

## HOW TO FAST DURING LENT

Adapted by Fr. Mark from a pamphlet by Fr. Al Demos

If one truly desires to FAST, he or she must not sin! The spiritual fast is the truest form of fasting—from evil thoughts, words, and deeds. Being weak and vulnerable beings, we find ourselves prone to sin. The Church recognizes our need to experience a physical fast to assist us in training ourselves to fast spiritually. However, the terminology we use is a misnomer. We do not fast, we abstain. To fast physically one does not eat at all. For example, we truly fast from midnight until we receive Holy Communion during the Divine Liturgy by partaking of nothing. So when we speak of fasting preparation of a feast day, such as Pascha, we are actually abstaining from certain foods. I would like to offer these suggestions for your Lenten fasting.

1. Try to do the best you can without condemning yourself or others.
2. Read the suggested degrees of fasting listed below and select one that you believe you can accomplish. Then try to do a bit more than that.
3. During each fasting period try to upgrade your previous degree of fasting until you reach a level which inspires you to seek an even higher degree of fasting and higher spiritual goals.

NOTE: Pregnant women, people who are ill or on medications or specialized diets, or who have other valid reasons are exempted from fasts which could harm their health. In most cases, the fast may more often aid one's health, especially in light of recent physiological findings. Strict abstinence is not allowed on Saturday (the seventh day of Creation and the day of rest) nor on Sunday (the weekly celebration of Christ's Resurrection). The strictest monks touch oil to their lips on these days in order to break the fast. Even the strictest fast should be broken on The Annunciation (March 25) and Palm Sunday (April 4, 2004); on these days, fish is allowed.

*In all cases, please consult with your parish priest for guidance.*

### 1. The Minimal Degree:

- a. The 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Great Lent—abstain from meat
- b. Throughout Great Lent on Wednesdays & Fridays—abstain from meat
- c. Holy Week—abstain from meat, fish, oil, and dairy products.

### 2. The Light Degree:

- a. The 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Great Lent—abstain from meat, fish, oil, and dairy products
- b. Throughout Great Lent on Wednesdays & Fridays—abstain from meat
- c. Holy Week—abstain from meat, fish, oil, and dairy products.

### 3. The Moderate Degree:

- a. The 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Great Lent—abstain from meat, fish, oil, and dairy products
- b. Throughout Great Lent on Wednesdays & Fridays—abstain from meat, fish, oil, and dairy products
- c. The Week after Cross-Veneration Sunday (March 14-20 in 2004)—abstain from meat every day of the week
- d. Holy Week—abstain from meat, fish, oil, and dairy products.

### 4. The Conservative Degree:

- a. The 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Great Lent—abstain from meat, fish, oil, and dairy products
- b. Throughout Great Lent every day—abstain from meat, fish, and dairy products, but consume oil.
- c. Holy Week—abstain from meat, fish, oil, and dairy products.

### 5. The Strict Degree:

Throughout Great Lent and Holy Week every day—abstain from meat, fish, oil, and dairy products

6. The Canonical Degree:

Throughout Great Lent and Holy Week every day—a “glass” of water and a “morsel” of bread each day after sundown.

Note 1: The term “**dairy products**” includes milk, butter, eggs, cheese, yogurt, and the like.

Note 2: Fasting on **Holy Saturday** is the strictest of the year. The fast must be continued the whole day, even after you have received Holy Communion at the morning Liturgy.

Note 3: Abstention from **oil** is interpreted in different ways: some take it to mean the exclusion of olive oil from food preparation, others take it to include all kinds of cooking oil (corn, canola, sesame, ... ). Still others take it to be merely an exclusion of fried foods, but not of oil used to dress a salad. For your health’s sake, at least exclude fried foods from your Lenten diet.

Note 4: **Shellfish** are allowed throughout Lenten periods (scallops, shrimp, lobster, crab, conch, mussels, prawns, clams, oysters, crawfish, abalone); traditionally, octopus and squid are included with shellfish as allowable fasting foods. In the Old World, these kinds of foods are cheap and easy to find: not so in America, where you pay more for a little lobster than for a rib-eye steak. Yet in the Orthodox homelands, even strict-fasting laypeople know the importance of getting some protein in the diet, and they avail themselves of shellfish, especially on weekends. Since we in America cannot obtain shellfish as easily (and since one of the goals of fasting is to save money to share with the needy!), Fr. Mark recommends that parishioners avail themselves of cheap forms of fish (canned tuna, salmon, sardines) instead so that they do not suffer protein deficiencies on the Lenten diet.

Note 5: You will notice that your ability to fast depends in no small part on the quality of your diet during non-fasting days and seasons. If you usually eat heavy meals, fasting will not come easily. If you lighten up your normal diet (eat less meat, fats, dairy), you will find fasting easier. Above all, during fast seasons do not make the mistake of increasing your intake of sugary things. In fact, do the opposite! Even though they are considered *nistisima* (“fasting”) foods, **cut out sweets** as well (and hidden sugars, in things like pretzels and peanut butter), and you will find your blood sugar less problematic during fasting seasons. To help your blood sugar stay even, give up the caffeine (coffee, tea, colas) also. Your digestive tract will thank you!!

Note 6: Above all, **drink more water!!** Both during Lent and the rest of the year, too.

Please do your best, and do not judge or condemn others for their lack of fasting. Spend more time on your spiritual self,

- ... in attending frequently the church for WORSHIP at Lenten services
- ... in giving more attention to PRIVATE PRAYER,
- ... in donating more money to those in gifts of CHARITY,
- ... in reading your BIBLE every day,
- ... in picking up a book on the Orthodox faith and LEARNING more on your own,
- ... in TURNING OFF THE TV and spending more time with family and friends.

May God grant you a most Blessed and satisfying Lent. *Kalee Sarakostee!*