A LENTEN MESSAGE FROM FATHER GEORGE

“Let us begin the all-holy season of fasting with joy; let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments of Christ our God: with the brightness of love and the splendor of prayer, the strength of good courage and the purity of holiness! So, clothed in garments of light, let us hasten to the holy resurrection on the third day, that shines on the world with the glory of eternal life. “ *From the Triodion*

Refrain from eating meat, fish, oil, wine, dairy, and eggs.

Fasting, or abstaining from food, was a discipline practiced by our Lord himself. It was after forty days of prayer and fasting in the wilderness, that Jesus victoriously faced the temptations of the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). He asked his disciples to use fasting, coupled with prayer, as a means to achieve spiritual victories (Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29; Luke 2:37), and the example of the Lord was followed by the disciples in their apostolic ministry and instruction to the early Christians (Acts 14:23; 27:9; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Corinthians 6:5, 11:27).

In its most basic sense, fasting is abstinence from food. But it is far more than that. It helps us to open our minds and souls to the guidance of the Spirit and to break away from our captivity to bodily appetites and selfish desires. Through fasting we overcome the burdens and pressures of physical gratification that are placed upon us in our world, and through our faith in Christ we are renewed and transformed into the holy people God created us to be.

Fasting is a regular practice for Orthodox Christians. Fast days and periods have been established by the Church throughout the year to help us direct our hearts and minds toward the life of prayer and worship, our spiritual needs, and the condition of our souls and relationship with God. During most weeks, Wednesday and Friday are fast days. On these days, we are guided to abstain from meat, dairy products and oil and wine. On some days, fish, wine, and oil may be permitted if a specific feast falls on a Wednesday or Friday or a portion of a fast is not as strict as other times.

The calendar and practice of the Church has fasting periods, which include the forty days of Great Lent and Holy Week, before Pascha, the Nativity Fast (November 15-December 24), the Apostles Fast (the Monday after the Sunday of All Saints to June 28) and the Dormition Fast (August 1-14). Because there is a great diversity in fasting disciplines people observe you should consult your parish priest about how to incorporate the discipline of fasting into your religious life.

In the practice of fasting it is important to remember that we are not fasting simply for the sake of fasting. Our observance of the fasting days and periods of the Church is for our spiritual growth and greater communion with God. No matter how austere our fast or how much in accordance our fast may be with purely technical "rules," it is void of faith and grace if we are not also committed to prayer and worship, study and growth in our knowledge of our Faith, and philanthropic and charitable acts.

As Orthodox Christians, let us cherish fasting as a vital part of our spiritual lives and practice. Let us experience the great joys that come through fasting as it contributes to a life of repentance and prayer. And in following the wise and spiritual traditions of the Church, let us offer all "to fight the good fight, to walk the way of fasting...to prove ourselves victorious over sin, and without condemnation to reach our goal of worshiping the Holy Resurrection," our goal of eternal life. (Prayer of the Presanctified Liturgy).

*From the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America's Faith & Life Series Fasting in the Orthodox Church.*

Χρόνια Πολλα! Καλή Σαρακοστή! Good Lent to us all!

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