



Fasting According to the Ancient Discipline of the Byzantine Churches

With St. Paul, we urge all to leave the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. We are sinners in need of *metanoia* (repentance) in order to be rid of sin, the passions, and everything that enslaves us with regard to food and drink, clothing, pleasure, jealousy, anger, hatred, pride, obstinacy, calumny, amusements, and superficiality. He who commits sin is not free, but is the slave of sin. Great Lent is a time of purity, holiness, prayer, and liberation from sin, evil and corruption: a time very pleasing to God, a time of salvation, and a spiritual springtime preparing us to shine with the light of the glorious Resurrection. We exhort the faithful to take on the discipline of fasting and abstinence that our fathers and ancestors always practiced. My brothers and sisters, “repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!”

What is the traditional fast and abstinence?

Fasting: is abstaining from any food and drink from midnight until Vespers (prayers at sunset). So, the person fasting eats only a single meal a day after Vespers or after the Liturgy of the Presanctified.

Abstinence: is abstaining from meat, dairy products, and eggs, while fish is permitted on the Annunciation and Palm Sunday. Wine and oil are permitted on certain days.

Days of fasting during Great Lent: Monday through Friday throughout Lent and Holy Week. Great and Holy Saturday is the only Saturday of the year on which one must keep a fast; otherwise it is forbidden to fast on Saturdays. Sunday, the day of Resurrection, is never a fast day.

Days of abstinence: The whole of Great Lent, including Sundays and all of Holy Week, except Annunciation and Palm Sunday when fish may be eaten.

The Eparchial Guidelines encourage the traditional forms of fasting and abstinence but the minimum is expected:

Fasting from all food and drink from Midnight to noon on the first day of Great Lent and On the last three days of Holy Week. Abstinence, at least from meat, is urged during the First week of the Fast, Holy Week and all Wednesdays and Fridays until Pascha.

Our liturgical prayers also tell us that a Fast pleasing to the Lord is “to put away all evil, to control our tongue, to forbear from anger, to abstain from lust, slander, falsehood and perjury.”