

Fasting in the Orthodox Church

From various sources

I. Taking Lent Seriously

"To take Lent Seriously means that we will consider it first of all on the deepest possible level - as a spiritual challenge which requires a response, a decision, a plan, a continuous effort." (Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, Great Lent, p. 90)

"The important point is that during this pre-Lenten season we look at Lent as it were from a distance, as something coming to us or even perhaps sent to us by God Himself, as a chance for a change, for renewal, for deepening, and that we take that forthcoming chance seriously, so that on forgiveness Sunday when we leave our home for Vespers we may be ready to make ours - be it only in a small way - the words of the Great Prokeimenon which will inaugurate Lent: "Turn not away Your face from your servant, for I am afflicted" (Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, Great Lent, p. 91.)

Things to do:

Increase your participation in the services of the Church.

If possible, come each Wednesday evening for the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy, or to some of them. There is also a Pre-sanctified Liturgy on Friday mornings. There are, for most of the Saturdays in Lent, a Divine Liturgy on Saturday mornings. So there are many opportunities to increase participation during this season.

Plan to make confession at least once during Lent before Pascha.

Adopt a Lenten Lifestyle in your home.

Reduce the use of TV and Radio (or other entertainments) during Lent

Intellectual Effort: - Undertake some spiritual reading during Lent

Lent is the time for the search for meaning in terms of our relationships with others and in our private responsibilities. How do I serve God in my relationships?

Lent is a time to control our Speech – Silence is perhaps the oldest spiritual discipline

Fasting is a spiritual discipline that, combined with prayer and generosity, restores within us the "likeness" of God.

The discipline of fasting includes more than just the manner of what we eat and don't eat. St. John Chrysostom said:

"... the honor of fasting consists not in the abstinence from food, but in withdrawing from sinful practices; since he who limits his food only to an abstinence from meats... do you fast? Give me proof of your works! Is it said by what kind of works? If you see a poor man, take pity on him. If you see an enemy, be reconciled to him. If you see a friend gaining honor, envy him not. If you see a handsome woman, pass her by. For let not the mouth only fast, but also the eye, and the ear, and the feet, and the hands, and all the members of our bodies."

A Rule of Fasting according to Orthodox Practice

The fast is kept in many ways depending on personal strength, prayer life, family circumstances, health, age, etc. The following is a sample of some *possible* ways the fast is kept and some possible ways it is often modified.

This description of fasting uses the concept of “degrees” of fasting, the “1st degree” being the easiest and least difficult.

For the Strict-Fast days of Lent: The first week of Lent, the Wednesdays and Fridays in the other weeks, and the days of Holy Week.

1st degree: Uncooked meal in the morning plus a Vegetarian Lunch, a Vegetarian Dinner eaten after the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy or following Evening prayers. (3 meals, No Fish or Dairy)

2nd degree: No breakfast, a Vegetarian Lunch, Vegetarian Dinner after Liturgy. (2 meals, no Fish or Dairy)

3rd degree: No Breakfast, no Lunch, Vegetarian Dinner after Liturgy (1 meal, no Fish or Dairy)

For the Non Strict-Fast Days of Lent: Saturdays, Sundays, Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays outside of the first week; and March 25th & Palm Sunday):

1st degree: Strict Fast Breakfast, Lunch (Fish and Dairy are permitted), Dinner (Fish and Dairy are permitted), (2 meals with Dairy & Fish)

2nd degree: Strict Fast Breakfast, Lunch (Fish and Dairy are permitted), Dinner (No Dairy or Fish) - (One meal with Dairy & Fish)

3rd degree: Strict Fast Breakfast, Strict Fast Lunch, Vegetarian Dinner after Liturgy (No meals with Dairy or Fish)

In the Rubrics Book of the Church we read:

“At all times it is essential to bear in mind that ‘you are not under the law but under grace’ (Romans 6:14), and that ‘the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life’ (2 Cor. 3:6). The rules of fasting, while they need to be taken seriously, are not to be interpreted with dour and pedantic legalism; ‘for the Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Romans 14:17).”

IV. The Rules of Fasting

Guiding Rule of the Fathers: We should never eat to the point of feeling full but should always rise from the table feeling that we could have taken more and that we are now ready for prayer.

Who must not fast?

Pregnant or nursing women, those who have health problems and the elderly. Anyone for whom fasting might be harmful. Children under four.

If you have questions about the fast—please contact Fr. Stephen