

SYNAXARIA OF THE TRIODION

by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos

SATURDAY of CHEESEFARE

On the same day, we commemorate all the Saints, both men and women, who shone forth in asceticism.

Verses

To the souls of the Righteous, whose memory abideth
Forever, do I offer these my words as abiding oblations.

Synaxarion

Having led us gently through the preceding Feasts, the God-bearing Fathers have prepared us for the arena of the Fast and led us away from luxury and satiety. They have instructed us with fear of the future Judgment, and have skillfully cleansed us by anticipation during Cheesefare week, having placed two fast days in the middle of the preceding week, in order gradually to rouse us to fasting. Behold, they now set in our midst those who lived lives of sanctity, through their many labors and toils, both men and women, so that, by reminding us of their struggles, they might make us more vigorous for the contest, and so that, having their lives as an example and guide, and eliciting their alliance and aid, we might disrobe for spiritual exertions, taking it into account that they shared in the same nature as ourselves. For, just as generals, when their armies are arrayed and are already standing in line, stir up their own troops by recounting examples and memories of men of old who fought with distinction and valor, and the troops, stimulated thereby with the hope of victory, set out wholeheartedly for combat, so also do the God-bearing Fathers wisely act in our case. Encouraging both men and women to spiritual contests through the example of those who have lived in holiness, in this way they bring them to the arena of the Fast, in order that, looking to their lives as an excellent prototype, we might attain to the many different kinds of virtue, as each of us is able: first, love, and then conscious abstinence from unseemly works and deeds, and fasting itself, that is, not just from food, but also from the sins of the tongue, anger, sins of the eyes, and, to put it simply, refraining from all that is evil. For this reason, the Holy Fathers appointed the present commemoration of all the Ascetic Saints, adducing those who were well-pleasing to God for fasting and other good works, urging us to proceed, in their image, to the arena of

the virtues, and exhorting us to arm ourselves valiantly against the passions and the demons, reckoning that if we show zeal equal to theirs, there is no impediment to our achieving all that they achieved and being vouchsafed the same rewards; for, they shared in the same nature as ourselves.

Concerning Cheesefare week, when it was previously permitted to eat meat, some say that Emperor Heraklios decreed its present form. After campaigning against Chosroës and the Persians for six years, he vowed to God that, if he prevailed against them, he would alter this week and make it intermediate between fasting and feasting, which he did. In my opinion, although this may have been the case, the Holy Fathers devised this week as kind of preparatory cleansing, lest we should become disgruntled at being led straight from consuming meat and overeating to extreme abstinence from food and damage our physical health, and so that, by abstaining gently and gradually from rich and delectable foods, we might, like recalcitrant horses, through a reduced intake of food, accept the bridle of fasting. That which they devised for the soul through parables, they also did for the body, little by little removing impediments to fasting.

By the intercessions of all Thine Ascetic Saints, O Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.

