



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2020 – MEATFARE SUNDAY

Meatfare Sunday receives its name from the fact that during the ancient days of the Church the tradition was not to eat meat from Monday following this Sunday until Easter Saturday. On Meatfare Sunday we commemorate the glorious event and anticipated day of the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgment of the world. The Holy Fathers placed this reminder of the Second advent of Christ on this day of Meatfare in order to have us exercise some restraint toward the delights of this life and not be drowned away by the senses into gluttony and other excesses of the flesh, which may occur before the Great Fast.

EPISTLE: The Reading is from St Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians [8:8-13, 9:1-2] But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols. And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food

makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

EXPLANATION: The lesson here is that we should abstain from anything which may cause our brother to stumble. In the ancient Church Christians had a dilemma. Should they eat meat offered to pagan idols or not? To a Christian who had knowledge of God's truth, it does not matter because an idol is nothing. To him, it's just food. A newly converted Christian, however, may not have this understanding. So if he saw a knowledgeable Christian eating this type of food his worship of idols could continue because he may believe that this food has validity and power. Therefore, rather than the risk of a new convert believing that there is power in eating meat offered to idols and continuing to worship idols, St Paul states he would rather not eat meat again. Similarly, it is important not to offend those who came into the Church who are of different ethnic backgrounds with actions of ethnic superiority. Nor should we comment on what others should eat or not eat during the Lenten period.

GOSPEL: The Reading is from St Matthew [25:31-46] **When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I**

was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.” Then the righteous will answer Him saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’ Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ Then they also will answer Him saying, ‘Lord when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me. And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

EXPLANATION: Jesus instructs us not to be careless and negligent in the conduct of our lives. He teaches his disciples to be ready for the Second Coming and the Universal Judgment by practising good works. The standard of judgment is “what mercy have you shown to the poor and needy (Christ’s brethren) during your lifetime?” Jesus identifies Himself with the poor and the outcasts because He lives as one and invites to brotherhood all who are kindled with love for others. Christ is both just and merciful. But mercy does not go without judgment. We will all be judged for our good or bad works in the next life. Let us therefore not waste our lives in unbelief, injustice, laziness and self-indulgence. God will render to every man according to his deeds: “to the righteous (“the sheep”) eternal life with Him in the

Kingdom of Heaven, and to those that obey evil (“the goats” who are unruly) everlasting fire. Only the meek and gentle sheep because of their virtues and good deeds are worthy to be called children of God and inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. See here how the sheep possess the virtue of humility. They insist that they are unworthy of Christ’s proclamation and praise, as having done nothing good. Ask yourselves, are you well fed and clothed while many people shiver and go without? Are you insensitive to the sufferings of your neighbour whom you are commanded to love as yourselves? If so, how great will the horror be if you are amongst the goats and hear Christ cry out, “Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire.” The eternal fire was not prepared for man, but for the “devil and his followers” who are irreversibly in the grip of evil. However, evil men joined them because their unrepentant minds were like the devil and they share the dwelling of the evil angels by their own choice. Why? Because their lives are full of sin, hatred and a lack of compassion, and a mind devoid of the desire to share. They callously hold on to everything for themselves. And for this hatred of their fellow man, and for this hatred alone they are condemned. Let us therefore show loving deeds to our brethren in Christ by being merciful to the poor, the needy and the infirmed so that we may attain to God’s love, receive His blessing and inherit the eternal heavenly kingdom promised to us from the foundation of the world.