

Before the transgression, Adam shared in divine illumination and brilliance. He was clothed in the true robe of glory and was not naked, nor was he ugly in his nakedness, but was truly unspeakably better adorned than those who wear diadems embellished with much gold and precious stones. When our human nature was stripped of this divine illumination and radiance as a result of the ugly transgression, the Word of God had mercy on this nature and in His compassion took it upon Himself. On Mount Tabor He showed it clothed once more to His chosen disciples, proving to all what we had once been, and what those of us who believed in Him and attained to perfection in Him would be through Him in the age to come. You will find that the earnest of this perfection of those who live according to Christ is openly given here and now to God's saints. They reap, so to speak, the good of the age to come.

Saint Gregory Palamas



**13 March 2016 is
Forgiveness Sunday**

Matins Gospel: John 20:11-18

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

Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

From on high didst Thou descend, O Compassionate One; to burial of three days hast Thou submitted that Thou mightest free us from our passions. O our Life and Resurrection, Lord, glory be to Thee.

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, 14 March: Isaiah 1:1-20; Genesis 1:1-13; Proverbs 1:1-20

First Monday of Lent - Clean Monday; Benedict of Nursia; Euschimonus the Confessor

Tuesday, 15 March: Isaiah 1:19-2:3; Genesis 1:14-23; Proverbs 1:20-33

First Tuesday of Lent; Martyr Agapius & Companions; Manuel the New Martyr of Crete

Wednesday, 16 March: Isaiah 2:3-11; Genesis 1:24-2:3; Proverbs 2:1-22

First Wednesday of Lent; Martyr Sabine; Christodulus the Wonderworker

Thursday, 17 March: Isaiah 2:11-21; Genesis 2:4-19; Proverbs 3:1-18

First Thursday of Lent; Alexis the Man of God; Patrick, Enlightener of Ireland

Friday, 18 March: Isaiah 3:1-14; Genesis 2:20-3:20; Proverbs 3:19-34

First Friday of Lent; Cyril, Abp. of Jerusalem; Trophimos & Eukarpion, Monk-martyrs

Saturday, 19 March: 2 Timothy 2:1-10; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-5

First Saturday of Lent: The Commemoration of the Miracle of Kollyva wrought by Saint Theodore the Tyro; Martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria; Demetrios the New Martyr



Evangelion

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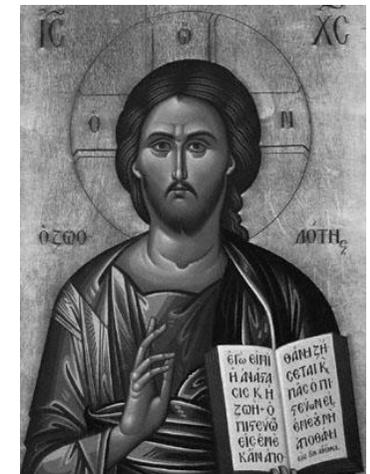
Forgiveness Sunday

Today is the final Sunday before the beginning of Great Lent, the time of grace in which the Church challenges us to return to God in fasting and repentance. And on this threshold of Lent we hear Jesus Christ's somewhat frightening words on the importance of forgiveness. He tells us that if we forgive others then God will forgive us, but if we do not forgive others then we will not be forgiven.

Fasting is common to many religions and some even keep stricter fasts than Christians do. The point of fasting for Christians is not the accumulation of our own ascetical efforts, but rather the softening of our hardened hearts so that we may be transformed into people who truly love God and our neighbours.

The Church therefore begins the fasting period by encouraging us to ask forgiveness of our brothers and sisters, and we are likewise called to forgive those who have offended and hurt us. This is no small task, especially in cases where we have been deeply hurt, yet Jesus Christ sees forgiveness as belonging to the very heart of the Gospel.

Moreover, it is not enough to simply say that we forgive people and to continue to hold grudges against them. Rather, we are called to "lay aside all memories of evil" so that the forgiveness that we offer with our lips may also take root in our hearts and may transform our relationships with those around us. This is something that we cannot do on our own. We need God's help. And it is only as we begin to see that we too are sinners who need God's mercy that we will be able to find the wellsprings of compassion within us that will enable us to forgive others from the heart.



Laying aside all memories of evil, let us cry aloud, "We have sinned against You, Christ our King; save us like the people of Nineveh in days of old, and in Your compassion make us sharers in Your heavenly Kingdom."

From Saturday Evening Vespers of Forgiveness Sunday

This Week's Lenten Prayer

The Church's worship takes on a particularly striking character during Great Lent. The first week of Lent is traditionally known as the "dawn of abstinence" or "clean week" and is a time of special grace when we are encouraged to make a particular effort. It is marked by two specific services that set the tone for the coming time of repentance.



Forgiveness Vespers

This unique service, which is held this afternoon or this evening, marks the real beginning of Lent. It begins joyfully, with the clergy in bright vestments, but with the evening Prokeimenon that announces the end of one day and the beginning of another, 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.

This is sung five times and then 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 final part of the service, which gives it its name, is the asking forgiveness of one another. One by one all those present approach the priest and ask him and one another for forgiveness. As this is happening the choir sings the Paschal hymns, for as we enter into the serious work of repentance we remain aware that we are journeying towards the Resurrection and that Easter is on the horizon.

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 of the canon 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 and begins:

Where shall I begin to weep for the actions of my wretched life? What first-fruit shall I offer O Christ in this my lamentation? But in Thy compassion grant me forgiveness of sins.

Come wretched soul, with thy flesh to the Creator of all. Make confession to Him, and abstain henceforth from thy past brutishness; and offer to God tears of repentance.

The stanzas that follow offer a richly biblical meditation on the theme of repentance and forgiveness, providing many examples from the Scriptures. Some of these are examples for us to emulate, while others are negative examples which we should avoid. However, they are not referred to abstractly. Instead, we are called to identify these positive models of repentance, making their repentance our own as we repeat regularly "Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me."

The Expulsion of Adam and Eve 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 who long for our 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)

**Repentance lifts one up.
Mourning knocks at heaven's gate.
Holy humility opens it.**

St John Climacus