

# the VOICE

Special Edition for Great Lent 2024 • Slightly Edited and Reprinted from 2023

## CHANGE OF SEASONS

The spirit, the mindset, the attitude, as well as the overall context of Lent is important to *get*. Especially if we've not yet experienced it. We always feel more comfortable in a neighborhood that we're familiar with, right? This issue of our newsletter has some resources that are meant to help you understand better what's going on during this season. Whether we've been through one Lent or many, or have yet to experience the season, we always have room to refine our approach.

On page 2 you can read how Great Lent is a very special and unique season in the Church Year that provides us with many opportunities for spiritual growth, and much more besides.

Page 3 will show you how during Lent we prepare ourselves to celebrate Christ's Resurrection, we call it Great and Holy Pascha. This is the most important day of the year for us and the reason why we are Christians.

There's important info there also about the two Sundays that precede the season of Lent and why they are important.

You'll come to page 5 and get to read a short but informative essay on the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete. We encounter this hymnography during the first and fifth weeks of Lent. These hymns are powerful and help us transform our thinking, our mindset, so that we can draw nearer to Christ with repentance.

On page 6 Fr Bill Olnhausen shares some great practical advice for each of us, but especially for those who are new to fasting. He also offers an answer to the question, "What will fasting do for you." Keep in mind that it's our approach to Lent that will determine our success.

You'll find general fasting guidelines on page 7.

Remember these are guides to fasting, not strict rules.

Saturday of Souls is part of this season, so we must remind ourselves why we do memorial services. You'll find this is on page 8.

All of these resources and information are here to help you approach Great Lent and to enter into the "*Stadium of Virtues*" as it is called, to challenge yourself and prepare yourself spiritually for Holy Week so that you can joyfully experience the brightest night of the year and come to Glorify the Holy Resurrection of Christ. This is our common goal.

You can see that we have a tremendous opportunity as we face the spiritual journey ahead of us. Let's make this journey together, and may God give us all strength! -Fr Stephen

## SPIRITUAL WISDOM

*"We must not avoid communion because we deem ourselves to be sinful. We must approach it more often for the healing of the soul and the purification of the spirit, but with such humility and faith that considering ourselves unworthy.... We would desire even more the medicine for our wounds... knowing that we are never worthy... we would then receive them every Sunday for the healing of our diseases, rather than, blinded by pride, think that after one year we become worthy of receiving them."*

-St John Cassian

## THE SEASON OF GREAT LENT

LITURGY OF ST. BASIL THE GREAT. Even

*Many people associate Great Lent strictly with fasting, in other words with deprivation of food. But while fasting is part of Great Lent, Great Lent is NOT about deprivation. It IS about discipline and spiritual growth; the discipline to stay away from certain kinds of food will train our minds to also stay away from certain kinds of behaviors. The logic here is that if we tame the thing we want the most often, food, we can tame other things that we want—greed, power, ego, lust, control, anger, etc.*

### **Lent is a time to look at our relationship with God.**

Does our life reflect loyalty and closeness to God our Father, or have we squandered our faith and His gifts to us in profligate living, becoming like the Prodigal Son?

### **Lent is also a time to look at our relationship with one another.**

Do we love our neighbor as ourselves? Are we concerned with his welfare—with feed, clothing, visiting and helping him?

### **The Lenten services provide both instruction and inspiration.**

- THE GREAT COMPLINE emphasizes stillness. This service is quiet and sedate. Most of the service is the reading of Psalms of repentance.
- THE PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGY provides us the opportunity to receive Christ through Holy Communion in the middle of the week, as a way to strengthen and support us in our time of fasting.
- THE SALUTATIONS TO THE VIRGIN MARY each Friday is a devotional to the Mother of God, who serves as the example par excellence of who God has called each of us to be.
- And of course, each Sunday provides us with the opportunity to hear THE DIVINE

more important than giving up food, we should each give up some time each week to attend additional worship services.

### **Rather than a time of deprivation, let us each use the Great Lent as a time of transformation.**

Rather than giving up things that we can't wait to get back after Pascha, let's instead consider making small improvements to our spiritual life and making those permanent. This way, after the 49 days of Great Lent and Holy Week, we have transformed ourselves in some way into more committed and focused Christians, rather than tired ourselves out anxiously awaiting to get back things we've given up.

### **Great Lent provides a great opportunity to take stock of our Christian journey.**

Another year has passed for everyone. We are all another year closer to our date before the Awesome Judgment Seat of Christ. Are we on the path to salvation or condemnation?

*Rather than feeling nervous or anxious, I choose (and I hope you will as well) to feel exhilarated. I hope that you will be motivated to make some small changes as you examine yourself inwardly.*

I hope that you will set some goals for where you want to be in 49 days. If anything, make this time a forty-nine-day journey to a better you, a person with a better understanding of your purpose and a better understanding of Christ.

Change a few habits and make those permanent lifestyle changes. So that you are reaping the rewards long after the journey has ended. *With this in mind, let us enter the arena of the great Fast to our great benefit!*

SOURCE: myocn.net

*“Even more important than giving up food, we should each give up some time each week to attend additional worship services.”*

## WHAT IS GREAT LENT?

*The first day of Lent this year is March 18.*

The season of Great Lent is the time of preparation for the feast of the Resurrection of Christ. It is the living symbol of a person's entire life which is to be fulfilled in our own resurrection from the dead with Christ. It is a time of renewed devotion: of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It is a time of repentance, a real renewal of our minds, hearts and deeds in conformity with Christ and His teachings. It is the time, most of all, of our return to the great commandments of loving God and our neighbors.

In the Orthodox Church, Great Lent is not a season of morbidity and gloominess. On the contrary, it is a time of joyfulness and purification. We are called to "*anoint our faces*" and to "*cleanse our bodies as we cleanse our souls.*" The very first hymns of the very first service of Great Lent set the proper tone of the season:

*Let us begin the Lenten time with delight, let us fast from passions as we fast from food, taking pleasure in the good words of the Spirit, that we may be granted to see the holy passion of Christ our God and his holy Pascha, spiritually rejoicing.*

*Thy grace has arisen upon us, O Lord, the illumination of our souls has shown forth; behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the time of repentance (Vespers Hymns).*

It is our repentance that God desires, not our remorse. We sorrow for our sins, but we do so in the joy of God's mercy. We mortify our flesh, but we do so in the joy of our resurrection into life everlasting. We make ready for the resurrection during Great Lent, both Christ's Resurrection and our own!

## CHEESEFARE & MEATFARE SUNDAYS

### **Meatfare & Cheesefare: the Basics**

Great Lent is fast approaching. Sunday the 10th is Meatfare and the following week is Cheesefare. These Sundays are really unique. We Orthodox Christian families are taking the time to prepare for Lent. That's right. We spend a few weeks preparing for a season of preparation!

Meatfare Sunday is the second Sunday before Great Lent. It is called Meatfare because it is the last day to eat meat before Lent. Who doesn't like a Sunday with food? Meatfare pancake breakfast at our church! This day is somewhat *akin to Shrove Tuesday for Latin Catholics. This Sunday is also called Judgment Sunday, or Sunday of the Last Judgment.* The gospel reading (Matthew 25:31-46) is Jesus describing our final judgment day.

Following this theme of judgment is forgiveness. *Cheesefare Sunday is also called Forgiveness Sunday.* The gospel reading (Matthew 6: 14-21) includes the message of forgiveness, fasting, and building up our treasures in heaven. How appropriate a reading for the day before the beginning of Lent! Cheesefare is also the last day to eat dairy products before Great Lent.

It is beautiful how these movable feasts connect the themes of judgment and forgiveness. We prepare for the Lenten season by contemplating our judgment and recognizing the ways in which we sin. Yet this is paired with a reminder of God's mercy and forgiveness.

*(Continued on page 4)*

(Continued from page 3)

### **Meatfare Sunday**

As mentioned, the gospel reading for this Sunday is the passage about *the Last Judgment*. It is sometimes labelled in the Bible as The Sheep and the Goats. In our society most people don't want to be called sheep. But on the day of judgment they certainly do! Jesus tells us that what we do to others is we do to Jesus. He describes the acts of mercy that the righteous have done for him: feed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked. Then he goes on to explain to "the goats" that they did not feed him when he was hungry, or give him water when he was thirsty. These people are surprised and claim not to have recognized Jesus as being hungry or thirsty.

In the busyness of our lives, it is easy to overlook the needs of others. Think for a moment, is someone at your work or church lonely? Struggling to get by? Do you know how your friends are doing, and do you make yourself available to help them if they need it? Is there someone you ignore or feel uncomfortable around? Perhaps God is challenging you to recognize the needs of one of His children.

This Sunday is a good time to reflect by yourself (and with your children) on the ways you are serving "the least of these" mentioned by Jesus in the gospel.

### **Cheesefare Week**

Although not specifically liturgical, Cheesefare week follows Meatfare Sunday. This is the last week to partake of dairy before Lent. Also, during this week we begin fasting from meat (for those who are able). Traditionally, this is the final week to have parties and celebrations that are not proper to the solemn nature of the Lenten season. Big parties, weddings, and other major celebrations are rarely permitted during

Lent. When they are allowed, they are often done on a much smaller scale.

Sometimes dancing, secular music, and other distractions from religious life are forgone during Great Lent. Because of this, people splurge on these activities during this week in anticipation of them being given up. (Again, this is rather like the Roman Catholic Shrove Tuesday). Many cultures have a special activity done each day of the week during Cheesefare. These vary from culture to culture but may include things like dancing, visiting certain relatives, or winter activities like sleigh rides and snowball fights.

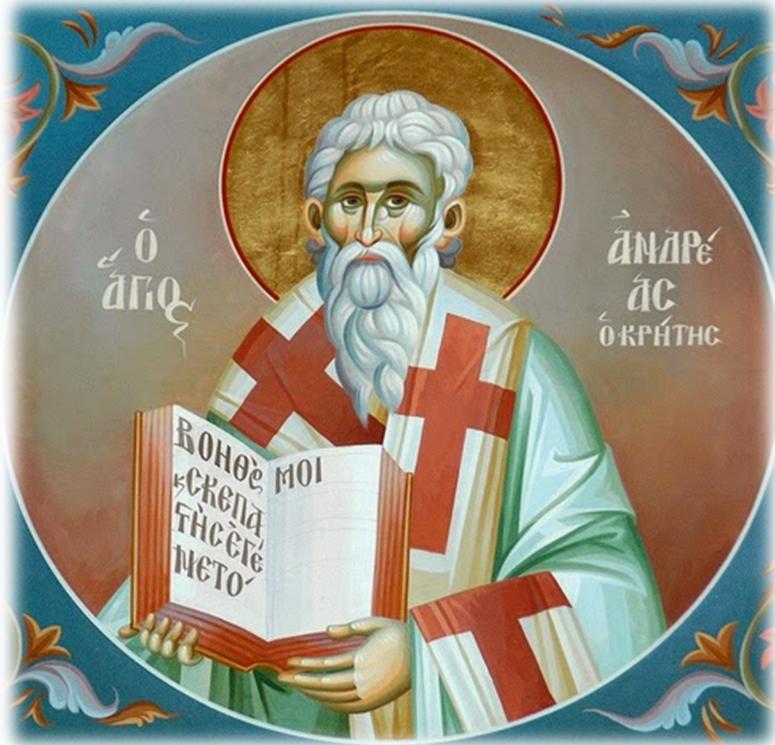
### **Cheesefare Sunday**

Aside from Cheesefare and Forgiveness Sunday, this day is *also called Adam's Lament*. We remember how Adam was banished from Eden, and join with Adam and Eve in expressing our sorrow over the sins which have separated us from God. This prepares us for our Lenten journey towards Pascha (Easter) when Christ's death and resurrection reopens for us the gates to Paradise and restores our relationship with God. We mourn the loss of Paradise in order to remember the joy of the hope which has been given to us through Christ.

The Rite of Forgiveness is celebrated following Vespers. During it the priest asks the people to forgive any sins he has committed against them, and the people do the same. The people offer forgiveness to the priest, and the priest offers the same forgiveness and reconciliation to us. This act of mutual forgiveness reminds us that we cannot reunite ourselves to God when we are not reconciled with each other. It is a beautiful way to begin the season of Great Lent!

The gospel reading calls for fasting and forgiveness, which reminds us why we celebrate Great Lent as we do. Fasting helps us to better

(Continued on page 6)



## FIRST WEEK OF GREAT LENT: THE GREAT CANON OF SAINT ANDREW

**The Great Canon of St Andrew**, Bishop of Crete, is the longest canon in all of our services, and is associated with Great Lent, since the only times it is appointed to be read in church are the first four nights of Great Lent (Clean Monday through Clean Thursday, at Great Compline, when it is serialized) and at Matins for Thursday of the fifth week of Great Lent, when it is read in its entirety (in this latter service, the entire life of St Mary of Egypt is also read).

There is no other sacred hymn which compares with this monumental work, which St Andrew wrote for his personal meditations. Nothing else has its extensive typology and mystical explanations of the scripture, from both the Old and New Testaments. One can almost consider this hymn to be a “*survey of the Old and New Testament*”. Its other distinguishing features are a spirit of mournful humility, hope in God, and complex and beautiful Trinitarian Doxologies and hymns to the Theotokos in each Ode.

☩ [The first week of] *Great Lent* is a time when we can shake off the shackles of sleep; a time when we can spiritually come to life, having listened once again to the kontakion of the Great Canon: "O My soul rise up, why art thou sleeping? The end draws near..." This is a time when we can make ourselves stop, interrupt the endless, daily rush, look into the state of our heart, understand how far we are from God, from the ideal to which He calls us unceasingly...

*This time, when the heavens open for us, is a time when the pain of repentance can most sting our soul and urge it to seek again for that freedom from sin and passions that can heal this pain. The Lord is so close to each penitent during these days...*

*So little is asked of us! Just to break away from everyday affairs, come to church in the evening, and let your soul drink in the words of the pastor of Crete [St. Andrew] like the parched earth drinks in the rain. Resolve to do what your soul, awakening and coming to life, will more and more insistently demand of you.”* -IGUMEN NEKTARY (MOROZOV)

*A canon is an ancient liturgical hymn, with a very strict format. It consists of a variable number of parts, each called an “ode”. Most common canons have eight Odes, numbered from one to nine, with Ode 2 being omitted. Most penitential canons, however, consist of all nine odes.*

(Continued from page 4)

hear God's voice, and forgiveness enacts God's will and grace in our lives. By letting go of our anger and other earthly attachments, we make more room for God in our lives.

### A Few Thoughts about the Presanctified Liturgy

Presanctified Liturgy is the favorite part of Great Lent for many people. Probably because we love vespers so much. But there are a lot of other great things about it!

Divine Liturgy is not celebrated during weekdays. This is because the Eucharist is a joyful gift, and a celebration of the resurrection. But while consecration of Holy Communion does not occur during the weekdays, the need for the Eucharist is not lessened. Therefore Eucharist is reserved on Sunday so it can be given to the faithful during weekdays. Especially given the intense nature of Lenten fasting, the purpose of weekday reception of the Eucharist is to give strength to the faithful. The prescribed fasting is difficult, but the grace and presence of Christ is an indispensable aid to the difficult task of fasting.

The way of receiving the Eucharist on a weekday during Great Lent is the in the Presanctified Liturgy. This Liturgy is served on Wednesdays and Fridays only and includes the Lenten vespers. Two readings are given from the Old Testament: one from Genesis, and one from Proverbs. There is also incense, prostrations, and a blessing with candles where the priest says "*the light of Christ enlightens all.*" When the Vespers is completed we transition to preparing to receive the Eucharist. There is a solemn procession of the previously consecrated gifts. Finally the faithful are ready to receive the Eucharist, at which time Psalm 34 is chanted:

*"Taste and see that the Lord is good, Alleluia."*

Making the time to attend Presanctified Liturgies is a great way to make the most of the Lenten season.

Source <https://thebyzantinelifelife.com/cheesefare-meatfare-sundays/>

## HOW TO KEEP THE *SPIRIT* OF THE GREAT FAST

by Father Bill Olnhansen

**F**ast with the Church, using the Church's fasting rules as a guide. Keep food simple. Eat light. Avoid snacks if you can. Remember that the Church's fasting rules may be adjusted for good cause: youth, age, health, pregnancy, travel, family situations and so on. You do not need a priest or bishop to dispense you. Use your common sense.

If fasting is new to you, start slowly this year and work up to the full Fast in due time. Make sure you get sufficient protein and calcium. If your fasting rule turns out to be too hard or too easy or impractical, it's alright to adjust it. If anyone serves you non-fasting food, eat it gratefully without mentioning the Fast. (Definitely do not do the "Oh, I can't eat that, I'm Orthodox" act.) Then go back to the Fast. Above all, keep the spirit of the Fast: Lobster and vodka are both technically legal but not always appropriate!

During Lent seek God and his will. Simplify your life. Cut back on entertainments. *Don't just give up things. Take on good things.* Try to concentrate on what's most important: God and your neighbor. Come to worship more often if you can. Most parishes offer the Wednesday night Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts. In Greek and Antiochian churches, on Friday nights the lovely

(Continued on page 8)

# FASTING GUIDELINES

## GREAT LENT AND HOLY WEEK 2024

**WEEKDAYS** (Monday – Friday) are observed as Strict Fast Days. On these days we abstain from meat, dairy, fish with backbones, fowl, wine, and olive oil.

On **WEEKENDS** (Saturday and Sunday) the fast is relaxed to permit wine and olive oil.

In addition, two special feast days that fall during this period, **Annunciation** (March 25) and **Palm Sunday** (April 28 this year). They are kept as Fish, Wine, and Oil Days. On these days the fast is relaxed to permit fish with backbones, in addition to wine and olive oil.

There are certain days of the Holy Week cycle that have special fasting rules:

**Great and Holy Thursday** (May 2 this year) is observed as a Wine and Oil Day due to the commemoration of the institution of the Eucharist.

**Great and Holy Saturday** (May 4 this year) is observed as a Strict Fast Day – the only Saturday of the year kept as a strict fast; however, wine (but not oil) is permitted.

### Additional Notes:

- Generally speaking, meals during the fast are cooked simply, and portions modest.
- Some will observe Great and Holy Friday as an absolute fast. If one does not have the strength to do this, it is good to abstain from food until after venerating the *Epitaphios* (winding sheet) during

Vespers on this day.

- If you have a medical condition that requires you to relax the fasting guidelines, then do so.
- Before you attempt to strictly follow the fasting guidelines, consider consulting with Fr. Stephen. It is very easy to lose sight of



the fact that fasting is merely a means to an end (that is, our salvation) and not an end in itself.

- Generally speaking, children, the elderly, and those with health challenges should relax the fast under the guidance of their spiritual father. +

(Continued from page 6)

Akathist to the Theotokos is sung, in celebration of the great feast of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary on March 25. Set aside time for extra prayer and study, and for your family and those you love. Take what you save by eating less and give to the needy.

## WHAT WILL FASTING DO FOR YOU?

*The purpose of fasting is to teach us to keep a discipline, so that when you need to give up something important you'll be able to do so.*

The purpose of fasting is not to make us suffer. This is why vegan Lenten desserts are permitted. A non-Orthodox friend, on hearing of our Lenten fasting, once asked me, "What do you eat?" Ask a silly question, get a silly answer: I replied, "Roots and berries." But seriously, there are many delicious vegan recipes on-line and in Orthodox recipe books. If you love Indian food, go Indian. On the other hand, if you have a special passion for Indian food, you may want to give that up and try to keep the discipline.

Fasting from food without fasting from sin leaves us worse off. A Pre-Lenten Matins hymn warns that fasting without love, humility and mercy makes us just *"like the demons who never eat at all"*. So, as you fast, work on overcoming a particular sin or failing, and if you fail (you probably will) go to Confession and try again. Remember, Christ taught that evil is driven out not by fasting alone, but by *"prayer and fasting"*.

**What will fasting do for you?** Don't expect quick results, but over the years it will help get your ego out of the way. Fasting will help you gain control over the desires for self-will and immediate self-gratification.

Fasting will unite you with Christ who sacrificed himself for you, with the many hungry people in the world, and with 250 million Orthodox Christians in every land with whom you are keeping the Fast. Strict fasting may produce a spiritual lightness before Lent is over, not to mention physical lightness, for fasting is good for the body, too. Fasting adds variety, and you'll learn that less is more: ordinary food tastes better after you have been fasting. And if you have kept the Lenten Fast, the Paschal Feast is just wonderful. It will give you the feel of what Christ's Eternal Banquet will be like after the "fast" of this earthly life.

Finally, if you want to have a good Lent, above all do not run around judging other peoples' fasting or lack of fasting. That is none of your business. It is between them and God. Note the last line of the Orthodox Church's Lenten prayer, below. Pray it every day.

### **The Prayer of Saint Ephraim of Syria**

O Lord and Master of my life do not permit the spirit of laziness and meddling, the lust for power and idle talk to come into me. (*prostration*) Instead, grant me, Your servant, the spirit of prudence, humility, patience and love. (*prostration*) Yes, Lord and King, give me the power to see my own faults and not to judge my brother. For You are blessed unto the ages of ages. Amen. (*prostration*) +

## WHY DO WE CONTINUE TO PRAY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE "FALLEN ASLEEP?"

We seem to have many memorial services these days! During these memorials and on special days called **'Saturday of Souls'**, we commemorate the souls of all Orthodox Christians who have gone before us into eternal rest.

In praying for those who have *"fallen asleep in the Lord,"* we continue to ask that God may have mercy on them in His divine judgement so they may gain the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our continued prayers also express our love for God and belief that the departed have not simply vanished but are alive in Christ.

We remember our loved ones by offering their names to be commemorated at Divine Liturgies and at memorial service, also by attending the holy services to offer our own prayers for their eternal rest, and, finally, by giving alms in their memory. +