

Koinonia Year One—March
Content from *Growing Faithful*
Scripture from the NRSV Bible

Seventh Sunday before Pascha (Easter)

Forgiveness Sunday

Cheese-fare Sunday

Romans 13:11-14:4 Matthew 6:14-21

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

LOOKING TO AND LIVING LENT—

We should know that today we ask forgiveness from our brothers and sisters in Christ so that we may begin the race in the stadium of Great Lent unhindered by any animosity. As long as we live self-centered lives, we cannot forgive our neighbor – our ego will not allow it. Once our lives are God-centered, however, we are able to forgive others as God forgives us. Let us remember that God’s mercy and forgiveness to us is often hidden in our mercy and forgiveness to others. Our Lenten journey is not an isolated or individual affair but a “family” event. Therefore, we are reminded in today’s reading from the Holy Gospel that unless there is mutual forgiveness between one another, there can be no true reconciliation with God. (“The Sunday of Forgiveness,” *Synaxarion of the Lenten Triodion and Pentecostarion*)

HEAR the Word of God—

Romans 13:11-14:4

11Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; 12the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; 13let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

14:1Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. 2Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. 3Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. 4Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Matthew 6:14-21

Jesus said, 14*"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; 15but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

16*"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. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

19*"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

SHARE thoughts and insights—

Forgiving...

- What does forgiveness mean to you?
- When is it easy to forgive?
- When is it difficult to forgive?
- How does one go about forgiving?

Fasting...

- How do you fast?
- How do you feel about fasting?
- What do you believe about fasting?
- Read and reflect together on the following quote from *Great Lent* by Father Alexander Schmemmann:

...We need first of all a spiritual preparation for the effort of fasting. It consists in asking God for help and also in making our fast God-centered. We should fast for God's sake. We must rediscover our body as the Temple of His Presence. We must recover a religious respect for the body, for food, for the very rhythm of life. All this must be done before the actual fast begins so that when we begin to fast, we would be supplied with spiritual weapons, with a vision, with a spirit of fight and victory.

Where is your treasure? What does this tell you?

How is humility related to Lent?

GROW in faith—

Lenten journey...

- What is your attitude toward Lent?
- What is God in Christ asking of you now?
- Are you willing to grow in faith on this Lenten journey?
- How do you intend to fast?

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:31-32).

SERVE one another in love—

How to live forgiving:

"...Forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Jesus in Matthew 18:35b).

- What message do you hear in these words of Jesus?
- Who are you being called to forgive?
 - What is the next step—or are the next steps—for you?
 - Is the other person's response to your request / plea for forgiveness important?

PRAY—

*Father,
forgive us..
as we have forgiven..
Amen (Matthew 6:12, Luke 11:4).*

The Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim of Syria

*Lord and Master of my life,
Give me not a spirit of idleness, vain curiosity, lust for power, and idle talk.
But rather give to me your servant a spirit of purity, humility, patience, and love.
Yes, Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins, and not to judge my brother and
sister; for you are blessed to the ages of ages.
Amen.*