



March 01, 2020
The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise

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. When the Lord returns in Glory with the Saints and Holy Angels, He will not simply be looking for the absence of vice, but the presence of virtue. 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 dependent upon our ability to forgive others.

Metropolitan Anthony Sourozh
Forgiveness Sunday
19February 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.



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“Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee.” Augustine

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 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.

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

+MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania