

# Triodion

The prayers from the Sunday of the Publican & the Pharisee till Holy Saturday are contained in the Triodion. The name derives from the fact that we sing three odes during the Matin canon for during the Great Fast. Normally, there are nine odes in a full canon. (Just to confuse the issue most canons do not have the full nine, but contain eight.) During the Great Fast we sing odes 8 and 9 every day with one other ode, the number of the other ode changes with each day of the week. Thus the book that contains the text for all these odes derives its name, Triodion.

The prayers of the Triodion walks me thematically through the season. During the preparation weeks they outline why we have arrived at exile. The aspects of my human nature that we must acknowledge and strive to turn towards the good. Standing then on Sunday evening before the Great Fast I place myself with Adam outside paradise. From the Triodion I sing the forgiveness vespers that launch the season of the Great Fast. I acknowledge my personal responsibility for this expulsion. I turn to my community and ask for their forgiveness for my faults during this past year. During this kiss of peace, begging for forgiveness I sing the Paschal canon of the kissing of the cross. Even as I stand in exile and acknowledge my sins I accept the power of Christ's Resurrection. I taste the victory that awaits me after the forty day fast and pilgrimage of Holy Week. I have experienced the Bright Sadness of the Great Fast from the first service of this season.

Week by week the journey to Pascha continues in the prayers of the Triodion. The services introduce all the meditations I need to keep a good fast, not a fast of physical observance, like the Pharisee, but a true fast of the spirit.

Open to me the doors of repentance, O Giver of life. As we worship in your temple this morning, teach us how to purify the temples of our bodies, and in your compassion, purify me by the goodness of your mercies.

Lead me to the paths of salvation, O Mother of God, for I have condemned myself with shameful sins and have wasted all my life in slothfulness. By your intercession purify me from all sinfulness.

Matins Stichera at Psalm 50

“O faithful, while fasting bodily, let us also fast in spirit. Let us loosen every bond of injustice; let us tear apart the strong chains of violence; let us rip up all unjust assertions; let us give bread to the hungry and welcome the poor and homeless to our houses, that we may receive from Christ our God, his great mercy.”

First Week Wednesday Vespers

Texts like this amplify the warning against false fasting that Jesus warns about in Matthew Chapter 6. If I approach the Great Fast as simply as rules to be followed faithfully, I have missed the point. The rules are outward signs for interior conversion. I must have the change of heart, metanoia (μετάνοια). The physical fasting is a reminder to perform these other actions. The physical hunger is a call to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17-20).

If I pray the Triodion, perform the works of charity and follow the physical fast I will arrive at the day of Resurrection with a renewed heart, a steadfast spirit that is ready to receive the risen Lord and follow his will in my life.

And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret.

Matthew 6:16-18

## Bright Sadness

The season of the Great Fast is a journey that begins in exile and ends joining myself to the joy of Christ's resurrection. The spirit of the season is a profound acknowledgement of my separation from God by my own actions. I have prepared for the season through the five themes during the preparation period. I end the preparation in exile and expelled from paradise with Adam. I sit at the gates of paradise and cry:

“Woe is Me!...Formerly I was clothed in an immortal brightness; now, as a poor mortal, I am wrapped in the shroud of death. Alas! Whom shall I find to weep with me?”

Matins on Cheesefare Sunday

With this dark, sad theme I begin my journey. This somber mood permeates the hymnography of the Great Fast. But during the same matins service,

All-blessed is the grace of the holy fast, for through it Moses was glorified and received the tablets of the Law; through it the Youths were made more powerful than the fire. In it we shall extinguish the burning passions of our flesh as we sing to Christ our Savior: Grant us conversion and save us from Hades.

Sessional Hymn  
First week Tuesday



# Journey to Pascha

Lenten Worship: Chapter 2

Great Lent by Fr. Schmemmann

These pages contain amplifications and additional reflections on the themes presented in the book **Great Lent—Journey to Pascha** by Father Alexander Schmemmann. Copies can be obtained from the publisher St. Valdimir's Seminary Press at 800-204-book or their website at <http://www.svots.edu>.

just two hymns later I sing:

“You are truly most blessed, O virgin Mother of God. Through the One who was incarnate of you, Hades was chained, Adam revived, the curse wiped out, Eve set free, Death put to death, and we ourselves were brought back to life”

At the same time that I openly acknowledge my short comings and my separation from God, I see the bright light of Pascha shining with the hope of my salvation. This mixed message is found in every service throughout the Great Fast. Bright Sadness is the term coined by Father Schmemmann for this spirit of our Great Fast services.

We experience the sadness of our human situa-

tion, in both words and the minor key of our music for the season. But at the same time I cannot forget that our salvation has already been achieved. Christ is still risen, I am still saved. But I cannot become proud or settled in my salvation. I must experience the real sadness of exile every year. I have accepted my savior but I have not become perfect yet. I have my shortcomings, I exile myself by my daily sins. Once a year I accept this exile and resolve to change my life anew, to consciously journey back to the Resurrection and join Christ on that road during Holy Week.

I can join Jesus on this pilgrimage during Holy Week by filling my spirit with this Bright Sadness during the season of the Great Fast. The daily hymns of the Church will take me step by step through my spiritual inventory for the journey.

# Prayer of St. Ephrem

The theme prayer for this spiritual inventory is the prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian. This prayer punctuates every weekday service for the entire Great Fast, and vespers during every other fasting period of the Church. In three short statements Saint Ephrem guides my thinking down the right paths for my spiritual renewal. I end each phrase with a full prostration; I fall face down onto the ground before the Lord. Then I repeat the entire prayer without pause and prostrate myself at the end of the second reading. My body, mind and spirit all

participate in this prayer ritual.

In the first section of the prayer I reject the negative baggage in my life. I turn my back on apathy; I refuse to give up; I do not seek earthly glory; I will not waste the precious time our Lord gave me with idleness. In this short statement I remind myself every day what I must avoid.

In the second section I ask for those positive traits that counteract those negative trends from the first. In place of apathy I want the whole spirit of the Lord; instead of pride, humility; in place of tearing people down with idle talk I build them up with patience and love.

Finally, I place my critical eye on my own actions not those of others. I avoid the harsh judgement of the Lord by refraining from judging others. The patience and love that I practice in the second section reinforce my support of my fellow travelers rather than my judgement of them.

Throughout the prayer I acknowledge the sovereignty and power of God over my life. He is Lord, Master of my Life, King. I am servant prostrating myself before the throne of might.

I say the prayer twice. Once pausing after each section to acknowledge how I commit to each portion. Then I repeat the prayer as a whole. I acknowledge that the three tasks are joined to each other. The prayer is an icon of the life of the Trinity. The three are individual but the three are one. When these three aspects of the

Christianity live in me I begin to become one with the Trinity. I begin to achieve Theosis.

O Lord and master of my life, keep from me the spirit of indifference and discouragement, lust of power and idle chatter.

Prostration

Instead, grant to me your servant, the spirit of wholeness of being, humble mindedness, patience and love.

Prostration

O Lord and King, grant me the grace to be aware of my own sin and not to judge my brother, for You are Holy, always now and forever and ever. Amen

Prostration

# Holy Scripture

Holy Scripture is the foundation for all our liturgical worship. The Great Fast is no exception. This journey of the Great Fast prepares us for Pascha. I expect to find the scriptural foundation for this central feast. I am not disappointed. Pascha is the culmination of salvation history.

The record of that salvation history is in the Old Testament. Rabbinical teaching divides the Old Testament into three categories, Law, Prophets and sacred writings. During the Great Fast I read an entire book from each of these three: Genesis, Isaiah, and Proverbs.

Every week day we read a section from each book. This is a simple continuous reading. I begin with Chapter 1 verse 1 on the first day and continue to completion by the Friday before Palm Sunday. Genesis and Proverbs are read during the vesper services and Isaiah is read at the sixth hour (Noon).

The Psalms are the cornerstone of our prayers, as they are for our Jewish cousins. Normally, monastic practice reads the entire Psalter every week. During the Great Fast they read the entire Psalter twice a week. In the Psalter I encounter every type and mood of prayer. They are a microcosm of my relationship with God. During the Great Fast I intensify that relationship by doubling my prayer. I experience each of those moods twice a week.

Genesis tells me what I already know, my own

story of sin, exile and God's action to save me. I started the Great Fast outside paradise weeping with Adam. This is where I start the reading of the Law as well. I begin the journey of salvation history from creation. I follow the trials, false starts, tribulations and errors of my fellow travelers throughout salvation history. I end the story still in exile in Egypt. But with a promise that God will redeem my bones. One week later on Pascha Jesus fulfills this promise.

Isaiah is the voice of the prophet told in three stages. Isaiah begins before the troubles have reached their peak in Israel. Things are bad; the people and leaders have forsaken God. But there is still order and calm. But the people do not have a change of heart and the Babylonians come and exile the community. Isaiah continues during the exile to call the people back to the Lord. I hear a redeemer promised. I hear about the suffering servant. I know that help is coming. The third section the promise of return is made. The people respond with faith. On the Friday before Holy week I hear the promise of the new heavens and the new earth that will be realized on Pascha.

Proverbs is a prime example of wisdom literature. Wisdom is personified throughout as the woman who calls us to the table. Here we see the shadow of Christ as the Word of God. We hear the practical knowledge passed on to us. We know that this personification of wisdom has become real flesh and blood in Christ.

Seeing in spirit your divine condescension, O Christ, the prophet Habakkuk trembled and cried out: You have come for the salvation of your people, to save those who are consecrated to You.

O holy apostles, you are the torches of the Sun of justice, from whom you have received the light; illumine the whole world by dispelling the darkness of error.

First Thursday  
Matin Canon ode 4