future of beauty and truth in you.

But this applies also to us. Perversely, we think very often of forgiving others, but we do not think sufficiently of the need in which we are, each of us personally, of being forgiven by others. We have a few hours left between the Liturgy and the Service of Forgiveness tonight, let us reflect and try to remember, not the offences which we have suffered, but the hurts which we have caused. And if we have hurt anyone in one way or another, in things small or great, let us make haste before we enter into Lent tomorrow morning, let us make haste to ask to be forgiven, to hear someone say to us: in spite of all that has happened I believe in you, I trust you, I hope for you and I will expect everything from you. And then we can go together through Lent helping one another to become what we are called to be - the disciples of Christ, following Him step by step to Calvary, and beyond Calvary to the Resurrection. Amen. --- Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh

Pondering the purpose of the Fast, let us not only fast from certain foods, but from those things which stir up the passions. Let us fast with our eyes by turning off the television set and the computer. Let us use our eyes to the glory of God by reading the Holy Scriptures. Let us fast with the ears, by not listening to gossip and filthy speech, but hear the beautiful prayers and Scriptures chanted and sung at the Divine Services. Let us fast with our hands, by not being grasping, but extending them to the the poor, the naked, and the sick. Let us fast with our feet by not going to casinos, clubs and various places of entertainment, but let us ever be at the Divine Services or ministering to those in need. Let us fast with the tongue by not speaking ill of anyone, but speak only such things that edify and build up the Body of Christ.

If we approach the Fast properly, those areas in our lives we felt helpless to change will find relief and Divine Assistance. Let us keep in mind, fasting is dangerous without confession because when the enemy of our souls sees us making progress, he will stir up passions we thought long ago defeated. Have a blessed Lenten Journey. The discipline of the Church works to our salvation and freedom in Christ if we embrace it.

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

+MARK

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