

Readings & Hymns

Sunday of Forgiveness / Cheesefare



Kontakion, Triodion – Tone 6

O Master, Teacher of Wisdom,
Bestower of virtue,
who teaches the thoughtless and protects the poor:
strengthen and enlighten my heart.
O Word of the Father,
let me not restrain my mouth from crying to Thee: //
Have mercy on me, a transgressor, O Merciful Lord.

The Prokeimenon – Tone 8

Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God! (*Ps 75 [76]: 11*)
verse: In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel! (*Ps 75 [76]: 1*)

The Epistle

§112: Romans 13: 11 – 14: 4 (Sunday of Forgiveness)

The reading from the Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Romans.

BRETHREN, now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand.

Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

Let us walk honestly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness,

not in debauchery and wantonness, not in strife and envy.

Rather, let us clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ;

and in fulfilling the needs of the flesh, transform them not into lust.

Receive him that is weak in the faith not disputing over opinions.

For one believes he may eat all things, but another, who is weak, eats only herbs.

Let not him that eats despise him that eats not, and let not him that eats not, pass judgment on him that eats; for God hath received him.

Who art thou to judge another man's servant?

It is before his own master that he stands or he falls.

Yea, he shall be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

The Alleluia – Tone 6

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

verse: It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Thy Name, O Most High.
(Sunday) (Ps 91 (92): 1)

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

verse: to declare Thy mercy in the morning, and Thy truth by night. *(Ps 91 (92): 2)*
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

The Gospel

§17: Matthew 6: 14 – 21 (Sunday of Forgiveness)

THE LORD SAID: if ye forgive men their trespasses,

your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

¹⁵ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses,

neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

¹⁶ Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance:

for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.

Amen I say unto you, They have their reward.

¹⁷ But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

¹⁸ That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret:

and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

¹⁹ Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,

where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

²⁰ But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,

where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt,

and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

²¹ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Communion Hymns

Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise Him in the highest! (*Sunday*) (*Ps 148: 1*)



On "Lord, I Call ..." **Tone 6 - Podoben:** "Having placed all their hope ..."

The Lord my Creator took me as dust from the earth / and formed me into a living creature, / breathing into me the breath of life / and giving me a soul; / He honoured me, setting me as ruler upon earth over all things visible, / and making me companion of the angels. / But Satan the deceiver, / using the serpent as his instrument, / enticed me by food; / he parted me from the glory of God / and gave me over to the earth and to the lowest depths of death. // But, Master, in compassion call me back again.¹

In my wretchedness / I have cast off the robe woven by God, / disobeying Thy divine command, O Lord, / at the counsel of the enemy; / and I am clothed now in fig leaves and in garments of skin. / I am condemned to eat the bread of toil in the sweat of my brow, / and the earth has been cursed so that it bears thorns and thistles for me. / But, Lord, who in the last times wast made flesh of a Virgin, // call me back again and bring me into Paradise.²

¹ Gen. 1: 28; 2: 7; Ps. 8: 6-8.

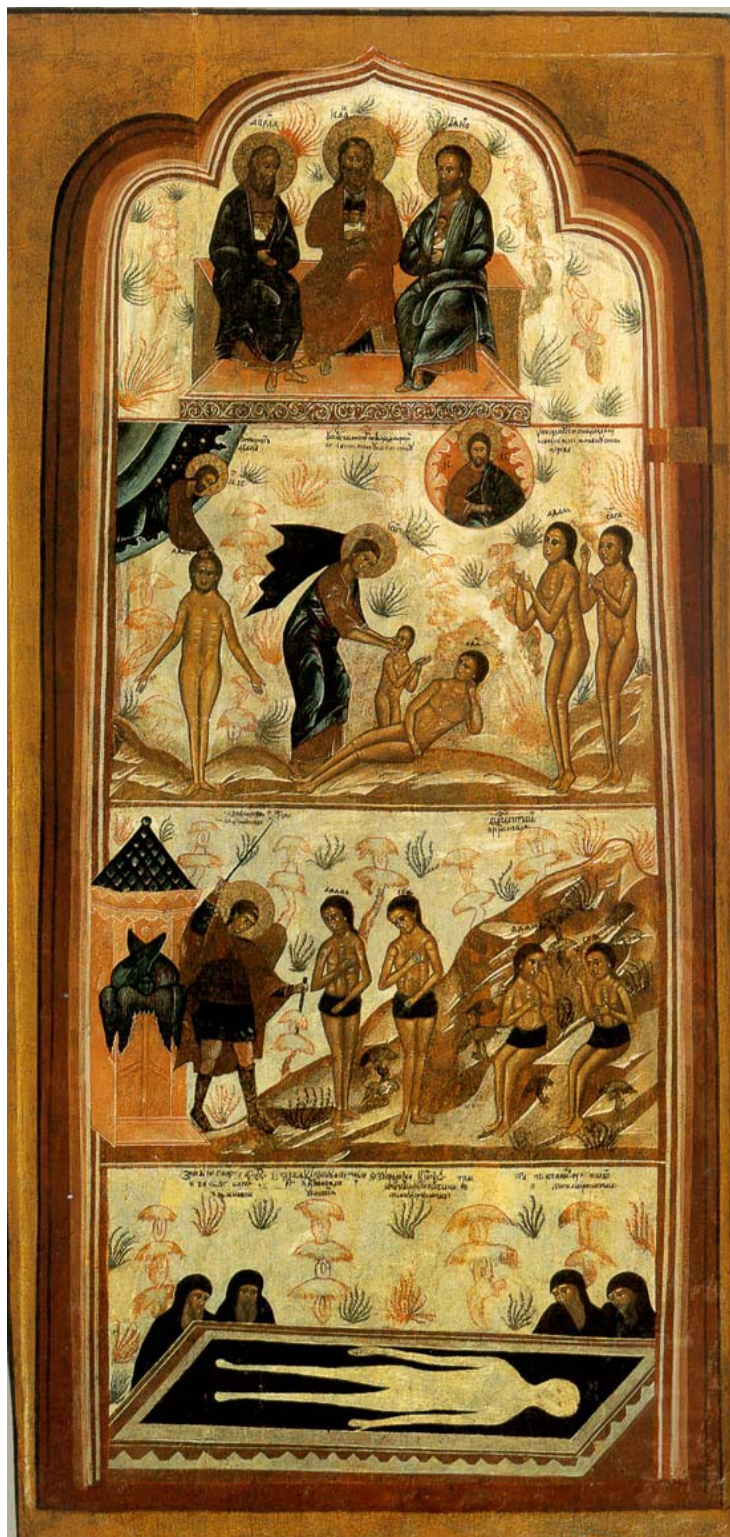
² Gen. 3: 7,18-19, 21.

O precious Paradise, / unsurpassed in beauty, / tabernacle built by God, / unending gladness and delight, / glory of the righteous, / joy of the prophets, and dwelling of the saints, / with the sound of thy leaves pray to the Maker of all; / may He open unto me the gates which I closed by my transgression, / and may He count me worthy to partake of the Tree of Life // and of the joy which was mine when I dwelt in thee before.

Adam was banished from Paradise through disobedience / and cast out from delight, / beguiled by the words of a woman. / Naked he sat outside the garden, lamenting 'Woe is me!' / Therefore let us all make haste to accept the season of the Fast / and hearken to the teaching of the Gospel, / that we may gain Christ's mercy // and receive once more a dwelling-place in Paradise.

On "Glory ..." **Tone 6**

Adam sat before Paradise / and, lamenting his nakedness, he wept: 'Woe is me! / By evil deceit was I persuaded and led astray, / and now I am an exile from glory. / Woe is me! In my simplicity I was stripped naked, and now I am in want. / O Paradise, no more shall I take pleasure in thy joy; / no more shall I look upon the Lord my God and Maker, / for I shall return to the earth whence I was taken. / O merciful and compassionate Lord, to Thee I cry aloud: // I am fallen, have mercy upon me.'



The Apostikha *On "Glory ..."* **Tone 6**

Adam was cast out of Paradise through eating from the tree. / Seated before the gates he wept, lamenting with a pitiful voice and saying: / 'Woe is me, what have I suffered in my misery! / I transgressed one commandment of the Master, / and now I am deprived of every blessing. / O most holy Paradise, / planted for my sake and shut because of Eve, / pray to Him that made thee and fashioned me, / that once more I may take pleasure in thy flowers.' / Then the Saviour said to him: / 'I desire not the loss of the creature which I fashioned, / but that he should be saved and come to knowledge of the truth; // and when he comes to me I will not cast him out.'³

Psalm 136 [137]

By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion. **Alleluia!**
On the willows there
we hung up our lyres. **Alleluia!**
For there our captors
required of us songs,
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" **Alleluia!**
How shall we sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land? **Alleluia!**
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither! **Alleluia!**
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember thee,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy! **Alleluia!**
Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem, **Alleluia!**
how they said, "Down with it, down with it!
Down to its foundations!" **Alleluia!**
O daughter of Babylon, thou wretched one!
Blessed shall he be who requites thee
with what thou hast done to us! **Alleluia!**
Blessed shall he be who takes thy little ones
and dashes them against the rock! **Alleluia!**

3 1 Tim. 2: 4; John 6: 37.

Stikhera of Repentance

Sung from the Triodion on the Sundays of Pre-Lent and Great Lent.

Tone 8

verse: **Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;**

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.

verse: **Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.**

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 thine intercessions, //
deliver me from all impurity.

Tone 6

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to Thy great mercy;
according to Thine abundant mercy, //
blot out my transgression!

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 living kindness,
like David I cry to Thee:
Have mercy on me, O God, //
according to Thy great mercy.

Second exapostilarion

We were banished once, O Lord, from Paradise through eating from the tree; but
Thou hast led us back again, O my God and Saviour, through Thy Cross and Passion.
Through the intercessions of Thy Mother, give us strength through this Thy Cross to
keep the Fast in holiness and to worship Thy divine Awakening, the Passover of
salvation.

*From the stikhera on the Praises at Matins:***TONE 5**

The arena of the virtues has been opened. Let all who wish to struggle for the prize now enter, girding themselves for the noble contest of the Fast; for those that strive lawfully are justly crowned. Taking up the armour of the Cross, let us make war against the enemy. Let us have as our invincible rampart the Faith, prayer as our breastplate, and as our helmet almsgiving; and as our sword let us use fasting that cuts away all evil from our heart. If we do this, we shall receive the true crown from Christ the King of all at the Day of Judgement.⁴

TONE 6

Adam was driven out of Paradise, because in disobedience he had eaten food; but Moses was granted the vision of God, because he had cleansed the eyes of his soul by fasting. If then we long to dwell in Paradise, let us abstain from all needless food; and if we desire to see God, let us like Moses fast for forty days. With sincerity let us persevere in prayer and intercession; let us still the passions of our soul; let us subdue the rebellious instincts of the flesh. With light step let us set out upon the path to heaven, where the choirs of angels with never-silent voice sing the praises of the undivided Trinity; and there we shall behold the surpassing beauty of the Master. O Son of God, Giver of Life, in Thee we set our hope: count us worthy of a place there with the angelic hosts, at the intercessions of the Mother who bore Thee, O Christ, of the apostles and the martyrs and of all the saints.⁵

The time is now at hand for us to start upon the spiritual contest and to gain the victory over the demonic powers. Let us put on the armour of abstinence and clothe ourselves in the glory of the angels. With boldness Moses spoke to the Creator, and he heard the voice of the invisible God. In Thy love for man, O Lord, grant us with the same boldness to venerate Thy Passion and Thy Holy Resurrection.

At Forgiveness Vespers:

Tone 2: Podoben: *"Joseph of Arimethea took Thee down from the Tree..." by Joseph*

Let us humble the flesh by abstinence. / As we follow the divine path of pure fasting. / With prayers and tears let us seek the Lord who saves us. / Let us put an end to anger, crying out: / Save us who have sinned against Thee! / Save us, O Christ our King, as Thou didst save the men of Ninevah, // And make us partakers of Thy heavenly kingdom, O compassionate One!

When I think of my deeds, O Lord, / I am filled with despair, / and know that I am worthy of every torment. / I have despised Thy commandments, O Savior. / I have

⁴ 2Tim. 2: 5; Eph. 6: 11–17.

⁵ Exod. 24: 18.

spent my life as a prodigal. / I pray to Thee, O only merciful One: / "Cleanse me by repentance, / enlighten me through prayers and fasting, // and despise me not, most gracious Benefactor of all!"

Tone 2 *by Theodore*

Let us begin the fast with joy! / Let us prepare ourselves for spiritual efforts! / Let us cleanse our soul and cleanse our flesh! / Let us abstain from every passion as we abstain from food! / Let us rejoice in virtues of the spirit and fulfill them in love! / That we all may see the passion of Christ our God, // And rejoice in spirit at the holy Pascha!

The Great Prokeimenon – Tone 8

Turn not away Thy face from Thy child for I am afflicted. Hear me speedily. Draw near unto my soul and deliver it! *Ps 68 [69]: 17, 18a*

verse: Thy salvation, O God, hath upheld me. *Ps 68 [69]: 29b*

verse: Let the poor see and be glad. *Ps 68 [69]: 32a*

verse: Seek ye God, and your soul shall live. *Ps 68 [69]: 32b*

The Apostikha Idiomelon, by Joseph **Tone 2**

Thy grace has shown forth, O Lord, / the grace which illumines our soul. / This is the acceptable time! / This is the time of repentance! / Let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, / that passing through the fast as through a great sea / we may reach the resurrection on the third day // of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of our souls.

The Reading of the Fall, from the First Friday of Great Lent:

Genesis 2: 20 – 3: 20

The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air,
and to every beast of the field;

but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man,

and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh;

and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man

he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called Woman,

because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife,

and they become one flesh.

And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature
that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman,

“Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden’?”

And the woman said to the serpent,

“We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden;

but God said,

‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden,
neither shall you touch it, lest you die’.”

But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die.

For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened,
and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food,

and that it was a delight to the eyes,

and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise,

she took of its fruit and ate;

and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked;

and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden

in the cool of the day,

and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence

of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where art thou?”

And he said, “I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid,

because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

He said, “Who told thee that thou wast naked?

Hast thou eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee not to eat?”

The man said, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me,

she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”

Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that thou hast done?”

The woman said, “The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.”

The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because thou hast done this,

cursed art thou above all cattle,

and above all wild animals;

upon thy belly thou shalt go,

and dust thou shalt eat

all the days of thy life.

I will put enmity between thee and the woman,

and between thy seed and her seed;

he shall bruise thy head,
and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

To the woman he said, “I will greatly multiply thy pain in childbearing;
in pain thou shalt bring forth children,
yet thy desire shall be for thy husband,
and he shall rule over thee.”

And to Adam he said, “Because thou hast listened to the voice of thy wife,
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded thee,
‘Thou shalt not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of thee;
in toil thou shalt eat of it all the days of thy life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

In the sweat of your face
thou shalt eat bread
till thou return unto the ground,
for out of it thou wast taken;
thou art dust,
and to dust thou shalt return.”

The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

FORGIVENESS

by V. Rev. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

As once more we are about to enter the Great Lent, I would like to remind us — myself first of all, and all of you my fathers, brothers, and sisters — of the verse that we just sang, one of the stichera, and that verse says: “Let us begin Lent, the Fast, with joy.”

Only yesterday we were commemorating Adam crying, lamenting at the gates of Paradise, and now every second line of the Triodion and the liturgical books of Great Lent will speak of repentance, acknowledging what dark and helpless lives we live, in which we sometimes are immersed. And yet, no one will prove to me that the general tonality of Great Lent is not that of a tremendous joy! Not what we call “joy” in this world — not just something entertaining, interesting, or amusing — but the deepest definition of joy, that joy of which Christ says: “no one will take away from you” (Jn. 16:22). Why joy? What is that joy?

So many people under various influences have come to think of Lent as a kind of self-inflicted inconvenience. Very often in Lent we hear these conversations: “What do you give up for Lent?” – it goes from candy to, I don’t know what. There is the

idea that if we suffer enough, if we feel the hunger enough, if we try by all kinds of strong or light ascetical tools, mainly to “suffer” and be “tortured,” so to speak, it would help us to “pay” for our absolution. But this is not our Orthodox faith. Lent is not a punishment. Lent is not a kind of painful medicine that helps only inasmuch as it is painful.

LENT IS A GIFT! Lent is a gift from God to us, a gift which is admirable, marvelous, one that we desire. Now a gift of what? I would say that it is a gift of the essential – that which is essential and yet which suffers most in our life because we are living lives of confusion and fragmentation, lives which constantly conceal from us the eternal, the glorious, the divine meaning of life and take away from us that which should “push” and, thus, correct and fill our life with joy. And this essential is thanksgiving: the acceptance from God of that wonderful life, as St. Peter says, “... created out of nothing ...,” created exclusively by the love of God, for there is no other reason for us to exist; loved by Him even before we were born, we were taken into His marvelous light. Now we live and we forget. When was the last time I thought about it? But I do not forget so many little things and affairs that transform my whole life into empty noise, into a kind of traveling without knowing where.

Lent returns to me, gives back to me, this essential – the essential layer of life, Essential because it is coming from God; essential because it is revealing God. The essential time, because time again is a great, great area of sin. Because time is the time of what? Of priorities. And how often our priorities are not at all as they should be. Yet in Lent, waiting, listening, singing... you will see, little by little that time – broken, deviated, taking us to death and nowhere else, without any meaning. You will see that time again become expectation, become something precious. You wouldn’t take one minute of it away from its purpose of pleasing God, of accepting from Him His life and returning that life to Him together with our gratitude, our wisdom, our joy, our fulfillment.

After this essential time comes the essential relationship that we have with everything in the world, a relationship which is expressed so well in our liturgical texts by the word reverence. So often, everything becomes for us an object of “utilizing,” something which is “for grabs,” something which “belongs” to me and to which I have a “right.” Everything should be as Communion in my hands. This is the reverence of which I speak. It is the discovery that God, as Pasternak once said, was “... a great God of details,” and that nothing in this world is outside of that divine reverence. God is reverent, but we so often are not.

So we have the essential time, the essential relationship with matter filled with reverence, and last, but not least, the rediscovery of the essential link among ourselves: the rediscovery that we belong to each other, the rediscovery, that no one has entered my life or your life without the will of God. And with that rediscovery,

there is everywhere an appeal, an offering to do something for God: to help, to comfort, to transform, to take with you, with each one of you, that brother and sister of Christ. This is that essential relationship.

Essential time, essential matter, essential thought: all that is so different from what the world offers us. In the world everything is accidental. If you don't know how to "kill" time, our society is absolutely ingenious in helping you to do that. We kill time, we kill reverence, we transform communications, relationships, words, divine words into jokes and blasphemies, and sometimes just pure nonsense. There is this thirst and hunger for nothing, but external success.

Don't we understand, don't we understand, brothers and sisters, what power is given to us in the form of Lent. Lenten Spring! Lenten beginning! Lenten resurrection! And all this is given to us free. Come, listen to that prayer. Make it yours! Don't even try to think on your own; just join, just enter and rejoice! And that joy will start killing those old and painful and boring sins, because you will have that great joy which the angels heard, which the disciples experienced when they returned to Jerusalem after Christ's Ascension. It is that joy which was left with them that we nobly adopted. It is first of all the joy of knowing, the joy of having something in me which, whether I want it or not, will start transforming life in me and around me.

This last essential is the essential return to each other: this is where we begin tonight. This is what we are doing right now. For if we would think of the real sins we have committed, we would say that one of the most important is exactly the style and tonality which we maintain with each other: our complaining and criticizing. I don't think that there are cases of great and destructive hatred or assassination, or something similar. It is just that we exist as if we are completely out of each other's life, out of each other's interests, out of each other's love. Without having repaired this relationship, there is no possibility of entering into Lent. Sin — whether we call it "original" sin or "primordial" sin — has broken the unity of life in this world, it has broken time, and time has become that fragmented current which takes us into old age and death. It has broken our social relations, it has broken families. Everything is diabolos — divided and destroyed. But Christ has come into the world and said: "... and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32).

It is impossible to go to Christ without taking with me the essential. It is not the abandonment of everything as we go to Christ; it is finding in Him the power of that resurrection: of unity, of love, of trust, of joy, of all that which, even if it occupies some place in our life, is at the same time so minuscule. It is tragic to think that from churches, from seminaries, what comes to heaven are complaints ... being tired, always something not going right ... You know, sitting in my office from time to time, I am admiring people for inventing new "tragedies" every half hour.

But we are Christ's and Christ is God's, And if we had — because we know — just a little bit of that which would bring us together, we would replace all my little offenses with even a little amount of that joy. That is the forgiveness we want and ask God to give us. Because if there is a strict commandment in the Gospel, it is that commandment: "if you forgive ... your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive...neither will your Father forgive..." (Mt. 6:14-15). So, of course it is a necessity. But the now of that, I repeat it once more, is to be horrified by the fragmentation of our own existence, by the pettiness in our relationships, by the destruction of words, and by the abandoning of this reverence.

Now we have to forgive each other whether or not we have any explicit sins or crimes against each other. That reconciliation is another epiphany of the Church as the Kingdom of God. We are saved because we are in the Body of Christ. We are saved because we accept from Christ the world and the essential order. And finally we accept Christ when we accept each other. Everything else is a lie and hypocrisy.

So, fathers, brothers, sisters: let us forgive one another. Let us not think about why. There is enough to think about. Let us do it. Right now, in a kind of deep breath, say: "Lord, help us to forgive. Lord, renew all those relationships." What a chance is given here for love to triumph! — for unity to reflect the Divine unity and for everything essential to return as life itself. What a chance! Is the answer we give today yes or no? Are we going to that forgiveness? Are we gladly accepting it? Or is it something which we do just because it is on the calendar — today, you know, forgiveness; tomorrow, let's do...? No! this is the crucial moment. This is the beginning of Lent. This is our spring "repair" because reconciliation is the powerful renewal of the ruin.

So, please, for the sake of Christ: let us forgive each other. The first thing I am asking all of you, my spiritual family is to forgive me. Imagine how many temptations of laziness, of avoiding too much, and so on and so forth. What a constant defense of my own interests, health, or this or that... I know that I don't even have an ounce of this self-giving, self-sacrifice which is truly a true repentance, the true renewal of love.

Please forgive me and pray for me, so that what I am preaching I could first of all somehow, be it only a little bit, integrate and incarnate in my life.

Delivered on Forgiveness Sunday, March 20, 1983, at St. Vladimir Orthodox Theological Seminary Chapel before the Rite of Forgiveness. Transcribed from tape recording and edited. Published with the approval of Juliana Schmemmann.

From Word Magazine, March 1985, p. 8

SUNDAY OF FORGIVENESS

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh 12 March 1989

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

After these weeks of preparation during which we have examined our soul, our lives, all our relationship before the eyes and the judgement of God, we enter today into the joy of Lent; the joy of Lent. The word 'lent' means the spring; it is a beginning, and a beginning of life, a beginning of newness, a new time. It is a time when we will no longer be reminded of our own sins, no longer be confronted with images in parables of fall and repentance, but faced with the names of Saints who have started their lives as we start them: the frail, weak, vacillating, but who by the grace of God, by the power of God have become what they are: men, women, children whom we can venerate, in whom we can rejoice, who can be set as examples to us, to whom we can turn for their prayers unto salvation.

Tonight we will start on this journey; on the journey that leads us from our sinful condition, recognised, repentant unto a new time, unto the Resurrection of Christ which is the beginning for us of our own eternal life. We will start on this journey tonight as the people of Israel started from the land of Egypt for the Promised Land: *still* frail, *still* burdened, *still* incompletely free. But it is not by looking back at ourselves, but by looking towards the Living God Who is Life and salvation, and to the example of those who have been victorious by the power of God that we will find courage, inspiration to come to the final victory, to the newness of life which is our calling and God's promise. We will have to journey together, and we must not be in any delusion: we will be difficult for one another as companions on the journey; but we will depend on one another if we want to achieve to come to an end, — in the same way in which the Israelites were in the desert: not always obedient to God, not always loyal to one another, and yet, *needing* each other in order to reach the promised goal.

So, let us start now; let us think of the feast which we keep next Sunday: Triumph of Orthodoxy. It is not the triumph of the Orthodox over anyone else; it is the triumph of God over people. The triumph of His truth, the triumph of God in the lives of people.

And then, let us look at one saint after the other, and listen to what he has got to say to us: Gregory Palamas, John of the Ladder, Mary of Egypt and all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ. And we will then reach the point at which we must forget everyone and everything, and remember nothing, no one but the Lord Jesus Christ: what He *is*, what He has *done* for us, what He is *doing* for us. Let us learn to forget ourselves in the course of those weeks, joyfully, gratefully, that we can now turn away from ourselves and look *only* Godwards. And when the time of Passion week comes, *again*, in a new way, with a new determination, with a new renunciation to ourselves, turn and look at God Who has become man that we may be saved, and be grateful, forget ourselves, remember only Him and He will remember us unto salvation. Amen.

HOMILY ON CHEESEFARE SUNDAY

St Tikhon (Bellavin)

delivered at Holy Trinity Cathedral, San Francisco, CA, 1901

Today is called "Forgiveness Sunday." It received this name from the pious Orthodox Christian custom at Vespers of asking each other's forgiveness for discourtesy and disrespect. We do so, since in the forthcoming fast we will approach the sacrament of Penance and ask the Lord to forgive our sins, which forgiveness will be granted us only if we ourselves forgive each other. "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:14, 15)

Yet it is said to be extremely difficult to forgive discourtesy and to forget disrespect. Perhaps our selfish nature finds it truly difficult to forgive disrespect, even though in the words of the Holy Fathers it is easier to forgive than to seek revenge. (St. Tikhon of Zadonsk after St. John Chrysostom) Yet everything in us that is good is not accomplished easily, but with difficulty, compulsion and effort. "The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." (Matt. 11:12) For this reason we should not be discouraged at the difficulty of this pious act, but should rather seek the means to its fulfillment. The Holy Church offers many means towards this end, and of them we will dwell on the one which most corresponds to the forthcoming season of repentance.

"Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother." The source of forgiving our neighbors, of not judging them, is included in seeing (acknowledging) our sins. "Imagine," says a great pastor, who knows the heart of man, Father John of Kronstadt, "picture the multitude of your sins and imagine how tolerant of them is the Master of your life, while you are unwilling to forgive your neighbor even the smallest offense. Moan and bewail your foolishness, and that obstruction within you will vanish like smoke, you will think more clearly, your heart will grow calm, and through this you will learn goodness, as if not you yourself had heard the reproaches and indignities, but some other person entirely, or a shadow of yourself." (Lessons on a Life of Grace, p. 149) He who admits his sinfulness, who through experience knows the weakness of human nature and its inclination toward evil, will forgive his neighbor the more swiftly, dismissing transgressions and refraining from a haughty judgment of others' sins. Let us remember that even the scribes and Pharisees who brought the woman caught in adultery to Christ were forced to depart, when their conscience spoke out, accusing them of their own sins. (John 8. 9)

Unfortunately, brethren, we do not like to acknowledge our transgressions. It would seem natural and easy for a person to know his own self, his own soul and his shortcomings. This, however, is actually not so. We are ready to attend to anything

but a deeper understanding of ourselves, an investigation of our sins. We examine various things with curiosity, we attentively study friends and strangers, but when faced with solitude without extraneous preoccupation even for a short while, we immediately become bored and attempt to seek amusement. For example, do we spend much time examining our own conscience even before confession? Perhaps a few minutes, and once a year at that. Casting a cursory glance at our soul, correcting some of its more glaring faults, we immediately cover it over with the veil of oblivion until next year, until our next uncomfortable exercise in boredom.

Yet we love to observe the sins of others. Not considering the beam in our own eye, we take notice of the mote in our brother's eye. (Matt. 7. 3) Speaking idly to our neighbor's detriment, mocking and criticizing him are not even often considered sins but rather an innocent and amusing pastime. As if our own sins were so few! As if we had been appointed to judge others! "There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy" ? God. (James 4. 12) "Who art thou to judge another's servant? It is before his own master that he stands or falls." (Rom. 14. 4) "Thou hast no excuse, O man, whoever thou art who judgest. For wherein thou judgest another, thou dost condemn thyself. For thou who judgest dost the same things thyself." (Rom. 2. 1) "Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith; put yourselves to the test." (2 Cor. 13. 5) The pious ascetics provide a good example of this. They turned their minds to themselves, meditated on their own sins and avoided judging their neighbors at all costs.

One pious starets, noticing that his brother had committed a sin, sighed and said, "Woe is me! As he sinned today, so will I tomorrow." And the following is a story about another ascetic, Abba Moisei. A monk committed a sin. The brethren, who had assembled to decide his case, sent for Abba Moisei, but the humble starets refused to attend the council. When the rector sent for him a second time, he appeared, but in quite a striking manner. He had taken an old basket, filled it with sand and was carrying it on his back. "What does this mean?" asked the monks, catching sight of him. "See how many sins I bear behind me?" answered Moisei, pointing to the heap of sand. "I don't see them, yet I have come to pass judgment upon another."

So therefore, brethren, following the example of the ascetics, upon observing others' sins, we should consider our own sins, regard our own transgressions and not judge our brother. And should we hold anything against him, let us pardon and forgive him, that our merciful Lord may forgive us also.

THE BEGINNING OF GREAT LENT

St. John of Shanghai

The doors of repentance are opening, Great Lent is beginning. Every year Great Lent is repeated, and each time it brings us great benefit if we spend it as we should. It is a preparation for the life to come and, more immediately, a preparation for the Bright Resurrection.

Just as a stairway is built into a tall building in order to enable one, by climbing the steps, to easily reach the top, so too, the various days in the year serve as steps for our spiritual ascent.

This is especially true of the days of Great Lent and Holy Pascha.

By means of Great Lent we cleanse ourselves of the filth of sin, and at Holy Pascha we experience the blessedness of Christ's Kingdom that is to come. In climbing a high mountain, one tries to eliminate all unnecessary weight. The less a person carries, the easier it is for him to climb and the higher he is able to climb. So, too, in order to ascend spiritually, it is necessary first of all to free oneself from the weight of sin. This weight is lifted from us through repentance, provided that we banish from ourselves all enmity and forgive each person whom we consider to be at fault before us. Once cleansed and forgiven by God, we then greet the Bright Resurrection of Christ.

And what a priceless gift of God we receive, at the culmination of our lenten struggle. We already hear about this in the first hymns of the daily lenten stichera: "Our food shall be the Lamb of God, on the holy and radiant night of His Awakening: the Victim offered for us, given in communion to the disciples on the evening of the Mystery." (Aposticha sticheron, Sunday of the Last Judgment).

Communing of the Body and Blood of the Risen Christ, unto life eternal — this is the aim of the holy Forty Days. Not only on Pascha do we commune, but during Lent also. On Pascha those people should commune who have fasted, confessed and received the Holy Mysteries during Great Lent. Just before Pascha itself there is little opportunity for a proper and thorough confession; the priests are very busy and most of the time occupied with the Passion services. Rather one must prepare ahead of time.

Each time one receives the Mysteries of Christ, one is united with Christ Himself; each time it is a soul-saving act. Why, then, is such significance attached to receiving Holy Communion on the night of Holy Pascha, and why are we all called to do so?

Then, especially, we are given to experience the Kingdom of Christ. Then, especially, we are illumined with the Eternal Light and strengthened for the spiritual ascent.

This is an irreplaceable gift of Christ, an incomparable good. Let no one deprive himself of this joy and, instead of receiving Holy Communion on Pascha night, hasten to eat meat and other foods. Communing of the Holy Mysteries on that night prepares us for the banquet in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Forgiveness Sunday

The last day before Great Lent has always been popularly known as "Forgiveness Sunday." On that day these words of Christ are read, "If you do not forgive men

their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mt 6: 15). In church that evening, each person asks forgiveness of everyone else in the "rite of forgiveness," so that we enter Lent, the time of cleansing, deepening and sanctifying our life, reconciled with one another.

Conscience is that mysterious depth within our mind that brings remorse and passionate desire for cleansing, rebirth and correction. Remorse, precisely, is the voice of conscience, and it brings us to the first step on the road to cleansing, to the desire to forgive and be forgiven, to this very "forgiveness" Sunday. Why? Why do forgiveness and the thirst for forgiveness enter us so clearly the moment our conscience is aroused, as its foremost demand? The answer is that conscience also reveals to us that the very essence of evil and falsehood is division, that it is guilt before other human beings.

Dostoevsky said through the elder Zosima that "Each is guilty of everything before everyone." At first glance these words seem not only grossly exaggerated, but simply absurd. "How am I guilty before others?," our offended reason, our "outer" mind, asks defiantly. As far as "morality" is concerned, our reason can probably agree that yes, somehow, I am in fact guilty toward someone, but, it adds comfortingly, isn't that just part of life? Let's allow reason to doubt, let's even allow morality to explain and rationalize. But let's also listen to conscience: there, deep, deep within us a quiet voice says so firmly, so insistently, "guilty." What is this guilt about? No, it's not about particular offenses and quarrels, which are, I think, quite unavoidable. It's not about trivial squabbles or petty irritations. No, this guilt which so suddenly and so obviously becomes apparent to me has its source elsewhere: in my own life, so thoroughly permeated with self love. The guilt therefore, is focused on myself; the "other" and "others" have really nothing to do with it, except insofar as they simply become means to an end. Even our love is poisoned from within, mutilated by "selfishness," as if even in love we could possess the loved one for ourselves alone.

It is the conscience, only the conscience, which suddenly reveals to us with ruthless clarity the whole world as the struggle of everyone against everyone else, a struggle which consumes life from beginning to end. Only in feeling this and becoming aware of it can we begin to hear inwardly the truth of Dostoevsky's words, "Each is guilty of everything before everyone." We can begin then to hear as well the truth of other words said before Dostoevsky, by Saint Seraphim of Sarov: "Save yourself, and thousands around you will be saved ..." Save yourself: but this means precisely to save yourself first of all from this primordial slavery to division, from this inner divorce from life and from people, from this conscious or unconscious state of struggle in which we live.

To forgive and be forgiven! This is exactly how we turn from division to unity,

from hostility to love, from separation to unification. But to forgive is not simply to ignore shortcomings, as we so often claim, or worse, to altogether dismiss others with the wave of a hand as hopeless and not worth the trouble. Forgiveness does not mean indifference or scorn or cynicism. Only someone who has suddenly realized with all his soul the full horror of love's absence from the world, who has felt the bottomless grief of that loneliness to which man has condemned himself by his self-affirmation and self-love-only they are capable of forgiving and being forgiven.

All of this is expressed, all of this is heard in the Church's prayer of Forgiveness Sunday: "Turn not away thy face away from thy child, for I am afflicted ..." There it is, that bright sadness, which alone enables us to finally understand the root, essence and power of evil: cold hearts, withered love, and the triumph in this world of individual self-affirmation, which can only end in isolation and loneliness. We pray for forgiveness, we thirst to be forgiven ... In the same way that a little child who wrongs his mother longs for the lost paradise of her love, so each of us knows that the destruction of evil begins with this conversion of soul, with this softening of heart, with this thirst for reconciliation. And therefore, no matter how far this seems from our cold, cruel life, in which the binding force of the "collective" tightens rather than tempers each person's loneliness, no matter how foreign this seems to the very spirit of our times, it is only here, in the power of conscience, in the thirst for forgiveness and conversion of soul, that we find the beginning of our spiritual rebirth.

Preached by Fr Alexander Schmemmann in Russian
on Voice of America. *Celebration of Faith*, Volume 2.

About Forgiveness Sunday Vespers

Commentary on the Vespers of Forgiveness from the booklet for Vespers published by the OCA Department of Religious Education booklet, 1975.

In the Orthodox Church, the last Sunday before Great Lent – the day on which, at Vespers, Lent is liturgically announced and inaugurated – is called *Forgiveness Sunday*. On the morning of that Sunday, at the Divine Liturgy, we hear the words of Christ:

If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Mark 6:14 – 15)

Then after Vespers – after hearing the announcement of Lent in the Great Prokeimenon: "Turn not away Thy face from Thy child for I am afflicted! Hear me speedily! Draw near unto my soul and deliver it!", after making our entrance into Lenten worship, with its special melodies, with the prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian, with its prostrations – we ask forgiveness from each other, we perform the rite of forgiveness and reconciliation. And as we approach each other with words of reconciliation, the choir intones the Paschal hymns, filling the church with the anticipation of Paschal joy.

What is the meaning of this rite? Why is it that the Church wants us to begin the Lenten season with forgiveness and reconciliation? These questions are in order because for too many people Lent means primarily, and almost exclusively, a change of diet, the compliance with ecclesiastical regulations concerning fasting. They understand fasting as an end in itself, as a “good deed” required by God and carrying in itself its merit and its reward. But the Church spares no effort in revealing to us that fasting is but a means, one among many, towards a higher goal: the spiritual renewal of man, his return to God, true repentance and, therefore, true reconciliation. The Church spares no effort in warning us against a hypocritical and pharisaic fasting, against the reduction of religion to mere external obligations. As a Lenten hymn says:

In vain do you rejoice in not eating, O soul!
For you abstain from food,
But from passions you are not purified.
If you persevere in sin, you will perform a useless fast.

Now, forgiveness stands at the very center of Christian faith and of Christian life because Christianity itself is, above all, the religion of forgiveness. God forgives us, and His forgiveness is in Christ, His Son, whom He sends to us so that by sharing in His humanity we may share in His love and be truly reconciled with God. Indeed, Christianity has no other content but love. And it is primarily the renewal of that love, a return to it, a growth in it, that we seek in Great Lent, in fasting and prayer, in the entire spirit and the entire effort of that season. Thus, truly forgiveness is both the beginning of, and the proper condition for, the Lenten season.

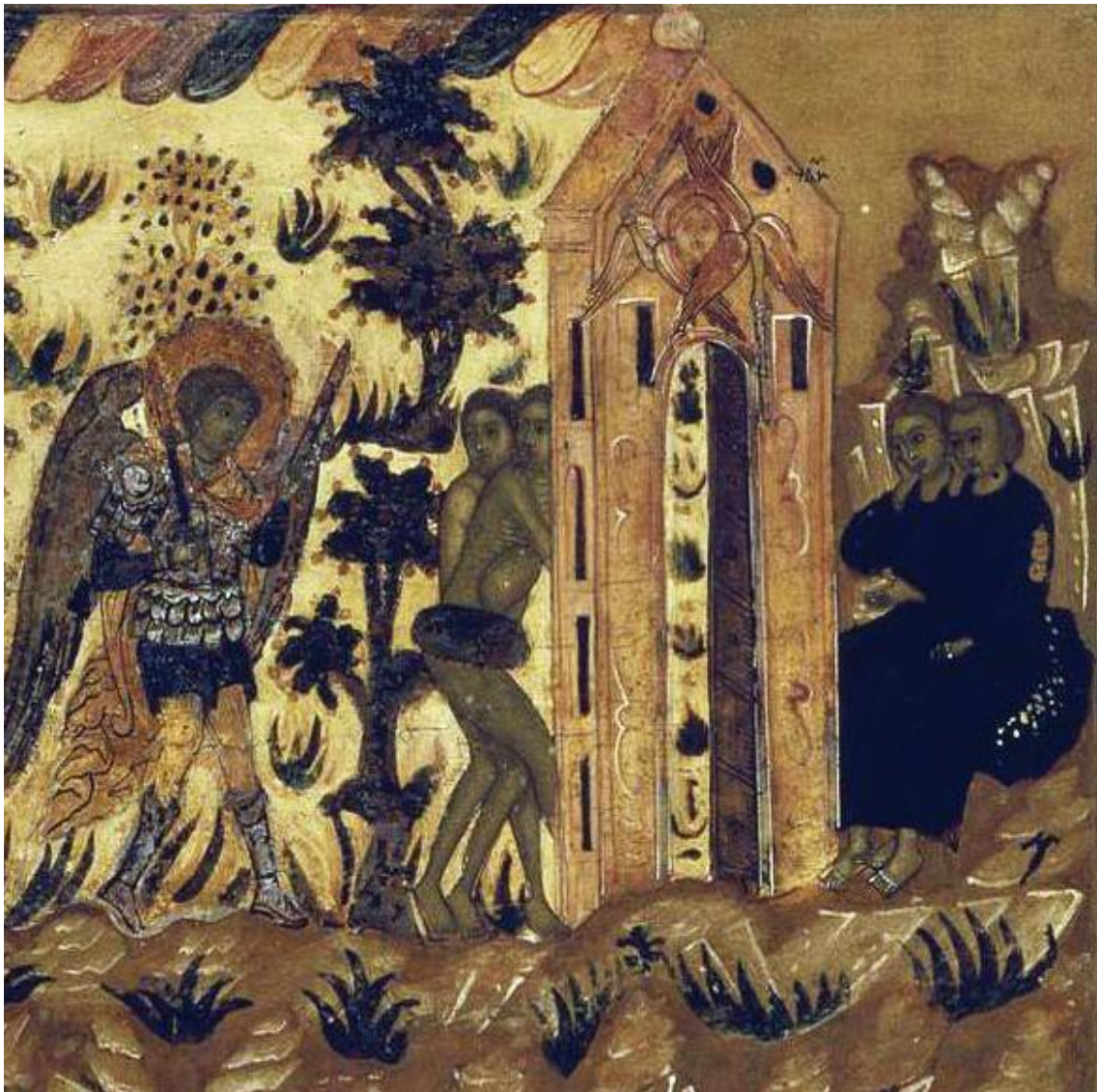
One may ask, however: Why should I perform this rite when I have no “enemies”? Why should I ask forgiveness from people who have done nothing to me, and whom I hardly know? To ask these questions is to misunderstand the Orthodox teaching concerning forgiveness. It is true that open enmity, personal hatred, real animosity may be absent from our life, though if we experience them, it may be easier for us to repent, for these feelings openly contradict Divine commandments. But the Church reveals to us that there are much subtler ways of offending Divine Love. These are indifference, selfishness, lack of interest in other people, of any real concern for them – in short, that wall which we usually erect around ourselves, thinking that by being “polite” and “friendly” we fulfill God’s commandments. The rite of forgiveness is so important precisely because it makes us realize – be it only for one minute – that our entire relationship to other men is wrong, makes us experience that encounter of one child of God with another, of one person created by God with another, makes us feel that mutual “recognition” which is so terribly lacking in our cold and dehumanized world. On that unique evening, listening to the joyful Paschal hymns we are called to make a spiritual discovery: to taste of another mode

of life and relationship with people, of life whose essence is love. We can discover that always and everywhere Christ, the Divine Love Himself, stands in the midst of us, transforming our mutual alienation into brotherhood. As I advance towards the *other*, as the *other* comes to me – we begin to realize that it is Christ who brings us together by His love for both of us.

And because we make this discovery – and because this discovery is that of the Kingdom of God itself: the Kingdom of Peace and Love, of reconciliation with God and, in Him, with all that exists – we hear the hymns of that Feast, which once a year, “opens to us the doors of Paradise.” We know why we shall fast and pray, what we shall seek during the long Lenten pilgrimage.

Forgiveness Sunday: the day on which we acquire the power to make our fasting – true fasting; our effort – true effort; our reconciliation with God – true reconciliation.

Father Alexander Schmemmann



This Kontakion is still sung on Cheesefare Sunday. Usually Kontakia sung in our current practice have only one Ikos, but this one exceptionally we sing four, 1-3 & 7

Kontakion on Adam's Lament – Tone 6

Acrostic: ON THE FIRST-FORMED, [ADAM]

Proëmium

O Master, Teacher of Wisdom,
Bestower of virtue,
who teaches the thoughtless and protects the poor:
strengthen and enlighten my heart.
O Word of the Father,
let me not restrain my mouth from crying to Thee: //
Have mercy on me, the fallen,* O Merciful Lord.

Ikos 1

Banished from the joys of Paradise,
Adam sat outside⁶ and wept,
and beating his hands upon his face he said:
'Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.'

Ikos 2

When Adam saw the angel drive him out and shut the door
of the divine garden, he groaned aloud
and said:
'Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.'

Ikos 3

O Paradise, share in the sorrow of thy master who is brought to poverty,
and with the sound of thy leaves pray to the Creator that
He may not keep thy gate closed for ever.
'Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.'

Ikos 4

Bend down thy trees like living beings and fall before
Him who holds the key, that thus thou mayest remain open
For one who cries:

* The usual OCA translation is "a transgressor". Translation, Proemium OCA Divine Liturgy Book, 1967 and following, Oikos 1-3, 7 from "The Lenten Triodion", the rest from Father Ephrem Lash. Alt.
6 Literally 'Adam sat opposite' Cf. Gen. 3:25 (LXX). The first line of Stanza 1 echoes the LXX text of Genesis 3:24, which reads 'And [God] settled Adam opposite the Paradise of pleasure and set in place the Cherubim'. This rendering has influenced both the liturgical and the iconographic traditions. The Hebrew has only one verb, 'And [God] settled east of the garden of Eden the Cherubim'. The Catholic New American Bible has adopted the LXX reading as the correct one.

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 5

I breathe the fragrance of thy beauty and I melt as I recall
How I delighted there from the sweet scent
Of the flowers:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 6

Now I have learnt what I suffered, now I have understood what God
Said to me in Paradise, ‘In taking Eve
thou stealest away from me’:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 7

O Paradise, perfect, all-holy and blessed,
planted for Adam’s sake and shut because of Eve,
pray to God for the fallen.

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 8

I am polluted, I am ruined, I am enslaved to my slaves;
For reptiles and wild beats, whom I subjected by fear,
Now make me tremble;

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 9

No longer do the flowers offer me pleasure,
But thorns and thistles⁷ the earth raises for me,
Not produce:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 10

The table without toil I overthrew by my own will;
And now in the sweat of my brow I eat
My bread:⁸

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 11

My throat, which holy waters had made sweet,
Has become bitter from the multitude of my groans,
As I cry out:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

⁷ Cf. Gen. 3:18.

⁸ Cf. Gen. 3:20.

Ikos 12

How have I fallen? Where have I arrived? From a pedestal to the ground;
From a divine admonition to a wretched existence
I have been reduced:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 13

Now Satan rejoices having stripped me of my glory;
But this gives him no joy; for see, my God
Clothes me:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 14

God himself pitied me, clothes my nakedness;
By this he shows me that he too cares
For me, the transgressor:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 15

The clothing signifies for me the state that is to come,
For the one who has now clothed me in a little while wears me
And saves me:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 16

‘Swiftly Adam thou hast understood the wish of my compassion;
Therefore I do not deprive thee of this thy hope
As thou criest:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 17

I do not wish nor do I will the death of the one I fashioned;
But having chastened him enough I will glorify eternally
The one who cries:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 18

Now therefore, O Savior, save me also who seek for thee with longing;
I do not wish to take Thee in, but I wish to be taken in by Thee⁹
And to cry to Thee:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

⁹ The trope in the second line of Stanza 18 is almost impossible to translate. The verb translated ‘take in’ in both clauses is the same, and means both ‘cheat’ and ‘steal’.

Ikos 19¹⁰

O incomparable, all-holy, all-blameless look down
From heaven as compassionate and save me as unworthily
I shout:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 20

Rouse my mind to praise, raise up
The one who lies sick in bed, who unworthily, O Savior,
Cries to Thee:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 21

Raise up make firm, O Lover of mankind, the one who has now
Stumbled as a profligate in life; draw near me, O Savior,
As I cry:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Ikos 22

Unity, Trinity undivided unseparated, through the prayers
Of the Mother of God take pity on me and overlook the sins
Of those who cry:

‘Have mercy on me, the fallen, O Merciful Lord.’

Collected at St Innocent Orthodox Church, Tarzana, CA 2020-2023

10 These stanzas, 19-22, are not considered part of the original text by the editor, though they are present in all but one ms. 18 forms a final prayer, which is feature of the classic kontakion, and the final stanzas, which form the word ADAM in the acrostic seem to be an addition; and they are not really about Adam.