

GUIDELINES FOR THE GREAT FAST & HOLY WEEK ACCORDING TO THE RECEIVED PRACTICE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Guidelines for Cheesefare Week (*Maslenitsa*: a semi-festal, semi-fasting week before the Great Fast begins)

1. This is a week of preparation to make our hearts and bodies ready for the full rigor of the Fast.
2. We do not consume meat (or meat-based products) during Cheesefare.
3. Dairy, wine, and fish may be eaten throughout Cheesefare so that we use up our non-fasting foods.

Guidelines for the Entirety of the Great Fast

1. We do not eat meat or dairy. (Essentially, we keep a vegan diet. But shellfish is allowed.)
2. We may consume wine and olive oil on weekends.
3. We may consume wine and olive oil on other certain feast-days (these are marked on the calendar).
4. We may consume fish, wine, & olive oil on the Annunciation and on Palm Sunday. (This is the strict practice. But from the second to the sixth weeks of the Fast, some occasionally eat canned fish. In the Slavic tradition in modern times, this was the custom followed in many places on weekends, since olive oil was not usually readily available. On the other hand, Orthodox Christians in places such as Greece were sometimes known to consume wine or oil for strength and sustenance on Tuesdays and Thursdays of the second to sixth weeks of the Fast.)
5. We spend more time in prayer and attending church services.
6. We increase our almsgiving.
7. We limit our entertainments as much as possible.
8. We intensify the practice of guarding our heart and our tongue.

Additional Guidelines for Monday to Friday of the First Week of the Great Fast (Clean Week)

1. We fast as strictly as we can, but without risking illness or endangering ourselves or others.
2. We eat very simple foods (e.g., nuts, vegetables, fruits, bread, etc.). This practice is known as *xerophagy* or “dry eating.” *Xerophagy* helps us spend less time on food preparation, while keeping up our strength for prayer and labors.
3. We eat a meal of cooked food mid-week after the Presanctified Liturgy on Wednesday evening. We also eat a meal of cooked food after the Presanctified Liturgy on Friday evening.
4. We use the time that we saved from not preparing food on prayer, worship, and almsgiving.

Additional Guidelines for Holy & Great Week

1. We keep a fast similar to that of Clean Week (e.g., we practice *xerophagy*, eating only simple foods, or we eat only one meal each day for the first three days).
2. Wine and oil are allowed on Holy Thursday.
3. Holy Friday is the strictest fast of the whole year. We do not eat at all if possible. If not possible, we try to wait until the Burial Shroud has been brought out for veneration (i.e., after Vespers).
4. After the Divine Liturgy on Holy Saturday, we break the fast by consuming blessed bread, wine, and figs (or dates). But afterwards, we start to keep the Eucharistic fast for the Divine Liturgy of Pascha.

In preparing your meals, please remember: Children should be included in fasting meals. Of course, for health and growth purposes, parents should supplement their children’s diet with non-fasting foods as needed. But still, children can and should participate in the lifestyle changes that the Great Fast brings, lest they be deprived of the graces of this period. **Finally: Fasting is designed for our healing and salvation—not to hurt us or to cause us to collapse physically. And so, if you are in doubt about how to adapt these guidelines because of your health (or other needs), you should consult the parish rector.**

(Guidelines Adapted from St Athanasius Church in Nicholasville, KY)

ON THE SPIRIT OF FASTING IN THE ORTHODOX FAITH: A COLLECTION OF QUOTATIONS FROM SCRIPTURE AND THE FATHERS

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:6)

“When you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:16–18)

“Fasting is as old as humanity: it was legislated in paradise. It was the first command that Adam received: ‘You shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ (Gen 2:17). ‘You shall not eat’ legislates fasting and self-control. If Eve had fasted from the tree, we would not need this fasting now. ‘For those who are well have no need of physician, but those who are sick’ (Mt 9:12). We have been injured by sin; let us be healed by repentance. But repentance is futile without fasting” (St Basil, “First Homily on Fasting”)

“Do you fast? Give me proof of it by your works! By what kind of works? If you see a poor man, take pity on him! If you see an enemy, be reconciled to him! If you see a friend gaining honor, envy him not! ... For let not the mouth only fast, but also the eye, and the ear, and the feet, and the hands, and all the members of our bodies. ... For it would be among things the most absurd to abstain from lawful food because of the fast, but with the eyes to touch even what is forbidden. Do you not eat flesh? Feed not upon lasciviousness by means of the eyes. Let the ear fast also. The fasting of the ear consists in refusing to receive evil speakings and calumnies” (St John Chrysostom, “Homily 3 on the Statues”)

“Fasting sends prayer up to heaven, as if it were its wings for the upward journey. Fasting is the expansion of households, the mother of health, the pedagogue of youth, an adornment for seniors, a good companion on journeys, and a safe housemate for married couples (St Basil, “First Homily on Fasting”)

“We fast meditating on death, that we may be able to live; and we watch, not as mourners, but as they that wait for the Lord, when He shall have returned from the wedding, so that we may vie with each other in the triumph, hastening to announce the sign of victory over death” (St Athanasius, “Festal Letter 5”)

“What is fasting? That fasting which is considered as a Christian virtue is abstaining from all food (at least from some, as in case of sickness) and alcohol, from all worldly concerns, and from all evil desires, so that, being freed from all hindrances and encumbrances, the devout Christian may apply himself with more readiness and tranquility to recommend himself to God in prayer, and obtain his pardon; and also subdue the lusts of the flesh, and to receive the grace of God. Of this kind of fasting the Scripture speaks thus (2 Cor. 6:4–5), “But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger.” And again, in another place (Joel 2:15), “Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly.” And a little after, “Spare thy people, O Lord, and make not thy heritage a reproach.” And this kind of fasting, being rightly and duly performed, has great power in obtaining God’s pardon for our sins, as came to pass at Nineveh” (St Peter Mohyla, *The Orthodox Confession*)

“This kind [*i.e., an evil spirit that torments us*] cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29)