

Lenten Synaxarion

Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee

*O Creator of all above and below,
as Thou receivest the thrice-holy hymn from the angels,
so also from mankind receive the Triodion.
He who lives like a Pharisee is far from the Church,
for Christ is received within, O ye humble of heart.*

With God on this present day we begin the Triodion, the hymns of which were composed by many of our holy and God-bearing Fathers, inspired by the Holy Spirit according to their worthiness. The first of all was the great author Cosmas of Maiuma, who composed the three odes (symbolic of the Holy and Life-Creating Trinity) for the Great and Holy Week of the Passion of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. After him others of the Fathers, including Theodore and Joseph of the Studite Monastery, following his zealous example, arranged the services of the other weeks of the Holy and Great Forty-day Fast, reserving them at first for the use of the Studite Monastery. Furthermore they composed and arranged hymns, seeking them and collecting them from other books of the Fathers. Since, according to the Triodion, Sunday, the celebration of the Resurrection, is the first day of the week as well as the last or eighth day, they prescribed the first canticle of the canon to be sung on the second day of the week, i.e. Monday. The second canticle was prescribed for Tuesday, the third day of the week, the third canticle for Wednesday, the fourth canticle for Thursday, the fifth canticle for Friday, and the sixth and seventh canticles for Saturday. The rest, the eighth and ninth canticles, are prescribed for every day.

It must be known, however, that although it is called the Triodion, it does have services with other than three-canticle canons. It is so named because the majority of the services have three canticle canons, especially during Holy Week. For it was our Holy Fathers' idea that through the entire Triodion would be commemorated in a concise form all God's benefits to us from the beginning, using it as a reminder for all of us that we were created by Him, and were exiled from Paradise through the tasting of the fruit, rejecting the commandment that was given to us for our knowledge, and we were cast out through the envy of the arch villain serpent and enemy, who was made to crawl for his arrogance. That we remained cut off from the benefits of Paradise and were led by the devil. That the Son and Word of God, having suffered in His mercy, bowing the heavens, descended and made His abode in the Virgin and became man for our sake, showing us through His life the ascent into the heavens, through humility first of all then fasting and the rejection of evil and through His other deeds. That He suffered and rose from the dead and ascended once more into heaven, and He sent down the Holy Spirit upon His holy disciples and Apostles, who all proclaimed Him to be the Son of God and the most perfect God. And that once more the divine Apostles acted through the grace of the most Holy Spirit and gathered all the saints from the ends of the earth through their preaching, filling the world on high, which was the intention of the Creator from the beginning.

Now the purpose of the Triodion intended by the Holy Fathers on these three present feasts of the Publican and the Pharisee, the Prodigal Son, and the Second Coming is a kind of preparatory lesson and stimulation to prepare ourselves for the spiritual labors of the Fast, having put aside our usual corrupt habits. First of all they present to us the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, and they call the week following precursory. For those who desire to go off to do military battle, first ascertain the time of the

battle from the leaders, so that having cleaned and polished their weapons, and preparing well all their other matters, and having removed all obstacles from their path, they earnestly go forth to their labors, taking the necessary supplies. Often before battle they tell anecdotes and tales and parables to incite their hearts to zeal, driving off idleness, fear, despair and other inadequate feelings. So the divine Fathers herald the coming fast against the armies of demons as a passion which holds fast our souls to cleanse ourselves of the poison accumulated over a long period of time. Not yet possessing those benefits, let us strive to obtain them, and arming ourselves properly, so let us set off to the labors of the Fast.

Now the first weapon among the virtues is repentance and humility. And the temptation to attain the greatest humility is pride and arrogance. So they place before us first of all this present trustworthy parable from the Divine Gospel. It encourages us to shun the desire for the pride and arrogance of the Pharisee, and to cultivate the opposite desire of the Publican for humility and repentance. For the greatest and most grievous passion is pride and arrogance, since this is how the Devil fell from the heavens before the morning star and was cast into darkness. Because of this Adam, the father of our race, was driven from Paradise through partaking of the fruit. Through this example the Holy Fathers encourage all not to be proud of their successes, but always to be humble. For the Lord sets Himself against the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. Better a man who has sinned, if he knows that he has sinned and repents, than a man who has not sinned and thinks of himself as righteous. For Christ said, "I say to you that the Publican went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee." This parable reveals that no one should exalt himself, even though he has done good deeds, but rather should always be humble and pray from his heart to God, for even if he should fall into the most serious sin, salvation is not far off.

*Through the prayers of all Thy holy hymnographers,
O Christ our God, have mercy on us.
Amen.*