



## GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

### PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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### SUNDAY 1 MARCH 2020 – CHEESEFARE SUNDAY

#### FORGIVENESS SUNDAY

We are reminded that because of greed and disobedience sin came into the world. The first commandment given to Adam by God was to fast from food, that is, not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Gospel reading for today is chosen by the Holy Fathers of the Church to remind us of the benefits of fasting and Christian behaviour. Today the Church commemorates the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

**EPISTLE: The Reading is from St Paul’s letter to the Romans [13:11-14, 14:1-4]** And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for 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 armour of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts. Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats for God has received him. Who are

**you to judge another's servant? To his master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.**

**EXPLANATION:** St Paul exhorts us to awaken and put on the “**armour of light**”. He says that the “**day**” is the glorious coming of the Lord which is at hand and the time of judgment is near. Therefore, we must now “**walk properly**”, as in the day and not as in the “**night**” which is life under the influence of evil powers – full of passions of lust, gluttony, drunkenness, strife and envy. We must pray, fast, read the Scriptures, attend Church services and receive the sacraments to help us subdue our passions in preparation for Lent and during the Lenten period. The person who is “**weak in the faith**” is the novice Christian in the ancient Church who was over-zealous for the Mosaic law and even went beyond its explicit requirements to abstain from swine’s flesh and abstained from meat altogether and ate only herbs. (14: 11-12) The knowledgeable Christians believed all things created by God are good and “**ate all things**”. In order to avoid disputes over “**doubtful things**” (ie. what you can and what you can’t eat), St Paul tells the knowledgeable Christians not to reproach the zealous Christians which may drive them to despondency whereby they may abandon the Christian faith altogether. Therefore he says, “**receive such novices with much attention**”, that is, with great forbearance and tenderness. Do not despise or judge them for doing a thing perfectly ridiculous for “**God has received them**”. (14:3) That is, God has shown His unspeakable grace concerning them and had freed them from all charges against them. “**So who are you to judge them?**” St Paul says to the knowledgeable Christians. (14:4) Do not judge those who do not fast. One person “**esteems one day above another**” (that is, fasts on a fixed day) whereas “**another**

esteems every day alike” (that is, does not abstain on any day). “Let each be fully convinced in his own mind” (that is, act according to your own conscience and do what you can in sacrifice for the love of Christ). (14:5)

**GOSPEL: The Reading is from St Matthew [6:14-21]** For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**EXPLANATION:** In today’s Gospel lesson Jesus offers us a three-part recipe for Lent: forgiveness, fasting and on making lasting investments (treasure in heaven). (1)**Forgiveness** – Once again Jesus insists on mutual forgiveness between people as a precondition of God’s forgiveness. Those who do not forgive are not forgiven. (6:14-15) The Church invites us to come to Christ during Lent in the Sacrament of Confession to exchange our sins for the richness of His grace, to taste and experience for ourselves the sweetness of His forgiving love and in turn to forgive our fellow men. So Lent becomes a time for tearing down the walls between man and God and then between

neighbours – walls created by enmity and hatred. Through forgiveness we return to unity, solidarity and love for God and out fellow men. (2) **Fasting** - During Lent, we are called upon to fast not only for reasons of abstinence, self-control and prayer, but also for reasons of love – to deny ourselves something that we may share what we have saved with a needy person. Jesus rejects the hypocritical method of fasting by the Pharisees who kept a “**sad countenance**” and disfigured their faces with ash whilst fasting as an external display of suffering in order to receive the praise of men. Fasting is for the glory of God, not to impress people around us. For the one who fasts, the compassion of God outshines physical discomfort – joy overshadows sorrow (**6:16**). And fasting is not merely abstaining from eating. Physical fasting works together with spiritual fasting, or self-denial; it is a liberation of the spirit from its voluntary enslavement to sinful passions. (3) **Lasting investments** – By attaching themselves to “**treasure on earth**” people cut themselves off from heavenly treasures. They become slaves to material possessions and their whole time is taken up with accumulation of wealth and self-indulgence. Lent is a time to strengthen our relationship to Christ, by prayer, reading the Scriptures, by frequent Communion and by attending the extra Lenten services. It is a time to cancel some of the unnecessary activities and create time for God and our soul; time to accumulate some treasures in heaven. To know Christ personally is the greatest treasure there is. Don’t invest in anything that you can’t take with you beyond the grave. Attach yourselves to the true treasure – Our Lord, Jesus Christ, otherwise what will you be able to claim as yours when you appear before Him at the final hour?