

Homily

Clean Week

Sunday of Forgiveness &

The Commemoration of Adam's Expulsion from Paradise

St. Andrew Orthodox Church, Riverside, Ca. 3/12/2000

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Introduction to Clean Week: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen. This Sunday is the last day before we enter into Great Lent. Tonight we ask each other's sincere forgiveness and tomorrow we begin Clean Week: a week of vigorous purgation, a very aggressive launch into intense spiritual training. Clean Week may be compared in many ways to what young men go through at the beginning of football season or military training. Clean Week is something of a spiritualized "hell week" or a "boot camp." I remember the days of youth when in late summer hell week would arrive. We would run and train until we couldn't run or train any longer. Some of us simply fell down in the grass and didn't move. In between practices twice a day we would lay on our couches at home and our mothers would feed us salted chicken and power drinks to try to bring us back to life before we would have to get in the car again and go back to practice. It was painful, but we all knew why we were doing it. We had to get ourselves in shape. We had to pull ourselves together if we were going to have a profitable practice season. If you spend all your time trying to get in shape you will have no time to develop your skills and improve your performance. The same applies spiritually. Clean Week accomplishes the same goals for the Christian. By our serious exertion we reorient our spiritual disposition. Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday nights we pray Great Compline with the Canon. Wednesday night we pray the Presanctified Liturgy. Friday night we pray the Akathist Hymn to the Virgin Mary. Saturday morning we celebrate liturgy. If we are faithful to the church's request we will eat twice from Monday to Friday. Once following Presanctified Liturgy Wednesday night and once Friday evening. If we are too weak with humility we take some bread, and juice, or something light to sustain us in the late afternoon or evening. The week is painful, but, just like boot camp or hell week, everyone who goes through it knows how valuable it is. Through this week we shock our souls into reality, and we find ourselves on the Sunday of Orthodoxy standing ready for making significant spiritual strides in the Lenten season. If we train so hard to play football or to learn to be a soldier ought we not much more embrace Clean Week for the benefit of our souls and for our eternal salvation?

What about those unable to fast? Now what do you do if you are pregnant, nursing, or elderly? What if you have a serious health impediment? Does this mean that Clean Week will pass you right by and you will not be able to reap its grace? No. You can still reap from Clean Week but you must be more creative. Fasting is absolutely necessary for spiritual progress, and as is evident from this morning's Gospel lesson our Lord assumes that His disciples fast and fast with humility. The goal of all fasting is to learn to fast from sin. Fasting teaches us basic obedience, and ever reminds us of the truth that a violation of fasting led to our being expelled from Paradise. A casual approach to the Lord's requirements, otherwise known as arrogance, led to our first parents being cast out and banned from the Garden of Delights. Fasting is an attempt on our parts to reestablish obedience to the Lord inside of us and to find our way back to Paradise. Fasting also seeks to reorient our human constitution, and to place the body and soul into proper relationship once again. At the fall the body and its desires came to dominate the soul. As humans in the garden revolted against their proper relationship of authority to God, and as Eve revolted against her proper relationship of authority to Adam, so our bodies joined in the rebellion and revolted against their proper relationship of authority to our souls. They stopped being submissive and purely directed by the good intents of the soul, and began to dictate. In fasting we strike a blow at this perverse relationship. We humble ourselves and attempt to reorient ourselves, to break the tyranny of earthly desire. Therefore, those who cannot fast seriously from food because of a medical problem must find another way to join their brothers and sisters in this yearning for paradise. **I suggest fasting from speech.** Learning to say no to the impulse to talk is serious fasting. There are, of course, other avenues of fasting that could be pursued including fasting from television, radio, the telephone, and more. It should be said that being exempt from the fasting guidelines of the church due to a medical problem doesn't mean we can be overweight and fat. I have never heard a doctor say that it is necessary to be fat for one's health.

The Casting Out of Adam From Paradise. For some this is all simply too serious. "Really Father, my last priest never asked me to fast like this." The fasting of the Orthodox is not about this or that priest establishing fasting rules. Priests don't do that. The fasting practices of Orthodox were established very early in the life of the Church by the Church and they aren't open to negotiation. The faithful observance of Clean Week simply doesn't find any place in the life of those who take their religion lightly. It stands, however, as a perpetual testimony to the fact that Holy Orthodoxy is true religion, and is therefore serious to the core. Orthodoxy is not religious feel-goodism, nor is it designed to make man's life happy on the earth by providing him friends, basic moral guidance, a place for his children to play, etc.. Orthodoxy exists as a gift of Almighty God to save us, because we are all ruined and corrupt, and are living as castaways in exile from Paradise. Our purpose in this life is one, to find our way into God's Kingdom and to eradicate from our life those things that keep us from God. That is why our Lord follows His discourse on fasting and the spiritual disciplines this morning with these words, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (St. Matt. 6:33). This Clean Week should teach us that in reality our whole earthly existence should be "Clean Years" in preparation for the resurrection of eternal life. To our Merciful Lord Who is calling us to Himself this week be our worship forever.

