

Today a Fresh Kind of Life is Starting
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The other day, I was reading a book and came across a quotation which at first didn't strike me as anything very earth-shattering. It went something like this: "...today a fresh kind of life is starting..." The more I thought about it, the more I could see how easily and accurately it applies to the season of Great Lent. Somehow, it took on a much deeper meaning in the light of the coming season than in the sense which the author had originally intended it.

What is this fresh kind of life? It is a fresh life in Christ, in His Holy Resurrection, His conquering of death, which we commemorate on the Feast of Feasts, Easter. But this life starts within *us*, and our joy on that glorious Easter night depends on how we prepare for it *during* the forty days of Lent.

Sorrow and Joy

When we hurt a close friend of ours, perhaps through what we say or do, aren't we sorry for it? Aren't we anxious to rectify the situation as soon as possible? Of course we are. And all the while, we are preparing to apologize. Although we are sorry for what we have done, we are still joyful in knowing that soon the alienation from our friend will be over. We will be able to renew our relationship on firmer ground, and we resolve to try not to drift further apart in the future.

It is these two elements, sorrow and joy, that the Church also expresses during Great Lent. Naturally, we are sorry for our sins, we are sorry for hurting our divine friend, and for our alienation from Him. We show our sorrow during Lent, we suffer and lament because of our transgressions. But by acknowledging Christ as our master, we constantly keep in mind that even during our sorrow and sadness, we can rejoice, for He is with us, as Lent is not purely the season of sorrow. From the beginning, we know why we are living Lent, we know the joy of that Great Pascha, and it is with us from the start. Lent is that great journey and pilgrimage to the joy of the Resurrection of Christ that joyous "day which knows no night," as St. John Chrysostom tells us.

The Way and The Light

Christ said, "I am the light of the world." He lights our journey to the Kingdom of Heaven, and if we are to move from our sadness to His joy, from our death to His life, from our sins to His forgiveness, then we must follow Him throughout our Lenten journey. "I am the Way," and it is only by following the way of Christ that we can hope to attain the Kingdom of God, the Joy of Pascha. As one of the prayers of the first day of Lent commands us, "Shine with the light of the commandments of Christ our God."

Love

How many times have we heard what is commonly called the Golden Rule – “do unto your neighbor as you would have him do unto you” – and not really given a second thought to its message? What in effect it is telling us is to love our neighbors. How very hard this is. But we must realize that without love, all our Lenten efforts are fruitless. We must *love all*, and through love be *united* with all.

All of us are on the same Lenten road, the same journey, and this unites us. We will unite in joy on Easter. But we can only be united through love. We must become of one mind and voice with each other, for we are living Lent for the same purpose. Without love, there can be no unity. Love is Christ’s greatest commandment, and if we cannot follow it, if we cannot unite with our fellow Christians in love, then how can we expect to be or call ourselves followers of Christ? Love gives life and unity, and *God is love*. As St. Paul writes, “...faith, hope, love abide...but the *greatest* of these is love.”

Prayer

Christ commanded His Apostles: “Whatsoever you ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you. Ask and you shall receive...” How can we love our enemies without the help of God? How can we receive God’s love if we don’t ask for it? Lent is a time for asking, for praying to God to grant us those virtues buried in that tomb; it is a time for, as we have mentioned before, shining in His commandments. Prayer unites us with God, and without that unity, there is no joy.

Purity

There is a lot of talk these days about hypocrites...in government, in the church, everywhere. We even hear that adults are hypocrites. Christ condemned hypocrisy most strongly. What is hypocrisy? In a sense, it is an insincerity of heart – in short, saying one thing and doing another. Unless we approach God in purity, our prayers are worthless. Lent is the time for a spiritual “house-cleaning” so that both our souls *and* lips may work as one and be worthy to converse sincerely with God.

Courage

Father John of Kronstadt says that we must always strive to overcome the devil, who constantly tries to tempt us during prayer. It is a struggle, a battle against the forces of evil...we are in open warfare with those things that can eat away at our souls and make our spiritual life more difficult. At Baptism, we have “put on Christ,” declared war on Satan and, as Christians, it is our duty not to lose the battle. We need courage. With it, we are prepared to defend our joy against all odds. If Christ was courageous and victorious over death, then to make our victory His, we must also be courageous. We need it to keep our Lenten life strong. Christ is our armor, our defense. If we lose the fight, then we have not accomplished that which we have prepared for. Once we win, no one can take away our joy, for our joy and victory is *in* Christ, and *from* Christ, and *is* Christ.

Life

In the Resurrection of Christ, we gain that fresh life. Great Lent is the preparation for it. It is our mirror life, for in it we re-evaluate ourselves, we struggle, weep, rejoice, repent, and carry on with all the functions of life that we normally would. The difference, though, is that we look at ourselves in a special way, *in* and *through* Christ. Christ is our “measuring stick.” We see ourselves in terms of how He loved, served, suffered, died, and rejoiced, so that we can be partakers of his new life. We see our failures, how little we are, and we are given this chance to change. We cleanse ourselves by fasting and prayer, and changing our behavior and attitudes, so that by attaining a kind of “spiritual maturity,” we may truly share in the great victory of life over death.

“Today a fresh kind of life is starting.” If only the author of that line knew all that it implied. This fresh life is in the Pascha, the destination of our Lenten journey, the victory of life over death. Lent is the preparation for it. It is the time when we must seriously ask ourselves “will we be a part of it?”