

Wonder

Volume: 2 Number: 2 Theme: **Preparing for Great Lent**

Title: **Forgiveness and Fasting** Author: **Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom)**

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<http://masarchive.org>*

Today two themes dominate the readings of the Holy Scriptures; St Paul speaks to us about fasting and the Lord about forgiveness, and St Paul insists on the fact that fasting does not consist simply of depriving oneself of one form of food or another, neither does it, if it is kept strictly, obediently, worshipfully, give us any ground to be proud of ourselves, satisfied and secure, because the aim of fasting is not to deprive our body of the one form of food rather than the other, the aim of fasting is to acquire mastery over our body and make it a perfect instrument of the spirit. Most of the time we are slaves of our bodies, we are attracted by all our senses to one form or another of enjoyment, but of an enjoyment which goes far beyond the purity which God expects of us.

And so, the period of fasting offers us a time during which we can say not that I will torment my body, limit myself in things material, but a time when I will re-acquire mastery of my body, make it a perfect instrument. The comparison that comes to my mind is that of tuning a musical instrument; this is what fasting is, to acquire the power not only to command our body, but also to give our body the possibility to respond to all the promptings of the spirit.

Let us therefore go into fasting with this understanding, not measuring our fasting by what we eat and how much, but of the effect it has on us, whether our fasting makes us free or whether we become slaves of fasting itself.

If we fast let us not be proud of it, because it proves simply that we need more perhaps than another person to conquer something in our nature. And if around us other people are not fasting let us not judge them, because God has received the ones as He receives the others, because it is into the heart of men that He looks.

And then there is the theme of forgiveness, of which I will say only one short thing. We think always of forgiveness as a way in which we would say to a person who has offended, hurt, humiliated us, that the past is past and that we do not any more hold a grudge against this person. But what forgiveness means more deeply than this is that if we can say to a person: let us no longer make the past into a destructive present, let me trust you, make an act of faith in you, if I forgive you it means in my eyes you are not lost, in my eyes there is a future of beauty and truth in you.

But this applies also to us perversely, we think very often of forgiving others, but we do not think sufficiently of the need in which we are, each of us personally, of being forgiven by others. We have a few hours left between the Liturgy and the Service of Forgiveness tonight, let us reflect and try to remember, not the offenses which we have suffered, but the hurts which we have

caused; and if we have hurt anyone in one way or another, in things small or great, let us make haste before we enter into Lent tomorrow morning, let us make haste to ask to be forgiven, to hear someone say to us: in spite of all that has happened I believe in you, I trust you, I hope for you and I will expect everything from you, and then we can go together through Lent helping one another to become what we are called to be — the disciples of Christ, following Him step by step to Calvary, and beyond Calvary to the Resurrection. Amen.

His Eminence Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) was the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church in Great Britain from 1957 until his death in 2003. He held honorary doctorates from the Moscow and Kiev Theological Academies, Aberdeen University and Cambridge University. He was a well-know theologian and writer, a powerful preacher, and an effective and saintly pastor.

Discussion Questions

What is the aim of fasting according to the author? According to Scripture? Why do you fast? What would becoming a slave of fasting look like?

What are some ways that we make the past into a “destructive present”? How do we stop that?

Do you feel the need to be forgiven by others? Is this need met in your life in Christ?