

## **By the Waters of Babylon The Great Fast, Our Exile**

by Fr.Seraphim (Rose) March 1965

This weekend, at the Sunday Vigil of the Prodigal Son, we will sing Psalm 135.<sup>1</sup>

**"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion".**

In these words of the Lenten psalm, we Orthodox Christians, the New Israel, remember that we are in exile. For Orthodox Russians, banished from Holy Russia,<sup>2</sup> the Psalm has a special meaning; *but all Orthodox Christians, too, live in exile in this world, longing to return to our true home, Heaven.*

*For us the Great Fast is a session of exile ordained for us by our Mother, the Church, to keep fresh in us the memory of Zion from which we have wandered so far.* We have deserved our exile and we have great need of it because of our great sinfulness. Only through the chastisement of exile, which we remember in the fasting, prayer and repentance of this season,

Do we remain mindful of our Zion?

**"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem..."**

Weak and forgetful, even in the midst of the Great Fast *we live as though Jerusalem did not exist for us.* We fall in love with the world, *our Babylon*; we are seduced by the frivolous pastimes of this "strange land" and neglect the services and discipline of the Church which remind us of our true home. Worse yet, we love our very captors - for our sins hold us captive more surely than any human master - and in their service we pass in idleness the precious days of Lent when we should be preparing to meet the Rising Sun of the New Jerusalem, the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*There is still time*; we must remember our true home and weep over the sins which have exiled us from it. Let us take to heart the words of St. John of the Ladder: "Exile is separation from everything in order to keep the mind inseparable from God. An exile loves and produces continual weeping." Exiled from Paradise, we must become exiled from the world if we hope to return.

*This we may do by spending these days in fasting, prayer, separation from the world, attendance at the services of the Church, in tears of repentance, in preparation for the joyful Feast that is to end this time of exile; and by bearing witness to all in this "strange land" of our remembrance of that even greater Feast that shall be when our Lord returns to take His people to the New Jerusalem, from which there shall be no more exile, for it is eternal.*

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This document is at:

<http://www.orthodox.net/greatlent/by-the-waters-of-babylon-the-great-fast-our-exile.html>

<http://www.orthodox.net/greatlent/by-the-waters-of-babylon-the-great-fast-our-exile.pdf>

<http://www.orthodox.net/greatlent/by-the-waters-of-babylon-the-great-fast-our-exile.doc>

**An outline for a catechetical talk on “By the Waters of Babylon”** is available at:

[http://www.orthodox.net/catechism/prayers-of-the-church-lenten-prayers\\_by-the-waters-of-babylon\\_psalms136.pdf](http://www.orthodox.net/catechism/prayers-of-the-church-lenten-prayers_by-the-waters-of-babylon_psalms136.pdf)

The talk given may be heard here: [http://www.orthodox.net/catechism/prayers-of-the-church-lenten-prayers\\_by-the-waters-of-babylon\\_psalms136.mp3](http://www.orthodox.net/catechism/prayers-of-the-church-lenten-prayers_by-the-waters-of-babylon_psalms136.mp3)

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<sup>1</sup> “By the Waters of Babylon” is the entire Psalm 136, sung to a plaintive melody, after the Polyelos Psalm during Matins. It is only sung in church the three Sundays that precede Great Lent, Sunday of the Prodigal Son, The Last Judgment (Meatfare) and Forgiveness (Cheesefare). It is significant that this same hymn is chanted at the beginning of the service of monastic tonsure.

<sup>2</sup> This homily was written in 1965, when the church in Russia was still under captivity to the Communist regime.