

The Healing of Humanity

Epistle: Romans 13:11-14:4: *Brethren, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. 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. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.*

Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21: *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. 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. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break*

through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The one who loves is asked to put the others first, to love for the sake of others, and not for his own sake. Putting others first means being able to control selfish passions, saying "No" to selfish desires. Whoever runs after fulfilling his own desires and passions not only is unable to love the others, but also violates them and use them as objects, or treats them as enemies competing with him. A man like this one cannot see God. Therefore he lives his life without a paradise. In this last Sunday before Great Lent, we remember Adam's expulsion from paradise.

The selfish movement within us is self-destructive. It means enslaving the free will of others, and disobedience to the divine command and will. Selfishness separates man from his God and his neighbor.

In His fasting for forty days and in His refusal to submit to the passion of gluttony, Christ affirms His "No" to His will and His "Yes" to the divine will. In doing so, He opens to all of us (the sons and daughters of Adam) the way of return. For this reason, the Church established this period of Great Lent to provide an opportunity for each man to say "No" to his selfishness, overcoming his desires and tendencies, and getting in control rather than being controlled.

Lent is finally a practice on how to love, for it strengthens the power of love and destroys the obstacles of selfishness and submission. Man is disciplined through this movement of love towards God and neighbor,

making him sensitive to both. That's why almsgiving goes hand in hand with fasting. Man is disciplined to overcome his "gratifying selfishness" and to be saved from this slavery.

Satan tempted Adam, offering him a "gratifying selfishness" (a desire for deification and royalty from one's own powers without God and saturation of one's pleasure). And the taste of this fruit was at the end bitter. More, Satan accused God of jalousie, because he did not want man to become god. This gratifying selfishness occurs on the expenses of others. It separates people. This is true hell. It is a separation from others and a loneliness. Therefore every action of gratifying selfishness is at the end bitter.

When man allows for his submission to this kind of selfishness to happen repeatedly, it becomes a habit. This habit destroys in him all discernment, differentiation, or evaluation, and selfishness becomes his rule. This leads to the spiritual death and the destruction of the humanity's uniqueness. A similar man does not take any more into account in his life the divine will, which becomes nonsense to him. This is the life expelled from paradise.

Here comes the role of fasting and asceticism to change and stop this movement of selfishness, and to revive the longing for the life in paradise. Lent is nothing but a return to the lost paradise. It is a time of weeping and knocking on the doors, and of longing to the Promised Land.

Lent and asceticism become a way of return, but they are not the purpose. Otherwise, they turn to become

a movement of selfishness, separating us from the face of Christ, and making us feel "self-righteous." Lent is the reversing from the self-gratifying desires to the controlled desires directed towards God and the neighbor. Lent is the changing of our love from the self to the outside (God-man). So the subject here is not strengthening our powers but rather doing the work of love. It is a personal change and a freedom from the bonds of slavery.

To fight our passions, we have to start with our bodily passions. For fighting our intellectual passions (passions in the mind) is much harder. But the beginning of lassitude starts from the body. The Fathers connect between the carnal desires and the corruption of mind. Gluttony for example brings in the spirit of fornication and other passions. Therefore, by doing this (fasting) one begins to control himself.

Abstinence and fasting is a way of approaching and befriending God. Through it, Moses talked to God (the epithet of Moses). This is mentioned in the Doxastikon hymn of last Sunday's Matins). Fasting is the beginning of all virtues. Subduing the gluttony is crushing the inner selfishness, and it opens the way to develop virtues. The power of controlling gluttony easily opens to man the way to practice virtue.

Our fasting today is much more important than ever. Today's world is saturated with gratifying selfishness and therefore fasting is a pressing request... Where are those people who want to reform it or cancel it?!! In this period when man is totally enslaved to his selfishness, man needs more than ever to fast. In our days individualism became the law, and we need to practice

fasting more than we did when fraternity and fellowship were the norm.

The young men of our gluttonous generation need to practice fasting much more than the men of the past generations of famine.

Lent is not a type of worship or a time to make us just "good" people. That's why some people asked to lighten fasting so that they stay "good."

Lent is simplicity in eating and guidance of the power of love from passions to the other. The degree of fasting is different from one to another. This is set in order that fasting does not become just another obligation of the Law. "Fast as much as you can" rather than "eat as much as you can."

This is how Lent becomes a way of turning to God and encountering Him.

The dissolution of fasting removed God from the eyes of Adam. Through fasting, Moses saw God, when his inner spiritual eyes were purified.

Amen