

A Call To Action

One day while a young group of boys and girls were playing baseball, the coaches were plotting against one another. The young children had no idea what their coaches were doing. Then something happened. A girl who was at bat swung as hard as she could and smashed the ball right at a boys face. The ball hit the young boy and he began to cry. All the players from both teams came to the aid of the hurt player and comforted him as he lay on the ground. The coaches were visibly shocked that someone was hurt while playing baseball. What they didn't realize was that the game they were playing wasn't for them but for the children.

No one makes the Christian journey alone. Especially the leaders, those who know the journey well enough to instruct others. In the Church, the bishops and priests are in the leadership roles. The Church however, is distinguished by the fact that the leaders are subjected to those being led. St. Paul's beautiful construct of identifying the Church as a body makes the point clear. (I Cor. 12:12)

All things in the church are subject to one another, consequently a faction within the body constitutes a faction within one's self. 'If I alienate myself from YOU, I have caused a break within me.' By extension, when a sin is committed in weakness, the whole body suffers. Likewise, when sin is overcome the glory is shared by all. (I Cor. 12:26) It is in this sense that we are called upon to attend the Sunday of Forgiveness Vespers.

The first action of Lent, its inauguration, is a call to openly, even publicly, admit having caused the Body of Christ to "suffer" because of our missing the mark. *It is a call to confess!* What is acknowledged is not that a personal sin has been committed against another, but as a member of the Body of Christ my personal sin has consequences for the whole. We are not playing the game alone. If the sign of being a Christian is love for one another, then by attending to this duty of forgiveness love is made known. The second action of Lent is to *die*. First, confessing our common failings, united together in the love of Christ, the Body journeys forward towards taking repentance even further.

The Church lifts up among many saints two of particular importance, Mary of Egypt and Andrew of Crete. Fully aware of our blindness to personal sins, two perfected Christians are called upon to show us otherwise.

Clean Monday begins with Great Compline and the Canon of Andrew of Crete. A Canon is a collection of hymns for a specific purpose. Here, the call is to repent! The author of the Canon, inspired by the life of St. Mary of Egypt (Celebrated on the 5th Sunday of Lent). Mary was the harlot who left the world and lived in the desert alone and achieved Theosis with God. St. Andrew of Crete was also motivated by his own self-knowledge as a sinner above everyone else. Through his meditations and insight, the members of the Church seeks to identify themselves as the worst of all, the least of all and the servants

of all. The Canon is divided into four parts of the first week of Lent and is repeated in its entirety the Thursday of the 5th Week of Lent (April 13). The beauty of the Canon lies in its ability to take us by the hand and present every sinner ever mentioned in the Bible beginning with Adam. Along the way, asking us to identify, learn from their mistakes and to seek being as source of glory and uplifting for the Church and not an example of what is not preferred.

The two actions of confessing and dying are meant to bear the fruit of prayer that unites one with God. Prayer is to the soul what air is to the body, says Gregory of Palamas. A soul must be free from sin before it can approach with boldness and without fear of condemnation to call upon God as Father. (Liturgy of John Chrysostom). Prayer is judgment and salvation at once. Its judgment if God is approached with pride and its salvation if Christ is approached with a contrite and humbled heart. (Psalm 51)
As the Church gears up to accepting 40 days without eating meat, it is its prayer that we may have 40 days without sin. Let us not count the calories abstained from as much as the number of sins abstained from. May we be made able to see our sins as numerous as Mary of Egypt and St. Andrew of Crete had. As we contemplate personal spiritual goals, let us not forget that we our journey is not made alone but as a member of the body of Christ. There is no such thing as "individualistic holiness" (Zizioulas).

In Christ,
+ Fr. Andrew