

The major purpose of Great Lent is to prepare us to worthily meet our Savior as He resurrects and comes out of the tomb. He will allow Himself to endure terrible suffering, ignominy, and unnatural death in order to resurrect. Through His resurrection, He empowers us to also be able to resurrect after our bodily death. All people will resurrect. But it is only the people who earned salvation during their earthly life that will resurrect unto eternal life, a sharing of a blessed eternity in union with Jesus Christ. Those who rejected the Savior during their life will resurrect unto eternal death, an eternity separated from God. This eternity is a torture we call hell.

We all sin, and sin completely separates us from God. To reunite with God requires us to repent. Only repentance is able to reconcile us with God, enabling us to receive His forgiveness for our trespasses against Him. But what we must never forget is that it is impossible to be reconciled with God, to receive His forgiveness, if we are in enmity with any person. In other words, we can only be forgiven by God if we sincerely forgive without conditions anyone who has done anything, no matter how evil, against us. Not to forgive someone, no matter what he has done against us, is to alienate ourselves from God's forgiveness. This is the first lesson we learn from this Gospel reading, something so important to remember during Great Lent when we are trying to reconcile ourselves with God.

Great Lent is a time for abstaining. We abstain from certain foods that make spiritual work too hard. But Great Lent is not only about food. We also try to abstain from our sinful inclinations. And we try to greatly strengthen our spiritual life. In other words, we are trying to become more spiritual, more god-like people. It is an inner transformation. Too often people forget this and work on fasting in an external way. They watch what they eat, what they do. They go to church more. They even read spiritual literature. But all of this activity doesn't affect their hearts. They remain unchanged internally. This kind of fasting is hypocrisy. There is no liberation from voluntary enslavement to sinful passions. Our Gospel reading is warning us that when we do this kind of fasting, all that we are doing is trying to impress people instead of working for the glory of God. This kind of fast is useless.

The last lesson that this Gospel warns us about is the danger of attaching ourselves to earthly treasures. These treasures enslave our hearts to the world. And in Great Lent we should be working on changing our hearts. What we must concentrate on during this fasting period is to disentangle ourselves from our attachments to earthly things and attach our hearts to true treasures, the kind of treasures that bring us closer to God. Yes, we do need material things to live, and God knows this. Therefore, He promises us that all that we need for survival will be given to us by Him if we make the pursuit of the Heavenly Kingdom the major pursuit during our life on earth. And Great Lent is the perfect time for us to begin this new way of life.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, my prayers and hopes are for all of us to be able to with joy in our hearts and faces use the time that is approaching for the betterment of our spiritual condition. If we do this, Pascha will be a immense time of joy for us. Therefore, let all of us gather at the cathedral this Sunday evening for the forgiveness rite and begin Great Lent in peace with everyone. Let us all without fail also remember our deceased relatives and friends. They need our prayers even more during the fast period. Let us support them by submitting a list of their names to be commemorated every day at the fasting services in church. The expense of \$50.00 dollars for this is miniscule compared to the joy that we give them by doing this. And since I will not be able to personally see all of you face to face, I would like to now ask you to forgive me if I have done anything to offend any one of you.

With Much Love in Christ,

Archpriest Serge Kotar