

## SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: FASTING CHANGING HEARTS

Fasting is not a symbolic 'giving up' of something nor is it a scrupulous observance of dietary regulations.

**Fasting is connected with Worship, Scripture and Theology. To practice fasting it is assume that one is embarking upon a spiritual effort of prayer and desire for drawing near to God**

"Ultimately, to fast means only one thing: *to be hungry* – to go to the limit of that human condition which depends entirely on food and , being hungry, to discover that this dependency is not the whole truth about man, that hunger itself is first of all a spiritual state and that it is in its last reality *hunger for God*. (Schmemmann, Great Lent, p. 97)."

"The purpose (ascetical) fasting is to liberate man from the unlawful tyranny of the flesh, of that surrender of the spirit to the body and its appetites which is the tragic result of sin and the original fall. It is only through a slow patient effort that man discovers that he 'does not live by bread alone' – that he restores in himself the primacy of the spirit. (Schmemmann, Great Lent, p. 50)"

"This means that without the corresponding spiritual effort, without feeding ourselves with Divine Reality, without discovering our total dependence upon God (not our will power) and God alone, physical fasting would indeed to suicide. If Christ Himself was tempted while fasting, we have not a single chance of avoiding that temptation... Fasting is an art fully mastered by Saints; it would be presumptuous and dangerous for us if we attempted that art without discernment and caution (Great Lent, Schmemmann pg. 97)."

### **Spiritual Preparation for Fasting (Great Lent, p. 97)**

1. Asking God for help in our fast
2. Make the fast God-centered – we should fast for God's sake
3. Rediscover our body of the Temple of God's presence
4. Recover a respect for the body and food – for the very rhythm of life
5. All this must be done before the actual fast begins

Jan 22 – Sunday of Zacchaios: Repentance begins with a DESIRE to change

Jan 29 – Sunday of Cananite Women: We are "outsiders" due to our sin and desperately need God's help to free us from demonic captivity. You are the Temple of the living God, make holiness perfect through the fear of God.

### TRIODION: FOUR SUNDAYS SUMMURIZING REPENTANCE

February 5 – Publican & Pharisee: HUMILITY

February 12 – Prodigal Son: Return from Exile

February 19 – Judgment Sunday: Repentance fulfilled in love of neighbor

February 26 – Forgiveness Sunday: The beginning and end of Great Lent, reconciliation with God

### PRAYER - FASTING – ALMSGIVING

**Prayer: REMEMBERING GOD – Fasting: NOT BY BREAD ALONE – Almsgiving: UNION WITH GOD IS TO HAVE LOVE FOR EVERYONE**

"For he that is praying as he ought, and fasting, has not many wants, and he who does not have many wants, cannot be covetous. He that is not covetous will also be more disposed to almsgiving."

**A theology of Fasting in relationship to liturgy** (Schmemmann, Fast and Liturgy, *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter 1959, pp. 2-9)

"Can the wedding guests fast as long as the Bridegroom is with them? As long as the Bridegroom is with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them, and they will fast in those days" (Mark 2:18; Luke 5: 33; Mt. 9:14).

1. It is impossible to "fast" when Christ is present it is always a "feast of the heavenly banquet" – the Kingdom has come. *"Fasting is impossible in the joy of His presence"* (Schmemmann)
2. Fasting is always expectation, being in a state of waiting and preparation

John the Baptist (fasting eating locust and honey) as a symbol of the Old Testament was in expectation of the coming of the Messiah and awaiting His Kingdom.

### **Theology of Fasting**

"And it is this Scriptural teaching about fast, the Christological and Messianic context of fasting that defined the place and the 'function' of fasting in the Church from its very beginning...But, on the other hand, with the Ascension of Christ, a new period of expectation has begun: expectation of the 'parousia,' of the second glorious coming of Christ...Christians are still living in this world, they expect, they wait for, this 'parousia,' they pray and keep the vigil for they do not know when the Son of Man shall come. And this expectation is expressed therefore in a new fasting, in a new state of awaiting." (Schmemmann, *Fast and Liturgy, St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly, Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter 1959, pp. 2-9*)

3. Each celebration of the Eucharist must be preceded by fasting in anticipation of the coming of Christ. This is a complete abstinence of food from the evening before a Liturgy i.e. a Eucharistic (total) Fast – this is the fast of the Church.
4. The Eucharist as the celebration of the presence of Christ and His Kingdom, to celebrate a liturgy is to feast. During Great Lent (40 days) "Presanctified" liturgy is introduced as a way to keep the fast and also be sustained by the Eucharist over a prolonged period of time i.e. an ascetical fast. The Saturdays and Sundays of Lent we still keep the ascetical fast but the liturgy is celebrated in full as a Resurrection Feast. Most likely, Presanctified liturgies were prescribed during all four fasting seasons.
5. An **Ascetical fast**, fasting as a fight against the demonic powers, as a method of recovering our true spiritual nature. Christ's 40 day fast after his baptism is the foundation for a prolonged 40 fasting period meant for spiritual warfare – this is the fast of a Christian in the Church.

"In the Gospel, we find a clear statement that fasting and prayer are the only means for a victory over Satan... According to the Bible, it is through food that Satan conquered man and became his master. Man has tasted of the forbidden fruit, and in doing so has become enslaved to food, so that his whole existence depends on it... by fasting, i.e., by refusing voluntarily food man discovers that he lives not by bread alone. And then fasting becomes the denial of what has become 'necessary,' the real mortification (*crucifixion, dying to*) of that flesh which depends entirely and exclusively on the 'unescapable laws of nature.' In fast, man reaches that freedom which he has lost in sin... (Mt. 17:21, Schmemmann)."

"...if one is hungry and then discovers that he can truly be independent of that hunger, not be destroyed by it but just on the contrary, can transform it into a source of spiritual power and victory, then nothing remains of that great lie (depend on bread alone, I can have life apart from God) in which we have been living since Adam. (Schmemmann, *Lent in our Life*, pg. 96)

### **FASTING GUIDELINES**

- I. **Liturgical Fasting a total abstaining of food before every Eucharist. The early church called this total fast "statio"** – a military term of being in a state of alarm and mobilization. The Church is on "watch" awaiting joyfully the coming of the Bridegroom in the Eucharist and at the end of time.

II.

“Eternity (is the sanctification of time) does not empty or make absurd and meaningless either time or our life in time, but on the contrary gives them all their weight, all their real value. The Church fills with an eternal truth, with reality which she alone possesses, the apparently meaningless flow of time. The rhythm of the Church, the rhythm of the Eucharist which comes and is always to come, fills everything with meaning, puts all things to their real place. (Schmemmann).”

- Practiced as a complete Fast from Saturday Evening until Sunday Eucharist (8<sup>th</sup> Day)
- Fasting: Wednesdays (remembering the betrayal of Christ) & Fridays (Paraskevi means day of preparation, remembering the crucifixion of Christ). No meat or dairy.

### **Four Periods of Ascetical Fasts**

1. The 40 plus days before Easter (Pascha)
2. 40 days before Christmas (November 14-December 25)
3. The Feast of Saints Peter & Paul (Monday after Pentecost until June 29)
4. The 14 days of August before the Feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. (August 1-14)

### **Guidelines For Ascetical Fasting during Great Lent**

- A limitation of the number of meals per day
- A limitation of quantity of food. One should eat just enough so that they would be ready to enter into pray after a meal.
- A total fast is practiced on Presanctified liturgy days of Wednesdays and Fridays – a day spent in watchfulness and expectation of the coming of the Lord.
- The elimination of certain types of food: it is a strict non-dairy vegetarian or “vegan” diet
  - No meat of any kind
  - No dairy products
  - No seafood with blood only crustaceans like shrimp, crawfish, crab or lobster. Squid and octopus.

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 may not fast?

- Pregnant or nursing women
- Those who have health related issues
- Anyone whom fasting might be harmful
- Very young children

- 1.) Sunday of Publican & Pharisee (Feb 5, 2023) – No fasting on Wednesday or Friday
- 2.) Meatfare Sunday/Judgement Sunday (Feb 19, 2023) – Fasting from meat begins two weeks before Lent
- 3.) The Week Before Lent: Eggs and cheese and other dairy products are permitted even on Wednesday and Friday.
- 4.) Cheesefare Sunday/Forgiveness Sunday (Feb 26, 2023) – Last day for dairy products
- 5.) The Strict Fast Days of Great Lent begins Clean Monday (February 27, 2023)
- 6.) The week after Pascha no fasting

An ascetical or “strict” fast consists of a vegan diet i.e. bread, vegetables, soups, tofu, fruits, nuts, bread, humus, honey, jelly, rice, beans, pasta, shell fish & squid, juice and tea.

Foods not allowed during Great Lent: All meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, cheese, milk, butter, eggs, wine, and alcohol. The feast of Annunciation (March 25) fish and wine are allowed.