

On fasting**CALENDAR**

Saint John Chrysostom says: "When you hear about the fast do not be afraid of it as if it were a fearsome commander: it is not terrible for us, but for the evil spirits. Has the evil spirit possessed you, show him the face of fasting, and the one - scared stiff and tied, as it were, with iron chains - will become more motionless than even a stone, especially at the sight of its friend, the prayer." This is why Christ also says: "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Mt. 17:21). So then, if fasting is that awful for our enemies and expels them, instead of fearing it we ought to like it and accept it with joy.

Fasting and prayer are a great gift of God to us, without which there are no deification and salvation for us humans. They are our graceful participation in the Cross of Christ and therefore in His Resurrection alike. Fasting and prayer were consecrated and granted to us in the Church by our Lord, the Godman Jesus Christ Himself, through His entire life in the flesh among us humans. Our Lord fasted in the desert for forty days and nights and often went into a deserted place and prayed. Ever since then, fasting and prayer in the Church have been observed and lived as some of our greatest sanctities. A sufficient indicator of the above is the life of any of our Saints, from the All-Holy Mother of God and the Holy Apostles until present-day.



Genuine fasting and prayer as graceful gifts of God exist in the Church alone and never outside of her. This means that the one who practices fasting and prayer ought to have been baptised, to communicate, confess, respect and participate in all the other Holy Mysteries of the Church.

By fasting, in the broader sense, we refer to our entire Christian life and mode of existence in the Church, including prayer as well. Hence we can, as it were, divide fasting into bodily and spiritual. In a limited sense by fasting we most often refer to bodily fasting, which is abstinence from certain foods in the days and seasons fixed by the Church in the course of the year. These days should accurately be observed and no one should devise, without blessing, more or less than the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has established.

Much caution ought to be taken when determining bodily fasting. It is not possible every man, every actual person to impose upon oneself and to be loaded one and the same weight. Within the Church there also live and are saved children that are growing up (from whom till the age of seven no fasting whatsoever is required as preparation for Communion), and helpless, aged people, then people in poor health or burdened with hard physical work, as well as women, pregnant or with infants. To each of these their spiritual father, the priest, will determine fasting according to their bodily strength or if needed, will completely absolve them from it.

There are also people who although may have no bodily infirmity, are spiritually weak and incapable of putting up with the whole rule of fasting. Among them there are likewise such ones who make their first steps towards the Church or come back to her after a longer period of time. Spiritual fathers ought to be much careful with these brothers and sisters Christians and not overburden them with fasting more than they can freely and with love bear and accept. By determining the right measure of fasting to those people, as well as their approach to the Holy Mysteries, we will help them a lot in their further spiritual growth. Whereas, on the other hand, the excessive, the immoderate fasting can paralyse and put an end to their spiritual development. We know that solid food is not given straight away to a newly born child, but milk at first. If this caution is necessary for physical growth, how much more it is then important for the spiritual one.

Here is what our Hagiorite monk, the great ascetic and a spiritual father, Episcopo Gabriel of Velika from the Lesnovo Monastery, who continually lived in strictest fasting, says about this: "Let those who do not fast at all begin fasting, if they wish to be saved and their souls to enter the Heavenly Kingdom. Yet they cannot immediately adopt the whole rule, but at first let them fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, in the first and in the last week of the fast, and afterwards in the course of time they will make efforts, and the Lord will help them accept the whole rule, so that in a while they will also fast properly. Besides, the beginner may at first not eat meat and fat in the fast days, but he may eat cheese and eggs, so that in the course of time he will transfer to complete fasting." (*Rules and Regulations of the Orthodox Church on Fasting*, Episcopo Gabriel of Velika, the Hagiorite). As we can well notice, a feature of the holy people of the Church is great rigorousness to themselves and great condescension and mercy towards their weaker brothers and sisters.

Bodily fasting is inseparably bound with spiritual fasting. There is no true fasting without repentance and mourning, without humility, without prayer, without patience, without love and mercy for our fellowmen and without the other Holy Virtues. From the bodily fasting, as we have seen, the spiritual father can absolve us, but from the spiritual fasting - no one can, not even an angel from on high. Thus, bodily fasting is not always compulsory as preparation for Holy Communion, whereas, the spiritual one is crucial. Spiritual fasting is the very core of Christian living and existence in the Church. Still, bodily fasting as well assists the spiritual one. For instance, it helps us a lot to practise patience, humility, and prayer, the spirit of repentance to reign in us, and besides, from what we would save by fasting, we could give alms and support the poor. Provided fasting were thus properly understood, we believe that there would be no Christian able to justify himself for not keeping it. [⌵](#)

As for those who devoutly and regularly observe fasts, they should always take them as preparation for the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ.

(excerpt from the Epistle *On Fasting, on Prayer, on Confession and on Holy Communion*, from the book *Homily from Eleusa*)

⌵ 64. Canon of the Holy Apostles**Sixth Ecumenical Council:**

If any of the clergy be found fasting on the Lord's day (Sunday), or on the Sabbath, excepting the one (the Great and Holy Saturday) only, let him be deposed. If a layman, let him be excommunicated.

69. Canon of the Holy Apostles**Sixth Ecumenical Council:**

If any episcopo, presbyter, or deacon, or reader, or singer, does not fast the holy Forty-day fast of Easter, or the fourth day, or the day of Preparation, let him be deposed, unless he be hindered by some bodily infirmity. If he be a layman, let him be excommunicated.