

568 The services of the Triodia guide the Christian liturgically from an awareness of their own sinfulness to a spiritual transfiguration. Great Lent is preceded by four preparatory Sundays: the Sunday of the Publican (Tax Collecto-or) and the Pharisee; the Sunday of the Prodigal Son; Meatfare Sunday; and Cheesefare Sunday. As preparation for Great Lent, on the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, the Church calls us to imitate the humbleness of the Publican and shun the pride of the Pharisee. On the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the Church points to the necessity of repentance as a return from the foreign land of sin to the Father's home. On Meatfare Sunday, when the Gospel about the Divine Judgment is read (see Mt 25:31-46), the Church defines the aim of the coming Lenten fast: to recognize our sins, confess them, and perform works of mercy. On Cheesefare (or Forgiveness) Sunday the Church calls us to take the first step in repentance—mutual forgiveness. During the Lenten fast, Christians practice restraint in eating, but this is not an aim in itself, only a means to cleanse ourselves of passions: "If you refrain from eating but do not purify yourself of the passions, then your fasting is in vain, for it will not serve for correction. Rather, through insincerity the soul will become similar to the evil demons, who in fact never eat."³⁹⁴

569 Authentic fasting means "to put away all evil, to control the tongue, to resist anger, and to abstain from lust, slander, falsehood, and perjury."³⁹⁵ The meaning of fasting for the Christian is presented in a sticheron from the Vespers of Cheesefare Sunday:

Let us set out with joy upon the season of the Fast and prepare ourselves for spiritual combat. Let us purify our soul and cleanse our flesh; and as we fast from food, let us abstain also from every passion. Rejoicing in the virtues of the Spirit, may we persevere with love, and so be counted worthy to see the solemn Passion of Christ our God, and with great spiritual gladness behold his holy Passover.³⁹⁶

The Lenten liturgical services progressively reveal the essence of true fasting: if we sow the "seeds of repentance" (First Sunday of Lent), our "shoots of virtues" will grow to maturity (Second Sunday of Lent), to allow us to consume the fruit of the life-giving Tree "which leads us back to paradise" (Third Sunday of Lent, the Veneration of the Holy Cross), and by way of the "spiritual ladder" (Fourth Sunday of Lent, Commemoration of Saint John of the Ladder) reach the summits of

394 Lenten Triodion, Cheesefare Week, Wednesday Matins, Apostichon.

395 Lenten Triodion, First Week of Great Lent, Tuesday, Vespers, Apostichon.

396 Lenten Triodion, First Week of Great Lent, Monday, Vespers, Sticheron at Psalm 140.

spiritual purification and repentance (Fifth Sunday of Lent, Commemoration of Saint Mary of Egypt).

570 Saint John Chrysostom, in his teaching on fasting, emphasizes the fruits of fasting in the moral and spiritual life:

What advantage is it, if we have gone through the Fast devoid of good works? If another says, "I have fasted the whole of Lent," then you should say, "I had an enemy, but I was reconciled; I had a habit of speaking evil of others, but I put a stop to it; I had a habit of swearing, but I have broken through this evil practice."³⁹⁷

If we engage the Fast with zeal, we will experience what is described by Saint John Chrysostom in his teaching:

Having in this week attained the practice of not swearing at all; and in the following having extinguished wrath; and in that which succeeds it, having pulled up evil-speaking by the roots; and after that, having amended what yet remains; thus, going forward in our course, we shall come by little and little to the very summit of virtue.³⁹⁸

571 Once we have "completed the Forty days that bring profit to our soul, on Lazarus Saturday, the day that begins the Floral Triodion [in the Kyivan tradition], the Church beseeches the Lord: "Grant us also to behold the Holy Week of your Passion, that in it we may glorify your mighty acts."³⁹⁹ Indeed, we pray to behold the Resurrection, the Ascension, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the glorious second coming. On the days of Passion Week, we liturgically commemorate and experience anew the last days of the earthly life of Jesus—his passion, death and burial—and we await his Resurrection, when the Lord, as a "gr of wheat, buried in the earth, has yielded a rich harvest, raising to lift the mortal sons of Adam."⁴⁰⁰

572 The growth of the Christian in deification is marked by the services of the Sundays from Pascha to Pentecost: it begins with the encounter with the Risen Christ (Sunday of Pascha, Thomas Sunday, and Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women), which leads to radical changes in particular persons—and in us as well (Sundays of the Paralytic, of the Samaritan Woman and of the Man Born Blind). The image of "living water" at the feast of Mid-Pentecost indicates the promise of the Holy Spirit, through whose grace we receive divinization.

³⁹⁷ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Statues*, 16, 6: PG 49, 169.

³⁹⁸ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Statues*, 4, 6: PG 49, 68.

³⁹⁹ Floral Triodion, Lazarus Saturday, Vespers, Sticheron at Psalm 140.

⁴⁰⁰ See Floral Triodion, Great and Holy Saturday, Matins, Stasis 1.