



"When the thrones are set up and the books are opened, and God sits in judgment, O what fear there will be! ...O Savior and Lover of Mankind, only King of the universe: before the end comes, turn me back through repentance and have mercy on me."

Vespers for Meatfare Sunday

The Sunday of Meatfare

The Fourth Pre-Greatfast Sunday

Monsignor Basil Shereghy

"Truly I wail and moan when I recall the eternal fire, the utmost darkness of Tartarus, the painful worms, the unceasing gnashing of teeth, the pain which is theirs who commit un-numbered sins...."

Vespers for Meatfare Sunday: Sticheron

Meatfare Sunday indicates a farewell to meat inasmuch as in the early Christian Church meat was no longer eaten from this time on throughout the greatfast season.

Even in the Carpathian Mountains of Eastern Europe where I was born and raised, the season of the Great Fast for the Byzantine Catholic faithful was perceived as a time of joy and anticipation, yet a time of severe fasting. Among the Ruthenians, most of the faithful popularly maintained the strict fast from meat and dairy products for the entire Great Fast. At this time of the year in Ruthenia, being an agrarian society with harsh weather conditions, a minimal amount of labor was performed, and a greater concentration was given to the Holy Fast. However, even in our technologically advanced American society, we can and will make time to participate in the greatfast services and maintain the fasting practices if we have the desire to express our love for the Lord.

The Byzantine Catholic Church sets before us today the final or "Terrible Judgment." Those, whom the Church was unable to convert through its instruction on the mercy of God in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, are now presented with the fear of hell in an attempt to affect them. The liturgical services for this day are interwoven with a fear of eternal damnation together with a firm resolution to reform, and they are designed to fill us with salutary fear and sorrow for our sins. One of the requisites for repentance is the law of love by which Christ at His Judgment will measure all of us.

Jesus describes in detail the Terrible Judgment. His simple words raised to the divine sphere the most delicate acts of human kindness. Compassion and mercy were branded by early philosophers as weakness, but in reality they are the signs of a nobility of heart. Christ has taught us that all those who are filled with love for Him should realize that whatever they do for the poor and the afflicted is done for Him. For a slice of bread and for a glass of water given in His name, our Lord promises heaven.

In describing the Last Judgment, we are led to hope for mercy if we have been charitable to our neighbors. We must always realize that our Lord is merciful in the highest degree, but He is also just.

SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 25:31-46