

Holy Assumption Orthodox Church
Celebrating 125 years witnessing to the Apostolic Faith

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Marblehead, OH 43440

V. Rev. Archpriest Peter Tomas, Rector

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***Holy Assumption Orthodox Church is a parish of the Orthodox Church in America,
Diocese of the Midwest***

MARCH 2, 2025

THIRTY SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
Cheesefare Sunday, Forgiveness Sunday

EPISTLE: Romans 13:11-14:4

Bretheren: Now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.



**Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the
Paradise**

GOSPEL: Mt 6:14-21

The Lord said, If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Moreover, when

you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

LITURGICAL SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK

MON. Mar 3	Martyrs Eutropius, Cleonicus, and Basiliscus of Amasea; Gen 1:1-13, Prov 1:1-20 6:00 PM GREAT CANON OF ST. ANDREW
TUE. Mar 4	Venerable Gerasimus of the Jordan; Gen 1:14-23, Prov 1:20-33 6:00 PM GREAT CANON OF ST. ANDREW
WED. Mar 5	Martyr Conon of Isauria; Gen 1:24-2:3, Prov 2:1-22 6:00 PM PRESANCTIFIED LITURGY, Followed by Lenten soup social
THU. Mar 6	42 Martyrs of Ammoria in Phrygia; Gen 2:4-19, Prov 3:1-18 6:00 PM GREAT CANON OF ST. ANDREW
FRI. Mar 7	The Holy Hieromartyrs of Cherson: Basil, Ephraim, Capito, Eugene, Aetherius, Elpidius, and Agathodorus; Gen 2:20-3:20, Prov 3:19-34 6:00 PM AKATHIST TO THE PASSION OF CHRIST, Followed by Book Club
SAT. Mar 8	Saint Theophylactus, Bishop of Nicomedia; Rom. 14-19-26, Mt 6:1-13 4:00 PM VESPERS
SUN. Mar 9	<i>1st SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT – Tone 4, Sunday of Orthodoxy</i> 9:10 AM HOURS 9:30 AM DIVINE LITURGY Followed by Procession with the Holy Icons and Coffee hour



FOR YOUR PRAYERS

Basil Glovinsky, 1007 Glendale Drive, Port Clinton, OH 43452; **Irene Vangeloff**, 454 Strouse Lane, Sandusky, OH 44870

PRAYER LIST

Parishioners & Family: Tina Rindfleisch / Sharon Shaheen (Patti Owen's sister) / Norb / Heidi Golob / Ron & Bobbie Royhab / Rodney Clevenger / Jennifer Heffernan / Tom Hileman / Pam / Jim Twarek / Ed Garrity / Patti Owens / Barbara Wroblewski / Michal Tomáš / Helena Tomášová / Ruth Sheller / Basil Glovinsky / Dale / Sophie / Carol / David Martin / Fred Soski / Chris Hannon / Subdeacon Roger Pinta / Irene Vangeloff / Sonja Rose / Ron Royhab / James Bargdill / John Beadle / Carole Conaway / Gary Conaway / Sharon Dietrich / Michael Glovinsky / Shirley Gresh / Joseph Habegger / Betty Kovach / Child Stella Miller / William Pipenur / Earl Rindfleisch / Helen Jean Rofkar / George Royhab / Marianne Royhab / Kathy Jacob / the child Bodhi Cassell / Gleice, Sophie & Chloe / Carol / Nora.

Other Requests: Marcie / Tom Osborne / Sarah King / Catechumen Blake Shoemaker / Catechumen Nickolas Dawenport / Catechumen Joshua Paull / Catechumen Danielle Paull / Catechumen Wrenley Paull / Arimus Paull / Linkoln Paull / Catechumen Joshua Schulden / Catechumen Ryan Stamp / Matushka Melania / Sharyn Osborne / Christine Zahm / Amy / Bill Byrnes / Michael Heffernan / Susanne / Barbara Heffernan / Charles Schlett / Kathy Debevits / Maxwell Chaney / Anthony / Archpriest Ján Čižmár / Archpriest David Lis / Archpriest Emilian & Matushka Laryssa Hutnyan / Donald Gresh / Mark Ludvik / Robert Piznar / Mark Masica / Valerie Ritzenthaler / William / Rick Rowe / Chris.

Military: Craig Cassell / Jake Ellithorpe / Jordon Fulton / Justin Issler / Tikhon / Nicholas / & All Military



MARCH REPOSED

Michael Elchisko (1909) No date provided; Helen Millie (1910) No date provided; George Danchisen (1912) No date provided; **1-** George Danchisen (2018); **3-** Anna Stoyka (2018); **4-** Andrew Mazur (2001); **6-** Frank Guzy (2002); **6-** Robert Haynal (2022); **8-** Mat. Sonya Tutko (2021); **11-** Ella Mazur (1918); **13-** Richard Michael Benya (1983); **17-** Frank Holodnak (1961); **23-** Eva Pondillo (2001); **23-** Ella Mazurik (1985); **23-** Francis Mitchell (2008); **23-** Barbara Ann Wasylenko (2017); **29-** Todd Pollack (2019); **29-** Carolyn Woodward (2000); **30-** John Rofkar (2019)



VIGILS FOR FEBRUARY 23

Angela Bricker 3 For family, Memory Eternal Ed Vangeloff, Birthday blessings for Basil Glovinsky

Susan Guzy 1 Birthday blessings to Basil, In memory of Ed, Vichnaya Pamyat

Jean Hileman 1 Special Intentions

Laura Kovach 3 For health and/or healing of Andrew K., Matushka Melania, Ron R., Betty K., Margaret M., David M., Hannah S., Mark M., Dana M., Bodhi C., Kathie J., Jerry P., Irene V, Heidi & Wayne G., Sarah K. and Brett D.

Safe travels for family and friends

Memory eternal to Ed Vangeloff

Sandy Martin 1 Special Intentions

Gabe Mazurik 1 Special Intentions

Bobbie & Ron Royhab 5 In loving memory of Ed, for the health and healing of Tony S, Marianne R, Heidi G, Karla H

Natalie Twarek 8 In loving memory of Ed Vangeloff, For God's strength and peace for Irene and family, Birthday blessing for Basil, For the health of Nikki, For the health & recovery of Matushka Melania, For the health and recovery on Basil, Ron, Ruth and Mike, Rodney, Betty, Carol, Kayla, Pam, Jim, Heidi, Wayne, Father Emilian, Health and healing for Father's parents Michal & Helena and Matushka's mom Barbara, and Walter, For the health of Jen, Tony, Father David, Judy, Tina, Carole, Gary, Sharon, Tina's dad, Earl, Sonya, Margi & Joe, Jackie, MaryAnn & Bob, Bodhi, Stella, Jake, Pat



READERS LIST

Sunday Mar 2 – Tim

Sunday Mar 9 – Jake

Sunday Mar 16 – Tim



MARCH CANDLE SPONSORS

Altar Candles: Fr. Peter and Mat. Michelle, For Health and God's Blessings for Barbara Wroblewski, and Michal & Helena Tomáš **(\$50)**; **Chandelier:** Available **(\$50)**; **Eternal Light & Icon Screen:** Available **(\$25)**; **Candles at the Cross:** Laura Kovach, Birthday blessings to Greg and in memory of Russ **(\$20)**; **Candles at St. Tikhon Icon:** Available **(\$20)**



ATTENDANCE

02/22 Memorial Saturday Divine Liturgy **10** attending; **02/22** Vespers, **9** attending; **02/23** Divine Liturgy, **24** attending (3 guests)

UP-COMING EVENTS IN OUR PARISH – MARK YOUR CALENDAR



Mar 3rd Beginning of the Great Fast (*Monday*)

Mar 9th Daylight Saving Time begins (*Sunday*)

Mar 15th Memorial Saturday (*Saturday*)

Apr 13th Palm Sunday (*Sunday*)

Apr 20th HOLY PASCHA (*Sunday*)



MARCH BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

3 – Tony Monastra *; **7** – Tamera Blackford; **8** – Ruthe Sheller; **15** – Blake Shoemaker; **23** – Wrenley Paull; **27** – Josh & Danielle Paull Anniversary; **29** – Donna Schoonmaker; **30** – Bobbie Royhab; **30** – Fred Cassell; **31** – Greg Mazur



COFFEE HOUR SPONSOR LIST

Mar 2– Parish Potluck Lunch for the Cheesefare Sunday
Mar 9– Roddie
Mar 16– Matushka Michelle
Mar 23– Danielle & Josh (Wrenley's 2nd Birthday)

Please sign up to host coffee hour. Signup sheet is located in the Social Hall



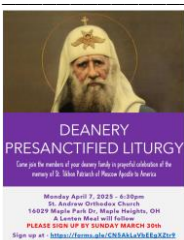
CHARITY OF THE MONTH

“Danbury Food Pantry” is the charity we donate to for the month of March.



CLEANING SCHEDULE

Mar 3, Natalie
Mar 10, Basil & Tim
Mar 17, Susan
Mar 24, Jean



DEANERY PRESANCTIFIED EVENT

You are invited to the Deanery Presanctified Divine Liturgy which will take place on Monday, April 7, 2025, from 6:30pm at St. Andrew Orthodox Church, 16029 Maple Park Dr., Maple Heights, OH hosted by Cleveland Deanery. A Lenten Meal will follow.

If you are planning to attend, please sign up at <https://forms.gle/CN5AkLaVbEEgXZtr9>
See the Flyer on our bulletin board!

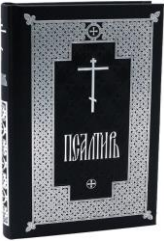


SUNDAY OFFERING

Sunday, February 23, 2025

Tithe	\$ 795.00
Donations	\$ 420.00
Candles	\$ 26.00
Vigils	\$ 135.00
St. Vladimir Seminary (Feb)	\$ 50.00
Candles at the Cross	\$ 20.00
Total:	<u>\$1,546.00</u>

May the Lord reward you for your financial and spiritual support!



GREAT LENT – READING OF THE HOLY PSALTER

Part of our daily spiritual life is prayer and reading of the Holy Scriptures. As we enter the Holy 40 Days of Lent tomorrow, we would like to invite you to be a part of the daily reading of the entire book of psalms as a parish family. The Holy Psalter is divided into 20 parts and each participant is required to read his/her part on their assigned day during this Fasting Season. The sign-up sheet with the prescribed parts of the Holy Psalter is located in the church vestibule.



MATUSHKA'S CORNER

Saint Matushka Olga - Tanqilria Arrsamquq

It is with immense joy and humility that the Diocese of Sitka and Alaska announces the Glorification of our Blessed Mother Olga.

The sacred celebrations will take place June 19-22, 2025. His Beatitude Metropolitan TIKHON and other hierarchs will be in attendance. The first two days of the Glorification will be held in Saint Olga's home village of Kwethluk. The solemn festivities will then continue in Anchorage on June 21 and conclude on June 22. For any information, or if you have a desire to attend this glorification, please see Matushka Michelle.

This gathering will be a blessing to all as we come together in the love of Christ, celebrating the life and legacy of Tanqilria Arrsamquq, our beloved Saint Olga, Matushka of all Alaska!

St. Olga of Alaska, pray unto God for us!

Now the Great and Holy Fast is upon us, keep in mind that:

Spiritual disciplines, like any physical disciplines like sports or weightlifting, are better engaged in when trained by an experienced guide. Otherwise, there is a danger of doing too much too quickly and trying to master difficult skills while not understanding basic fundamentals of the discipline.

The point of fasting is to learn obedience and humility as well as discipline. It's hard to learn obedience or humility while you are making up your own rules! This is why we lean on our Spiritual Father for guidance. Stay obedient and true to the Orthodox fast!

I beg, in humility, forgiveness to any of you that I may have offended or given cause to any grievances, whether it be from ignorance, naivety or pride, please forgive me, a sinner.

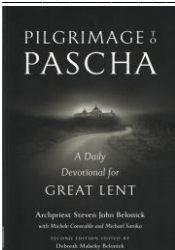
Next week.... hmmm maybe a recipe for "Marry me beans!"



12th ANNUAL GOLF CLASSIC

St. Herman House in Cleveland is inviting you to their 12th Annual Golf Classic & Auction on Monday, July 14th, 2025 at the Elyria Country Club! We invite you to be a part of our largest annual fundraiser, where all proceeds help us carry out our mission to shelter and support homeless men on the path to well-being and independence, as well as meet the basic needs of people in our community.

Registration details will be upcoming. Please, see the flyer on the bulletin board!



LENTEN BOOK CLUB AND MEDITATIONS

We invite you to participate in our Book Club every Friday during the Great Lent. Our sessions will take place after the service of Akathist to the Passion of Christ which begins at 6:00 PM. This year we will use the same book as we used last year “Pilgrimage to the Pascha” and will be focusing on the meditations of every Wednesday of the Great Lent. Please try to attend these sessions as they are for your spiritual benefit.

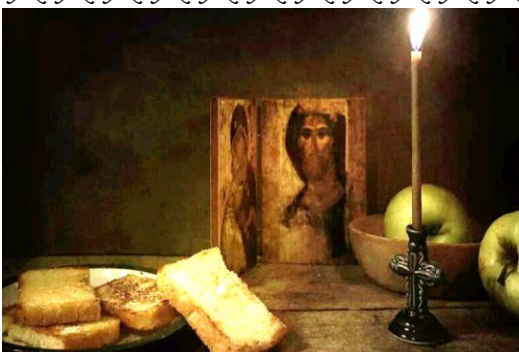


Sunday of Cheesefare: Expulsion of Adam from Paradise Commemorated on March 2

As we begin the Great Fast, the Church reminds us of Adam’s expulsion from Paradise. God commanded Adam to fast (Gen. 2:16), but he did not obey. Because of their disobedience, Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden and lost the life of blessedness, knowledge of God, and communion with Him, for which they were created. Both they and their descendents became heirs of death and corruption.

Let us consider the benefits of fasting, the consequences of disobedience, and recall our fallen state. Today we are invited to cleanse ourselves of evil through fasting and obedience to God. Our fasting should not be a negative thing, a mere abstention from certain foods. It is an opportunity to free ourselves from the sinful desires and urges of our fallen nature, and to nourish our souls with prayer, repentance, to participate in church services, and partake of the life-giving Mysteries of Christ.

At Forgiveness Vespers we sing: “Let us begin the time of fasting in light, preparing ourselves for spiritual efforts. Let us purify our soul, let us purify our body. As we abstain from food, let us abstain from all passion and enjoy the virtues of the spirit...”



The Great Fast Through the Ages: What Has Changed? by Anastasia Parkhomchik

With the approach of Great Lent, Christians prepare their hearts—some with eager anticipation, others with reverence or even trepidation—as they once again embark on the path of repentance. This season offers an opportunity to present to God a small sacrifice in response to His boundless love and suffering for our salvation. It is also a time to detach, however briefly, from worldly concerns and turn our gaze toward the heavenly, striving for spiritual growth.

Today, we observe a 48-day fast before Pascha, including Holy Week, adhering to strict dietary rules that apply equally to monastics and laypeople. But was this always the case? In this article, we explore the early Christian traditions of Lenten fasting and how they evolved over time.

The Origins and Early Practices

Fasting before Pascha developed gradually in the Christian Church. Until the third century, different regions observed various practices in preparation for the Feast of the Resurrection.

In the first and second centuries, many Christians fasted with complete abstinence from food for one or two days, or for a total of 40 hours from the evening of Great Friday until the conclusion of the Paschal Liturgy. This was seen as a symbolic participation in Christ's suffering and a literal fulfillment of His words: *"Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast"* (Matthew 9:15). Early Christians believed that Christ was taken from them at His death on the Cross on Friday evening and remained absent until His Resurrection, thus justifying the 40-hour fast.

Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (†202) noted the variety of fasting practices among early Christians: *"Some think they should fast one day, others two, some more; some count their day as 40 hours, both day and night."* He also emphasized that these differences did not cause discord in the Church: *"This diversity in observance is not something of our time, but dates back to our forefathers... Yet despite this, all lived in peace with one another, and we continue to do so, for the difference in fasting affirms the unity of faith."*

By the mid-third century, some local Churches extended the fast to six days, forming the foundation for what would become Holy Week. This extension was a natural outgrowth of pious Christians desiring a longer period of preparation. However, many believers still adhered only to the shorter one- or two-day fast, considering prolonged abstinence excessive.

Saint Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria (†265), described the fast in his time: *"The six days of fasting are not observed uniformly; some fast all six days, others not at all. Those who have grown weak from prolonged fasting and are near death from exhaustion may break the fast earlier, while others fast continuously only on Friday and Saturday."* This illustrates the severity of early Lenten practices, to the point that some were granted dispensation to break the fast before Pascha for the sake of their health.

By the fourth century, fasting during Holy Week had become a universal practice in the Church, though the sick and pregnant women were granted leniencies.

The development of the forty-day fast was partly influenced by the combination of pre-Paschal and pre-baptismal fasting traditions.

The Influence of Baptismal Preparation on Lent

In the early centuries, catechumens preparing for baptism were required to undergo extensive instruction, lasting two to three years, during which they prayed in the Church and learned the tenets of the faith. Prior to baptism, they observed a period of fasting, though its duration varied by region. The idea of fasting before making life-changing commitments had roots in the Old Testament, as seen in the fasts of Moses and Elijah, as well as Christ's own forty-day fast in the wilderness.

Saint Justin Martyr (2nd century) recorded that Christians supported catechumens in their preparation by fasting and praying alongside them: *"Those who are convinced of the truth of our teaching and promise to live accordingly are instructed to pray and fast for the remission of their past sins, and we pray and fast with them. Then we lead them to a place where there is water, and they are born anew... just as we ourselves have been."*

Since baptisms were often performed on the night of Pascha, it was natural for pre-baptismal fasting to merge with the Lenten fast. The desire of the faithful to support catechumens in their spiritual struggle contributed to the establishment of the forty-day fast.

Another contributing factor was the growing influence of monastic asceticism. Many revered spiritual fathers, including Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Jerome, and Saint Ambrose of Milan, encouraged a

longer period of fasting in memory of Christ's Passion. Saint Ambrose (†397) exhorted his flock: *"If you desire to be a Christian, do as Christ did. He, though sinless, fasted for forty days—yet you, a sinner, refuse to fast? Consider... what kind of Christian are you if you indulge yourself while Christ hungered for your sake?"*

From 40 Hours to 40 Days

By the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the Local Churches had formally established the observance of the Forty-Day Fast (Holy Quadragesima) as obligatory for all Christians. References in the canons of the Ecumenical Councils and the writings of the Holy Fathers attest to the fact that a Christian who neglected to keep the Great Fast could face temporary excommunication from the Church.

Interestingly, in the early centuries, the duration of the Great Fast varied among different Churches, ranging from six to eight weeks. This discrepancy arose due to differences in how fasting days were counted. In the Eastern Churches, Saturdays and Sundays were not considered fasting days and were thus excluded from the count. Evidence of this practice is found in the account of the fourth-century Roman pilgrim Egeria (Etheria), who documented her observations of Lenten practices in Palestine:

"Here, the fast lasts for eight weeks before Pascha... On Sundays and Saturdays, except for one [Holy Saturday], fasting is not observed. That final Saturday is kept as a strict fast in preparation for the Paschal Vigil. Thus, when we exclude eight Sundays and seven Saturdays, we are left with forty-one fasting days, which are called 'eortae' [from the Greek, meaning 'festal days'], or as we would say, Holy Quadragesima."

From this, we see that in the early centuries, Christians observed a 40-day fast before Pascha, including Holy Week. Today, the Church prescribes a seven-week fast, lasting 48 days: 40 days constitute Holy Quadragesima (including weekends), followed by the six days of Holy Week. The Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday, which fall between them, do not belong strictly to either period. Though observed with abstinence, these two days allow certain dietary concessions.

Lenten Dietary Regulations in the East and West



The Eastern Churches embraced the forty-day fast with great enthusiasm, while the West was slower to adopt it, often maintaining more lenient fasting practices.

The fourth-century Roman pilgrim Egeria provided a unique account of the Lenten fasting customs in Palestine:

"On Saturdays, the Liturgy is celebrated early, before sunrise, to release those known as the 'Ebdomadarii' from their fast. These individuals fast for the entire week, consuming food only on Sundays after the dismissal of the service at the fifth hour [11 a.m.]. Having partaken of food on Sunday, they abstain again until the following Saturday morning, when they receive Communion in the Church of the Resurrection..."

There is also a special custom among those who call themselves 'Apotactites,' both men and women; they eat only once a day, not just during Lent, but throughout the entire year.

Among those who cannot endure a full week without food, some eat at midday on Thursdays. Others who are unable to do even this fast for two consecutive days within the week. Those who cannot manage that take their meal in the evening. No specific number of fasting days is imposed—each fasts according to their strength. No one is praised for doing more or condemned for doing less, for this is the custom here. During Holy Quadragesima, neither leavened bread, olive oil, nor fruits of the trees are consumed—only water and a small amount of porridge."

Egeria's account highlights only the more striking ascetic practices that captured her attention. Other contemporary sources indicate that Lenten fasting traditions were quite diverse across different regions.

These practices continued through the fifth to eighth centuries. Over time, however, instead of complete abstinence from food on certain days, new customs developed, such as refraining from specific types of food—most notably meat. Others abstained from eating until a designated hour. For example, in the fourth century, Saint Ephraim the Syrian instructed children to refrain from food at least until 9 a.m. during Holy Quadragesima, while those with greater endurance fasted until noon or even 3 p.m. Monastics observed even stricter disciplines, abstaining not only from dairy but also from cooked foods, restrictions that were not typically imposed on laypeople.

Today, the Russian Orthodox Church follows the Jerusalem Typikon, established in the sixth century by Saint Sabbas the Sanctified in his Lavra in Palestine, which later spread throughout the Orthodox East.

Simplifying its directives, the Typikon prescribes limiting meals to once a day in the evening and observing dry eating (bread, water, and raw vegetables without oil). Certain days require complete abstinence from food and water, such as Monday and Tuesday of the first week, as well as Thursday and Friday of the same week, and Great Friday of Holy Week. Fish is permitted only on the feast of the Annunciation (unless it coincides with Holy Week) and on Palm Sunday.

After the first week of Lent, from Monday to Friday, a single daily meal of simple food without oil (bread, water, and vegetables) is prescribed, except in specific cases. On Saturdays and Sundays, two meals are allowed, including the use of vegetable oil and a small amount of wine (up to one cup), as Saturdays and Sundays are not considered full fasting days—a distinction also reflected in the structure of liturgical services on these days.

In Russia, adherence to these fasting rules was exceptionally strict. Even monks from the Antiochian Church were astonished by the rigor of the Russian fast. Archdeacon Paul of Aleppo, who visited Russia in the seventeenth century with his father, Patriarch Macarius of Antioch, recorded his experience:

“During this fast, we endured great suffering, following the Russians against our will, particularly in food. We found no sustenance other than gruel, resembling boiled peas and beans, for in this fast, they completely abstain from oil. Because of this, we experienced indescribable torment... How often we sighed and lamented over the meals of our homeland, swearing that no one should ever again complain about fasting in Syria.”

Balancing Strictness and Mercy

Over time, the Orthodox Church recognized that such strict regulations were too burdensome for all believers, especially laypeople. Thus, the Church established a minimum standard of dietary abstinence that every Christian is expected to observe—namely, refraining from meat, dairy, and eggs. Allowances for fish and cooked vegetable meals with oil are considered a concession to human frailty.

Even within monastic traditions, certain accommodations were made. For example, in the Solovetsky Monastery in northern Russia, where the climate was particularly harsh, significant leniencies were granted. Records indicate that during the first week of Lent, meals were not served on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday. On Tuesday and Thursday, monks ate bread with warm berry broth, pickled cabbage, and porridge. Throughout the remaining weeks, on fasting days, they were permitted one hot meal and two cold dishes, while on Saturdays (except Holy Saturday), they consumed warm food with oil. On Sundays, fish was also permitted.

Nonetheless, it is always recommended that any dietary modifications be undertaken with the guidance of a spiritual father, with a focus on balancing physical fasting with spiritual endeavors.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the history of Great Lent, we see that its development stemmed from a continuous desire among Christians to imitate Christ and offer Him a worthy sacrifice in gratitude for His suffering. As St. Paul writes, “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). At the same time, the fast is not about legalism but humility, repentance, and spiritual renewal. Whether through strict abstinence or modest efforts, the goal remains the same: to draw closer to God, offering Him our “first fruits” in gratitude for His boundless love. Christ gave Himself up for our sins, and we, if we are truly His disciples, should joyfully dedicate this ‘tithing of the year’ to Him—lightening the burdens of the flesh, lifting up our hearts, and allowing God to renew His image within us.

May this Lenten journey uplift your heart, refine your spirit, and prepare you to meet the risen Lord with joy.



Lent Is an Inner Striving for God *by Archpriest Andrey Lemeshonok*

Sermon of the day

Great Lent shows man the path to Pascha – to the Resurrection. During this time, man limits his food as well as entertainment, but this fasting is not merely abstinence from food; it is the restoration of inner peace in our hearts. This journey of a soul towards God is a struggle with sin. Sin distracts a person from God, destroying his inner peace. Thus, we must control our words, thoughts, and feelings, as this is the basis of our inner struggle towards God. In order for our hearts to be able to embrace the love of Christ, they must be open to embracing the virtues of love, compassion, humility, and patience.

We are all inclined to sin. Therefore, the purpose of the fast is to focus on the struggle with our sinful nature, so that we may gain that inner spiritual freedom and beauty, which can only be bestowed through the love of Christ.

The mind and feelings of an intemperate and proud man wanders. He looks for sinful foods to satisfy his emotions and desires and seeks opportunities to quarrel with others. For sin develops roots that entwine the inner world of the soul, distorting man's perception of the world and hindering his focus. Fasting is not just outward abstinence. The external abstinence of food, entertainment and pleasures enables man to focus inwardly, in the silence of his heart, allowing him to make way for God to dwell in his heart through prayer and repentance.

When sin enters a man, it destroys his inner world and prevents him from being attentive and sensitive to what is happening both within his soul, as well as outside. Consequently, in such a state, we often cannot see our fellow man. We hurt people through our words, looks and behavior, without even noticing it. We live in a way, which we think is more convenient, simple, and profitable and when we encounter someone in need of help or for whom something needs to be done, we simply ignore them or consciously move away. We have an imaginary sense of freedom and independence, not wanting to listen and humble ourselves before those next to us.

A life built on self-esteem, self-exaltation, and pride, mortifies a person, making him unable to see or hear another. God too becomes dead for a man who has no repentance or love. One who is consumed by his own ego, does not know anyone but himself. Thus, the aim of fasting through outward abstinence is to soften our hearts, in order to "fertilize" our souls and make them capable of embracing the love and grace of God, which alone revives and resurrects us, making us partakers of the "life of the age to come".

The Church speaks about the heavenly world, but the heavenly world begins here, on earth. It begins when the Lord enters a person's heart. Enlightening him to begin to sympathize and empathize. The love of Christ is sacrificial, when it touches our hearts, we can reach out to others and support them. The Lord Himself said "...love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). The fruits of God's love and of the Holy Spirit are inner peace and Divine beauty, transmitted through our words, thoughts, and deeds. Indeed, a person who bears God within himself, becomes a source of love and peace. To acquire the peace of Christ, one must open one's heart to the love of God. Which means that we must help those who are near. As St Seraphim of Sarov says, "Acquire a peaceful spirit, and thousands around you will be saved."

The school of love is worship. During the fast, we ask God to help us in our struggle with ourselves, with the sin, which is in us, that prevents us from being free in and with God.

Passion enslaves and binds a person, making him incapable of creating something new in this world. Destruction begins when sin takes possession of a person. Therefore, our struggle for inner peace is the beginning of building within ourselves the wholeness and purposefulness that we need in order to get to the source of life and to draw from it the love that animates and resurrects us.

This path of fasting is the path to eternal life, and we do not walk this path alone. Abstinence is not some external gloominess or some outward harsh rules of life. Rather, it is gratitude to God for what you have; a careful attitude towards everything you have received in this life. It is a humble bearing of those sorrows, illnesses, and losses, which are inevitable in this world. One sinful thought or word is enough for us to lose contact with God and other people. That is why we need to be careful about what we say and where we go in this world. Sin tries to deceive us and becomes our desire. Yet, we must consider whether there can be joy, where there is no love of God? Can there be joy where my ego results in the rejection of my fellow human being? Is it even possible to use the word "joy" for something that is built on sin, selfishness, and disregard for others?

Let us think of the consequences of our choices in this world. Let us not, thoughtlessly, rush when it seems we can do something and get instant pleasure. The Psalmist teaches, "*Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy*" (Psalms 125:5) Therefore, by satisfying our sinful desires, we kill our immortal soul and close our heart's doors to love, thus killing it.

Fasting helps us to take a sober look at ourselves, focusing the strength of our soul on our inner being and acknowledging our sin. We pray, "Grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother" (From the prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian – Ed).

Too often, we are judgmental, rebuking and seeing the faults of another. Yet, we fail to see ourselves and justify our sins. This deceit has become the norm of our life, and thus, we live following our own desires, in accordance with the sin that controls us.

So, entering Lent, let us look at the examples of the holy fathers who spoke about the importance of the inner struggle. "If you have love within you, it will get you through any situation in life, without losing peace and love for your neighbor and your whole life will be turned into a journey towards the eternal kingdom of God's love".

May God help us all!

Do you fast? Then feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, visit the sick, do not forget the imprisoned, have pity on the tortured, comfort those who grieve and who weep, be merciful, humble, kind, calm, patient, sympathetic, forgiving, reverent, truthful, and pious, so that God might accept your fasting and might plentifully grant you the fruits of repentance. Fasting of the body is food for the soul. St. John Chrysostom