GREAT LENT

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GREAT LENT
Journey to Pascha

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Contents

Let us receive with joy, O faithful, the divinely inspired announcement of Lent.
Like Ninevites of old, like harlots and publicans who heard John preaching repentance through abstinence, let us prepare for the Master's communion performed in Zion.
Let us wash ourselves with tears for its divine purification.
Let us pray to behold the fulfillment of Pascha, the true Revelation.
Let us prepare for adoring the Cross and Resurrection of Christ our God!
Do not deprive us of our expectation, O Lover of Man!

(Cheese-Fare Week, Tuesday Vespers, Apostikha)

Foreword

This short explanation of Great Lent is written for all those—and they are many today—who desire a better understanding of the liturgical tradition of the Church and a more conscious participation in her life.

Repentance, we are told, is the beginning and the condition of a truly Christian life. Christ's first word when He began to preach was: "Repent!" (Matt. 4:17). But what is repentance? In the rush of our daily life, we have no time to think about it, and we simply assume that all we have to do during Lent is abstain from certain foods, cut down on "entertainment," go to Confession, be absolved by the priest, receive (once in the whole year!) Holy Communion, and then consider ourselves perfectly "in order" till next year. There must be a reason, however, why the Church has set apart seven weeks as a special time for repentance and why she calls us to a long and sustained spiritual effort. All this certainly must concern *me, my* faith, *my* life, *my* membership in the Church. Is it not then my first duty to try to understand the teaching of my Church about Lent, to try to be an Orthodox Christian not in name only but in life itself?

To the questions: What is repentance? Why do we need it? How are we to practice it?—Great Lent gives the answer. It is indeed a school of repentance to which every Christian must go every year in order to deepen his faith, to re-evaluate, and, if possible, to change his life. It is a wonderful pilgrimage to the very sources of Orthodox faith—a rediscovery of the Orthodox way of life.

It is through the forms and the spirit of her lenten worship that the Church conveys to us the meaning of this unique season. This brief explanation of Lent, therefore, is based mainly, although not exclusively, on lenten services. It is my hope that the reader may discover for himself that in this world nothing is as beautiful and deep, as inspired and inspiring, as that which the Church, our Mother, reveals and freely gives to us once we enter the blessed season of the "lenten spring."

Introduction

LENT: THE JOURNEY TO PASCHA[1]

When a man leaves on a journey, he must know where he is going. Thus with Lent. Above all, Lent is a spiritual journey and its destination is Easter, "the Feast of Feasts." It is the preparation for the "fulfillment of Pascha, the true Revelation." We must begin, therefore, by trying to understand this connection between Lent and Easter, for it reveals something very essential, very crucial about our Christian faith and life.

Is it necessary to explain that Easter is much more than one of the feasts, more than a yearly commemoration of a past event? Anyone who has, be it only once, taken part in that night which is "brighter than the day," who has tasted of that unique joy, knows it. But what is that joy about? Why can we sing, as we do during the Paschal liturgy: "today are all things filled with light, heaven and earth and places under the earth"? In what sense do we celebrate, as we claim we do, "the death of Death, the annihilation of Hell, the beginning of a new and everlasting life . . ."? To all these questions, the answer is: the *new life* which almost two thousand years ago shone forth from the grave, has been given to us, to all those

who believe in Christ. And it was given to us on the day of our Baptism, in which, as St. Paul says, we "were buried with Christ . . . unto death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead we also may walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Thus on Easter we celebrate Christ's Resurrection as something that happened and still happens *to us*. For each one of us received the gift of that new life and the power to accept it and to live by it. It is a gift which radically alters our attitude toward everything in this world, including death. It makes it possible for us joyfully to affirm: "Death is no more!" Oh, death is still there, to be sure, and we still face it and someday it will come and take us. But it is our whole faith that by His own death Christ changed the very nature of death, made it a *passage*—a "passover," a "Pascha"—into the Kingdom of God, transforming the tragedy of tragedies into the ultimate victory. "Trampling down death by death," He made us partakers of His Resurrection. This is why at the end of the Paschal Matins we say: "Christ is risen and life reigneth! Christ is risen and not one dead remains in the grave!"

Such is the faith of the Church, affirmed and made evident by her countless Saints. Is it not our daily experience, however, that this faith is very seldom ours, that all the time we lose and betray the "new life" which we received as a gift, and that in fact we live as if Christ did not rise from the dead, as if that unique event had no meaning whatsoever for us? All this because of our weakness, because of the impossibility for us to live constantly by "faith, hope, and love" on that level to which Christ raised us when he said: "Seek ye, first of all, the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." We simply forget all this—so busy are we, so immersed in our daily preoccupations—and because we forget, we fail. And through this forgetfulness, failure, and sin, our life becomes "old" again—petty, dark and ultimately meaningless—a meaningless journey toward a meaningless end. We manage to forget even death and then, all of a sudden, in the midst of our "enjoying life" it comes to us: horrible, inescapable, senseless. We may from time to time acknowledge and

confess our various "sins," yet we cease to refer our life to that new life which Christ revealed and gave to us. Indeed, we live as if He never came. This is the only real sin, the sin of all sins, the bottomless sadness and tragedy of our nominal Christianity.

If we realize this, then we may understand what Easter is and why it needs and presupposes Lent. For we may then understand that the liturgical traditions of the Church, all its cycles and services, exist, first of all, in order to help us recover the vision and the taste of that *new life* which we so easily lose and betray, so that we may repent and return to it. How can we love and desire something that we do not know? How can we put above everything else in our life something which we have not seen and enjoyed? In short: how can we seek a Kingdom of which we have no idea? It is the worship of the Church that was from the very beginning and still is our entrance into, our communion with, the *new life of the Kingdom.* It is through her liturgical life that the Church reveals to us something of that which "the ear has not heard, the eye has not seen, and what has not yet entered the heart of man, but which God has prepared for those who love Him." And in the center of that liturgical life, as its heart and climax, as the sun whose rays penetrate everywhere, stands *Pascha.* It is the door opened every year into the splendor of Christ's Kingdom, the foretaste of the eternal joy that awaits us, the glory of the victory which already, although invisibly, fills the whole creation: "death is no more!" The entire worship of the Church is organized around Easter, and therefore the liturgical year, i.e., the sequence of seasons and feasts, becomes a journey, a pilgrimage towards Pascha, the *End,* which at the same time is the *Beginning:* the end of all that which is "old"; the beginning of the new life, a constant "passage" from "this world" into the Kingdom already revealed in Christ.

And yet the "old" life, that of sin and pettiness, is not easily overcome and changed. The Gospel expects and requires from man an effort of which, in his present state, he is virtually incapable. We are challenged with

a vision, a goal, a way of life that is so much above our possibilities! For even the Apostles, when they heard their Master's teaching, asked Him in despair: "but how is this possible?" It is not easy, indeed, to reject a petty ideal of life made up of daily cares, of search for material goods, security, and pleasure, for an ideal of life in which nothing short of perfection is the goal: "be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." This world through all its "media" says: be happy, take it easy, follow the broad way. Christ in the Gospel says: choose the narrow way, fight and suffer, for this is the road to the only genuine happiness. And unless the Church helps, how can we make that awful choice, how can we *repent* and *return* to the glorious promise given us each year at Easter? This is where Great Lent comes in. This is the help extended to us by the Church, the school of repentance which alone will make it possible to receive Easter not as mere permission to eat, to drink, and to relax, but indeed as the end of the "old" in us, as our entrance into the "new."

In the early Church, the main purpose of Lent was to prepare the "catechumen," i.e., the newly converted Christian, for baptism which at that time was performed during the Paschal liturgy.[2] But even when the Church rarely baptized adults and the institution of the catechumenate disappeared, the basic meaning of Lent remained the same. For even though we are baptized, what we constantly lose and betray is precisely that which we received at Baptism. Therefore Easter is our return every year to our own Baptism, whereas Lent is our preparation for that return—the slow and sustained effort to perform, at the end, our own "passage" or "pascha" into the new life in Christ. If, as we shall see, lenten worship preserves even today its catechetical and baptismal character, it is not as "archeological" remains of the past, but as something valid and essential for us. For each year Lent and Easter are, once again, the rediscovery and the recovery by us of what we were made through our own baptismal death and resurrection.

A journey, a pilgrimage! Yet, as we begin it, as we

make the first step into the "bright sadness" of Lent, we see—far, far away—the destination. It is the joy of Easter, it is the entrance into the glory of the Kingdom. And it is this vision, the foretaste of Easter, that makes Lent's sadness bright and our lenten effort a "spiritual spring." The night may be dark and long, but all along the way a mysterious and radiant dawn seems to shine on the horizon. "Do not deprive us of our expectation, O Lover of man!"

Chapter One

PREPARATION FOR LENT

1. THE DESIRE
(Sunday of Zacchaeus)

Long before the actual beginning of Lent, the Church announces its approach and invites us to enter into the period of pre-lenten preparation. It is a characteristic feature of the Orthodox liturgical tradition that every major feast or season—Easter, Christmas, Lent, etc.—is announced and "prepared" in advance. Why? Because of the deep psychological insight by the Church into human nature. Knowing our lack of concentration and the frightening "worldliness" of our life, the Church knows our inability to change rapidly, to go abruptly from one spiritual or mental state into another. Thus, long before the actual effort of Lent is to begin, the Church calls our attention to its seriousness and invites us to meditate on its significance. Before we can *practice* Lent we are given its *meaning*. This preparation includes five consecutive Sundays preceding Lent, each one of them—through its particular Gospel lesson—dedicated to some fundamental aspect of repentance.

The very first announcement of Lent is made the Sunday on which the Gospel lesson about Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10) is read. It is the story of a man who was too short to see Jesus but who *desired* so much to see Him that

he climbed up a tree. Jesus responded to his desire and went to his house. Thus the theme of this first announcement is *desire.* Man follows his desire. One can even say that man *is* desire, and this fundamental psychological truth about human nature is acknowledged by the Gospel: "Where your treasure is," says Christ, "there shall your heart be." A strong desire overcomes the natural limitations of man; when he passionately desires something he does things of which "normally" he is incapable. Being "short," he overcomes and transcends himself. The only question, therefore, is whether we desire the right things, whether the power of desire in us is aimed at the right goal, or whether—in the words of the existentialist atheist, Jean Paul Sartre—man is a "useless passion."

Zacchaeus desired the "right thing"; he wanted to see and approach Christ. He is the first symbol of repentance, for repentance begins as the rediscovery of the deep nature of all desire: the desire for God and His righteousness, for the true life. Zacchaeus is "short"—petty, sinful and limited—yet his his desire overcomes all this. It "forces" Christ's attention; it bring Christ to his home. Such, then, is the first announcement, the first invitation: ours is to *desire* that which is deepest and truest in ourselves, to acknowledge the thirst and hunger for the Absolute which is in us whether we know it or not, and which, when we deviate from it and turn our desires away, makes us indeed a "useless passion." And if we desire deeply enough, strongly enough, Christ will respond.

2. HUMILITY
(Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee)

The next Sunday is called the *"Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee."* On the eve of this day, on Saturday at Vespers, the liturgical book of the lenten season—the *Triodion*[3]—makes its first appearance and texts from it are added to the usual hymns and prayers of the weekly

Resurrection service. They develop the next major aspect of repentance: *humility.*

The Gospel lesson (Lk. 18:10-4) pictures a man who is always pleased with himself and who thinks that he complies with all the requirements of religion. He is self-assured and proud of himself. In reality, however, he has falsified the meaning of religion. He has reduced it to external observations and he measures his piety by the amount of money he contributes to the temple. As for the Publican, he humbles himself and his humility justifies him before God. If there is a moral quality almost completely disregarded and even denied today, it is indeed humility. The culture in which we live constantly instills in us the sense of pride, of self-glorification, and of self-righteousness. It is built on the assumption that man can achieve anything by himself and it even pictures God as the One who all the time "gives credit" for man's achievements and good deeds. Humility—be it individual or corporate, ethnic or national—is viewed as a sign of weakness, as something unbecoming a real man. Even our churches—are they not imbued with that same spirit of the Pharisee? Do we not want our every contribution, every "good deed," all that we do "for the Church" to be acknowledged, praised, publicized?

But what is humility? The answer to this question may seem a paradoxical one for it is rooted in a strange affirmation: *God Himself is humble!* Yet to anyone who knows God, who contemplates Him in His creation and in His saving acts, it is evident that humility is truly a divine quality, the very content and the radiance of that *glory* which, as we sing during the Divine Liturgy, fills heaven and earth. In our human mentality we tend to oppose "glory" and "humility"—the latter being for us the indication of a flaw or deficiency. For us it is our ignorance or incompetence that makes or ought to make us feel humble. It is almost impossible to "put across" to the modern man, fed on publicity, self-affirmation, and endless self-praise, that all that which is genuinely perfect, beautiful, and good is at the same time naturally humble; for precisely because

of its perfection, it does not need "publicity," external glory, or "showing off" of any kind. God is humble *because* He is perfect; His humility *is* His glory and the source of all true beauty, perfection, and goodness, and everyone who approaches God and *knows* Him immediately partakes of the Divine humility and is beautified by it. This is true of Mary, the Mother of Christ, whose humility made her the joy of all creation and the greatest revelation of beauty on earth, true of all the Saints, and true of every human being during the rare moments of his contacts with God.

How does one become humble? The answer, for a Christian, is simple: by contemplating Christ, the divine humility incarnate, the One in whom God has revealed once and for all His glory as humility and His humility as glory. "Today," Christ said on the night of His ultimate self-humiliation, "the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in Him." Humility is learned by contemplating Christ who said: "Learn from Me for I am meek and humble in heart." Finally, it is learned by measuring everything by Him, by referring everything to Him. For without Christ, true humility is impossible, while with the Pharisee, even religion becomes pride in human achievements, another form of pharisaic self-glorification.

The lenten season begins then by a quest, a prayer for humility which is the beginning of true repentance. For repentance, above everything else, is *a return to the genuine order of things,* the restoration of the right vision. It is, therefore, rooted in humility, and humility—the divine and beautiful humility—is its fruit and end. "Let us avoid the high flown speech of the Pharisee," says the *Kontakion* of this day, "and *learn the majesty* of the Publican's humble words. . . ." We are at the gates of repentance and at the most solemn moment of the Sunday Vigil; after the Resurrection and the appearance of Christ have been announced—"having beheld the Resurrection . . ."—we sing for the first time the *troparia* which will accompany us throughout the entire Lent:

Open to me the gates of repentance, O Giver of Life,
For my spirit rises early to pray towards Thy holy temple,

Bearing the temple of my body all defiled;
But in Thy compassion, purify me by the loving kindness of Thy mercy.

Lead me on the paths of salvation, O Mother of God,
For I have profaned my soul with shameful sins,
and have wasted my life in laziness.
But by your intercessions, deliver me from all impûrity.

When I think of the many evil things I have done, wretch that I am,
I tremble at the fearful day of judgement.
But trusting in Thy loving kindness, like David I cry to Thee:
Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.

3. RETURN FROM EXILE
(The Sunday of the Prodigal Son)

On the third Sunday of preparation for Lent, we hear the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32). Together with the hymns of this day, the parable reveals to us the time of repentance as man's *return from exile.* The prodigal son, we are told, went to a far country and there spent all that he had. A far country! It is this unique definition of our human condition that we must assume and make ours as we begin our approach to God. A man who has never had that experience, be it only very briefly, who has never felt that he is exiled from God and from real life, will never understand what Christianity is about. And the one who is perfectly "at home" in this world and its life, who has never been wounded by the nostalgic desire for another Reality, will not understand what is repentance.

Repentance is often simply identified as a cool and "objective" enumeration of sins and transgressions, as the act of "pleading guilty" to a legal indictment. Confession and absolution are seen as being of a juridical nature. But something very essential is overlooked—without which neither confession nor absolution have any real meaning or power. This "something" is precisely the feeling of *alienation from God,* from the joy of communion with Him, from the real life as created and given by God. It is easy indeed to confess that I have not fasted on prescribed days, or missed my prayers, or become angry. It is quite

a different thing, however, to realize suddenly that I have defiled and lost my spiritual beauty, that I am far away from my real home, my real life, and that something precious and pure and beautiful has been hopelessly broken in the very texture of my existence. Yet this, and only this, is repentance, and therefore it is also a deep desire *to reurn,* to go back, to recover that lost home. I received from God wonderful riches: first of all life and the possibility to enjoy it, to fill it with meaning, love, and knowledge; then—in Baptism—the new life of Christ Himself, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the peace and the joy of the eternal Kingdom. I received the knowledge of God, and in Him the knowledge of everything else and the power to be a son of God. And all this I have lost, all this I am losing all the time, not only in particular "sins" and "transgressions," but in the sin of all sins: the deviation of my love from God, preferring the "far country" to the beautiful home of the Father.

But the Church is here to remind me of what I have abandoned and lost. And as she reminds me, I *remember:* "I have wickedly strayed away from Thy fatherly glory," says the *Kontakion* of this day, "and wasted with sinners the riches Thou gavest me. Then do I raise the prodigal's cry unto Thee, O bountiful Father: I have sinned against Thee; take me back as a penitent, and make me as one of Thy hired servants. . . ."

And, as I *remember,* I find in myself the desire to return and the power to return: ". . . I shall return to the compassionate Father crying with tears: Receive me as one of Thy servants. . . ."

One liturgical particularity of this *"Sunday of the Prodigal Son"* must be especially mentioned here. At Sunday Matins, following the solemn and joyful Psalms of the *Polyeleion,* we sing the sad and nostalgic Psalm 137:

> By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, and we wept when we remembered Zion. . . . How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy . . .

It is the Psalm of exile. It was sung by the Jews in their Babylonian captivity as they thought of their holy city of Jerusalem. It has become forever the song of man as he realizes his exile from God, and realizing it, becomes man again: the one who can never be fully satisfied by anything in this fallen world, for by nature and vocation he is a pilgrim of the Absolute. This Psalm will be sung twice more: on the last two Sundays before Lent. It reveals Lent itself as pilgrimage and repentance—as *return.*

4. THE LAST JUDGMENT (Meat-Fare Sunday)

The next Sunday is called *"Meat-Fare"* because during the week following it a limited fasting—abstention from meat—is prescribed by the Church. This prescription is to be understood in the light of what has been said above about the meaning of preparation. The Church begins now to "adjust" us to the great effort which she will expect from us seven days later. She gradually takes us into that effort—knowing our frailty, foreseeing our spiritual weakness.

On the eve of that day (Meat-Fare Saturday), the Church invites us to a universal commemoration of all those who have "fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection and life eternal." This is indeed the Church's great day of prayer for her departed members. To understand the meaning of this connection between Lent and the prayer for the dead, one must remember that Christianity is the religion of *love.* Christ left with his disciples not a doctrine of individual salvation but a new commandment "that they love one another," and He added: "By this shall all know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Love is thus the foundation, the very life of the Church which is, in the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the "unity of faith and love." Sin is always absence of love, and therefore separation, isolation, war of all against all. The new life given by Christ and conveyed to us by the

Church is, first of all, a life of reconciliation, of "gathering into oneness of those who were dispersed," the restoration of love broken by sin. But how can we even begin our return to God and our reconciliation with Him if in ourselves we do not return to the unique new commandment of love? Praying for the dead is an essential expression of the Church as *love.* We ask God to remember those whom we remember and we remember them because we love them. Praying for them we meet them in Christ who is Love and who, because He is Love, overcomes death which is the ultimate victory of separation and lovelessness. In Christ there is no difference between living and dead because all are alive in Him. He is the Life and that Life is the light of man. Loving Christ, we love all those who are in Him; loving those who are in Him, we love Christ: this is the law of the Church and the obvious rationale for her of prayer for the dead. It is truly our love in Christ that keeps them alive because it keeps them "in Christ," and how wrong, how hopelessly wrong, are those Western Christians who either reduce prayer for the dead to a juridical doctrine of "merits" and "compensations" or simply reject it as useless. The great Vigil for the Dead of Meat-Fare Saturday serves as a pattern for all other commemorations of the departed and it is repeated on the *second, third,* and *fourth* Saturdays of Lent.

It is *love* again that constitutes the theme of *"Meat-Fare Sunday."* The Gospel lesson for the day is Christ's parable of the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). When Christ comes to judge us, what will be the criterion of His judgment? The parable answers: *love*—not a mere humanitarian concern for abstract justice and the anonymous "poor," but concrete and personal love for the human person, any human person, that God makes me encounter in my life. This distinction is important because today more and more Christians tend to identify Christian love with political, economic, and social concerns; in other words, they shift from the unique *person* and its unique personal destiny, to anonymous entities such as "class," "race," etc. Not that these concerns are wrong. It is obvious that in their

respective walks of life, in their responsibilities as citizens, professional men, etc., Christians are called to care, to the best of their possibilities and understanding, for a just, equal, and in general more humane society. All this, to be sure, stems from Christianity and may be inspired by Christian love. But Christian love as such is something different, and this difference is to be understood and maintained if the Church is to preserve her unique mission and not become a mere "social agency," which definitely she is not.

Christian love is the "possible impossibility" to see Christ in another man, whoever he is, and whom God, in His eternal and mysterious plan, has decided to introduce into my life, be it only for a few moments, not as an occasion for a "good deed" or an exercise in philanthropy, but as the beginning of an eternal companionship in God Himself. For, indeed, what is love if not that mysterious power which transcends the accidental and the external in the "other"—his physical appearance, social rank, ethnic origin, intellectual capacity—and reaches the *soul,* the unique and uniquely personal "root" of a human being, truly the part of God in him? If God loves every man it is because He alone knows the priceless and absolutely unique treasure, the "soul" or "person" He gave every man. Christian love then is the participation in that divine knowledge and the gift of that divine love. There is no "impersonal" love because love *is* the wonderful discovery of the "person" in "man," of the personal and unique in the common and general. It is the discovery in each man of that which is "lovable" in him, of that which is from God.

In this respect, Christian love is sometimes the opposite of "social activism" with which one so often identifies Christianity today. To a "social activist" the object of love is not "person" but *man,* an abstract unit of a not less abstract "humanity." But for Christianity, man is "lovable" because he is *person.* There person is reduced to man; here man is seen only as person. The "social activist" has no interest for the personal, and easily sacrifices it to the "common interest." Christianity may seem to be, and in

some ways actually is, rather sceptical about that abstract "humanity," but it commits a mortal sin against itself each time it gives up its concern and love for the person. Social activism is always "futuristic" in its approach; it always acts in the name of justice, order, happiness to come, to be achieved. Christianity cares little about that problematic future but puts the whole emphasis on the *now*—the only decisive time for love. The two attitudes are not mutually exclusive, but they must not be confused. Christians, to be sure, have responsibilities toward "this world" and they must fulfill them. This is the area of "social activism" which belongs entirely to "this world." Christian love, however, aims beyond "this world." It is itself a ray, a manifestation of the Kingdom of God; it transcends and overcomes all limitations, all "conditions" of this world because its motivation as well as its goals and consummation is in God. And we know that even in this world, which "lies in evil," the only lasting and transforming victories are those of love. To remind man of this *personal* love and vocation, to fill the sinful world with this love—this is the true mission of the Church.

The parable of the Last Judgment is about Christian love. Not all of us are called to work for "humanity," yet each one of us has received the gift and the grace of Christ's love. We know that all men ultimately need this *personal love*—the recognition in them of their unique soul in which the beauty of the whole creation is reflected in a unique way. We also know that men are in prison and are sick and thirsty and hungry because that personal love has been denied them. And, finally, we know that however narrow and limited the framework of our personal existence, each one of us has been made responsible for a tiny part of the Kingdom of God, made responsible by that very gift of Christ's love. Thus, on whether or not we have accepted this responsibility, on whether we have loved or refused to love, shall we be judged. For "inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me. . . ."

5. FORGIVENESS
(Cheese-Fare Sunday)

And now we have reached the very last days before Lent. Already during Meat-Fare Week, which precedes *"Forgiveness Sunday,"* two days—Wednesday and Friday—have been set apart as fully "lenten": The Divine Liturgy is not to be served and the whole order and type of worship have the liturgical characteristics of Lent. On Wednesday at Vespers we greet Lent with this beautiful hymn:

> The lenten spring has come!
> the light of repentance;
> Let us, brothers, cleanse ourselves from all evil,
> crying out to the Giver of Light:
> Glory to Thee, O Lover of man.

Then on Cheese-Fare Saturday the Church commemorates all men and women who were "illumined through fasting:" the Saints who are the patterns we must follow, guides in the difficult art of fasting and repentance. In the effort we are about to begin we are not alone:

> Let us praise the assemblies of holy fathers:
> Anthony the Great, Euthymius the Great and all of their company!
> Passing through their lives as through a paradise of sweetness....

We have helpers and examples:

> We honor you as examples, O holy fathers!
> You truly taught us to walk on the right path;
> You are blessed for you worked for Christ....

Finally comes the last day, usually called *"Forgiveness Sunday,"* but whose other liturgical name must also be remembered: the *"Expulsion of Adam from the Paradise of Bliss."* This name summarizes indeed the entire preparation for Lent. By now we know that man was created for paradise, for knowledge of God and communion with Him. Man's sin has deprived him of that blessed life and his existence on earth is exile. Christ, the Savior of the world, opens the door of paradise to everyone who follows Him, and the Church, by revealing to us the beauty of

the Kingdom, makes our life a pilgrimage toward our heavenly fatherland. Thus, at the beginning of Lent, we are like Adam:

> Adam was expelled from paradise through food;
> Sitting, therefore, in front of it he cried:
> 'Woe to me....
> One commandment of God have I transgressed,
> depriving myself of all that is good;
> Paradise holy! Planted for me,
> And now because of Eve closed to to me;
> Pray to thy Creator and mine
> that I may be filled again by thy blossom.'
> Then answered the Savior to him:
> 'I wish not my creation to perish;
> I desire it to be saved and to know the Truth;
> For I will not turn away him who comes to Me....'

Lent is the liberation of our enslavement to sin, from the prison of "this world." And the Gospel lesson of this last Sunday (Matt. 6:14-21) sets the conditions for that *liberation.* The first one is *fasting*—the refusal to accept the desires and urges of our fallen nature as normal, the effort to free ourselves from the dictatorship of flesh and matter over the spirit. To be effective, however, our fast must not be hypocritical, a "showing off." We must "appear not unto men to fast but to our Father who is in secret." The second condition is *forgiveness*—"If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you." The triumph of sin, the main sign of its rule over the world, is division, opposition, separation, hatred. Therefore, the first break through this fortress of sin is forgiveness: the return to unity, solidarity, love. To forgive is to put between me and my "enemy" the radiant forgiveness of God Himself. To forgive is to reject the hopeless "dead-ends" of human relations and to refer them to Christ. Forgiveness is truly a "breakthrough" of the Kingdom into this sinful and fallen world.

Lent actually begins at Vespers of that Sunday. This unique service, so deep and beautiful, is absent from so many of our churches! Yet nothing reveals better the "tonality" of Great Lent in the Orthodox Church; nowhere is better manifested its profound appeal to man.

The service begins as solemn Vespers with clergy in bright vestments. The hymns (stichira) which follow the Psalm "Lord, I have cried . . ." announce the coming of Lent and, beyond Lent, the approach of Pascha!

> Let us begin the time of fasting in light!
> Preparing ourselves for the spiritual efforts.
> Let us purify our soul; let us purify our body.
> As from food, let us abstain from all passion
> and enjoy the virtues of the spirit,
> So that perfected in time by love
> We may all be made worthy to see
> the Passion of Christ and the Holy Pascha
> In spiritual joy!

Then comes, as usual, the Entrance with the evening hymn: "O Gladsome Radiance of the holy glory. . . ." The celebrant then proceeds to the "high place" behind the altar for the proclamation of the evening *Prokeimenon* which always announces the end of one and the beginning of another day. This day's *Great Prokeimenon* announces the beginning of Lent:

> Turn not away Thy face from Thy servant
> for I am afflicted!
> Hear me speedily.
> Attend to my soul and deliver it!

Listen to the unique melody of this verse—to this cry that suddenly fills the church: ". . . for I am afflicted!"—and you will understand this starting point of Lent: the mysterious mixture of despair and hope, of darkness and light. All preparation has now come to an end. I stand before God, before the glory and the beauty of His Kingdom. I realize that I belong to it, that I have no other home, no other joy, no other goal; I also realize that I am exiled from it into the darkness and sadness of sin, "for I am afflicted!" And finally, I realize that only God can help in that affliction, that only He can "attend to my soul." Repentance is, above everything else, a desperate call for that divine help.

Five times we repeat the *Prokeimenon.* And then, Lent is here! Bright vestments are put aside; lights are extin-

guished. When the celebrant intones the petitions for the evening litany, the choir responds in the lenten "key." For the first time the lenten prayer of St. Ephrem accompanied by prostrations is read. At the end of the service all the faithful approach the priest and one another asking for mutual forgiveness. But as they perform this rite of reconciliation, as Lent is inaugurated by this movement of love, reunion, and brotherhood, the choir sings the Paschal hymns. We will have to wander forty days through the desert of Lent. Yet at the end shines already the light of Easter, the light of the Kingdom.

Chapter Two

THE LENTEN WORSHIP

1. "BRIGHT SADNESS"

For many, if not for the majority of Orthodox Christians, Lent consists of a limited number of formal, predominantly negative, rules and prescriptions: abstention from certain food, dancing, perhaps movies. Such is the degree of our alienation from the real spirit of the Church that it is almost impossible for us to understand that there is "something else" in Lent—something without which all these prescriptions lose much of their meaning. This "something else" can best be described as an "atmosphere," a "climate" into which one enters, as first of all a state of mind, soul, and spirit which for seven weeks permeates our entire life. Let us stress once more that the purpose of Lent is not to force on us a few formal obligations, but to "soften" our heart so that it may open itself to the realities of the spirit, to experience the hidden "thirst and hunger" for communion with God.

This lenten "atmosphere," this unique "state of mind," is brought about mainly by means of worship, by the various changes introduced during that season into the liturgical life.[4] Considered separately, these changes may appear as incomprehensible "rubrics," as formal prescriptions to be formally adhered to; but understood as a whole, they

reveal and communicate the spirit of Lent, they make us see, feel, and experience that *bright sadness* which is the true message and gift of Lent. One can say without exaggeration that the spiritual fathers and the sacred writers who composed the hymns of the *Lenten Triodion,* who little by little organized the general structures of the lenten services, who adorned the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts with that special beauty which is proper to it, had a unique understanding of the human soul. They truly knew the art of repentance, and every year during Lent they make this art accesible to everyone who has ears to hear and eyes to see.

The general impression, I said, is that of "bright sadness." Even a man having only a limited knowledge of worship who enters a church during a lenten service would understand almost immediately, I am sure, what is meant by this somewhat contradictory expression. On the one hand, a certain quiet sadness permeates the service: vestments are dark, the services are longer than usual and more monotonous, there is almost no movement. Readings and chants alternate yet nothing seems to "happen." At regular intervals the priest comes out of the sanctuary and reads always the same short prayer, and the whole congregation punctuates every petition of that prayer with prostrations. Thus, for a long time we stand in this monotony—in this quiet sadness.

But then we begin to realize that this very length and monotony are needed if we are to experience the secret and at first unnoticeable "action" of the service in us. Little by little we begin to understand, or rather to feel, that this sadness is indeed "bright," that a mysterious transformation is about to take place in us. It is as if we were reaching a place to which the noises and the fuss of life, of the street, of all that which usually fills our days and even nights, have no access—a place where they have no power. All that which seemed so tremendously important to us as to fill our mind, that state of anxiety which has virtually become our second nature, disappear somewhere and we begin to feel free, light and happy. It is not the noisy and superficial happiness which

comes and goes twenty times a day and is so fragile and fugitive; it is a deep happiness which comes not from a single and particular reason but from our soul having, in the words of Dostoevsky, touched "another world." And that which it has touched is made up of light and peace and joy, of an inexpressible trust. We understand then why the services had to be long and seemingly monotonous. We understand that it is simply impossible to pass from our normal state of mind made up almost entirely of fuss, rush, and care, into this new one without first "quieting down," without restoring in ourselves a measure of inner stability. This is why those who think of church services only in terms of "obligations," who always inquire about the required minimum ("How often must we go to church?" "How often must we pray?") can never understand the true nature of worship which is to take us into a different world—that of God's Presence!—but to take us there slowly because our fallen nature has lost the ability to accede there naturally.

Thus, as we experience this mysterious liberation, as we become "light and peaceful," the monotony and the sadness of the service acquire a new significance, they are transfigured. An inner beauty illumines them like an early ray of the sun which, while it is still dark in the valley, begins to lighten up the top of the mountain. This light and secret joy come from the long alleluias,[5] from the entire "tonality" of lenten worship. What at first appeared as monotony now is revealed as peace; what sounded like sadness is now experienced as the very first movements of the soul recovering its lost depth. This is what the first verse of the lenten alleluia proclaims every morning: "My soul has desired Thee in the night, O God, before dawn, for Thy judgments are a light upon the earth!"

"Sad brightness": the sadness of my exile, of the waste I have made of my life; the brightness of God's presence and forgiveness, the joy of the recovered desire for God, the peace of the recovered home. Such is the climate of lenten worship; such is its first and general impact on my soul.

2. THE LENTEN PRAYER OF ST. EPHREM THE SYRIAN

Of all lenten hymns and prayers, one short prayer can be termed *the* lenten prayer. Tradition ascribes it to one of the great teachers of spiritual life—St. Ephrem the Syrian. Here is its text:

> O Lord and Master of my life!
> Take from me the spirit of sloth,
> faint-heartedness, lust of power, and idle talk.
> But give rather the spirit of chastity,
> humility, patience, and love to Thy servant.
> Yea, O Lord and King!
> Grant me to see my own errors
> and not to judge my brother;
> For Thou art blessed unto ages of ages. Amen.

This prayer is read twice at the end of each lenten service Monday through Friday (not on Saturdays and Sundays for, as we shall see later, the services of these days do not follow the lenten pattern). At the first reading, a prostration follows each petition. Then we all bow twelve times saying: "O God, cleanse me a sinner." The entire prayer is repeated with one final prostration at the end.

Why does this short and simple prayer occupy such an important position in the entire lenten worship? Because it enumerates in a unique way all the *negative* and *positive* elements of repentance and constitutes, so to speak, a "check list" for our individual lenten effort. This effort is aimed first at our liberation from some fundamental spiritual diseases which shape our life and make it virtually impossible for us even to start turning ourselves to God.

The basic disease is *sloth*. It is that strange laziness and passivity of our entire being which always pushes us "down" rather than "up"—which constantly convinces us that no change is possible and therefore desirable. It is in fact a deeply rooted cynicism which to every spiritual challenge responds "what for?" and makes our life one tremendous spiritual waste. It is the root of all sin because it poisons the spiritual energy at its very source.

The result of *sloth* is *faint-heartedness.* It is the state of despondency which all spiritual Fathers considered the greatest danger for the soul. Despondency is the impossibility for man to see anything good or positive; it is the reduction of everything to negativism and pessimism. It is truly a demonic power in us because the Devil is fundamentally a *liar.* He lies to man about God and about the world; he fills life with darkness and negation. Despondency is the suicide of the soul because when man is possessed by it he is absolutely unable to see the light and to desire it.

Lust of power! Strange as it may seem, it is precisely sloth and despondency that fill our life with *lust of power.* By vitiating the entire attitude toward life and making it meaningless and empty, they force us to seek compensation in a radically wrong attitude toward other persons. If my life is not oriented toward God, not aimed at eternal values, it will inevitably become selfish and self-centered and this means that all other beings will become means of my own self-satisfaction. If God is not the Lord and Master of my life, then I become my own lord and master—the absolute center of *my* own world, and I begin to evaluate everything in terms of *my* needs, *my* ideas, *my* desires, and *my* judgments. The lust of power is thus a fundamental depravity in my relationship to other beings, a search for their subordination to me. It is not necessarily expressed in the actual urge to command and to dominate "others." It may result as well in indifference, contempt, lack of interest, consideration, and respect. It is indeed sloth and despondency directed this time at others; it completes spiritual suicide with spiritual murder.

Finally, *idle talk.* Of all created beings, man alone has been endowed with the gift of speech. All Fathers see in it the very "seal" of the Divine Image in man because God Himself is revealed as Word (John 1:1). But being the supreme gift, it is by the same token the supreme danger. Being the very expression of man, the means of his self-fulfillment, it is for this very reason the means of his fall and self-destruction, of betrayal and

sin. The word saves and the word kills; the word inspires and the word poisons. The word is the means of Truth and it is the means of demonic Lie. Having an ultimate positive power, it has therefore a tremendous negative power. It truly creates positively or negatively. When deviated from its divine origin and purpose, the word becomes *idle*. It "enforces" sloth, despondency, and lust of power, and transforms life into hell. It becomes the very power of sin.

These four are thus the negative "objects" of repentance. They are the obstacles to be removed. But God alone can remove them. Hence, the first part of the lenten prayer—this cry from the bottom of human helplessness. Then the prayer moves to the positive aims of repentance which also are four.

Chastity! If one does not reduce this term, as is so often and erroneously done, only to its sexual connotations, it is understood as the positive counterpart of sloth. The exact and full translation of the Greek *sofrosini* and the Russian *tselomudryie* ought to be *whole-mindedness*. Sloth is, first of all, dissipation, the brokenness of our vision and energy, the inability to see the whole. Its opposite then is precisely *wholeness*. If we usually mean by chastity the virtue opposed to sexual depravity, it is because the broken character of our existence is nowhere better manifested than in sexual lust—the alienation of the body from the life and control of the spirit. Christ restores wholeness in us and He does so by restoring in us the true scale of values by leading us back to God.

The first and wonderful fruit of this wholeness or chastity is *humility*. We already spoke of it. It is above everything else the victory of truth in us, the elimination of all lies in which we usually live. *Humility* alone is capable of truth, of seeing and accepting things as they are and therefore of seeing God's majesty and goodness and love in everything. This is why we are told that God gives grace to the humble and resists the proud.

Chastity and humility are naturally followed by *patience*. The "natural" or "fallen" man is impatient, for being

blind to himself he is quick to judge and to condemn others. Having but a broken, incomplete, and distorted knowledge of everything, he measures all things by his tastes and his ideas. Being indifferent to everyone except himself, he wants life to be successful right here and now. Patience, however, is truly a divine virtue. God is patient not because He is "indulgent," but because He sees the depth of all that exists, because the inner reality of things, which in our blindness we do not see, is open to Him. The closer we come to God, the more patient we grow and the more we reflect that infinite respect for all beings which is the proper quality of God.

Finally, the crown and fruit of all virtues, of all growth and effort, is *love*—that love which, as we have already said, can be given by God alone—the gift which is the goal of all spiritual preparation and practice.

All this is summarized and brought together in the concluding petition of the lenten prayer in which we ask "to see my own errors and not to judge my brother." For ultimately there is but one danger: *pride.* Pride is the source of evil, and all evil is pride. Yet it is not enough for me to see my own errors, for even this apparent virtue can be turned into pride. Spiritual writings are full of warnings against the subtle forms of pseudo-piety which, in reality, under the cover of humility and self-accusation can lead to a truly demonic pride. But when we "see our own errors" *and* "do not judge our brothers," when, in other terms, chastity, humility, patience, and love are but one in us, then and only then the ultimate enemy—pride—will be destroyed in us.

After each petition of the prayer we make a prostration. Prostrations are not limited to the Prayer of St. Ephrem but constitute one of the distinctive characteristics of the entire lenten worship. Here, however, their meaning is disclosed best of all. In the long and difficult effort of spiritual recovery, the Church does not separate the soul from the body. The whole man has fallen away from God; the whole man is to be restored, the whole man is to return. The catastrophe of sin lies precisely in the victory of the

flesh—the animal, the irrational, the lust in us—over the spiritual and the divine. But the body is glorious, the body is holy, so holy that God Himself "became flesh." Salvation and repentance then are not contempt for the body or neglect of it, but restoration of the body to its real function as the expression and the life of spirit, as the temple of the priceless human soul. Christian asceticism is a fight, not *against* but *for* the body. For this reason, the whole man—soul and body—repents. The body participates in the prayer of the soul just as the soul prays through and in the body. Prostrations, the "psycho-somatic" sign of repentance and humility, of adoration and obedience, are thus the lenten rite *par excellence.*

3. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

The prayer of the Church is always *biblical*—i.e., expressed in the language, images, and symbols of the Holy Scriptures. If the Bible contains the Divine Revelation to man, it is also man's inspired response to that Revelation and thus the pattern and the content of man's prayer, praise, and adoration. For example, thousands of years have passed since the Psalms were composed; yet when man needs to express repentance, the shock of his entire being at the challenge of divine mercy, he still finds the only adequate expression in the penitential Psalm beginning, "Have mercy on me, O God!" Every imaginable situation of man before God, the world, and other men, from the overwhelming joy of God's presence to the abysmal despair of man's exile, sin, and alienation has found its perfect expression in this unique Book which, for this reason, has always constituted the daily nourishment of the Church, the means of her worship and self-edification.

During Great Lent the biblical dimension of worship is given increased emphasis. One can say that the forty days of Lent are, in a way, the return of the Church into the spiritual situation of the Old Testament—the time *before* Christ, the time of repentance and expectation, the

time of the "history of salvation" moving *toward* its fulfillment in Christ. This return is necessary because even though we belong to the time *after Christ,* and know Him, and have been "baptized into Him," we constantly fall away from the new life received from Him, and this means lapse again into the "old" time. The Church, on the one hand, is already "at home" for she *is* the "grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit"; yet, on the other hand, she is also "on her way" as the pilgrimage—long and difficult—toward the fulfillment of all things in God, the return of Christ and the end of all time.

Great Lent is the season when this second aspect of the Church, of her life as expectation and journey, is being actualized. It is here, therefore, that the Old Testament acquires its whole significance: as the Book not only of prophecies which have been fulfilled, but of man and the entire creation "on their way" to the Kingdom of God.

Two main principles govern the use of the Old Testament in lenten worship[6]: the "double reading" of the *Psalter;* and the *lectio continua,* i.e., the reading virtually in their totality of three books—*Genesis, Isaiah* and *Proverbs.*

Psalms have always occupied a central and indeed unique place in Christian worship.[7] The Church sees in them not only the best, the most adequate and perfect expression of man's prayer, repentance, adoration, and praise, but a true verbal icon of Christ and the Church, a revelation within the Revelation. For the Fathers, says an exegete of their writings, "only Christ and His Church pray, weep, and speak in this Book." From the very beginning, the *Psalms* constituted, therefore, the very foundation of the Church's prayer, her "natural language." They are used in worship first as "fixed Psalms," i.e., as the permanent material of all daily services: the "evening Psalm" (Ps. 104) at Vespers; the Six Psalms (Psalms 3, 38, 63, 88, 103, 143), the Praises (Psalms 148, 149, 150) at Matins; and groups of three Psalms at the Hours, etc. From the *Psalter* are selected the *prokeimena,* verses for the alleluias, etc., for all feasts and commemorations of the liturgical year. And

finally, the entire *Psalter,* divided into twenty parts or *kathismata,* is chanted in its totality every week at Vespers and Matins. It is this third use of the *Psalter* that is doubled during Lent; the *Psalter* is chanted not once but twice every week of Lent, and portions of it are included in the Third and Sixth Hours.

The "continuous reading" of *Genesis, Isaiah* and *Proverbs* has its origin at the time when Lent was still the main pre-baptismal season of the Church and lenten services were predominantly *catechetical* in their character, i.e., dedicated to the indoctrination of the catechumen. Each of the three books corresponds to one of the three basic aspects of the Old Testament: the history of God's activity in Creation, prophecy, and the ethical or moral teachings. The Book of *Genesis* gives, as it were, the "framework" of the Church's faith. It contains the story of Creation, of the Fall, and finally that of the promise and the beginning of salvation through God's Covenant with his chosen people. It conveys the three fundamental dimensions of the Church's belief in God as Creator, Judge, and Savior. It reveals the roots of the Christian understanding of man as created in the "image and likeness of God," as falling away from God, and as remaining the object of divine love, care, and ultimately salvation. It discloses the meaning of history as the *history of salvation* leading to and fulfilled in Christ. It announces the mystery of the Church through the images and realities of the People of God, Covenant, Ark, etc. *Isaiah* is the greatest of all prophets and the reading of his book during Lent is meant to reveal once more the great mystery of salvation through the sufferings and sacrifices of Christ. Finally, the Book of *Proverbs* is the *epitome* of the ethical teachings of the Old Testament, of the moral law and wisdom—without whose acceptance man cannot understand his alienation from God and is unable therefore even to hear the good news of forgiveness through love and grace.

Lessons from these three books are read daily during Lent, Monday through Friday: *Genesis* and *Proverbs* at Vespers, and *Isaiah* at the Sixth Hour. And although Lent has long ago ceased to be the catechetical season of the

Church, the initial purpose of these readings keeps its full significance. Our Christian faith needs this annual return to its biblical roots and foundation for there can be no end to our growth in the understanding of Divine Revelation. The Bible is not a collection of dogmatic "propositions" to be accepted and memorized once for all, but the living voice of God speaking to us again and again, taking us always deeper into the inexhaustible riches of His Wisdom and Love. There is no greater tragedy in our Church than the almost total ignorance by her members of the Holy Scriptures and, what is worse, our virtually total indifference toward them. What for the Fathers and Saints was endless joy, interest, spiritual and intellectual growth, is for so many Orthodox today an antiquated text with no meaning for their lives. It is to be hoped, therefore, that as the spirit and significance of Lent are recovered, this will also mean the recovery of the Scriptures as true spiritual food and communion with God.

4. THE TRIODION

Great Lent has its own liturgical book—*The Lenten Triodion.* It contains hymns and biblical readings for every day of the lenten season beginning with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee and ending with Vespers of Great and Holy Saturday. The hymns of the Triodion were composed in the main part after the virtual disappearance of the Catechumenate (i.e., adult baptism and the necessity of preparing candidates for it). Their emphasis, therefore, is not on Baptism but on repentance. Unfortunately very few people today know and understand the unique beauty and depth of this lenten hymnography. The ignorance of the *Triodion* is the principal cause of the slow transformation of the very understanding of Lent, of its purpose and meaning—a transformation which took place little by little in the Christian mentality and reduced Lent to a juridical "obligation" and a set of dietary laws. The real inspiration and challenge of Lent is all but lost

today and there is no other way toward its recovery but by an attentive listening to the hymns of the *Triodion.*

It is significant, for example, how often these hymns warn precisely against a "formal" and, therefore, hypocritical understanding of fasting. As early as Cheese-Fare Wednesday we hear:

> In vain do you rejoice in not eating, O soul!
> For you abstain from food,
> But from passions you are not purified.
> If you have no desire for improvement,
> You will be despised as a lie in the eyes of God,
> You will be likened to evil demons who never eat!
> If you persevere in sin, you will perform a useless fast;
> Therefore, remain in constant striving so as to
> stand before the Crucified Savior, or rather,
> To be crucified with the One who was crucified for your sake!

And again on Wednesday of the Fourth Week, we hear:

> Those who thirst for spiritual blessings
> Perform their good deeds in secret,
> Not noising them abroad in markets,
> But ceaselessly pray in the depths of our hearts:
> For He who sees all that is done in secret,
> Will reward us for our abstinence.
> Let us fulfill the fast without sad faces,
> But ceaselessly pray in the depths of our hearts:
> Our Father, who art in heaven,
> Lead us not into temptation,
> But deliver us from evil.

Throughout the whole Lent, the opposition of the Publican's humility to the Pharisee's boasting and self-glorification is stressed in hymns, while hypocrisy is denounced. But what then is the real fast? The *Triodion* answers: It is first of all an inner purification:

> Let us fast, O faithful,
> from corrupting snares, from harmful passions,
> So that we may acquire life from the divine cross
> and return with the good thief to our initial home....

It is also a return to love, a fight against "broken life," against hatred, injustice, envy:

While fasting physically, brothers,
Let us also fast spiritually;
Let us loose every knot of iniquity,
Let us tear up every unrighteous bond,
Let us distribute bread to the hungry and welcome
to our homes those who have no roof over their heads,
So that we may receive great mercy from Christ our God.

Come, O faithful,
Let us perform the works of God in the light;
Let us walk honestly as in the day.
Let us rid ourselves of unjust accusations against our neighbors
so that we place no stumbling block in their way.
Let us put aside the pleasures of the flesh
so that we may increase the grace of our souls.
Let us give bread to those in need.
Let us draw near in repentance to Christ and say:
O, our God! Have mercy on us....

As we listen to that, how far we are from the petty and Pharisaic understanding of Lent which prevails today and which views it exclusively in negative terms, as a kind of "inconvenience" which, if we voluntarily accept it and "suffer through it," will automatically credit us with "merits" and achieve our "good standing" with God. How many people have accepted the idea that Lent is the time when something which may be good in itself is *forbidden,* as if Good were taking pleasure in torturing us. For the authors of lenten hymns, however, Lent is exactly the opposite; it is a return to the "normal" life, to that "fasting" which Adam and Eve broke, thus introducing suffering and death into the world. Lent is greeted, therefore, as a spiritual spring, as a time of joy and light:

The lenten spring has come,
The light of repentance....

Let us receive the announcement of Lent with joy!
For if our forefather Adam had kept the fast,
We would not have been deprived of paradise....

The time of Lent is a time of gladness!
With radiant purity and pure love,
Filled with resplendent prayer and all good deeds,
Let us sing with joy....

Only those who "rejoice in the Lord," and for whom Christ and His Kingdom are the ultimate desire and joy of their existence, can joyfully accept the fight against evil and sin and partake of the final victory. This is why of all the categories of Saints, only *martyrs* are invoked and praised in special hymns every day in Lent. For martyrs are precisely those who preferred Christ to everything in this world including life itself, who rejoiced so much in Christ that they could say, as St. Ignatius of Antioch while dying said: "Now I begin to live. . . ." They are the *witnesses* of the Kingdom of God because only those who have seen it and tasted of it are capable of that ultimate surrender. They are our companions, our inspiration during Lent which is our fight for the victory of the divine, the heavenly, and the eternal in us.

Breathing one hope, beholding one sight,
You, suffering martyrs, found death to be the way of life. . . .

Dressed in the armor of faith,
Armed with the sign of the Cross,
You were soldiers worthy of God!
Manfully you opposed the tortures,
Crushing the Devil's deceits;
Victors you were, worthy of crowns.
Pray to Christ that He save our souls. . . .

Throughout the forty days, it is the Cross of Christ and His Resurrection, and the radiant joy of Pascha that constitute the supreme "term of reference" of all lenten hymnography, a constant reminder that however narrow and difficult the way, it ultimately leads to Christ's table in His Kingdom. As I said already, the expectation and foretaste of the Paschal joy permeates the entire Lent, and is the real motivation of lenten effort.

Desiring to commune with the Divine Pascha . . .
Let us pursue victory over the Devil through fasting. . . .

We will partake of the Divine Pascha of Christ!

TRIODION—the unknown and neglected book! If only we knew that it is there we can recover, make ours once more, the spirit not only of Lent alone but of Orthodoxy itself—of its "Paschal" vision of life, death, and eternity.

Chapter Three

THE LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS[8]

1. THE TWO MEANINGS OF COMMUNION

Of all liturgical rules pertaining to Lent, one is of crucial importance for its understanding, and being peculiar to Orthodoxy, is in many ways a key to its liturgical tradition. It is the rule which forbids the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on weekdays of Lent. The rubrics are clear: under no circumstances can the Divine Liturgy be celebrated in Lent Monday through Friday, with one exception—the Feast of the Annunciation, if it falls on one of these days. On Wednesdays and Fridays, however, a special evening service of Communion is prescribed; it is called the *Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.*[9]

So radically has the meaning of this rule been forgotten that in many parishes, especially those which for a long time were exposed to Western and Latin influences, it is simply not obeyed and the purely Latin practice of the daily—"private" or "memorial"—liturgies is continued throughout the whole Lent. But even where it is obeyed, no effort is made to go beyond a formal compliance with "rubrics" and to understand their spiritual significance, the deep "logic" of Lent. It is important, therefore, that we explain in a more detailed way the meaning of this rule

which transcends the framework of Lent and enlightens the entire liturgical tradition of Orthodoxy.

In very general terms, we have here the expression and the application of one fundamental liturgical principle: the incompatibility of the Eucharist with fasting. To understand, however, the meaning of that principle, one must begin not with fasting but with the Eucharist. In the Orthodox tradition, deeply different in this from the eucharistic theology and practice of Western Catholicism, the Eucharist has always preserved its festal and joyful character. It is first of all the sacrament of Christ's coming and presence among His disciples, and therefore the celebration—in a very real sense—of His Resurrection. Indeed it is the coming and presence of Christ at the Eucharist that is for the Church the "proof" of His Resurrection. It is the joy and the burning of hearts experienced by the disciples when on the way to Emmaus Christ revealed Himself to them "in the breaking of bread" (Lk. 24:13-35) that is the eternal source of the Church's "experiential" and "existential" knowledge of the Resurrection. No one saw the actual Resurrection and yet the disciples believed in it, not because someone taught them so, but because they saw the Risen Lord when "the doors being shut" He appeared among them and partook of their meal.

The Eucharist is still the same coming and presence, the same joy and "burning of heart," the same transrational yet absolute knowledge that the Risen Lord makes Himself known "in the breaking of bread." And so great is this joy that for the early Church the Day of the Eucharist was not *one* of the days but the *Lord's Day*—a day already beyond time, for in the Eucharist the Kingdom of God was already "breaking through." At the Last Supper, Christ Himself told His disciples that He bestowed upon them the Kingdom so that they might "eat and drink at His table in His Kingdom." Being the presence of the Risen Lord who ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father, the Eucharist is, therefore, the partaking of the Kingdom which is "joy and peace in the Holy Spirit." Communion is the "food of immortality," the "heavenly

bread," and approaching the Holy Table is truly ascending to heaven. Eucharist is thus *the* feast of the Church or, better still, the Church as the feast, as rejoicing in Christ's presence, as anticipating the eternal joy of the Kingdom of God. Every time the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she is "at home"—in heaven; she is ascending where Christ has ascended in order to make us "eat and drink at His table in His Kingdom. . . ." One understands then why the Eucharist is incompatible with fasting, for fasting (we shall see below) is the main expression of the Church as still in a state of pilgrimage, as being only on her way to the heavenly Kingdom. And "the sons of the Kingdom," Christ said, "cannot fast while the Bridegroom is with them" (Matt. 9:15).

But why then, one may ask, is Communion still distributed during fasting days at the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts? Does it not contradict the principle enunciated above? To answer this question, we must now consider the second aspect of the Orthodox understanding of Communion, its meaning as the source and the sustaining power of our spiritual effort. If, as we have just seen, Holy Communion is the fulfillment of all our efforts, the goal toward which we strive, the ultimate joy of our Christian life, it is *also* and of necessity the source and *beginning* of our spiritual effort itself, the divine gift which makes it possible for us to know, to desire, and to strive for a "more perfect communion in the day without evening" of God's Kingdom. For the Kingdom, although it has come, although it comes in the Church, is yet to be fulfilled and consummated at the end of time when God will fill all things with Himself. We know it, and we partake of it in anticipation; we partake *now* of the Kingdom which is still *to come*. We foresee and foretaste its glory and blessedness but we are still on earth, and our entire earthly existence is thus a long and often painful journey toward the ultimate Lord's Day. On this journey we need help and support, strength and comfort, for the "Prince of this world" has not yet surrendered; on the contrary, knowing his defeat by Christ, he stages a last and violent

battle against God to tear away from Him as many as possible. So difficult is this fight, so powerful the "gates of Hades," that Christ Himself tells us about the "narrow way" and the few that are capable of following it. And in this fight, our main help is precisely the Body and Blood of Christ, that "essential food" which keeps us spiritually alive and, in spite of all temptations and dangers, makes us Christ's followers. Thus, having partaken of Holy Communion, we pray:

> . . . let these gifts be for me the healing of soul and body, the repelling of every adversary, the illumining of the eyes of my heart, the peace of my spiritual powers, a faith unashamed, a love unfeigned, the fulfilling of wisdom, the observing of Thy commandments, the receiving of Thy divine grace, and the attaining of Thy Kingdom . . . .
>
> . . . consume me not, O my Creator, but instead enter into my members, my veins, my heart . . . may every evil thing, every carnal passion flee from me as from a fire as I become Thy tabernacle through communion. . . .

And if Lent and fasting mean the intensification of that fight, it is because—according to the Gospel—we then are face to face with evil and all its power. It is then, therefore, that we especially need the help and the power of that Divine Fire; hence, the special lenten Communion with the Presanctified Gifts, i.e., the Gifts consecrated at the Eucharist on the preceding Sunday and kept on the altar for distribution on Wednesday and Friday evenings.

There is no celebration of the Eucharist on fasting days because the celebration is one continuous movement of joy; but there is the continuous presence of the fruits of the Eucharist in the Church. Just as the "visible" Christ has ascended into heaven yet is invisibly present in the world, just as the Pascha is celebrated once a year yet its rays illumine the whole life of the Church, just as the Kingdom of God is yet to come but is already in the midst of us, so too with the Eucharist. As the sacrament and the celebration of the Kingdom, as the feast of the Church, it is incompatible with fast and is not celebrated during Lent; as the grace and the power of the Kingdom

which are at work in the world, as our supplier of the "essential food" and the weapon of our spiritual fight, it is at the very center of the fast, it is indeed the heavenly manna that keeps us alive in our journey through the desert of Lent.

2. THE TWO MEANINGS OF FASTING

At this point, the next question arises: if Eucharist is incompatible with fasting, why then is its celebration still prescribed on Saturdays and Sundays of Lent, and this without "breaking" the fast? The canons of the Church seem here to contradict one another.[10] While some of them forbid fasting on Sundays, some others forbid the breaking of the fast on any of the forty days. This contradiction, however, is only apparent, because the two rules which seem to be mutually exclusive refer in fact to two different meanings of the term fasting. To understand this is important because we discover here the Orthodox "philosophy of fasting" essential for our whole spiritual effort.

There are indeed two ways or modes of fasting rooted both in Scripture and Tradition, and which correspond to two distinct needs or states of man. The first one can be termed *total* fast for it consists of total abstinence from food and drink. One can define the second one as *ascetical* fast for it consists mainly in abstinence from certain foods and in substantial reduction of the dietary regimen. The *total* fast, by its very nature, is of short duration and is usually limited to one day or even a part of one day. From the very beginning of Christianity, it has been understood as a state of *preparation* and expectation—the state of spiritual concentration on that which is about to come. Physical hunger corresponds here to the spiritual expectation of fulfillment, the "opening up" of the entire human being to the approaching joy. Therefore, in the liturgical tradition of the Church, we find this total fast as the last and ultimate preparation for a great feast, for a decisive spiritual event. We find it, for example, on the eves of Christmas and

Epiphany, and above everything else it is the Eucharistic Fast, the essential mode of our preparation for the messianic banquet at Christ's table in His Kingdom. Eucharist is always preceded by this total fast which may vary in its duration but which for the Church constitutes a necessary condition for Holy Communion. Many people misunderstand this rule, seeing here nothing but an archaic prescription and wondering why an empty stomach should serve as a prerequisite for receiving the Sacrament. Reduced to such a physical and grossly "physiological" understanding, viewed as mere discipline, this rule, of course, loses its meaning. Thus it is no wonder that Roman Catholicism which long ago replaced the spiritual understanding of fasting with a juridical and disciplinary one (cf. for example, the power to "dispense" from fasting as if it is God and not man who needed fasting!) has nowadays virtually abolished the "Eucharistic" fast. In its true meaning, however, the total fast is the main expression of that rhythm of preparation and fulfillment by which the Church lives, for she is both the expectation of Christ in "this world," and the coming of this world into the "world to come." We may add here that in the early Church this total fast had a name taken from the military vocabulary; it was called *statio,* which meant a garrison in the state of alarm and mobilization. The Church keeps a "watch"—she expects the Bridegroom and waits for Him in readiness and joy. Thus, the total fast is not only a fast of the members of the Church; it is the Church herself as fast, as expectation of Christ who comes to her in the Eucharist, who shall come in glory at the consummation of all time.

Quite different are the spiritual connotations of the second type of fasting which we defined as *ascetical.* Here the purpose for fasting is to liberate man from the unlawful tyranny of the flesh, of that surrender of the spirit to the body and its appetites which is the tragic result of sin and the original fall of man. It is only by a slow and patient effort that man discovers that he "does not live by bread alone"—that he restores in himself the primacy of the spirit. It is of necessity and by its very nature a

long and sustained effort. The *time* factor is essential for it takes time to uproot and to heal the common and universal disease which men have come to consider as their "normal" state. The art of ascetical fasting had been refined and perfected within the monastic tradition and then was accepted by the entire Church. It is the application to man of Christ's words that the demonic powers which enslave man cannot be overcome but by "prayer and fasting." It is rooted in the example of Christ Himself who fasted forty days and then met Satan face to face and in this encounter reversed the surrender of man to "bread alone," thus inaugurating man's liberation. The Church has set apart four periods for this ascetical fast: the seasons before Easter, Christmas, the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, and the Dormition of the Mother of God. Four times a year she invites us to purify and liberate ourselves from the dominion of the flesh by the holy therapy of fasting, and each time the success of the therapy depends precisely on the application of certain basic rules among which the "unbrokenness" of fasting, its continuity in time, is the major one.

It is this distinction between the two modes of fasting that helps us to understand the apparent contradiction between the canons regulating the fast. The canon forbidding fasting on Sundays means literally that on that day fasting is "broken" first of all by the Eucharist itself, which fulfills the expectation, and being the goal of all fasting, is also its end. It means that Sunday, the Lord's Day, transcends Lent as it transcends time. It means in other terms that Sunday, the Day of the Kingdom, does not belong to that time whose meaning as pilgrimage or journey is expressed precisely in Lent; Sunday thus remains the day not of fasting but of spiritual joy.

But while breaking the *total* fast, the Eucharist does *not* break the "ascetical" fast which, as we have explained, requires by its very nature the *continuity* of effort. This means that the dietary regulations which govern the ascetical fasting remain in force on lenten Sundays. To put it in concrete terms, meats and fats are forbidden, but only because of the "psycho-somatic" character of ascetical

fasting, because the Church knows that the body, if it is to be "subdued," must undergo a lengthy and patient discipline of abstinence. In Russia, for example, monks never ate meat; but this did not mean that they fasted on Easter or any other great feast. One can say that a certain degree of ascetical fasting belongs to Christian life as such and should be kept by Christians. But the understanding of Easter, alas so common, as almost an obligation to overeat and overdrink is a sad and ugly caricature of the true spirit of Pascha! It is tragic indeed that in some churches people are discouraged from partaking of Holy Communion at Easter and the beautiful words of St. John Chrysostom's Paschal Sermon—"the table is full-laden, feast ye all sumptuously! The calf is fatted; let no one go hungry away"—are probably understood as referring *exclusively* to the rich contents of Easter baskets. The Feast is a spiritual reality and to be properly kept it requires as much sobriety and spiritual concentration as the fast.

It must be clearly understood, therefore, that there is no contradiction between the Church's insistence that we maintain abstinence from certain foods on lenten Sundays and the condemnation by her of fasting on the day of the Eucharist. It is also clear that only by following both rules, by keeping simultaneously the Eucharistic rhythm of preparation and fulfillment and the sustained effort of the "soul-saving forty days" can we truly achieve the spiritual goals of Lent. All this leads us now to the special place in lenten worship of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.

3. THE EVENING COMMUNION

The first and essential characteristic of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is that it is an *evening service.*[11] From the formal point of view, it is a service of Communion following Vespers. At the early stages of its development it was deprived of the solemnity it has today so that its connection with the daily evening service was even more obvious. The first question, therefore, concerns the Vesperal

character of the Liturgy. We know already that the Eucharist in the Orthodox tradition is always preceded by a period of total fasting. This general principle explains the fact that the Eucharist, different in this from all other services, has no *fixed hour* of its own, for the time of its celebration depends primarily on the nature of the day on which it is to be celebrated. Thus, on a great feast the *Typikon* prescribes a very early Eucharist because the Vigil fulfills the function of fasting or preparation. On a smaller feast with no Vigil, the Eucharist is moved to a later hour so that—theoretically, at least—on a weekday it ought to take place at Noon. Finally, on the days when a strict or total fasting is prescribed for the duration of the day, Holy Communion—the "breaking" of the fast—is received in the evening. The meaning of all these rubrics, which unfortunately are completely forgotten and neglected today, is very simple: the Eucharist, being always the end of preparation, the fulfillment of expectation, has the time of its celebration, or *kairos,* correlated to the length of the total fast. The latter either takes the form of an All-Night Vigil Service, or is to be kept individually. And, since during Lent Wednesdays and Fridays are days of total abstinence, the Communion Service, which is the fulfillment of that fast, becomes an evening celebration. The same logic applies to the *eves* of Christmas and Epiphany, also days of total fasting, and on which therefore the Eucharist is celebrated after Vespers. If, however, the eve of these feasts falls on Saturday or Sunday, which in the Orthodox tradition are Eucharistic days, the "total" abstinence is advanced to Friday. Another example: if Annunciation falls on a weekday of Lent, the celebration of the Eucharist is prescribed for after Vespers. These rules which to many seem archaic and irrelevant today, reveal in fact the fundamental principle of Orthodox liturgical spirituality: the Eucharist as always the end of preparation and fulfillment of expectation; and the days of total abstinence and fast being the most intense expressions of the Church as preparation, they are "crowned" with the evening Communion.

On Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent the Church prescribes complete abstinence from food until sunset. These

days, therefore, are selected as appropriate for lenten Communion which, as we said above, is one of the essential means or "weapons" for the lenten spiritual fight. Days of intensified spiritual and physical effort, they are illumined by the expectation of the forthcoming Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ, and this expectation sustains us in our effort, spiritual as well as physical; it makes it an effort aimed at the joy of the evening Communion. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence comes my help!"

And then, in the light of the approaching encounter with Christ, how serious and how grave becomes the day I have to spend in the usual occupations; how the most trivial and insignificant things, which fill my daily existence and to which I am so accustomed that I pay no attention to them, acquire a new significance. Every word I say, every act I perform, every thought passing through my mind becomes important, unique, irreversible, and either each is "in line" with my expectation of Christ or in opposition to it. Time itself, which we usually "waste" so easily, is revealed in its true meaning as the time of either salvation or damnation. Our whole life becomes that which it was made by Christ's coming into this world—ascension to Him, or running away from Him into darkness and destruction.

Nowhere indeed is the true meaning of fasting and Lent revealed better or fuller than on the days of the evening Communion—the meaning not only of Lent but of the Church and of Christian life in their totality. In Christ, all of life, all of time, history, the cosmos itself have become expectation, preparation, hope, ascension. Christ has come; the Kingdom is yet to come! In "this world" we can only anticipate the glory and joy of the Kingdom, yet as Church we leave this world in spirit and meet at the Lord's table where in the secret of our heart we contemplate His uncreated light and splendor. This anticipation is given to us, however, that we might desire and love the Kingdom and long for a more perfect communion with God in the forthcoming "day without evening." And each time, in anticipation, having

tasted of the "peace and joy of the Kingdom," we return into this world and find ourselves again on the long, narrow, and difficult road. From the feast we return to the life of fast—to preparation and waiting. We wait for the evening of this world which will make us partakers of the "gladsome radiance of God's holy glory," of the *beginning* that will have no end.

4. THE ORDER OF SERVICE

In the early Church, when Christians were very few and well "tested," there existed the practice of distributing the consecrated Gifts to the faithful at the end of the Sunday Eucharist for their daily individual Communion at home; the corporate and joyful Eucharist of the Lord's Day was thus "extended" to the totality of time and life. This practice, however, was discontinued when the growth in Church membership, the transformation of Christianity into a mass religion, inevitably lowered the spiritual intensity characteristic of the first Christian generations and forced the Church authorities to take measures against a possible misuse of the Holy Gifts. In the West, this led to the appearance of the daily Eucharist—one of the characteristic features of the Western liturgical tradition and piety but also the source of a significant change in the very understanding of the Eucharist. Once the Eucharist was deprived of its "festal" character and ceased to be the feast of the Church, becoming an integral part of the daily cycle, the door was opened for the so-called "private" masses which in turn altered more and more all other elements of worship. In the East, however, the initial eschatological, Kingdom-centered, joyful understanding of the Eucharist was never given up and, in theory at least, the Divine Liturgy even today is not a mere part of the daily cycle. Its celebration is always a feast, and the day of its celebration always acquires a spiritual connotation of the Lord's Day. As we have stressed time and again, it is incompatible with fast and is not served on weekdays of Lent. Thus, once the daily Communion at

home was discontinued, it was not replaced in the East with the daily celebration of the Eucharist, but gave birth to a new form of Communion with the Gifts reserved from the Sunday or "festal" celebration. It is very likely that at first this "Presanctified" service was not limited to Great Lent but was common to all fasting seasons of the Church. But then, as the number of feasts—major and minor—increased and made the celebration of the Eucharist much more frequent, the Presanctified Liturgy became a characteristic liturgical feature of Great Lent, and little by little under the influence of the lenten liturgical spirit, of that "bright sadness" of which we spoke, it acquired that unique beauty and solemnity which make it the spiritual climax of lenten worship.

The service begins with Great Vespers, although the opening doxology is "eucharistic"—"Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . ."—and puts the entire celebration in the perspective of the Kingdom which is the spiritual perspective of Lent and fasting. The Evening Psalm (Ps. 104)—"Bless the Lord O my soul . . ."—is chanted as usual, followed by the Great Litany and the 18th portion or *kathisma* of the *Psalter.* This *kathisma* is prescribed for every weekday of Lent. It consists of Psalms 120-134, called "Songs of Degrees." They were sung on the steps of the Temple of Jerusalem as a processional—as the song of the people assembling for worship, preparing themselves to meet their God: "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord . . ." (Ps. 122:1). "Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord. The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion" (Ps. 134).

While these Psalms are chanted, the celebrant takes the consecrated Bread preserved from the previous Sunday and places it on the paten. Then, having transferred the paten from the altar to the Table of Oblation, he pours wine into the chalice and covers the Gifts as is usually done before the Liturgy. It is noteworthy that all this is performed with

the priest "saying nothing." This rubric stresses the pragmatic character of these actions, for all Eucharistic prayers have been said at the Sunday Eucharist.

After the Entrance and the evening hymn "O gladsome radiance . . . ," the two appointed Old Testament lessons from the Books of *Genesis* and *Proverbs* are read. A particular rite accompanies the reading, taking us back to the time when Lent was still centered on the preparation of the catechumen for Baptism. While the lesson from *Genesis* is read, a burning candle is placed on the Book of the Gospel on the altar, and after the lesson the priest takes the candle and the censer and with them blesses the congregation, proclaiming: "The light of Christ illumines all men." The candle is the liturgical symbol of Christ—the Light of the World. Its being placed on the Gospel during the reading of the Old Testament signifies that all prophecies are fulfilled in Christ who opened His disciples' minds "that they might understand the scriptures." The Old Testament leads to Christ just as Lent leads to the baptismal illumination. The light of Baptism integrating the catechumens with Christ will open their minds for the understanding of Christ's teaching.

After the second Old Testament reading, the rubrics prescribe the singing of five verses from the Evening Psalm (Ps. 141)—beginning with verse 2: "Let my prayer be set before Thee as incense . . . ." Since Psalm 141 was already sung at its usual place—before the Entrance—one may inquire about the meaning of this second singing of the same verses. One may presume on the basis of certain indications that this practice goes back to the earliest stages in the development of the Presanctified Liturgy. It is probable that at the time when this Liturgy had not yet acquired its present solemnity and complexity but consisted simply in the distribution of Communion at Vespers, these verses were sung as the Communion hymn. Today, however, they form a beautiful penitential introduction to the second part of the service—the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts proper.

This second part begins with the Liturgy of the Catechumens—i.e., a set of special prayers and petitions

for those who are preparing themselves for Baptism. At "mid-Lent"—on Wednesday of the Fourth Week—special prayers and petitions are added for the *photizomenoi*—"those ready for illumination." Once more the origin and the initial character of Lent as preparation for Baptism and Easter are stressed.

The catechumens having been dismissed, two prayers introduce the "Liturgy of the Faithful." In the first, we ask for the purification of our soul, body, and senses:

> Let our eyes have no part in any evil sight;
> Let our hearing be inaccessible to all idle words;
> Let our tongues be purged from unseemly speech;
> Purify our lips which praise Thee, O Lord;
> Make our hands to abstain from evil deeds
> And to work only such things as are acceptable unto Thee,
> Strengthening all our members and our minds by Thy grace....

The second prayer prepares us for the Entrance of the consecrated Gifts:

> For behold, His most pure Body and His life-giving Blood,
> Entering at this present hour,
> Are about to be spread forth upon this mystical altar,
> Invisibly escorted by a great multitude of the heavenly host.
> Enable us to partake of them in blamelessness,
> That the eyes of our understanding being enlightened thereby,
> We may become children of the light and of the day
> Through the gift of Thy Christ....

Then comes the most solemn moment of the whole service: the transfer of the Holy Gifts to the altar. Externally this entrance is similar to the Great Entrance of the Eucharist but its liturgical and spiritual meaning is of course totally different. In the full Eucharistic service, we have here the Offertory procession: the Church brings herself, her life, the life of her members, and indeed that of the entire creation as sacrifice to God, as re-enactment of the one full and perfect sacrifice of Christ. Remembering Christ, she remembers all those whose life He assumed for their redemption and salvation. At the Presanctified Liturgy, there is no offering, no sacrifice, no Eucharist, no Consecration, but the mystery of Christ's presence in the Church is being revealed and manifested!

It is useful to note here that the Orthodox liturgical tradition, different in this from the Latin practice, has no adoration of the Eucharistic Gifts outside Communion. But the preservation of Gifts as *reserved sacrament,* used for Communion for the sick and other emergency situations, is a self-evident tradition which has never been questioned in the Orthodox Church. We mentioned already that in the early Church there even existed a practice of private "self-communion" at home. We have thus the permanent *presence* of the Gifts and the *absence* of their adoration. By maintaining simultaneously these two attitudes, the Orthodox Church has avoided the dangerous sacramental rationalism of the West. Moved by the desire to affirm—against the Protestants—the objectivity of Christ's "real presence" in the Eucharistic Gifts, the Latins have, in fact, separated adoration from Communion. By doing this, they have opened the door to a dangerous spiritual deviation from the real purpose of the Eucharist and indeed of the Church herself. For the purpose of the Church and of her sacraments is not to "sacralize" portions and elements of matter and by making them sacred or holy to oppose them to the profane ones. Instead her purpose is to make man's life communion with God, knowledge of God, ascension toward God's Kingdom; the Eucharistic Gifts are the *means* of that communion, the food of that new life, but they are not an end in themselves. For the Kingdom of God is "not food and drink but joy and peace in the Holy Spirit." Just as in this world food fulfills its function only when it is consumed and thus transformed into life, the new life of the world to come is given to us through the partaking of the "food of immortality." The Orthodox Church consistently avoids all adoration of the sacrament outside Communion because the only true adoration is that having partaken of Christ's Body and Blood, we "act in this world as He did." As to the Protestants, in their fear of any "magical" connotation, they tend to "spiritualize" the sacrament to such an extent that they deny the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ outside the act of Communion. Here again the Orthodox Church, by the practice of reserving the Holy Gifts, restores

the true balance. The gifts are given *for* Communion but the reality of Communion depends on the reality of the Gifts. The Church does not speculate on the mode of Christ's presence in the Gifts. She forbids the use of them for any act other than Communion. She does not reveal, so to speak, their presence outside Communion, but she firmly believes that just as the Kingdom which is yet to come is "already in the midst of us," just as Christ ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father yet is also with us until the end of the world, the means of Communion with Christ and with His Kingdom, the food of immortality, is always present in the Church.

This theological footnote brings us back to the Presanctified Liturgy and the "epiphany" of the consecrated Gifts which constitutes its solemn climax. This "great entrance" developed from the necessity to bring forth the consecrated Gifts which at first were kept not on the altar but in a special place, sometimes even outside the Temple. This transfer would naturally acquire a great solemnity for it expresses liturgically the coming of Christ and the end of a long day of fasting, prayer, and expectation, the coming of that help, comfort and joy for which we have been waiting.

> Now the powers of heaven with us invisibly do minister,
> For lo! the King of Glory enters now.
> Behold the Mystical Sacrifice, all accomplished, is ushered in.
> Let us with faith and love draw near,
> That we may become partakers of life everlasting.
> Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

The Holy Gifts are placed on the altar and then, preparing ourselves for Communion, we ask that

> all our souls and bodies be hallowed with the sanctification which cannot be taken away; that partaking with a pure conscience, with faces unashamed, with hearts illumined, of these Divine consecrated Gifts, and being quickened through them, we may be united unto Christ Himself . . . who has said: 'whoso eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him' . . . that we may become the temple of the Holy and adorable Spirit, redeemed from every wile of the Devil . . . and may obtain the good things promised unto us, with all the Saints . . . .

Following this is the Lord's Prayer which is always our ultimate act of preparation for Communion, for being Christ's own prayer, it means that we accept Christ's mind as our mind, His prayer to His Father as our prayer, His will, His desire, His life—as ours. And then Communion begins while the congregation sings the Communion hymn: "O taste and see how good the Lord is!"

Finally, having completed the service, we are invited to "depart in peace." The last prayer summarizes the meaning of this service, of this evening Communion, of its relation to our lenten effort:

> O Almighty Lord, who has made all created things in Wisdom, and by Thine inexpressible Providence and great goodness has brought us to these all-holy days for the purification of body and soul, for the controlling of carnal passions, and for the hope of the Resurrection; who during the forty days didst give into the hand of Thy servant Moses the Tables of the Law . . . enable us also, O Good One, to fight the good fight, to accomplish the course of the Fast, to preserve inviolate the faith, to crush under foot the heads of invisible serpents, to be accounted victors over sin, and to attain uncondemned and adore the Holy Resurrection . . . .

By then it may be dark outside, and the night into which we must go and in which we have to live, to fight, and to endure, may still be long. But the light which we have seen now illumines it. The Kingdom, whose presence nothing seems to reveal in this world, has been given to us "in secret"; its joy and peace accompany us as we get ready to continue the "course of the Fast."

Chapter Four

THE LENTEN JOURNEY

1. THE BEGINNING: THE GREAT CANON[12]

It is important that we return now to the idea and experience of Lent as a spiritual *journey* whose purpose is to transfer us from one spiritual state into another. As we have already said, a great majority of Christians today ignore this purpose of Lent and see it only as a season during which they "must" fulfill their religious obligation—the "once a year" Communion—and comply with dietary restrictions, soon to be replaced by the permissiveness of the Paschal time. And since not only laity but many priests as well have adopted this simple and formal idea of Lent, its true spirit has all but disappeared from life. The liturgical and spiritual restoration of Lent is one of the most urgent tasks, but it can be accomplished only if it is based on a genuine understanding of Lent's liturgical rhythm and structure.

At the commencement of Lent, as its inauguration, as the "pitch" which is to begin the entire "melody," we find the great penitential *Canon of St. Andrew of Crete.* Divided into four parts, it is read at Great Compline on the evenings of the first four days of Lent. It can best be described as a penitential lamentation conveying to us the scope and depth of sin, shaking the soul with despair, repentance,

and hope. With a unique art, St. Andrew interwove the great biblical themes—Adam and Eve, Paradise and Fall, the Patriarchs Noah and the Flood, David, the Promised Land, and ultimately Christ and the Church—with confession of sin and repentance. The events of sacred history are revealed as events of *my* life, God's acts in the past as acts aimed at *me* and *my* salvation, the tragedy of sin and betrayal as *my* personal tragedy. My life is shown to me as part of the great and all-embracing fight between God and the powers of darkness which rebel against Him.

The Canon begins on this deeply personal note:

> Where shall I begin to weep over the cursed deeds of my life?
> What foundation shall I lay, Christ, for this lamentation?

One after another, my sins are revealed in their deep connection with the continuous drama of man's relation to God; the story of man's fall is my story:

> I have made mine the crime of Adam; I know myself deprived of God, of the eternal Kingdom and of bliss because of my sins....

I have lost all divine gifts:

> I have defiled the vestment of my body, obscured the image and likeness of God....
> I have darkened the beauty of my soul; I have torn my first vestment woven for me by the Creator and I am naked....

Thus, for four evenings the nine odes of the Canon tell me again and again the spiritual story of the world which is also my story. They challenge me with the decisive events and acts of the past whose meaning and power, however, are eternal because every human soul—unique and irreplaceable—moves, as it were, through the same drama, is faced with the same ultimate choices, discovers the same ultimate reality. Scriptural examples are more than mere "allegories" as many people think, and who therefore find this Canon too "overworked," too loaded with irrelevant names and episodes. Why speak, they ask, of Cain and Abel, of David and Solomon, when it would be so much simpler just to say: "I have sinned"? What they do not

understand, however, is that the very word *sin*—in the biblical and Christian tradition—has a depth, a density which "modern" man is simply unable to comprehend and which makes his confession of sins something very different from true Christian repentance. The culture in which we live and which shapes our world view excludes in fact the concept of sin. For if sin is, first of all, man's fall from an incredibly high altitude, the rejection by man of his "high calling," what can all this mean within a culture which ignores and denies that "high altitude" and that "calling," and defines man not from "above" but from "below"—a culture which even when it does not openly deny God is in fact materialistic from the top to the bottom, which thinks of man's life only in terms of material goods and ignores his transcendental vocation? Sin here is thought of primarily as a natural "weakness" due usually to a "maladjustment" which has in turn social roots and, therefore, can be eliminated by a better social and economic organization. For this reason even when he confesses his sins, the "modern" man no longer repents; depending upon his understanding of religion, he either formally enumerates formal transgressions of formal rules, or shares his "problems" with the confessor—expecting from religion some therapeutic treatment which will make him happy again and well-adjusted. In *neither* case do we have repentance as the shock of man who, seeing in himself the "image of the ineffable glory," realizes that he has defiled, betrayed, and rejected it in his life; repentance as regret coming from the ultimate depth of man's consciousness; as the desire to return; as surrender to God's love and mercy. This is why it is not enough to say: "I have sinned." This confession becomes meaningful and efficient only if sin is understood and experienced in all its depth and sadness.

It is precisely the function and the purpose of the *Great Canon* to reveal sin to us and to lead us thus to repentance, and it reveals sin not by definitions and enumerations but by a deep meditation on the great biblical story which is indeed the story of sin, repentance, and forgiveness. This meditation takes us into a different spiritual culture,

challenges us with an entirely different view of man, of his life, his goals, and his motivation. It restores in us the fundamental spiritual framework within which repentance again becomes possible. When we hear for example,

> I have not assumed the righteousness of Abel, O Jesus, not having offered to Thee either an acceptable gift, or divine deed, or pure sacrifice, or life immaculate...

we understand that the story of the first sacrifice so briefly mentioned in the Bible reveals something essential about our own life, about man himself. We understand that sin is first of all the rejection of life as offering or sacrifice to God, or in other terms, of the divine orientation of life; that sin therefore is in its roots the deviation of our love from its ultimate object. It is this revelation that makes it possible then to say something which is so deeply removed from our "modern" experience of life yet now becomes so "existentially" true:

> Filling dust with life, Thou hast given me flesh and bones, breathing in life; O Creator, Redeemer, and Judge: accept me repenting....

To be properly heard, the *Great Canon* implies, of course, knowledge of the Bible and the ability to share in the meditations on its meaning for us. If today so many people find it dull and irrelevant, it is because their faith no longer is fed at the source of the Holy Scriptures which for the Church Fathers were *the* source of faith. We have to learn again how to enter into the world as revealed by the Bible and how to live in it; and there is no better way into that world than by the Church's liturgy which is not only the communication of biblical teachings but precisely the revelation of the biblical way of life.

The lenten journey begins thus with a return to the "starting point"—the world of Creation, Fall, and Redemption, the world in which all things speak of God and reflect His glory, in which all events are referred to God, in which man finds the true dimension of his life, and having found it, *repents.*

2. SATURDAYS OF LENT

The Fathers often compared Lent to the forty years journey of the chosen people through the desert. From the Bible we know that in order to keep His people from despair, in order also to reveal His ultimate design, God performed many miracles during that journey; by analogy, the same pattern of explanation is given by the Fathers to the forty days of Lent.

Although its final destination is Pascha, the promised land of God's Kingdom, Lent has at the end of each week a special "stopover"—an anticipation of that goal. It is two "Eucharistic" days—Saturday and Sunday—which in the spiritual journey of Lent have a special significance.

Let us begin with Saturday. Its special liturgical status in our tradition and its exclusion from the lenten type of worship need some explanation. From the point of view of "rubrics," which we explained earlier, Saturday is a day not of *fast* but of *feast* for God Himself instituted it as feast: "and God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made" (Gen. 2:3). No one can undo or abolish that which God has ordered. It is true that many Christians think that the divine institution of sabbath has simply been transferred to Sunday which thus became the Christian day of rest or sabbath. Nothing in the Scriptures or Tradition can substantiate this belief. On the contrary, the "numbering" of Sunday for the Fathers and the entire early Tradition as the *first* or the *eighth* day stresses its difference from and a certain opposition to Saturday which forever remains the *seventh* day, the day blessed and sanctified by God. It is the day on which Creation is acknowledged as "very good," and such is its meaning in the Old Testament, a meaning retained by Christ Himself and the Church. This means that in spite of sin and the fall, the world remains God's *good* creation; it keeps that essential goodness in which the Creator rejoiced: "and God saw everything that He had made and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). To keep the sabbath as was meant from the very beginning means there-

fore that life can be meaningful, happy, creative; it can be that which God made it to be. And the sabbath, the day of rest on which we *enjoy* the fruits of our work and activities, remains forever the blessing which God bestowed on the world and on its life. This *continuity* of the Christian understanding of sabbath with that of the Old Testament not only does not exclude, but indeed implies also a *discontinuity.* For in Christ nothing remains the same because everything is fulfilled, transcended, and given a new meaning. If the sabbath in its ultimate spiritual reality is the presence of the divine "very good" in the very texture of this world, it is "this world" that in Christ is revealed in a new light and is also made something new by Him. Christ bestows upon man the Kingdom of God which is "not of this world." And here is the supreme "break" which for a Christian makes "all things new." The goodness of the world and of all things in it are now referred to their final consummation in God, to the Kingdom which is *to come* and which will be manifested in all its glory only after "this world" comes to its end. This world, moreover, by rejecting Christ has revealed itself to be in the power of the "Prince of this world" and to "lie in wickedness" (I John 5:19); and the way of salvation for it is not through evolution, improvement, or "progress," but through the Cross, Death and Resurrection. "It does not come to life unless it dies" (I Cor. 15:36). A Christian thus lives a "double life"—not in the sense of juxtaposing his "worldly" and his "religious" activities, but in the sense of making this life in its totality the "foretaste" of and preparation for the Kingdom, of making his every action a sign, an affirmation and expectation of that which is "to come." Such is the meaning of the Gospel's apparent contradiction: the Kingdom of God is "in the midst" of us and the Kingdom of God is "to come." Unless one discovers it "in the midst" of life, one cannot see in it the object of that love, expectation, and longing to which the Gospel calls us. One can still believe in punishment or reward after death, but one can never understand the joy and the intensity of *the* Christian prayer: "Thy Kingdom come!"—"Come, Lord

Jesus!" Christ has *come* that we may *wait* for Him. He entered life in time so that life and time may become the passage, the passover into God's Kingdom.

Sabbath, the day of Creation, the day of "this world," became—in Christ—the day of expectation, the day *before* the Lord's Day. The transformation of the sabbath took place on that Great and Holy Sabbath on which Christ, having "accomplished all His works," rested in the grave. On the next day, "the first after the sabbath," Life shone forth from the life-giving tomb, the myrrh-bearing women were told "Rejoice!," the disciples "disbelieved for joy and wondered," and the first day of the New Creation began. Of that new day the Church partakes, and into it she enters on Sunday. Yet she still lives and journeys in the time of "this world" which in its mystical depth has become sabbath, for according to St. Paul, "you are all dead and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, appears then we also will appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:3).

All this explains the unique place of Saturday—the 7th day—in the liturgical tradition: its double character, as a day of *feast* and a day of *death*. It is a *feast* because it is in this world and in its time that Christ overcame death and inaugurated His Kingdom, because His Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection are the fulfillment of Creation in which God rejoiced at the beginning. It is a day of *death* because in Christ's Death the world died, and its salvation, fulfillment, and transfiguration are beyond the grave, in the "age to come." All Saturdays of the liturgical year receive their meaning from two decisive Saturdays: that of Lazarus' Resurrection, which took place in this world and is the announcement and the assurance of the common resurrection; and that of the Great and Holy Sabbath of Pascha when death itself was transformed and became the "passover" into the new life of the New Creation.

During Lent this meaning of Saturdays acquires a special intensity, for the purpose of Lent is precisely to recover the Christian meaning of time as preparation and pilgrimage and of the status of the Christian as "alien" and "exile" in this world (I Peter 2:11). These Saturdays refer the

lenten effort to the future fulfillment and thus give Lent its special rhythm. On the one hand, Saturday in Lent is a "eucharistic" day marked by the celebration of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, and Eucharist always means *feast.* The peculiar character of that feast, however, is that it refers itself to Lent as journey, patience, and effort and thus becomes a "stopover" whose purpose is to make us reflect on the ultimate goal of that journey. This is especially evident in the sequence of the Epistle lessons for lenten Saturdays selected from the *Epistle to the Hebrews* in which the typology of the history of salvation, of pilgrimage, promise, and faith in the things to come are central.

On the *first* Saturday, we hear the majestic preface to the Epistle (Heb. 1:1-12) with its solemn affirmation of Creation, Redemption, and the eternal Kingdom of God:

> ... in many and various ways God spoke of old to the fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.... Thou art the same and Thy years will never end....

We are living in these "last days"—the days of ultimate effort. We are still in the "today," but the end is approaching. We hear the *second* Saturday (Heb. 3:12-16):

> Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart leading you away from the living God. But exhort one another every day *as long as it is called today*... for we share in Christ if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end....

The fight is difficult. Suffering and temptations are the price we pay for a "better possession and an abiding one." For this reason, the lesson of the *third* Saturday (Heb. 10:32-38) exhorts us:

> Therefore, do not throw away your confidence which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised. For yet a little while and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry....

Faith, love, and hope are the weapons of this fight as the lesson of the *fourth* Saturday (Heb. 6:9-12) affirms:

> ... for God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the *love* you showed for His sake in serving the saints as you still do. And we desire every one of you to show the same earnest in realizing the full assurance of *hope* until the end so that you may not be sluggish but imitators of those who through *faith* and *patience* inherit the promises.

The time is growing short, the expectation becomes more eager, the assurance more joyful. Such is the tone of the lesson for the *fifth* Saturday (Heb. 9:24-28):

> ... Christ having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time not to deal with sin but to save those *who are eagerly waiting for him.*

This is the last lesson before the Saturday of Lazarus when from the time of expectation we begin the "passover" into the time of fulfillment.

Gospel lessons for the Saturdays in Lent are selected from the *Gospel of St. Mark* and also constitute a sequence.

The key to its meaning is given on the *first* Saturday: Christ overrules the hypocritical taboos of the Jewish sabbath proclaiming:

> ... the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. Therefore the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath ....
>
> (Mark 2:23-3:5)

A new age is coming, the re-creation of man has begun. On the *second* Saturday we hear the leper say to Christ:

> ... if you will you can make me clean .... and Christ answers him, I will: be clean ....
>
> (Mark 1:35-44)

On the *third* Saturday, we see Christ breaking all taboos and

> ... eating with tax collectors and sinners ....
>
> (Mark 2:14-17)

On the *fourth* Saturday, to the "very good" of Genesis 1, the Gospel responds with the joyful exclamation:

> He does all things well, He even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak ....
>
> (Mark 7:31-37)

Finally, on the *fifth* Saturday, all this finds its climax in the decisive confession of Peter:

> . . . Thou art the Christ . . . .
>
> (Mark 8:29)

It is the acceptance by man of the mystery of Christ, of the mystery of New Creation.

Lenten Saturdays, as we have said above, have a *second* theme or dimension: that of *death.* With the exception of the first Saturday, which is traditionally dedicated to St. Theodore Tyron, and the fifth—that of the Akathist—the three remaining Saturdays are days of the universal commemoration of all those who "in the hope of resurrection and life eternal" are asleep in the Lord. This commemoration, as we have said already, prepares and announces the Saturday of Lazarus' Resurrection and the Great and Holy Sabbath of Passion Week. It concerns not only an act of love, a "good deed"; it is also an essential rediscovery of "this world" as dying and death. In this world we are condemned to death, as is indeed the world itself. But in Christ death has been destroyed from within, has, as St. Paul said, lost its "sting," has itself become an entrance into a more abundant life. For each one of us, this entrance has begun in our baptismal death which makes *dead* those of us who are alive ("you are all dead," Col. 3:3), and *alive* those of us who are dead: for "death is no more." A broad deviation of popular piety from the true meaning of Christian faith made death *black* again. This is symbolized in many places by the use of black vestments at funerals and "requiems." We should know, however, that for a Christian the color of death is white. Praying for the dead is not mourning and nowhere is this better revealed than in the connection between the universal commemoration of the dead with Saturdays in general, and the lenten Saturdays in particular. Because of sin and betrayal, the joyful day of Creation has become the day of death; for Creation, by "subjecting itself to futility" (Rom. 8:20), has itself become death. But Christ's Death restores the seventh day, making it the day of re-creation, of the overcoming and

destruction of that which made this world a triumph of death. And the ultimate purpose of Lent is to restore in us the "eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" which is the content of Christian faith, love, and hope. By this hope "we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience . . . ." It is the light of Lazarus Saturday and the joyful peace of Great and Holy Saturday that constitute the meaning of Christian death and of our prayer for the dead.

3. SUNDAYS OF LENT

Each Sunday in Lent has two themes, two meanings. On the one hand, each one belongs to a sequence in which the rhythm and the spiritual "dialectics" of Lent are revealed. On the other hand, in the course of the Church's historical development almost each lenten Sunday has acquired a second theme. Thus on the *first* Sunday the Church celebrates the *"Triumph of Orthodoxy"*—commemorating the victory over Iconoclasm and the restoration of the veneration of icons in Constantinople in 843. The connection of this celebration with Lent is purely historical: the first "triumph of Orthodoxy" took place on this particular Sunday. The same is true of the commemoration on the *second* Sunday of Lent of *St. Gregory Palamas.* The condemnation of his enemies and the vindication of his teachings by the Church in the 14th century was acclaimed as a second triumph of Orthodoxy and for this reason its annual celebration was prescribed for the second Sunday of Lent. Meaningful and important as they are in themselves, these commemorations are independent from Lent as such and we can leave them outside the scope of this essay. More "integrated" into Lent are the commemorations of *St. John of the Ladder* on the *fourth* Sunday, and of *St. Mary of Egypt* on the *fifth* Sunday. In both the Church sees the supreme bearers and proponents of Christian asceticism—St. John having expressed the precepts of asceticism

in his writings and St. Mary in her life. Their commemoration during the second half of Lent is obviously meant to encourage and to inspire the faithful struggling through their lenten spiritual effort. Since, however, asceticism is to be *practiced* and not merely commemorated, and since the commemoration of these two saints is aimed at our *personal* lenten effort, we shall deal with its meaning in the last chapter.

As to the first and essential theme of lenten Sundays, it also is primarily revealed in the scriptural lessons. To understand their sequence, we must once more remember the original connection between Lent and Baptism—Lent's meaning as preparation for Baptism. These lessons are therefore an integral part of the early Christian catechesis; they explain and summarize the preparation of the catechumen for the Paschal mystery of Baptism. Baptism is the entrance into the new life inaugurated by Christ. To the catechumen, this new life is as yet only announced and promised, and he accepts it by faith. He is like the men of the Old Testament who lived by their faith in a promise whose fulfillment they did not see.

This is the theme of the *first* Sunday. After having mentioned the righteous men of the Old Testament, the Epistle (Heb. 11:24-26; 32-40; 12:2) concludes:

> ... and these all, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised since God has foreseen *something better for us.*

What is it? The answer is given in the Gospel lesson of the first Sunday (John 1:43-51):

> ... you shall see greater things than these .... truly, truly I say unto you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

This means: you catechumens, you who believe in Christ, you who want to be baptized, who are preparing yourselves for Pascha—you shall see the inauguration of the new age, the fulfillment of all promises, the manifestation of the Kingdom. But you shall see it only if you believe and repent,

if you change your mind, if you have the desire, if you accept the effort.

Of this we are reminded in the lesson of the *second* Sunday (Heb. 1:10-2:3):

> ... therefore, we must pay close attention to what we have heard lest we drift away from it.... How shall we escape if we neglect such salvation?

In the Gospel lesson of the second Sunday (Mark 2:1-12) the image of this effort and desire is the paralytic who was brought to Christ through the roof:

> ... and when Jesus saw their faith He said to the paralytic: 'My son, your sins are forgiven.'

On the *third* Sunday—*"Sunday of the Cross"*—the theme of the Cross makes its appearance, and we are told (Mark 8:34-9:1):

> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

From this Sunday on, the lessons from the Epistle to the Hebrews begin to reveal to us the meaning of Christ's *sacrifice* by which we are given access "into the inner shrine behind the curtain," i.e., into the holy of holies of God's Kingdom (cf. *Third* Sunday, Heb. 4:14-5:6; *Fourth* Sunday, Heb. 6:13-20; and *Fifth* Sunday, Heb. 9:11-14), while the lessons from the Gospel of St. Mark announce the voluntary Passion of Christ:

> ... the Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill Him....
> (Mark 9:17-31)—Fourth Sunday

and His Resurrection:

> ... and the third day He shall rise again.
> (Mark 10:32-45)—Fifth Sunday

The catechesis, the preparation for the great mystery, is drawing to its end, the decisive hour of man's entrance into Christ's Death and Resurrection is approaching.

Today Lent is no longer the preparation of the catechumen for Baptism, but although baptized and confirmed, are we not in a sense still "catechumens"? Or rather, are we not to return to this state every year? Do we not fall away again and again from the great mystery of which we have been made participants? Do we not need in our life—which is one permanent alienation from Christ and His Kingdom—this annual journey back to the very roots of our Christian faith?

4. MID-LENT: THE HOLY CROSS

The Third Sunday of Lent is called *"The Veneration of the Cross."* At the Vigil of that day, after the Great Doxology, the Cross is brought in a solemn procession to the center of the church and remains there for the entire week—with a special rite of veneration following each service. It is noteworthy that the theme of the Cross which dominates the hymnology of that Sunday is developed in terms not of suffering but of victory and joy. More than that, the theme-songs (*hirmoi*) of the Sunday Canon are taken from the Paschal Service—"The Day of the Resurrection"—and the Canon is a paraphrase of the Easter Canon.

The meaning of all this is clear. We are in *Mid-Lent.* On the one hand, the physical and spiritual effort, if it is serious and consistent, begins to be felt, its burden becomes more burdensome, our fatigue more evident. We need help and encouragement. On the other hand, having endured this fatigue, having climbed the mountain up to this point, we begin to see the end of our pilgrimage, and the rays of Easter grow in their intensity. Lent is our self-crucifixion, our experience, limited as it is, of Christ's commandment heard in the Gospel lesson of that Sunday: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). But we can not take up our cross and follow Christ unless we have *His* Cross which He took up in order to save us.

It is His Cross, not ours, that saves us. It is His Cross that gives not only meaning but also power to others. This is explained to us in the *synaxarion* of the Sunday of the Cross:

> On this Sunday, the third Sunday of Lent, we celebrate the veneration of the honorable and Life-Giving Cross, and for this reason: inasmuch as in the forty days of fasting we in a way crucify ourselves . . . and become bitter and despondent and failing, the Life-Giving Cross is presented to us for refreshment and assurance, for remembrance of our Lord's Passion, and for comfort . . . . We are like those following a long and cruel path, who become tired, see a beautiful tree with many leaves, sit in its shadow and rest for a while and then, as if rejuvenated, continue their journey; likewise today, in the time of fasting and difficult journey and effort, the Life-Giving Cross was planted in our midst by the holy fathers to give us rest and refreshment, to make us light and courageous for the remaining task . . . . Or, to give another example: when a king is coming, at first his banner and symbols appear, then he himself comes glad and rejoicing about his victory and filling with joy those under him; likewise, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is about to show us His victory over death, and appear to us in the glory of the Resurrection Day, is sending to us in advance His scepter, the royal symbol—the Life-Giving Cross—and it fills us with joy and makes us ready to meet, inasmuch as it is possible for us, the King himself, and to render glory to His victory . . . . All this in the midst of Lent which is like a bitter source because of its tears, because also of its efforts and despondency . . . but Christ comforts us who are as it were in a desert until He shall lead us up to the spiritual Jerusalem by His Resurrection . . . . for the Cross is called the Tree of Life, it is the tree that was planted in Paradise, and for this reason our fathers have planted it in the midst of Holy Lent, remembering both Adam's bliss and how he was deprived of it, remembering also that partaking of this Tree we no longer die but are kept alive . . . .

Thus, refreshed and reassured, we begin the second part of Lent. One more week and, on the *Fourth* Sunday, we hear the announcement: "The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill Him, and when He is killed, after three days He will rise again" (Mark 9:31). The emphasis shifts now from us, from our repentance and effort, to the events which took place "for our sake and for our salvation."

O Lord, who made us anticipate today
the Holy Week foreshining brightly
by the resurrection of Lazarus,
Help us to achieve the journey of the fast.

Having reached the second half of fasting,
Let us make manifest the beginning of life divine;
And when we reach the end of our effort,
May we receive the never-fading bliss.

At Matins on Thursday of the Fifth Week we hear once more the *Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete,* but this time in its totality. If at the beginning of Lent this Canon was like a door leading us into repentance, now at the end of Lent it sounds like a "summary" of repentance and its fulfillment. If at the beginning we merely listened to it, now hopefully its words have become our words, our lamentation, our hope and repentance, and also an evaluation of our lenten effort: how much of all this has truly been made ours? how far have we come along the path of this repentance? For all that which concerns us is coming to its end. From now on we are following the disciples "as they were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them." And Jesus said to them: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles, and they will mock Him and scourge Him and kill Him, and after three days He will arise" (Mark 10:32-45). This is the Gospel of the *Fifth* Sunday.

The tone of lenten services changes. If throughout the first part of Lent our effort was aimed at our own purification, we are made to realize now that this purification was not an end in itself but must lead us to the contemplation and comprehension and appropriation of the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection. The meaning of our effort is now being revealed to us as participation in that mystery to which we were so accustomed as to take it for granted, and which we simply forgot. And, as we follow Him going up to Jerusalem together with the disciples, we are "amazed and afraid."

5. ON THE WAY TO BETHANY AND JERUSALEM

The *Sixth* and last week of Lent is called *"The Week of the Palms."* For six days preceding Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday, the liturgy of the Church makes us follow Christ as He first announces the death of His friend and then begins His journey to Bethany and Jerusalem. The theme and tone of the week are given on Sunday night at Vespers:

> Beginning with zeal the sixth week of Lent,
> we shall bring to the Lord hymns,
> announcing the feast of the palms;
> to Him who comes in glory and power divine
> to Jerusalem to put death to death....

The center of attention is *Lazarus*—his sickness, his death, the grief of his relatives, and Christ's reaction to all of this.

Thus, on Monday we hear:

> Today the sickness of Lazarus appears to Christ
> as He walks on the other side of the Jordan....

On Tuesday:

> Yesterday and today, Lazarus is sick....

On Wednesday:

> Today the dead Lazarus is being buried
> and his relatives weep....

On Thursday:

> For two days now Lazarus has been dead....

Finally, on Friday:

> On the morrow Christ comes...
> to raise the dead brother [of Martha and Mary]....

The entire week is thus spent in the spiritual contemplation of the forthcoming encounter between Christ and Death—first in the person of His friend, Lazarus, then in Christ's

own Death. It is the approach of that "hour of Christ" of which He so often spoke and toward which all His earthly ministry was oriented. And we must ask: What is the place and the meaning of this contemplation in the lenten liturgy? How is it related to our own lenten effort?

These questions presuppose another one with which we must now briefly deal. In the commemoration of the events of Christ's life, the Church very often, if not always, transposes past into present. Thus, on Christmas Day we sing: "*Today* the Virgin gives birth . . ."; on Good Friday: "*Today* stands before Pilate . . ."; on Palm Sunday: "*Today* He comes to Jerusalem . . .". The question is: What is the meaning of this transposition, the significance of this liturgical *today?*

An overwhelming majority of church-goers probably understand it as a rhetorical metaphor, as a poetical "figure of speech." Our modern approach to worship is either *rational* or *sentimental.* The *rational* approach consists of reducing the liturgical celebration to *ideas.* It is rooted in that "Westernized" theology which developed in the Orthodox East after the breakdown of the Patristic age and for which liturgy is at best a raw material for neat intellectual definitions and propositions. That which in worship cannot be reduced to an intellectual truth is labeled "poetry"—i.e., something not to be taken too seriously. And since it is obvious that the events commemorated by the Church belong to the past, the liturgical *today* is not given any serious meaning. As to the *sentimental* approach, it is the result of an individualistic and self-centered piety which is in many ways the counterpart of intellectual theology. For that kind of piety worship is above everything else a useful framework for personal prayer, an inspiring background whose aim is to "warm up" our heart and direct it toward God. The content and meaning of services, liturgical texts, rites, and actions is here of secondary importance; they are useful and adequate as long as they make me pray! And thus the liturgical *today* is dissolved here, as are all other liturgical texts, into a kind of non-differentiated devotional and inspirational "prayer."

Because of the long polarization of our Church mentality between these two approaches it is very difficult today to show that the real liturgy of the Church *cannot* be reduced either to "ideas" or to "prayer." One does not celebrate ideas! As to personal prayer, is it not said in the Gospel that when we want to pray we should lock ourselves up in our room and enter there in personal communion with God (Matt. 6:6)? The very concept of celebration implies both an event and the social or corporate reaction to it. A celebration is possible only when people come together and, transcending their natural separation and isolation from one another, react together as one body, as indeed one person to an event (e.g., the coming of Spring, a wedding, a funeral, a victory, etc.). And the natural miracle of all celebration is precisely that it transcends, be it only for a time, the level of ideas and that of individualism. One truly loses oneself in the celebration and one finds the others in a unique way. But what then is the meaning of the liturgical *today* by which the Church inaugurates all her celebrations? In what sense are past events celebrated *today?*

One can say without exaggeration that the whole life of the Church is one continuous *commemoration* and *remembrance.* At the end of each service we refer to the saints "whose memory we celebrate," but behind all memories, the Church is *the remembrance of Christ.* From a purely natural point of view, memory is an ambiguous faculty. Thus to remember someone whom we love and whom we lost means two things. On the one hand memory is much more than mere knowledge of the past. When I remember my late father, I see him; he is present in my memory not as a sum total of all that I know *about* him but in all his living reality. Yet, on the other hand, it is this very presence that makes me feel acutely that he is no longer here, that never again in this world and in this life shall I touch this hand which I so vividly see in my memory. Memory is thus the most wonderful and at the same time the most tragic of all human faculties, for nothing reveals better the broken nature of our life, the impossibility for

man truly to keep, truly to possess anything in this world. Memory reveals to us that "time and death reign on earth." But it is precisely because of this uniquely human function of memory that Christianity is also centered on it, for it consists primarily in remembering one Man, one Event, one Night, in the depth and darkness of which we were told: "... do this in remembrance of me." And lo, the miracle takes place! We remember Him and He is here—not as a nostalgic image of the past, not as a sad "never more," but with such intensity of presence that the Church can eternally repeat what the disciples said after Emmaus: "... did not our hearts burn within us?" (Luke 24:32).

Natural memory is first of all a "presence of the absent," so that the more he whom we remember is present, the more acute is the pain of his absence. But in Christ, memory has become again the power to fill the time broken by sin and death, by hatred and forgetfulness. And it is this new memory as *power* over time and its brokenness which is at the heart of the liturgical celebration, of the liturgical *today*. Oh, to be sure, the Virgin does not give birth today, no one "factually" stands before Pilate, and as facts these events belong to the past. But *today* we can remember these facts and the Church is primarily the gift and the power of that remembrance which transforms facts of the past into eternally meaningful *events*.

Liturgical celebration is thus a re-entrance of the Church into the event, and this means not merely its "idea," but its joy or sadness, its living and concrete reality. It is one thing to know that by crying, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me," the crucified Christ was manifesting His "kenosis" and his humility. It is quite a different thing to celebrate it every year on that unique Friday on which without rationalizing it we know with total certitude that these words, having been proffered once, remain eternally real so that no victory, no glory, no "synthesis" can ever erase them. It is one thing to explain that the resurrection of Lazarus was "to confirm the universal resurrection" (*troparion* of the day). It is quite a different thing to celebrate day after for one entire week this slowly approaching encounter

between life and death, to become part of it, to see with our own eyes and feel with our whole being what was involved in John's words: "He groaned in the spirit and was troubled and . . . wept" (John 11:33-35). For us and to us all this happens *today*. We were not there in Bethany at the grave with the crying sisters. From the Gospel we only know *about* it. But it is in the Church's celebration *today* that an historical fact becomes an *event* for us, for me, a power in my life, a memory, a joy. Theology cannot go beyond the "idea." And, from the point of view of idea, do we need those five long days when it is so simple just to say, "to confirm the universal resurrection"? But the whole point is that in itself and by itself the sentence confirms nothing. The true *confirmation* comes from celebration, and precisely from those five days on which we witness the beginning of that mortal fight between life and death, and begin not so much to understand as to witness Christ going to put death to death.

The resurrection of Lazarus, the wonderful celebration of that unique Saturday, is beyond Lent. It is on Friday preceding it that we sing, "Having completed the edifying forty days . . .", and in liturgical terms, Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday are the "beginning of the Cross." But the last week of Lent, which is one continuous pre-celebration of these days, is the ultimate revelation of the meaning of Lent. At the very beginning of this essay we said that Lent is preparation for Easter; in reality, however, in the common experience that has by now become traditional, this preparation remains abstract and nominal. Lent and Easter are put side by side but without any real understanding of their connection and interdependence. Even when Lent is not understood as the season of the fulfillment of a once-a-year Confession and Communion, it is usually thought of in terms of individual effort and thus remains self-centered. In other words, what is virtually absent from the lenten experience is that physical and spiritual effort aimed at our participation in the *today* of Christ's Resurrection, not abstract morality, not moral improvement, not greater control of passions, not even

personal self-perfecting, but partaking of the ultimate and all-embracing *today* of Christ. Christian spirituality not aimed at this is in danger of becoming pseudo-Christian, for in the last analysis it it motivated by the "self" and not by Christ. The danger here is that once the room of the heart is purified, made clean, freed from the demon which inhabited it, it remains empty and the demon returns to it "taking with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter it and dwell there and the last state of that man is worse than the first" (Lk. 11:26). In this world everything—even "spirituality"—can be demonic. Thus it is very important to recover the meaning and the rhythm of Lent as genuine preparation for the great *today* of Easter. We have seen by now that Lent has two parts. Before the Sunday of the Cross, the Church invites us to concentrate on ourselves, to fight flesh and passions, evil and all other sins. But even while doing this, we are constantly invited to look forward, to measure and motivate our effort by "something better" prepared for us. Then, from the Sunday of the Cross, it is the mystery of Christ's suffering, of His Cross and Death that becomes the center of lenten celebration. It becomes "going up to Jerusalem."

Finally, during this last week of preparation, the celebration of the mystery begins. Lenten effort has made us capable of putting aside all that which usually and consistently obscures the central object of our faith, hope, and joy. Time itself comes, as it were, to an end. It is measured now not by our usual preoccupations and cares, but by what happens on the way to Bethany, and beyond to Jerusalem. And, once more, all this is not rhetoric. To anyone who has tasted of the true liturgical life—be it only once and however imperfectly—it is almost self-evident that from the moment we hear, "Rejoice, O Bethany, home of Lazarus . . ." and then ". . . on the morrow Christ is coming . . . ," the external world becomes slightly unreal, and one almost experiences pain in entering into the necessary daily contact with it. "Reality" is that which is going on in the Church, in that celebration which day after

day makes us realize what it means to expect, and why Christianity is above everything else expectation and preparation. Thus, when that Friday evening comes and we sing, "having completed the edifying forty days . . . ," we have not only fulfilled an annual Christian "obligation"; we are ready to make ours the words which we will sing on the next day:

> In Lazarus Christ is already destroying thee, O death, and where, O Hell, is thy victory . . . ?

Chapter Five

LENT IN OUR LIFE

1. "TAKING IT SERIOUSLY . . ."

So far we have been speaking of the Church's teaching about Lent as conveyed to us primarily by lenten worship. Now these questions must be asked: How can we apply this teaching to our lives? What could be not only a nominal but a real impact of Lent on our existence? This existence (do we need to recall it) is very different from the one people led when all these services, hymns, canons, and prescriptions were composed and established. One lived then in a relatively small, mainly rural community within one organically Orthodox world; the very rhythm of one's life was shaped by the Church. Now, however, we live in an enormous urban, technological society which is pluralistic in its religious beliefs, secularistic in its world view, and in which we Orthodox constitute an insignificant minority. Lent is no longer "visible" as it was, let us say, in Russia or in Greece. Our question thus is a very real one: how can we—besides introducing one or two "symbolical" changes into our daily life—keep Lent?

It is obvious, for example, that for the great majority of the faithful the daily attendance at lenten worship is out of the question. They continue to go to church on Sundays, but, as we already know, on Sundays of Lent the

Liturgy, at least in its externals, does not reflect Lent and thus one can hardly have even a "feel" of the lenten type of worship, the main means by which the spirit of Lent is communicated to us. And since Lent is in no way reflected in the culture to which we belong, it is no wonder then that ours today is mainly a *negative* understanding of Lent—as a season when certain different things such as meat and fats, dancing and entertainment are forbidden. The popular question, "What are you giving up for Lent?" is a good summary of that common negative approach. In "positive" terms, Lent is viewed as the time when we must fulfill the annual "obligation" of Confession and Communion ("... and not later than Palm Sunday...," as I have read in a parish bulletin). This obligation having been fulfilled, the rest of Lent seems to lose all positive meaning.

Thus it is evident that there has developed a rather deep discrepancy between, on the one hand, the spirit or the "theory" of Lent, which we tried to outline on the basis of lenten worship, and, on the other hand, its common and popular understanding which is very often shared and supported not only by laity but also by clergy themselves. For it is always easier to reduce something spiritual to something formal rather than search for the spiritual behind the formal. We can say without any exaggeration that although Lent is still "observed," it has lost much of its impact on our lives, has ceased to be that bath of repentance and renewal which it is meant to be in the liturgical and spiritual teaching of the Church. But then, can we rediscover it, make it again a spiritual power in the daily reality of our existence? The answer to this question depends primarily, and I would say almost exclusively, on whether or not we are willing to *take Lent seriously.* However new or different the conditions in which we live today, however real the difficulties and obstacles erected by our modern world, *none* of them is an *absolute* obstacle, none of them makes Lent "impossible." The real root of the progressive loss by Lent of its impact on our lives lies deeper. It is our conscious or unconscious reduction of religion to a superficial nominalism and symbolism which is precisely the way to by-pass

and to "explain away" the seriousness of religion's demands on our lives, religion's demand for commitment and effort. This reduction, we must add, is in a way peculiar to Orthodoxy. Western Christians, Catholics or Protestants, when faced with what they consider as "impossible" would rather change religion itself, "adjust" it to new conditions and thus make it "practicable." Quite recently, for example, we have seen the Roman Church first reduce fasting to a bare minimum and then practically dispose of it altogether. With just and righteous indignation, we denounce such an "adjustment" as a betrayal of Christian tradition and as minimizing Christian faith. And indeed, it is the truth and the glory of Orthodoxy that it does not "adjust" itself to and compromise with the lower standards, that it does not make Christianity "easy." It is the glory of *Orthodoxy,* but certainly *not* of us Orthodox people. Not today, not even yesterday, but long ago we have found a way to reconcile the absolute demands of the Church and our human weakness, and this not only without "losing face" but with additional reasons for self-righteousness and good conscience. The method consists of fulfilling these demands symbolically, and symbolic nominalism permeates today our whole religious life. Thus, for example, we would not even think of revising our liturgy and its monastic regulations—God forbid!—we will simply keep calling a one-hour service an "All-Night Vigil" and proudly explain that it is the same service the monks of the Lavra of St. Sabbas served in the 9th century. In regard to Lent, instead of asking fundamental questions—"What is fasting?" or "What is Lent?"—we satisfy ourselves with Lenten symbolism. In church magazines and bulletins appear recipes for "delicious lenten dishes," and a parish might even raise some additional money by means of a well-advertized "tasty lenten dinner." So much in our churches is explained sympolically as interesting, colorful, and amusing customs and traditions, as something which connects us not so much with God and a new life in Him but with the past and the customs of our forefathers, that it becomes increasingly difficult to discern behind this religious folklore the utter seriousness of religion. Let

me stress that there is nothing wrong in the various customs themselves. When they appeared they were the means and the expressions of a society *taking religion seriously;* they were not symbols, but life itself. What happened, however, was that as life changed and became less and less shaped by religion in its totality, a few customs survived as symbols of a way of life no longer lived. And what survived was that which on the one hand is most colorful and on the other hand the least difficult. The spiritual danger here is that little by little one begins to understand religion itself as a system of symbols and customs rather than to understand the latter as a challenge to spiritual renewal and effort. More effort goes into preparing lenten dishes or Easter baskets than into fasting and participation in the spiritual reality of Easter. This means that as long as customs and traditions are not connected again with the total religious world view which produced them, as long as symbols are not taken *seriously,* the Church will remain disconnected from life and have no power over life. Instead of symbolizing our "rich heritage," we must start integrating it into our real life.

To *take Lent seriously* means then that we will consider it first of all on the deepest possible level—as a spiritual challenge which requires a response, a decision, a plan, a continuous effort. It is for this reason, as we know, that the weeks of preparation for Lent were established by the Church. This is the time for the response, for the decision and the planning. And the best and easiest way here is to follow the Church's guidance—be it only by meditating on the five Gospel themes offered to us on the five Sundays of the pre-lenten season: that of desire (Zacchaeus), of humility (Publican and Pharisee), of the return from exile (Prodigal Son), of the judgment (Last Judgment), and of forgiveness (Forgiveness Sunday). These Gospel lessons are not merely to be listened to in church; the whole point is that they are to be "taken home" and meditated upon in terms of *my* life, *my* family situation, *my* professional obligations, *my* concern for material things, *my* relation to the concrete human beings with whom I

live. If to this meditation one adds the prayer of that pre-lenten season, "Open to me the gates of repentance, O Giver of Life . . . ," and Psalm 137—"By the rivers of Babylon . . ."—one begins to understand what it means to "feel with the Church" how a liturgical season colors the daily life. It is also a good time to read a religious book. The purpose of this reading is not only to increase our knowledge about religion; it is mainly to purify our mind from all that which usually fills it. It is simply incredible how crowded our minds are with all kinds of cares, interests, anxieties, and impressions, and how little control we have over that crowd. Reading a religious book, concentrating our attention on something entirely different from the usual contents of our thinking, creates by itself another mental and spiritual atmosphere. These are not "recipes"—there may be other ways of preparing oneself for Lent. The important point is that during this pre-lenten season we look at Lent as it were from a distance, as something coming to us or even perhaps sent to us by God Himself, as a chance for a change, for renewal, for deepening, and that we take that forthcoming chance *seriously,* so that on Forgiveness Sunday when we leave our home for Vespers we may be ready to make ours—be it only in a small way—the words of the *Great Prokeimenon* which will inaugurate Lent:

> Turn not away Thy face from Thy servant,
> for I am afflicted . . . .

2. PARTICIPATION IN LENTEN SERVICES

No one, as we have already said, can attend the entire cycle of lenten worship. Everyone *can* attend some of it. There is simply no excuse for not making Lent first of all the time for an increased attendance of and participation in the liturgy of the Church. Here again, personal conditions, individual possibilities and impossibilities can vary and result in different decisions, but there must be a decision, there must be an effort, and there must be a "follow-up."

From the liturgical point of view, we may suggest the following "minimum" aimed not at the spiritually self-destructive sense of having fulfilled an obligation, but at receiving at least the essential in the liturgical spirit of Lent.

In the first place, a special effort must be made on the parish level for a proper celebration of the *Forgiveness Sunday Vespers.* It is indeed a tragedy that in so many churches this service is either not celebrated at all, or not given sufficient care and attention. It must become one of the great "parish affairs" of the year and, as such, well prepared. The preparation must consist in training the choir, explaining the service by means of sermons or parish bulletins, planning it for a time when the greatest number of parishioners can attend; in short: in making it a true spiritual *event.* For, once more, nothing better than this service reveals the meaning of Lent as the crisis of repentance, reconciliation, as embarking together on a common journey.

The next "priority" must be given to the first week of Lent. A special effort must be made to attend at least once or twice the *Great Canon of St. Andrew.* As we have seen, the liturgical function of these first days is to take us into the spiritual "mood" of Lent which we described as "bright sadness."

Then, throughout the entire Lent, it is imperative that we give at least one evening to attend the *Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts* with the spiritual experience it implies—that of total fasting, that of the transformation of at least one day into a real expectation of judgment and joy. No reference to conditions of life, lack of time, etc., are acceptable at this point, for if we do only that which easily "fits" into the conditions of our lives, the very notion of lenten effort becomes absolutely meaningless. Not only in the 20th century, but in fact since Adam and Eve, "this world" was always an obstacle to the fulfillment of God's demands. There is, therefore, nothing new or special about our modern "way of life." Ultimately it all depends again on whether or not we take our religion *seriously,* and if we do, eight or ten additional evenings a year at church are

truly a minimal effort. Deprived of that evening, however, we are depriving ourselves not only of the beauty and the depth of the lenten services, not only of a necessary spiritual inspiration and help, but of that which, as we shall see in the next section, makes our fasting meaningful and effective.

3. "...BUT BY PRAYER AND FASTING"

There is no Lent without fasting. It seems, however, that many people today either do not take fasting seriously or, if they do, misunderstand its real spiritual goals. For some people, fasting consists in a symbolic "giving up" of something; for some others, it is a scrupulous observance of dietary regulations. But in both cases, seldom is fasting referred to the total lenten effort. Here as elsewhere, therefore, we must first try to understand the Church's teaching about fasting and then ask ourselves: how can we apply this teaching to our life?

Fasting or abstinence from food is not exclusively a Christian practice. It existed and still exists in other religions and even outside religion, as for example in some specific therapies. Today people fast (or abstain) for all kinds of reasons, including sometimes political reasons. It is important, therefore, to discern the uniquely Christian content of fasting. It is first of all revealed to us in the interdependence between two events which we find in the Bible: one at the beginning of the Old Testament and the other at the beginning of the New Testament. The first event is the "breaking of the fast" by Adam in Paradise. He ate of the forbidden fruit. This is how man's original sin is revealed to us. Christ, the New Adam—and this is the second event—begins by fasting. Adam was tempted and he succumbed to temptation; Christ was tempted and He overcame that temptation. The results of Adam's failure are expulsion from Paradise and death. The fruits of Christ's victory are the destruction of death and our return to Paradise. The lack of space prevents us from giving a detailed explanation of the meaning of this parallelism. It is clear, however, that in this perspective

fasting is revealed to us as something decisive and ultimate in its importance. It is not a mere "obligation," a custom; it *is* connected with the very mystery of life and death, of salvation and damnation.

In the Orthodox teaching, sin is not only the transgression of a rule leading to punishment; it is always a mutilation of life given to us by God. It is for this reason that the story of the original sin is presented to us as an act of eating. For food is means of life; it is that which keeps us alive. But here lies the whole question: what does it mean to be alive and what does "life" mean? For us today this term has a primarily biological meaning: life is precisely that which entirely depends on food, and more generally, on the physical world. But for the Holy Scripture and for Christian Tradition, this life "by bread alone" is identified with death because it is mortal life, because death is a principle always at work in it. God, we are told, "created no death." He is the Giver of Life. How then did life become mortal? Why is death and death alone the only absolute condition of that which exists? The Church answers: because man rejected life as it was offered and given to him by God and preferred a life depending not on God alone but on "bread alone." Not only did he disobey God for which he was punished; he changed the very relationship between himself and the world. To be sure, the world was given to him by God as "food"—as means of life; yet life was meant to be communion with God; it had not only its end but its full content in Him. "In Him was Life and the Life was the light of man." The world and food were thus created as means of communion with God, and only if accepted for God's sake were to give life. In itself food has no life and cannot give life. Only God has Life and is Life. In food itself God—and not calories—was the principle of life. Thus to eat, to be alive, to know God and be in communion with Him were one and the same thing. The unfathomable tragedy of Adam is that he ate for its own sake. More than that, he ate "apart" from God in order to be independent of Him. And if he did it, it is because he believed that food had life in

itself and that he, by partaking of that food, could be like God, i.e., have life in himself. To put it very simply: he *believed in food,* whereas the only object of belief, of faith, of dependence is God and God alone. World, food, became his gods, the sources and principles of his life. He became their slave. *Adam*—in Hebrew—means "man." It is my name, our common name. Man is still Adam, still the slave of "food." He may claim that he believes in God but God is not his life, his food, the all-embracing content of his existence. He may claim that he receives his life from God but he doesn't live in God and for God. His science, his experience, his self-consciousness are all built on that same principle: "by bread alone." We eat in order to be alive but we are not alive in God. This is the sin of all sins. This is the verdict of death pronounced on our life.

Christ is the New Adam. He comes to repair the damage inflicted on life by Adam, to restore man to true life, and thus He also begins with fasting. "When He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He became hungry" (Matt. 4:2). Hunger is that state in which we realize our dependence on something else—when we urgently and essentially need food—showing thus that we have no life in ourselves. It is that limit beyond which I either die from starvation or, having satisfied my body, have again the impression of being alive. It is, in other words, the time when we face the ultimate question: on what does my life depend? And, since the question is not an academic one but is felt with my entire body, it is also the time of temptation. Satan came to Adam in Paradise; he came to Christ in the desert. He came to two hungry men and said: eat, for your hunger is the proof that you depend entirely on food, that your life is in food. And Adam believed and ate; but Christ rejected that temptation and said: man shall not live by bread alone but by God. He refused to accept that cosmic lie which Satan imposed on the world, making that lie a self-evident truth not even debated any more, the foundation of our entire world view, of science, medicine, and perhaps even of religion. By doing this, Christ restored that relation-

ship between food, life, and God which Adam broke, and which we still break every day.

What then is fasting for us Christians? It is our entrance and participation in that experience of Christ Himself by which He liberates us from the total dependence on food, matter, and the world. By no means is our liberation a full one. Living still in the fallen world, in the world of the Old Adam, being part of it, we still depend on food. But just as our death—through which we still must pass—has become by virtue of Christ's Death a passage into life, the food we eat and the life it sustains can be life in God and for God. Part of our food has already become "food of immortality"—the Body and Blood of Christ Himself. But even the daily bread we receive from God can be in this life and in this world that which strengthens us, our communion with God, rather than that which separates us from God. Yet it is only fasting that can perform that transformation, giving us the existential proof that our dependence on food and matter is not total, not absolute, that united to prayer, grace, and adoration, it can itself be spiritual.

All this means that deeply understood, fasting is the only means by which man recovers his true spiritual nature. It is not a theoretical but truly a practical challenge to the great Liar who managed to convince us that we depend on bread alone and built all human knowledge, science, and existence on that lie. Fasting is a denunciation of that lie and also the proof that it is a lie. It is highly significant that it was while fasting that Christ met Satan and that He said later that Satan cannot be overcome "but by fasting and prayer." Fasting is the real fight against the Devil because it is the challenge to that one all-embracing law which makes him the "Prince of this world." Yet if one is hungry and then discovers that he can truly be independent of that hunger, not be destroyed by it but just on the contrary, can transform it into a source of spiritual power and victory, then nothing remains of that great lie in which we have been living since Adam.

How far we are by now from the usual understanding

of fasting as a mere change of diet, as what is permitted and what is forbidden, from all that superficial hypocrisy! Ultimately, to fast means only one thing: *to be hungry*—to go to the limit of that human condition which depends entirely on food and, being hungry, to discover that this dependency is not the whole truth about man, that hunger itself is first of all a spiritual state and that it is in its last reality *hunger for God.* In the early Church, fasting always meant total abstinence, a state of hunger, pushing the body to the extreme. It is here, however, that we discover also that fasting as a physical effort is totally meaningless without its spiritual counterpart: "... by fasting and *prayer.*" This means that without the corresponding spiritual effort, without feeding ourselves with Divine Reality, without discovering our total dependence on God and God alone, physical fasting would indeed be suicide. If Christ Himself was tempted while fasting, we have not a single chance of avoiding that temptation. Physical fasting, essential as it is, is not only meaningless, it is truly dangerous if it is disconnected from the spiritual effort—from prayer and concentration on God. Fasting is an art fully mastered by Saints; it would be presumptuous and dangerous for us if we attempted that art without discernment and caution. The entire lenten worship is a constant reminder of the difficulties, the obstacles, and the temptations that await those who think that they may depend on their will power and not on God.

It is for this reason that we need first of all a spiritual preparation for the effort of fasting. It consists in asking God for help and also in making our fast God-centered. We should fast for God's sake. We must rediscover our body as the Temple of His Presence. We must recover a religious *respect* for the body, for food, for the very rhythm of life. All this must be done before the actual fast begins so that when we begin to fast, we would be supplied with spiritual weapons, with a vision, with a spirit of fight and victory.

Then comes the fast itself. In accordance with what has been said above, it should be practiced on two levels:

first, as *ascetical* fast; and second, as *total* fast. The *ascetical* fast consists of a drastic reduction of food so that the permanent state of a certain hunger might be lived as a reminder of God and a constant effort to keep our mind on Him. Everyone who has practiced it—be it only a little—knows that this ascetical fast rather than weakening us makes us light, concentrated, sober, joyful, pure. One receives food as a real gift of God. One is constantly directed at that inner world which inexplicably becomes a kind of food in its own right. The exact amount of food to be received in this ascetical fasting, its rhythm and its quality, need not be discussed here; they depend on our individual capacities, the external conditions of our lives. But the principle is clear: it is a state of half-hunger whose "negative" nature is at all times transformed by prayer, memory, attention, and concentration into a *positive* power. As to the *total* fast, it is of necessity to be limited in duration and coordinated with the Eucharist. In our present condition of life, its best form is the day before the evening celebration of the Presanctified Liturgy. Whether we fast on that day from early morning or from noon, the main point here is to live through that day as a day of expectation, hope, hunger for God Himself. It is a spiritual concentration on that which comes, on the gift to be received, and for the sake of which one gives up all other gifts.

After all this is said, one must still remember that however limited our fasting, if it is true fasting it will lead to temptation, weakness, doubt, and irritation. In other terms, it will be a real fight and probably we shall fail many times. But the very discovery of Christian life as fight and effort is the *essential aspect of fasting.* A faith which has not overcome doubts and temptation is seldom a real faith. No progress in Christian life is possible, alas, without the bitter experience of failures. Too many people start fasting with enthusiasm and give up after the first failure. I would say that it is at this first failure that the real test comes. If after having failed and surrendered to our appetites and passions we start all over again and do not give up no matter how many times we fail, sooner

or later our fasting will bear its spiritual fruits. Between holiness and disenchanted cynicism lies the great and divine virtue of *patience*—patience, first of all with ourselves. There is no short-cut to holiness; for every step we have to pay the full price. Thus it is better and safer to begin at a minimum—just slightly above our natural possibilities—and to increase our effort little by little, than to try jumping too high at the beginning and to break a few bones when falling back to earth.

In summary: from a symbolic and nominal fast—the fast as obligation and custom—we must return to the *real* fast. Let it be limited and humble but consistent and serious. Let us honestly face our spiritual and physical capacity and act accordingly—remembering however that there is no fast without challenging that capacity, without introducing into our life a divine proof that things impossible with men are possible with God.

4. A LENTEN "STYLE OF LIFE"

Attending liturgical services, fasting, and even praying at regular intervals do not exhaust the lenten effort. Or rather, in order to be effective and meaningful, they need the support of our whole life. They need, in other terms, a "style of life" which would not be in contradiction with them, would not lead to a "split" existence. In the past, in Orthodox countries, such support was given by society itself: it was that complex of customs, external changes, legislation, and public and private observances which is covered by the Russian word *"byt"* and which is partly rendered by the English word *culture*. During Lent, the whole society accepted a certain rhythm of life, certain rules, which kept reminding the individual members of that society of the lenten season. In Russia, for example, one could not forget Lent if only because of a special lenten church bell ringing; theaters were closed; and, in more ancient times, the courts suspended their activities. By themselves, all those externals were obviously unable

to force man into repentance or toward a more active religious life. But they created a certain atmosphere—a kind of lenten climate—in which personal effort was made easier. Being weak, we need external reminders, symbols, signs. Of course there is always the danger that these external symbols may become ends in themselves and instead of being mere reminder become in popular opinion the very content of Lent. This danger has already been mentioned above when we spoke of external customs and observances replacing genuine personal effort. Properly understood, however, these customs constitute that "belt" which connnects the spiritual effort to the totality of life.

We are not living in an Orthodox society and no lenten "climate" can therefore be created on a social level. Lent or no Lent, the world around us and of which we are an integral part does not change. Consequently, this requires from us a new effort of rethinking the necessary religious relationship between the "external" and "internal." The spiritual tragedy of secularism is that it forces us into a real religious "schizophrenia"—dividing our life into two parts: the religious and the secular, which are less and less interdependent. Thus a spiritual effort is needed in order to transpose the traditional customs and reminders, the very means of our lenten effort. In a tentative and, of necessity, schematic way, one can consider this effort in terms first of *home,* and second, *out of home* existence.

In the Orthodox world view, the home and the family constitute the first and most important area of Christian life, of *application* of Christian principles to daily existence. It is certainly the home, the very style and spirit of family life, and not the school, not even the Church, that shapes our fundamental world view, that shapes in us that fundamental orientation of which we may not even be aware for a long time, but which ultimately will become a decisive factor. Dostoevsky's "staretz" Zosima—in *The Brothers Karamazov*—says: "A man who from his childhood can remember good things is saved for his whole life." It is very significant that he makes this remark after recalling his mother taking him to the Presanctified Liturgy, the

beauty of the service, the unique lenten melody of "Let my prayer be set forth in Thy sight as incense . . .". The wonderful effort of religious education which is being made today in our church schools will mean very little unless it is rooted in the home and family life. What then could and should be done during Lent at home? Since it is impossible to cover here all aspects of family life, I will concentrate on one of them.

Everyone will no doubt agree that the whole style of family existence has been radically altered by radio and television. These media of "mass communication" permeate today our whole life. One does not have to "go out" in order to "be out." The whole world is permanently here within my reach. And, little by little, the elementary experience of living within an inner world, of the beauty of that "interiority," simply disappears from our modern culture. If it is not television, it is music. Music has ceased to be something one listens to; it is fast becoming a kind of "background sound" for conversation, reading, writing, etc. In fact, this need for permanent music reveals the incapacity of modern man to enjoy silence, to understand it not as something negative, as a mere absence, but precisely as a presence and the condition for all real presence. If the Christian of the past lived in great measure in a silent world, giving him ample opportunity for concentration and inner life, today's Christian has to make a special effort to recover that essential dimension of silence which alone can put us in contact with higher realities. Thus the problem of radio and TV during Lent is not a marginal one but in many ways a matter of spiritual life or death. One must realize that it is impossible simply to split our life between the "bright sadness" of Lent and "The Late Show." Those two experiences are incompatible and one eventually kills the other. It is very likely, however, that unless a special effort is made "The Late Show" has a greater chance against the "bright sadness" than vice versa. A first "custom" to be suggested, therefore, is that the use of TV and radio be drastically reduced during Lent. We do not dare to hope here for a "total" fast but only for an "ascetical" one which,

as we know, means first of all a change of diet and its reduction. There is nothing wrong, for example, with continuing to watch the news or selecting serious, interesting, and intellectually or spiritually enriching programs. What must be stopped during Lent is the "addiction" to TV—the transformation of man into a vegetable in an armchair, glued to the screen and passively accepting anything coming from it. When I was a child (this was the pre-TV era) my mother used to lock the piano during the first, fourth, and seventh weeks of Lent. I remember this more vividly than the long lenten services, and even today a radio playing during Lent shocks me as almost a blasphemy. This personal recollection is only an illustration of the impact some very external decisions can have on a child's soul. And what is involved here is not a mere isolated custom or rule but the experience of Lent as a special time, as something which is constantly present and must not be lost, mutilated, or destroyed. Here also however, as with fasting, a mere absence or abstinence is not sufficient; it must have its positive counterpart.

The silence created by the absence of the world's noises made available by the media of mass communication is to be filled with positive content. If prayer feeds our soul, our intellect also needs its food for it is precisely the intellect of man which is being destroyed today by the ceaseless hammering of TV, radio, newspapers, pictorial magazines, etc. What we suggest then, in addition to the purely spiritual effort, is an intellectual effort. How many masterpieces, how many wonderful fruits of human thought, imagination, and creativity we neglect in our life simply because it is so much easier returning home from work in a state of physical and mental fatigue to push the TV button or to plunge into the perfect vacuum of an illustrated magazine. But suppose we plan our Lent? Suppose we make in advance a reasonable list of books to be read during Lent? Not all of them must necessarily be religious books; not all people are called to be theologians. Yet there is so much implicit "theology" in certain literary masterpieces, and everything which enriches our intellect,

every fruit of true human creativity, is blessed by the Church and, properly used, acquires a spiritual value. In the preceding chapter I have mentioned that the fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent are dedicated to the commemoration of two great teachers of Christian spirituality: *St. John of the Ladder* and *St. Mary of Egypt.* Let us understand this as a broad indication that what the Church wants us to do during Lent is to seek the enrichment of our spiritual and intellectual inner world, to read and to meditate upon those things which are most likely to help us recover that inner world and its joy. Of that joy, of the true vocation of man, the one that is fulfilled inside and not outside, the "modern world" gives us no taste today; yet without it, without the understanding of Lent as a journey into the depth of our humanity, Lent loses its meaning.

Secondly, what could be the meaning of Lent during the long hours we spend outside of home—commuting, sitting at our desks, taking care of our professional duties, meeting our colleagues and friends? Although no clear-cut "recipe" can be given here as in any other area, some very general considerations are possible. In the first place, Lent is a good time to measure the incredibly superficial character of our relations with men, things, and work. The "keep smiling" and "take it easy" slogans are truly the great "commandments" which we joyfully keep, and they mean: don't get involved, don't question, don't deepen your relations with human beings; keep the rules of the game which combine a friendly attitude with total indifference; think of everything in terms of material gains, benefits, advancement; be, in other terms, a part of the world which, while constantly using the great words "freedom," "responsibility," "care," etc., *de facto* follows the materialistic principle that man is what he eats! Lent is the time for the search for *meaning:* meaning of my professional life in terms of vocation; meaning of my relationship to other persons; meaning of friendship; meaning of my responsibility. There is no job, no vocation, which cannot be "transformed"—be it only a little—in terms not of greater efficiency or better organization but in those of human

value. It is the same effort of "interiorization" of all our relations that is needed here, for we are free human beings who have become (without very often knowing it) prisoners of systems that progressively de-humanize the world. And if our faith has any meaning, it is to be related to life in all its complexity. Thousands of people think that necessary changes come only from outside, from revolutions and change in external conditions. It is for us Christians to prove that in reality everything comes from *inside*—from faith and life according to faith. The Church, when she entered the Greco-Roman world, did not denounce slavery, did not call for a revolution. It was her faith, her new vision of man and life that progressively made slavery impossible. One "saint"—and saint here means very simply a man taking his faith seriously all the time—will do more for changing the world than a thousand printed programs. The saint is the only true revolutionary in this world.

Finally, and this is our last general remark, Lent is the time to control our speech. Our world is incredibly verbal and we are constantly flooded by words which have lost their meaning and therefore their power. Christianity reveals the sacredness of the word—a truly divine gift to man. For this reason our speech is endowed with tremendous power either positive or negative. For this reason also we shall be judged on our words: "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:36-37). To control speech is to recover its seriousness and its sacredness, to understand that sometimes an innocent "joke," which we proffered without even thinking about it, can have disastrous results—can be that last "straw" which pushes a man into ultimate despair and destruction. But the word can also be a witness. A casual conversation across the desk with a colleague can do more for communicating a vision of life, an attitude toward other men or toward work, than formal preaching. It can sow the seeds of a question, of the possibility of a different approach to life, the desire to know more. We have no idea how,

in fact, we constantly influence one another by our words, by the very "tonality" of our personality. And ultimately men are converted to God not because someone was able to give brilliant explanations, but because they saw in him that light, joy, depth, seriousness, and love which alone reveal the presence and the power of God in the world.

And thus if Lent is, as we have said at the very beginning, the recovery by man of his faith, it is also his recovery of life, of its divine meaning, of its sacred depth. It is by abstaining from food that we rediscover its sweetness and learn again how to receive it from God with joy and gratitude. It is by "slowing down" on music and entertainment, on conversation and superficial socializing, that we rediscover the ultimate value of human relationships, human work, human art. And we rediscover all this because very simply we *rediscover God Himself*—because we return to Him and in Him to all that which He gave us in His infinite love and mercy.

And thus, on Easter night we sing:

> Today are all things filled with light,
> Heaven and earth and the places under the earth;
> All creation does celebrate the Resurrection of Christ
> On whom it is founded....

Of this expectation, do not deprive us, O Lover of Man!

APPENDIX

HOLY THINGS FOR THE HOLY
Some Remarks on Receiving Holy Communion*

1. AN URGENT AND ESSENTIAL QUESTION

The questions and controversies about more frequent communion, about the link between the sacrament of Communion and that of Penance (Confession), about the essence and the meaning of Confession, are in our Church today a sign not of weakness or spiritual decay but of life and awakening. That there appears among Orthodox people a growing concern for the *essential,* a thirst and hunger for a more spiritual life, can no longer be denied, and for this we must render thanks to God. If, as some people seem to think, there is a "crisis"—and all questioning, all deepening of spiritual awareness is always and inescapably a crisis—it is a good and timely crisis. And it would be wrong and indeed impossible to try to solve it by mere administrative measures, by decrees and interdicts. What we face today is a crucial spiritual question ultimately related to all aspects

*These remarks include some parts of my *Report on Confession and Communion* presented to the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America and approved by the Synod on February 17, 1971. The Report as well as the decision of the Synod were printed in *Documents of the OCA.*

of our life and, I would add, to the very destiny of Orthodoxy in the deeply troubled "modern" world of ours.

Only a spiritually blind and totally insensitive person would deny that in spite of her relative success and achievements, mainly external and material, our Church is threatened from within with a formidable and growing danger: that of *secularism.* What is secularism? In an article published some years ago,[1] I tried to define it as:

> ... a world view and consequently a way of life in which the basic aspects of human existence—such as family, education, science, profession, art, etc.—not only are not rooted in or related to religious faith, but in which the very necessity or possibility of such a connection is denied. The secular areas of life are thought of as *autonomous,* i.e., governed by their own values, principles, and motivations, different from the religious ones. Secularism is more or less common to modern civilizations everywhere, but the particularity of its American brand, the one which concerns us here, is that in America secularism is not at all anti-religious or atheistic, but, on the contrary, implies as its almost necessary element a definite view of religion, can be indeed termed "religious." It is a 'philosophy of religion' as much as a 'philosophy of life.' An openly anti-religious society, such as Soviet Russia or Red China, cannot even be called 'secularistic'! Religion there is an enemy to be liquidated and all compromises with it may at best be temporary ones. But the characteristic feature of the American culture and 'way of life' is that they simultaneously *accept* religion as something essential to man and *deny* it as an integrated world view shaping the totality of human existence.
>
> An American 'secularist' may be a very 'religious' man, attached to his Church, regular in attending services, generous in his contributions, punctual in prayer. He will have his marriage 'solemnized' in Church, his home blessed, his religious obligations fulfilled—all this in perfectly good faith. But all this does not in the least alter the plain fact that his understanding of all these aspects of his life—marriage and family, home and profession, and ultimately his religious obligations themselves—is derived not from the creed he confesses in Church, not from his professed belief in the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Christ, the Son of God become Son of Man, but from 'philosophies of life,' that is, ideas and convictions having virtually nothing to do with that creed, if not directly opposed to it. One has only to enumerate some of the key 'values' of our culture—success, security, status, competition, profit, prestige, ambition—to realize that they are at the opposite pole from the entire *ethos* and inspiration of the Gospel....
>
> But does this mean that this religious secularist is a cynic, a hypocrite, or a schizophrenic? Not at all. It means only that his understanding of religion is rooted in his secularistic world view and not *vice versa.* In a non-secularistic society—the only type of

society Orthodoxy knew in the past—it is religion and its values that constitute the ultimate criterion of one's whole life, a supreme 'term of reference' by which man, society, and culture evaluate themselves, even if they constantly deviate from it. They may live by the same worldly motivations, but they are constantly challenged by religion, be it only by its passive presence. Thus the 'way of life' may not be religious even though the 'philosophy of life' certainly is. In the secularistic society it is exactly the opposite: the 'way of life' includes religion; the 'philosophy of life' excludes it.

Acceptance of secularism means, of course, a radical transformation of religion itself. It may keep all its external and traditional forms, yet inside it is simply a different religion. Secularism, when it 'approves' of religion and gives it a place of honor in social life, does so only inasmuch as religion itself accepts becoming a part of the secularistic world view, a sanction of its values and a *help* in the process of attaining them. And indeed no word is used more often by secularism in its dealing with religion than the word *help*. 'It helps' to belong to a religious group, to be identified with a religious tradition, to be active in the Church, to pray; 'it helps,' in short, to 'have religion.' And since religion *helps*, since it is such a useful factor in the personal and social life, it must in turn be *helped*. Hence the remarkable success of religion in America, attested to by all statistics. Secularism accepts religion but on its own terms; it assigns religion a function, and, provided religion accepts and fulfills that function, it covers religion with wealth, honor and prestige. 'America,' writes W. Herberg, 'seems to be at once the most religious and the most secular of nations. . . . Every aspect of contemporary religious life reflects this paradox: pervasive secularism amid mounting religiosity. . .'.[2]

2. "RELIGIONLESS RELIGION"

It is this American secularism which so many Orthodox naively and wrongly identify with the "American way of life" that is the root of the deep spiritual crisis of Orthodoxy. And nowhere is this crisis more visible than in the strange "religionless religion" which seems to permeate our Church life. The reduction of the Church to material, organizational, and legalistic preoccupations and concerns at the expense of religious and spiritual ones; the obsession with "property," money, and the defense of "parish rights" against bishops and clergy viewed as an external "threat;" the indifference to the missionary, educational, and charitable needs of the Church; the passive, and sometimes even active, resistance

to all efforts to deepen the spiritual and liturgical life, to make it less "nominal" and more authentic; the identification of religion with ethnic folklore and ethnic customs; the self-centeredness and virtual isolation of so many of our parishes, their lack of interest in the vital needs of the Church-at-large, to her mission in America—all this reveals such a deep secularization of Church consciousness that one becomes truly apprehensive about the future of our Church, whose leadership and members alike do not seem to realize the scope and depth of this crisis.

And yet it is precisely this secularization of the Church itself that causes so many people, especially among the youth, simply to leave the Church in which no one reveals to them what is her real essence and life, what it means to be her member; in which one hardly hears the appeal to deepen the inner spiritual effort; in which, indeed, the spiritual is reduced to a "formal" minimum (attendance, a once-a-year Communion, some fasting, some abstention from entertainment), while the material and the external are developed to a maximum.

And all this happens and develops at a time when we Orthodox are called to begin a new life, when the possibility—denied to so many of our brothers and sisters of our "mother Churches"—is given to us to grow, to be free not in words alone but in reality, to fill our Church with spiritual content, to achieve all that which, alas, cannot be achieved by the Orthodox living in the horrible conditions of openly atheistic and totalitarian regimes. Is it not tragic, therefore, that all these gifts, challenges, and possibilities are little, if at all, acknowledged, accepted, met; that the very structure of our churches, the spirit and the interests prevailing in them, make it virtually impossible truly to feed and to sustain genuine religious life?

3. WHY SACRAMENTS?

I began these remarks with some general considerations of the present situation of the Church because of my deep

conviction that the new interest in the Sacraments, in sacramental practice and discipline, stems from this crisis and is directly related to it. I am convinced that the question of lay participation in the Divine Mysteries is indeed the key question of our Church life. It is upon the solution of that question that the future of the Church—her genuine renewal or her inevitable decay—ultimately depends.

I am convinced that where Eucharist and Communion have again become, in the words of the late Father Sergius Cetverikov, "the center of Christian life,"[3] the tragic "reductions" and defects mentioned above begin to be overcome and healed. And this, of course, is not accidental; for if Church life is not founded above all on Christ—and this means on a constant and living communion with Him in the Sacrament of His Presence—then unavoidably something else emerges and dominates as the "focus" of a parish's preoccupation and activities. It may be "property" or superficial cultural "ethnicism," or simply material success as the only goal.... If it is not Christ, then something else—worldly and even sinful—will of necessity shape but also disintegrate the life of the Church.

Until quite recently it may have been possible not to realize the urgency of this "either/or" proposition. Indeed, throughout the long *immigrant period* of the history of Orthodoxy in America, our parishes, in addition to their purely religious functions, had a kind of self-evident "secular" function and foundation: ethnic, national, linguistic. They were the necessary form and means of uniting the immigrants in need of corporate identity for mere survival within American society which at first was alien and sometimes even inimical to them. Now, however, this immigrant period is rapidly approaching its end. The "natural"—ethnic and linguistic—foundation of our Church is simply fading away; more and more of the Orthodox people understand no other language but English, and in some of our parishes nearly half of the parishioners are converts to Orthodoxy. But then the question is: what shall replace that foundation? Is it not abundantly clear that if it is not replaced with the central belief and also the experience of the Church as

unity, life, and growth in Christ, i.e., with the genuine religious content of Orthodoxy, then inevitably the parish and the Church herself will begin their slow but inevitable decay and disintegration. Then, not united *in* and *for* something, people will unite *against* something. And herein lies the tragic urgency and depth of our present situation.

This is why the question of Sacraments is so important. Only in them, and of course above all in the very Sacrament of Christ's Presence and of our unity with Him and in Him, can we rediscover the positive, and not the negative, principles so obviously lacking in our Church today. Only in them are the roots for the very possibility of a change and renewal in the layman's mind which, for a long time, has been cut off from the sources and the experience of the Church. And if, in our days, this question has acquired such an urgency, it is because more and more people are, consciously or unconsciously, seeking such a renewal, seeking that foundation which alone can help the Church and the parish to recover their religious depth and to stop their rapid secularization.

I am fully aware that there exists among the Orthodox a tendency to solve all problems, all burning and difficult issues, including the one we are to discuss here—that of lay participation in the Divine Mysteries—by simple references to the past, i.e., to what was done thirty, fifty, or a hundred years ago, or is still being done in Russia, Greece, Poland, Serbia, etc. This tendency, however, is not very helpful and can sometimes do more harm than good. It is not helpful because not everything in that past, be it Russian, Greek, or whatever, was *ipso facto* truly Orthodox. To realize this one should read for example the observations made by Russian bishops at the beginning of this century, at the time of the preparation by the Russian Church of her long overdue national Council (which convened in 1917 but was interrupted by revolutionary violence and adjourned in 1918 without having completed its work). Virtually without exception, the Russian bishops, then probably the best educated in the whole Orthodox Church and unquestionably conservative, declared the Church's situation—spiritual,

liturgical, structural—to be deeply deficient and in dire need of reforms.[4] As to Russian theology, all its best representatives unanimously denounced its surrender to Western scholasticism and legalism, and precisely in the crucial area of sacramental theology. In a famous report to the Russian Holy Synod, one of the leaders of the Russian episcopate, Archbishop Anthony Khrapovitsky, suggested physical destruction of Russian theological schools and their replacement with an entirely different approach to religious education. The saintly Father John of Cronstadt tirelessly denounced and condemned the lukewarm and formal piety of Russian society, the reduction of Communion to a "once-a-year-obligation," the lowering of the Church's life to the level of customs.

In view of all this, mere references and appeals to the past are not sufficient, for this past itself needs to be evaluated in the light of the genuine Orthodox Tradition. The only criterion, always and everywhere, is Tradition itself—and the pastoral concern about how to "apply" it in our situation which is often radically different from those of the past.

4. THE NORM

It is impossible and unnecessary to present here the question of lay participation in the Divine Mysteries in all its dogmatic and historical aspects. What is essential can be summarized as follows:

The well-established and undisputed fact is that in the early Church the communion of all the faithful at every Divine Liturgy was a self-evident norm.[5] What must be stressed, however, is that this corporate and regular communion was understood and experienced not only as an act of personal piety and sanctification, but above all as an act stemming from one's membership in the Church, as precisely the fulfillment and the actualization of that membership. The Eucharist was both defined and experienced as the *Sacrament of the Church,* the *Sacrament of the assembly,* the *Sacrament of unity.* "He mixed Himself with us," writes St.

John Chrysostom, "and dissolved His Body in us so that we may constitute a wholeness and be a body united to the Head." In fact, the early Church knew no other sign or criterion for membership save participation in the Sacrament: "it was commonly held that the one who did not receive Communion for a few weeks had excommunicated himself, had anathematized himself from the Body of the Church."[6] Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ was the self-evident fulfillment of Baptism and Chrismation, and there existed no other conditions for receiving Communion.[7] All other Sacraments were also "sealed" in the partaking of the Holy Gifts.[8] And so evident was this connection between membership in the Church and Communion that in an early liturgical text we find the dismissal, before the consecration, of those "who cannot partake of this Divine Mystery."[9] And it must be clear that however obscured and complicated it became later, this initial understanding and experience of Communion has never been discarded and forever remains the essential norm of the Church's Tradition.

One must ask, therefore, not about this norm but about what happened to it. Why did we forget it so fully that a mere mention of more frequent (not to speak of regular) communion appears to so many (and especially to the clergy) an unheard of novelty shaking and, in their opinion, even destroying the foundations of the Church? How is it possible that for centuries nine out of ten Liturgies were Liturgies without communicants? Why is it that this incredible fact provokes no amazement, no trembling, while the desire to communicate more often raises fear, opposition, resistance? How could the strange doctrine of a once-a-year Communion appear in the Church and be considered a "norm" any departure from which could be but an exception? How, in other terms, did the understanding of Communion become so deeply individualistic, so detached from the doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ, so deeply contradictory to the Eucharistic prayer itself: "and all of us partaking of the one Bread and one Cup unite one to another in the Communion of the one Spirit. . ."?

5. THE DECAY: ITS CAUSES AND ITS EXCUSES

The usual answer given to these questions is this: if the early practice had to be discontinued, say the opponents of frequent or regular communion, if a radical distinction had to be introduced between the clergy whose receiving Communion is a self-evident part of their celebration, and the laity who may be admitted to it only under certain conditions unknown to the early Church, if, in general, communion for laity has become exception rather than norm, it is because of a good and holy fear—that of profaning the Sacrament by unworthily partaking of it, thus endangering one's salvation; for, in the words of St. Paul, "he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks his damnation" (I Cor. 11:29).

This answer must in turn be answered, for in fact it raises more questions than it solves. First of all even if it were true that the *de facto* excommunication of the laity had its origin in this saving fear and the feeling of unworthiness, it is certainly no longer true today. For if it were so, the non-communicants would at least feel some sadness while attending the Divine Liturgy, would feel sorry for the sinfulness and unworthiness which separate them from the Holy Gifts, would, in short, feel "excommunicated." But in reality none of this is true. Generation after generation of Orthodox attend the Liturgy with a perfectly clear conscience, totally convinced that nothing more is required from them, that Communion is simply not for them. Then, on those very rare and exceptional occasions when it is given to them, they receive it as an "obligation being fulfilled" by which, for one full year, they again consider themselves Christians "in good standing." But where in this attitude, which alas has become a norm in our Church, can one find—be it only a trace—humility and repentance, reverence and the fear of God?

In fact, when this attitude first made its appearance in the Church—and this happened soon after the conversion to Christianity of the Roman Empire, resulting in the sub-

sequent massive Christianization of its population and the corresponding lowering of moral and spiritual life among Christians—the Fathers saw in it the result not of fear and humility but of *neglect* and *spiritual relaxation.*[10] And just as they denounced as sinful the postponement of Baptism for reasons of "unpreparedness" and "unworthiness," they fought any neglect of the Sacraments. It is simply impossible to find one patristic text in support of the idea that since one cannot partake of the Mysteries worthily, it is better to abstain from them. St. John Cassian writes:

> We must not avoid communion because we deem ourselves to be sinful. We must approach it more often for the healing of the soul and the purification of the spirit, but with such humility and faith that considering ourselves unworthy . . . we would desire even more the medicine for our wounds. Otherwise it is impossible to receive communion once a year, as certain people do . . . considering the sanctification of heavenly Mysteries as available only to saints. It is better to think that by giving us grace, the sacrament makes us pure and holy. Such people manifest more pride than humility . . . for when they receive, they think themselves as worthy. It is much better if, in humility of heart, knowing that we are never worthy of the Holy Mysteries we would receive them every Sunday for the healing of our diseases, rather than, blinded by pride, think that after one year we become worthy of receiving them . . . .[11]

"Blinded by pride"! St. Cassian here truly put his finger on the strange ability in all spiritual error to find for itself a spiritual "alibi," to dress itself in that pseudo-humility which constitutes the most subtle and therefore the most dangerous form of pride. Thus, what according to the unanimous testimony of the Fathers originated as neglect soon became justified by pseudo-spiritual arguments and was little by little accepted as the norm.

There appeared, for example, the idea—absolutely unknown and alien to the early Tradition—that in regard to Communion there exists a spiritual and even mystical difference between the clergy and the laity, so that the former not only can but must receive Communion often while for the latter it is not permitted. Here once more one should quote St. John Chrysostom who more than anyone else defended the holiness of the Sacraments and insisted on

worthy preparation for Communion. The great pastor writes:

> There are cases when a priest does not differ from a layman, notably when one approaches the Holy Mysteries. We are all equally given them, not as in the Old Testament when one food was for the priests and another for the people and when it was not permitted to the people to partake of that which was for the priest. Now it is not so: but to all is offered the same Body and the same Cup....[12]

And a thousand years later, Nicholas Cabasilas, speaking of Communion in his *Explanation of the Divine Liturgy,* makes no distinction whatsoever between clergy and laity in regard to Communion. He writes:

> ...if anyone, having the possibility, refuses to accede to the eucharistic banquet, he will not obtain the sanctification procured by this banquet; not because of the fact itself of him not approaching, but because, having that possibility, he refuses to come.... How could one believe in the love of the one who, having the faculty to receive the sacrament, does not receive it?[13]

And yet, in spite of such clear testimonies, this strange and indeed heretical idea remained and still remains a part, if not of the teaching, at least of the liturgical piety in our Church.

The real triumph of this attitude toward Communion came when, after the end of the patristic age and the collapse of the Byzantine commonwealth, Orthodox theology entered the long period of "Western captivity," of radical Westernization, and when, under the influence of the Western scholastic and legalistic sacramental theology, the Sacraments, while obviously remaining *in* the Church, ceased to be viewed and experienced as fulfilling, or in the words of Fr. Georges Florovsky, as "*constituting* the Church";[14] when, on the one hand, Communion was identified as a means of personal, individual piety and sanctification with an almost total exclusion of its *ecclesial* meaning; when, on the other hand, membership in the Church ceased to be rooted in and measured by the participation in the Sacrament of the Church's unity in faith, love and life.

It was then that the layman was not only "permitted" but indeed *forced* to envisage Communion within an entirely subjective perspective—that of *his* needs, *his* spirituality,

his preparedness or unpreparedness, *his* possibilities, etc. He himself became the criterion and the judge of his own and other people's "spirituality." And he became all this within the framework of a theology and a piety which—in spite of the clear witness of the genuine Orthodox Tradition—endorsed this non-communicant status of the laity, made it into a norm, almost the "trade-mark" of Orthodoxy.

It is indeed a miracle that the combined pressure of this Westernized sacramental theology and this extra-ecclesial, individualistic, and subjective piety did not succeed in eradicating altogether the thirst and hunger for Communion, for a genuine, and not a nominal and formal, participation in the life of the Church. At all times but especially in our troubled and confused era, every Orthodox revival has had its source in the "rediscovery" of the Sacraments and sacramental life, and above all in a eucharistic revival. So it was in Russia when persecutions washed away the lukewarm, formal, and nominal attitudes toward the Church passionately denounced by Fr. John of Cronstadt. So it was with the emergence in Europe and the Middle East of the Orthodox youth movements with their renewed and deepened understanding of the Church. And that today this eucharistic and sacramental revival knocks at the doors of our Church should hearten us as the sign that the fateful crisis of "secularism" can be overcome.

6. THE MEANING OF COMMUNION

"He who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (I Cor. 11:29). Now we can come to these words of St. Paul and ask ourselves their real meaning. For, as we have seen, neither the early Church nor the Fathers understood them to mean that the alternative to "eating and drinking unworthily" consists in abstaining from Commuion, that reverence for the Sacrament and fear of its profanation ought to result in refusing the Divine Gifts. Such obviously was not the thought of St. Paul himself, for it is indeed in

his Epistles, in his exhortations, that we find the first formulation of the apparent paradox which in reality constitutes the basis of Christian "ethics" and the source of Christian spirituality.

"Know you not," writes St. Paul to the Corinthians, "that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Cor. 6:19-20). These words are a real summary of St. Paul's constant appeal to Christians: we must live according to what has "happened" to us in Christ; yet we can live thus only because it *has* happened to us, because salvation, redemption, reconciliation, and "buying with a price" have already been given to us and we are "not our own." We can and must work at our salvation because we have been saved, yet it is only because we are saved that we can work at our salvation. We must always and at all times *become* and *be* that which—in Christ—we already *are:* "you are Christ's and Christ is God's" (I Cor. 3:22).

This teaching of St. Paul is of crucial importance for the Christian life in general and for the sacramental life in particular. It reveals the essential tension on which this life is based, from which it stems, and which cannot be removed, for this would mean the abandonment and a radical mutilation of the Christian faith itself: the tension in each one of us between the "old man, which is corrupt through the lusts of the flesh," and "the new man, renewed after the image of Him who created him" through baptismal death and resurrection;[15] between the gift of the new life, and the effort to appropriate it and truly make it one's own life; between the grace "given not by measure" (John 3:34), and the always deficient measure of my spiritual life.

But then the first and essential fruit of all Christian life and spirituality, so manifest in the Saints, is the feeling and the awareness not of any "worthiness," but of *unworthiness.* The closer one is to God the more conscious he becomes of the ontological unworthiness of all creatures

before God, of the totally free gift of God. Such genuine spirituality is absolutely incompatible with any idea of "merit," of anything that could make us, in itself and by itself, "worthy" of that gift. For, as St. Paul writes: ". . .while we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why one will hardly die for a righteous man. . . . But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. . ." (Rom. 5:6-8). To "measure" that gift with our merits and worthiness is the beginning of that spiritual pride which is the very essence of sin.

This tension has its focus and also its source in the sacramental life. It is here, while approaching the Divine Gifts, that we become aware again and again of the divine "net" into which we have been caught and from which, in human reasoning and logic, there is no escape. For if, because of my "unworthiness," I abstain from approaching, I reject and refuse the divine gift of love, reconciliation, and life. I excommunicate myself, for "except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you have no life in you" (John 6:53). If, however, I "eat and drink unworthily" I eat and drink my damnation. I am condemned if I do not receive and I am condemned if I do, for who has ever been "worthy" to be touched by the Divine Fire and not be consumed?

Once more from this divine *trap* there is no escape by means of human reasoning when we apply to the Divine Mysteries our human criteria, measures, and rationalizations. There is something spiritually frightening in the ease and good conscience with which bishops, priests, and laymen alike, but perhaps especially those who pretend to be well versed in "spirituality," accept and defend as traditional and self-evident the contemporary sacramental situation: the one in which a member of the Church is considered to be "in good standing" if for fifty one weeks he has not approached the Chalice because of his "unworthiness" but then, during the fifty-second, after having complied with a few rules, gone through a four-minute confession and received absolution, he suddenly becomes "worthy" in order to return, immediately after Communion, to his "unworthiness." It

is frightening because this situation so obviously rejects that which constitutes the real meaning and also the *cross* of Christian life and which is revealed to us in the Eucharist: the impossibility to accommodate Christianity to our measures and levels; the impossibility to accept it except on God's, and not our, terms.

What are these terms? Nowhere do we find them better expressed than in the words which the priest pronounces while elevating the Holy Bread and which in the early Church were the very words of invitation to Communion: *"Holy Things for the Holy!"* With these words and also with the congregation's answer to them—*"One is Holy, One is the Lord Jesus Christ. . ."*—all human reasoning indeed comes to an end. The Holy Things, the Body and Blood of Christ, are for those alone who are holy. Yet *no one* is holy, save the One Holy Lord Jesus Christ. And thus, on the level of miserable human "worthiness," the door is closed; there is nothing we can offer and which would make us "worthy" of this Holy Gift. Nothing indeed except precisely the Holiness of Christ Himself which He in His infinite love and mercy has imparted to us, making us "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (I Pet. 2:9). It is His Holiness and not ours which makes us holy and thus "worthy" of approaching and receiving the Holy Gifts. For as Nicholas Cabasilas says in commenting on these words: "No one has holiness by himself and it is not the effect of human virtue, but all those who possess it have it from Him and by Him. It is as if several mirrors were placed beneath the sun: they are all bright and all issue rays, while in reality there is but one sun which brightens all of them. . . ."[16]

Such then is the essential "paradox" of the sacramental life. It would be an error, however, to limit it to Sacraments alone. The sin of profanation, of which St. Paul speaks when he mentions "eating and drinking unworthily," embraces the whole of life because the whole of life, the whole man, body and spirit, were sanctified by Christ and made holy, and being holy "are not our own." The only question addressed to man is whether he is willing and ready to

accept, in humility and obedience, this holiness so freely and lovingly given to him first of all as the *cross* on which he is to crucify the old man with his lust and his corruption, as that which judges him all the time, and then as the *grace* and *power* to fight constantly for the growth of the new man in him, of that new and holy life of which he has been made a partaker. We partake of Holy Communion *only* because we have been made holy by Christ and in Christ; and we partake of it in order to become holy, i.e., to fulfill the gift of holiness in our life. It is when one does not realize this that one "eats and drinks unworthily"—when, in other terms, one receives Communion thinking of one's self as "worthy" through one's own, and not Christ's, holiness; or when one receives it without relating it to the whole of life as its judgment, but also as the power of its transformation, as forgiveness, but also as the inescapable entrance into the "narrow path" of effort and struggle.

To make us realize this, not only with our mind but with our entire being, to lead us into that repentance which alone opens to us the doors of the Kingdom, is the real meaning and content of our *preparation for Holy Communion.*

7. THE MEANING OF PREPARATION FOR COMMUNION

In our present situation, shaped in many ways by the practice of "infrequent" communion, the *preparation* for it means primarily the fulfillment by the communicant-to-be of certain disciplinary and spiritual prescriptions and rules: abstention from otherwise permitted acts and activities, reading of certain canons and prayers (*Rule for Those Preparing Themselves for Communion* printed in our prayer books), abstention from food during the morning before *Communion,* etc. But before we come to this preparation in the narrow sense of the word, we must, in the light of what has been said above, try to recover the idea of preparation in its wider and deeper meaning.

Ideally, of course, the whole life of a Christian is and should be preparation for Communion, just as it is and should be the spiritual fruit of Communion. "Unto Thee we commit our whole life and hope, O Lord. . ." we read in the liturgical prayer before Communion. All of our life is judged and measured by our membership in the Church and therefore by our participation in the Body and Blood of Christ. All of it is to be filled with and transformed by the grace of that participation. The worst consequence of our present practice is that it "cuts off" preparation for Communion from life itself, and by doing this makes our real life even more profane, more unrelated to the faith we profess. But Christ did not come to us so that we may set apart a small segment of our life for our "religious obligations." He claimed the whole of man and the totality of his life. And He left with us the Sacrament of Communion with Himself so that it may sanctify and purify our whole existence and relate all aspects of our life to Him. A Christian thus is one who lives *between:* between the coming of Christ in the flesh and His return in glory to judge the quick and the dead; between Eucharist and Eucharist—the Sacrament of remembrance and the Sacrament of hope and anticipation. In the early Church it was precisely the rhythm of that participation in the Eucharist—the living in the remembrance of the one and in the expectation of the next—which truly shaped Christian spirituality and gave it its true content: the participation, while living in this world, in the new life of the world to come and the transformation of the "old" by the "new."

In practical terms this preparation consists, first of all, in the *awareness* not only of "Christian principles" in general, but precisely of *Communion* itself—both of the one that I have *already* received and which, by making me a partaker of the Body and Blood of Christ, judges my life, challenges me with the inescapable call to *be* what I have become, and of the one that I shall receive, in the life and holiness and approaching light of which time itself and all the details of my life acquire an importance, a spiritual significance which from a purely human and "secular" point of

view they would not have. A venerable priest, when asked how one can live a Christian life in the world, answered: "Simply by remembering that tomorrow (or after tomorrow, or in a few days) I shall receive Holy Communion. . .".

One of the simplest ways to generate the beginning of that awareness is to include prayers *before* and *after* Communion into our daily rule of prayer. Usually we read the prayers of preparation just before Communion and the prayers of thanksgiving just after, and having read them, we simply return to our "profane" life. But what prevents us from reading one or several prayers of *thanksgiving* during the first days of the week after the Sunday Eucharist, and the prayers of *preparation* during the second part of the week, thus introducing the *awareness* of the Sacrament into our daily life, referring the whole of our life to the Holy Gifts received and about to be received? This of course is only one step. Much more is needed and, above all, a real *rediscovery*—through preaching, teaching, and counseling—of the Eucharist itself as the Sacrament of the Church and therefore the very source of all Christian life.

The second level of preparation is centered on that *self-examination* of which St. Paul speaks: ". . .let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup" (I Cor. 11:28). The goal of that preparation consisting of fasting, special prayers (the *Rule for Those Preparing Themselves for Communion*), spiritual concentration, silence, etc., is, as we have seen already, not to make a man consider himself "worthy," but to make him aware precisely of his *unworthiness* and to lead him to true *repentance.* Repentance is all this: man *seeing* his sinfulness and weakness, realizing his state of separation from God, experiencing sorrow and pain because of that state, desiring forgiveness and reconciliation, rejecting the evil and opting for a return to God, and finally desiring Communion for the "healing of soul and body."

This repentance begins however not with preoccupation with one's self but with the contemplation of the holiness of Christ's gift, of the heavenly reality to which one is called. It is only because and inasmuch as we see the "bridal

chamber adorned" that we can realize that we are deprived of the garment needed to enter therein. It is only because Christ has come to us that we can truly repent, i.e., see ourselves as unworthy of His love and of His holiness and thus desire to return to Him. Without this true repentance, this inner and radical "change of mind," communion for us will be for "damnation" and not "healing." Yet it is the very fruit of repentance that, by making us realize our total unworthiness, it takes us to Christ as the only salvation, healing, and redemption. By revealing to us our unworthiness, repentance fills us with that *desire,* that humility, that obedience which alone, in the eyes of God, makes us "worthy." Read the prayers before Communion. They all contain that one cry:

> . . . I am not worthy, Master and Lord, that You should enter under the roof of my soul. Yet inasmuch as You desire to live in me as the lover of men, I approach with boldness. You have commanded: let the doors be opened which You alone have made and You shall enter with Your love . . . You shall enter and enlighten my darkened reasoning. I believe that You will do this. . . .

Finally, the third and the highest level of preparation is reached when we desire to receive Communion simply because we love Christ and long to be united to Him who "with desire has desired" to be united to us. Beyond the need and the desire for forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing there is, there must be, simply this: our love for Christ whom we love "because He first loved us" (I John 4:19). And ultimately it is this love and nothing else that makes it possible for us to cross the abyss separating the creature from the Creator, the sinful from the Holy One, this world from the Kingdom of God. It is this love which alone truly transcends and therefore abolishes as an irrelevant dead end all our human—all too human—digressions about "worthiness" and "unworthiness," brushes away our fears and inhibitions, makes us surrender to the Divine Love. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear. Because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love. . ." (I John 4:18). It is this love which inspired the beautiful prayer of St. Symeon the New Theologian:

> . . . partaking of the Divine Mysteries which deify man, I am no longer alone, but with Thee, O my Christ. . . . And I shall not be left without Thee, the Life-Giver, my breath, my life, my joy, the salvation of the world.

Such is then the goal of all preparation, all repentance, all efforts and prayers: that we may love Christ and "with boldness and without condemnation" partake of the Sacrament in which Christ's love is given to us.

8. CONFESSION AND COMMUNION

What—in this preparation—is the place of *sacramental confession?* We must ask this question and try to answer it because in many Orthodox Churches there developed, and is commonly accepted today, the doctrine which affirms that Communion for laity is *impossible* without sacramental confession and absolution. Even if someone wishes to receive Communion frequently, he must each time go to Confession or at least receive sacramental absolution.

The time has come to state openly that whatever the various and sometimes serious reasons that brought this doctrine and this practice into existence, they not only have no foundation in Tradition but, in fact, lead to very alarming distortions of the Orthodox doctrine of the Church, of the Eucharist, and of the Sacrament of Penance itself.

To be convinced of this one has to recall the initial understanding by the Church of the Sacrament of Penance. It was and, according to the essential teaching of the Church, still is the Sacrament of reconciliation with the Church, of the return to her and into her life of those excommunicated, i.e., excluded from the eucharistic gathering of the Church. At first the high moral standard of life expected from the members of the Church, and the very strict ecclesiastical discipline, allowed for only *one* such reconciliation: "After that great and holy calling [of Baptism] if anyone is tempted by the devil and sins, *he has but one penance,*" we read in *The Shepherd of Hermas,* a Christian document of the second century, "for if anyone should sin and do penance frequently, to such a man his penance will be of no avail."[17] Later on,

and especially after the massive Christianization of the Empire following the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, the discipline of Penance was somewhat relaxed, but the understanding of the Sacrament itself was in no way altered: it was for those alone who were excommunicated from the Church for acts and sins clearly defined in the canonical Tradition of the Church.[18] And that this understanding of the Sacrament of Penance remains that of the Church even today is clearly seen in the very prayer of absolution: "...reconcile him (her) with Thy Holy Church in Christ Jesus our Lord...." (This incidentally is *the* prayer of absolution used universally in the Orthodox Church. As to the second one, unknown to many Orthodox Churches—"...and I, an unworthy priest, by the power given unto me, do forgive and absolve..."—it is of Western origin and was introduced into our liturgical books at the time of the acute "Latinization" of Orthodox theology.)

Does this mean that the *non-excommunicated,* the *faithful* were considered by the Church to be *sinless?* Of course not. It is indeed the teaching of the Church that no one, save God, is sinless, and "there is no man who lives and sins not." But it has always been the teaching of the Church also that while certain sins do excommunicate a Christian, some other sins do not lead to this separation from the body of the believers and from the participation in the Sacraments. Nicolas Cabasilas writes:

> There are sins which are not mortal according to the teaching of St. John. And this is why nothing prevents those Christians, who have not committed sins separating them from Christ and leading them to death, from communion to Divine Mysteries and the participation to sanctification, not only externally, but in reality, for they continue to be living members united to the Head....[19]

It is not that these sins—the general sinfulness, weakness and unworthiness of our whole life—need no repentance and no forgiveness; the whole preparation for Communion, as we have seen, is indeed such repentance and a cry for forgiveness. What they do not need is sacramental confession and sacramental absolution, the latter applying only to those excommunicated. Our "non-mortal" sins and our general

sinfulness are confessed by the members of the Church each time we gather together for the sacrament of Christ's Presence, and the whole life of the Church indeed constitutes this constant repentance. During the Divine Liturgy itself we confess our sins and ask for forgiveness in the *Prayer of the Trisagion:*

> . . .Forgive us every transgression, voluntary and involuntary. Sanctify our souls and bodies and enable us to serve Thee in holiness all the days of our life. . . .

And, as we approach the Holy Chalice, we ask for forgiveness of "sins voluntary and involuntarily committed in word and in deed, knowingly or unknowingly," and we believe that, in the measure of our repentance, we are forgiven by partaking of the very Sacrament of forgiveness and healing.

It must be clear then that the doctrine which declares the Sacrament of Penance to be a *sine qua non* condition for admitting the lay members of the Church to Communion is not only a deviation from the initial and universal Tradition of the Church, but also a mutilation of the Orthodox teaching on the Church, the Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Penance itself. It mutilates the doctrine of the Church because it *de facto* divides her members into two categories, for one of which (the laity) the regeneration through Baptism, the sanctification in the Holy Chrismation, the becoming "fellow citizens with the Saints and of the household of God" are not considered as imparting *full membership,* i.e., the participation in the Sacrament in which the Church fulfills herself as the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. It mutilates the doctrine of the Eucharist because, by setting for Communion conditions other than membership in the Church, it makes it virtually impossible to see and to experience the Eucharist as the very Sacrament of the Church, as the act by which, in the words of St. Basil's Liturgy, "all of us who partake of the one Bread and one Cup are united to one another in the communion of the Holy Spirit." And finally it mutilates the Sacrament of Penance itself because by having become a formal and, in fact, the only condition for Communion, Confession *replaces* the true preparation for Communion which consists, as we have seen, in true

inner repentance. The emphasis, the whole experience of this Sacrament, shifts from repentance to *absolution,* and is understood in terms of an almost magical power.[20] It is this formal, half-magical, half-legalistic "absolution," and not reconciliation with the Church from which his sins have excommunicated him, that one seeks today in Confession; and he seeks it not because his sinfulness troubles him (he usually finds it natural and inevitable), but because it "entitles" him to approach the Holy Gifts in good conscience. Having become a mere "condition" for Communion, the Sacrament of Penance—so crucial, so awesome in the early Church—has in reality lost its true function and place in the Church.

How could such a doctrine appear in the Church and become a norm, defended by many as almost the quintessence of Orthodoxy? Three main factors share the responsibility for this. We have already mentioned one of them: it is that nominal, minimalistic, and lukewarm approach to the demands of the Church, that *neglect* of the Sacraments which the Fathers denounced and which led first to less and less frequent communion, and finally to its understanding in terms of a "once-a-year obligation." Thus it is obvious that a Christian approaching the Divine Mysteries infrequently, and who for the rest of the time is quite content with his *de facto* "excommunication," *must* be reconciled with the Church and cannot be accepted to Communion except through the Sacrament of Penance.

The second factor, entirely different from the first one, was the influence within the Church of monastic confession—the spiritual guidance by an experienced monk of a less-experienced one—which was based on a constant "opening of the thoughts" of the latter to the former. The "elder" entrusted with such spiritual guidance and confession was not necessarily a priest (in its original form monasticism in fact was thought of as incompatible with priesthood), and this confession was in no way related to the Sacrament of Penance. It was an integral part of the monastic life and discipline based on total obedience, on the monk's renunciation of his will. Thus, according to the Byzantine monastic *typica* of the XII—XIII centuries, a monk was forbidden

both to receive Communion and to abstain from it by his own decision, without the permission of the abbot or of his spiritual father, for, to quote one of these *typica,* "to exclude one's self from communion is to follow one's own will." In women's monasteries the same power belonged to the abbess.[21] Thus we have here a confession of a non-sacramental type, comparable *mutatis mutandis* to what today we would term "counseling" or "spiritual guidance." Historically, however, it made a great, indeed a decisive impact on sacramental confession. At a time of spiritual decadence (the scope of which one can see for example in the canons of the so-called Quinisext Council in Trullo, held in Constantinople in A.D. 691) and the loss by the "secular" clergy of their moral and spiritual authority, the monasteries became virtually the only centers of spiritual guidance and the monks the only spiritual counsellors of the Orthodox people. And thus the two types of confession—the "sacramental" and the "spiritual"—little by little merged into one: the "spiritual" becoming a preparation for Holy Communion, and the "sacramental" including spiritual problems previously excluded from it.

This development, however justified historically and spiritually, however beneficial within the conditions in which it took place, contributed nevertheless to a confusion which today, in our present conditions, is likely to do more harm than good. There can be no question about the essential *need* in the Church for pastoral and spiritual guidance and counseling. But the real question is: is this need met in our present short three-to-five-minute confessions with a line of once-a-year penitents waiting to "fulfill their duty," with the obvious impossibility of getting to the heart of the matter, with the ambiguity of the confession ceasing to be confession and not quite developing into spiritual conversation? And then the other question: is every priest, especially a young one, sufficiently experienced, adequately "equipped" to solve all problems and even to understand them? How many tragic mistakes, how much spiritually harmful advice, how many misunderstandings could have been avoided if we had kept the essential Tradition of the

Church, reserving sacramental confession for the confession by the penitent of his sins and finding some other time and context for the most needed pastoral and spiritual counseling which, among other things, would enable the priest to realize his own inadequacies in certain cases and himself seek help and guidance—from his bishop, from another priest, from the spiritual experience of the Church.

The third and, alas, decisive factor was once more the influence of the Western scholastic and juridical understanding of Penance. Much has been written about the "Western captivity" of Orthodox theology, but few people realize the scope and the depth of the distortion caused by these Western influences in the life of the Church and, first of all, in the understanding of Sacraments. It is this Western influence that led to the shift (mentioned above) from repentance and reconciliation with the Church as being the essence of the Sacrament of Penance, to *absolution,* conceived almost exclusively in terms of a juridical power. If in the initial Orthodox understanding absolution stems from the priest being the *witness* of repentance, of its authenticity and reality, and *therefore* the authorized announcer and "sealer" of divine forgiveness, of the penitent's "reconciliation with the Holy Church in Christ Jesus," within the Western legal framework *absolution* becomes a "power in itself"—so much so that there developed here and there a truly strange practice of asking for and receiving "absolution" without any confession! The initial distinction—the one mentioned by Cabasilas—between sins resulting in excommunication and those not separating a man from the Church, was rationalized in the West as a difference between, on the one hand, "mortal sins"—depriving man of the "state of grace" and therefore requiring sacramental absolution—and, on the other hand, "venial sins"—not affecting the "state of grace" and for which an act of contrition is sufficient. In the Orthodox East and especially in Russia (under the influence of the Latinizing theology of Peter Moghila and his followers) this doctrine resulted in a compulsory connection between Confession and every Communion. It is ironic, indeed, that this most obvious of all

Latin "infiltrations" is believed by many Orthodox to be the very norm of Orthodoxy, while a mere attempt to re-evaluate it in the light of the genuine Orthodox Tradition is often denounced as a Roman Catholic deviation!

9. A TOTAL REDISCOVERY

What we need then is, first of all, the real *rediscovery* in the Church and by her faithful members of the true meaning of the Eucharist as the Sacrament of the Church, as that essential act in which she always *becomes what she is:* the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the new life, the manifestation of the Kingdom of God, the knowledge of God and communion with Him. The Church becomes all this by the "sacrament of the gathering" —many coming together to constitute the Church, by offering as one body united by one faith, one love, one hope, the Holy Oblation, by offering "with one mouth and one heart" the Eucharist, and by sealing this unity—in Christ with God, and in Christ with one another—in the partaking of the Holy Gifts.

What we need furthermore is the rediscovery of Holy Communion as the *essential food* uniting us to Christ, making us partakers of His Life, Death and Resurrection, as the very means of our fulfilling ourselves as members of the Church and of our spiritual life and growth.

What we need finally is the rediscovery of the true meaning of *preparation* as the very focus of our spiritual life, as that spiritual effort which always reveals to us our *unworthiness* and makes us therefore desire the Sacrament of healing and forgiveness, and which by revealing to us the unfathomable depth of Christ's love for us, makes us love Him and desire to be united with Him.

And if we "rediscover" all this, we shall also discover that in fact the entire life of the Church has always been that *preparation:* that all her rules—liturgical and spiritual, penitential and disciplinary—have indeed no other reason for existence but to help us in making our own life a constant

preparation not only for Communion but ultimately for that for which Communion itself prepares us—the joy and the fulness of the "day without evening" of God's eternal Kingdom.

We shall thus rediscover the real need for the Sacrament of Penance, for sacramental confession. We shall seek in it not a formal "absolution" or an equally formal "condition" for Communion, but a deep spiritual renewal, the true reconciliation with God and a return to His Church from which we are indeed so often excommunicated by the hopeless secularism of our existence. We shall rediscover the spiritual meaning of the *penitential seasons* of the Church—Great Lent, Pre-Christmas Lent, etc.—which are the proper times and the proper seasons for sacramental Penance. We shall rediscover in ourselves the need for real spiritual guidance. And above everything else we shall—with fear and joy, spiritual trembling and faith—rediscover the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood as the very source and the constant focus of our life as Christians!

All this, to be sure, will not happen overnight. It will take much time, much effort, much patience. Yet the very fact that all these questions—and on a deeper level, a thirst and hunger for a fuller participation in the essential, spiritual and sacramental life of the Church—have appeared in our Church and in her members, reassures us that even in the darkness and the spiritual decomposition of our troubled times the Church "never ages but always rejuvenates herself." It belongs to those whom God has entrusted with "rightly defining the Word of His Truth"—to the bishops, as the guardians of the Truth—to see to it that this spiritual hunger be satisfied in accordance with the true norms, the true demands of the Church's Tradition.

Notes and References

1. *Great Lent*—Great Lent as we know it today is the fruit of a long and extremely complex historical development, not all aspects of which have been adequately studied. Several questions still remain unanswered and much work—and not only in the area of secondary details—remains to be done. The following is a very brief summary of the main evidence.

It seems well established that in the middle of the second century the Church knew only a very short fast before the annual celebration of Pascha, but even that fast was observed differently in different places. Commenting on the Paschal controversy, St. Irenaeus of Lyons writes that the controversy "is not only about the day but also about the actual character of the fast; for some think that they ought to fast one day, others two, others even more; some count their day as forty hours, day and night. And such variation of observance did not begin in our own time but much earlier, in the days of our predecessors." (cit. in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5, 24, 12. Cf. also Hippolitus of Rome, *Apostolic Tradition* 2, 20, 2-9; 21, 1-5; and Tertullian, *Concerning Baptism,* 19.) A century later the evidence shows this pre-paschal fast to have extended, in some regions at least, to the entire week ("Holy Week" in our terminology). Thus in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* we read: "... therefore you shall fast in the days of Pascha from the second day of the week (i.e., Monday) and you shall sustain yourselves with bread and salt and water only up to the ninth hour until the fifth day (i.e., Thursday) .... But on Friday and Saturday fast wholly and taste nothing" (ed. R. H. Connolly, 1929, p. 189). Then "there is unfortunately a gap of about three quarters of a century... before the earliest information concerning the Forty Days Lent" (A. Allan McArthur, *The Evolution of the Christian Year* [London: 1953], p. 115). From that information, however, which is found in Canon 5 of the Council of Nicaea "we receive the impression that Lent is no recent innovation but is something familiar" (McArthur, p. 125). When, where, and how then did the early pre-paschal fast of two to six days develop into the Forty Days? To this question two different answers are given by liturgiologists. According to some of them, our present Lent is the result of a "fusion" between the pre-paschal fast mentioned above and another fast, independent at first from the Paschal Season and commemorating Christ's fasting in the desert after

His Baptism. This fast was connected not with Easter but with Epiphany and its observance began on January 7. The fusion between the two occurred under the influence of the institution of catechumens and the practice of preparing them for Baptism before Easter (cf. A. Braumstark, *Liturgie Comparée,* p. 208 and J. Daniélou, "Le Symbolisme des Quarante Jours" in *La Maison Dieu,* 31 [1932], p. 19). Other students of liturgical history are of the opinion that the Forty Days are due to a progressive extension of the pre-paschal fast and originated in connection with the institution of the catechumenate (cf. McArthur, p. 114 ff., G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy,* p. 354). Personally, I do not find the first hypothesis to be a conclusive one, at least in its universal application, but once more the conclusive evidence here is still lacking.

Be that as it may, in the fourth and fifth centuries the pre-paschal fast called *Forty Days* (Quadragesima, Tessaracosti) is clearly an universally accepted institution. But as late as the fifth century a great variety of practices is attested to by the church historians Socrates and Sozomen. "The fast before Easter," writes Socrates, "is observed differently in different places. In Rome one fasts for three weeks without interruption except on Saturdays and the Lord's Day, whereas in Illyricum, Greece, and Alexandria one keeps the fast for six weeks before Pascha and it is called Forty Days; still others begin to fast seven weeks before the feast" (Socrates, *His. Eccles.* 5, 22). Socrates' younger contemporary Sozomen repeats the same information: "The so-called Forty Days before Pascha when people fast—some begin at 6 weeks, namely Illyricum and the Christians living in the West, Libya, Egypt and Palestine, but others at 7 weeks, as the inhabitants of Constantinople and its region . . . . During these six weeks or more some fast for three weeks with interruptions, some for three solid weeks before the feast, and some—e.g. the Montanists—only for two weeks" (Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl.,* 7, 19). It is clear that these differences were due to the various ways in which one understood the very concept of "forty days." Are they to include, on the one hand, Holy Week which we know existed before there appeared the idea of a forty days pre-paschal season, and independently from it; and, on the other hand, Saturdays and Sundays which tradition unanimously viewed as non-fasting days? In Jerusalem, according to the famous *Peregrinatio Etheriae* (27, 1), Lent included Holy Week but excluded Saturdays and Sundays; Lent thus consisted of eight weeks, each including five days of fasting which gave exactly forty days of strict fast. Here, in other terms, the term "forty days" was understood as forty days of fasting. The same practice is attested by Epiphanios for Cyprus and by St. John Chrysostom in 387 for Antioch. In Constantinople, however, as well as in Egypt and the West, "forty days" meant primarily a season of preparation during which one actually fasted for five days a week but which, as a liturgical season, included the two weekly eucharistic days. In one of his *Festal Letters,* St. Athanasius of Alexandria speaks of the *time* of Lent and the *fast* of Holy Week (see especially his *Festal Letter* for 330). In Constantinople, therefore, the Forty Days included Saturdays and Sundays but excluded not only Holy Week but also Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday. Finally, in the West and in Egypt, Lent included both Holy Week and the weekly eucharistic days which resulted in an even shorter fast (see A. Chavasse, "La Structure de Carême et les lectures des messes quadragésimales dans la liturgie romaine" in *Maison Dieu,* 31 [1952], pp. 76-119). These differences no doubt

provoked violent controversies. Thus, for example, "Cheese-Fare" Week, which in the Byzantine Typikon precedes the Forty Days and forms a kind of eighth week with limited fasting and some lenten liturgical features, seems to have originated as a compromise with Palestinian monks, attached to their eight week Lent and opposed to the Byzantine practice. It was not before the Arab conquest of Egypt and Syria and the loss by these provinces of their ecclesiastical independence from Constantinople that the final unification of the lenten season was achieved. This was done by Constantinople to which, in the words of G. Dix, "we must look for the real origin of an 'universal' calendar."

Within this Byzantine synthesis, however, the development of Lent continued for a long time in terms both of its organization in time and its worship. In time, two more "pre-lenten" weeks were added to Cheese-Fare Week. The Week of the Prodigal Son developed from Meat-Fare Sunday, mentioned in the ninth century by St. Theodore of Stoudion (Sermo, 50, Patr. Gr. 99, 577). The Week of the Publican and Pharisee developed from anti-Armenian polemics; it is mentioned for the first time in the eighth century. As to the liturgical contents of Lent, a decisive factor was the liturgical reform carried out in the ninth century by the Stoudion Monastery in Constantinople and especially by St. Theodore of Stoudion. At that time adult Baptism and the institution of the catechumenate all but vanished from Church life, and the pre-baptismal and catechetical character of Lent was replaced by a purely "penitential" one. It is this new emphasis that permeates the great Studite work—the Lenten *Triodion* which became the *terminus ad quem* in the historical development of the Lenten Season. Thus, one can say that by the tenth century and with the exception of some minor details, Great Lent had reached its present form.

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2. *Lent and Catechumenate*—Bibliography: P. de Puniet, "Catéchumenat," *Dict. Arch. Lit. Chrét.* II, 2, col. 2579-2621; J. Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1956); L. Bouyer, "Le Carême, initiation pascale," *Maison Dieu,* 31 (Paris: 1952).

3. *Triodion*—see I. Karabinov, *Postnaia Triod* (Lenten Triodion), in

Russian (St. Petersburg: 1910). For further study, cf. K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der Byzantinishen Litteratur,* II (Munich: 1897).

4. For a detailed description of these changes see C. Nikolsky, *Posobie K Izucheniu Ustava Bogosluzhenia* (Manual of Church Order), in Russian, 7th ed. (St. Petersburg: 1907), and S. V. Bulgakov, *Nastolnaia Kniga dlia Sviashenno-Tzerkovnych Slushiteley* (Manual for Clergy), in Russian (Kharkov: 1900), pp. 487-530.

5. In our liturgical books, Lent is often referred to as *Alleluia,* whereas in the West at a relatively early date "Alleluia" was banned from the lenten worship and reserved for the Paschal season. This discrepancy is interesting because there can be no doubt that this most important liturgical word inherited by the Church from Jewish worship has joyful connotations, is always an expression of joy. From a purely formal point of view the term "Alleluia" became synonymous with Lent because during Lent it is sung at Matins instead of the usual "God is the Lord and has revealed Himself unto us" (Ps. 117). But it is this latter verse that at one time constituted an innovation. It was taken from the festal Matins of the "cathedral rite" (see my *Introduction to Liturgical Theology,* p. 125), and little by little went into common usage (cf. J. Mateos, S. J., *Some Problems of Byzantine Orthros,* mimeographed transl. by A. Lewis, II, 2). At the beginning of the seventh century the *non-singing* of the "God is the Lord" was still a distinctive mark of monastic worship as attested by the famous description of the Sinai Vigil (J. B. Pitra, *Juris Ecclesiae graecorum historia et monumenta,* I, p. 220). Abba Nilus refers to "God is the Lord" as a festal addition to be sung "at the beginning of the canon." As to Psalm 117 from which the five verses of the "God is the Lord" are selected, it is a "Hallel" or Alleluia Psalm—in which "Alleluia" is used as a refrain after each strophe (see S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship,* English transl. [Oxford: 1962], I, p. 120). Finally, it is known that St. Theodore of Stoudion, the "organizer" of the *Triodion,* composed special "Alleluiaria" (Skaballanovich, p. 404)—perhaps they are at the origin of our lenten Alleluias? On the fate of "Alleluia" in the West, cf. J. A. Jungman, *Missarum Solemnia,* III, pp. 92 ff.

6. *Readings in Lenten Worship:* See the important study by Alexis Kniazeff, "La Lecture de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament dans le Rite Byzantin" in Mgr. Cassien and Dom Bernard Botte, *La Prière des Heures,* Collection "Lex Orandi" 35 (Paris: 1963), pp. 202-251.

7. On *Psalms* in the liturgy, see Balthazar Fisher, "Le Christ dans les psaumes," *La Maison Dieu,* 27 (1951), pp. 86-109, and the special issue of the same periodical, "Les Psaumes, prière de l' assemblée chrétienne," *La Maison Dieu,* 33 (1953). On the monastic origin of our present system see Skaballanovich, pp. 208 ff.

8. *Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts*—Bibliography: D. N. Moraitis, Ἡ Λειτουργία τῶν Προηγιασμένων (Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts), in Greek (Thessalonica: 1955); P. N. Trempela, Αἱ τρεῖς Λειτουργίαι (The Three Liturgies), in Greek (Athens: 1935); V. Jameras, "La partie vesperale de la liturgie byzantine des présanctifiés," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica,* 30 (1964), pp. 193-222; H. Engberding, "Zur Geschichte der

Liturgie der vorgeweihten Gaben," *Ostkirchliche Studien,* 13 (1964), pp. 310-314. Cf. also H. W. Codrington, "The Syrian Liturgy of the Presanctified," *Journal of Theological Studies,* IV (1903), pp. 69-81, and V (1904), pp. 369-377, 535-545; J. Ziade in *Diction. de Théol. Catholique,* 13, 77-111; H. Leclerq in *Dict. d' Arch. Chrét. et Liturgie,* XI, 770-771; I. M. Hanssens, *Institutiones Liturgicae De Ritibus Orientalibus* (Rome: 1930), pp. 86-121.

9. *Wednesday and Friday*—In the past the Liturgy of the Presanctified was celebrated on every day of Lent (see Moraitis, pp. 29-33).

10. *Apostolic Canon* 66: "If any one belonging to clergy is found fasting on Sunday or Saturday with exception of one only [i.e., Great Saturday] let him be deposed. Let a layman be excommunicated." Cf. *Trullo,* 55, 56, *Gangra,* 18, Peter of Alexandria, 15). But then *Trullo,* 56: "Likewise we have learned that in the country of the Armenians and in other regions on the Saturdays and Sundays of holy Lent some persons eat eggs and cheese. It has therefore seemed best to decree also this, that the Church of God throughout the inhabited world, carefully following a single procedure, *shall carry out fasting. . . .*"

11. See my article "Fast and Liturgy," in *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* (1959: 1), pp. 2-10.

12. On St. Andrew of Crete, see: Krumbacher, I, p. 165, II, p. 673; E. Wellecz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford: 1949), pp. 174 ff., 202 ff.

APPENDIX NOTES

[1]Alexander Schmemann, "Problems of Orthodoxy in America: III. The Spiritual Problem," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly,* 9:4 (1965).

[2]Schmemann, pp. 173-174.

[3]"The Eucharist as the Focus of Christian Life" (in Russian), *Put* (The Way) 22, (1930), pp. 3-23.

[4]See *Reports of the Diocesan Bishops Concerning the Question of Church Reform,* Vol. I, 548 pp., Vol. II, 562 pp. (St. Petersburg: Synodal Press, 1906).

[5]See Boris Sove, "Eucharist in the Ancient Church and Contemporary Practice," (in Russian), *Living Tradition* (Paris: 1936), pp. 171-195.

[6]Archimandrite Kiprian, *Eucharist* (in Russian), (Paris: 1947), p. 304. See Canons: 2 of the Local Council of Antioch (341); Apostolic Canon 2; Trullo 80. See also Nikodim Milash, *The Canons of the Orthodox Church with Commentaries* (in Russian), (St. Petersburg: 1911), Vol. I, p. 69.

[7]See the Prayer before Chrismation: ". . .Do Thou, the same Master, compassionate King of Kings, grant also unto him [i.e., the newly baptized]

the seal of the gift of Thy holy, and almighty, and adorable Spirit, and participation in the Holy Body and the precious Blood of Thy Christ. . . ."

[8]See for example, I. Pokrovsky, "Matrimonial Prayers and Blessings of the Ancient Church (1st-9th Centuries)" (in Russian), *Essays for the Hundreth Jubilee of the Moscow Spiritual Academy* (Moscow: 1913), Vol. II, especially pp. 577-592.

[9]See Sove, p. 176, note 2.

[10]See: St. John Chrysostom, *In Ephes. Hom. III,* 4, P.G. 62, 29; *In I Tim. Hom. V,* 3, P.G. 62, 529 ff.; *In Heb. Hom. XVII,* 4, P.G. 63, 131 ff.; St. Ambrose of Milan, *De Sacramentis,* Vol. 4, 25; Sove, p. 178; Kiprian, pp. 323-324.

[11]"Third Conference of Abbott Theonas on Sinlessness," Chapter 21.

[12]*In II Corinth. Hom. 18,* 3.

[13]42, P.G. 150, 460 B.

[14]"Eucharist and Sobornost" (in Russian), *Put,* 19, (1929), pp. 3-23.

[15]Prayers of the Baptismal Liturgy.

[16]36, P.G. 150, 449 C.

[17]4, 3. See P. Palmer, "Sacraments and Forgiveness," *Sources of Christian Theology,* Vol. II, (Westminster: Newman Press, 1959), p. 13 ff.

[18]See Palmer, pp. 71 ff.

[19]449 B.

[20]See my article: "Some Reflections on Confession," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly,* 5:3 (1961), pp. 38-44.

[21]S. Salaville, "Messe et Communion d'après les Typika monastiques byzantins du X au XIV s.," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica,* 13: 1-2, pp. 282-298.

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