

# Our Lenten Journey



## PREPARING FOR THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

Great Lent is a time for self-examination and self-denial – a time for taking control of our lives and our bodies. The purpose of the fast is to give us a greater awareness of our dependence on God. It is a time to improve ourselves and our relationship with God.

Lent is a time for greater works of mercy and charity for those less fortunate than us. It is a time for visitation of the sick and assistance to the poor, and generally a more joyful relationship with those who are close to us – our family and friends.

Most of all, Lent is a time of joy and a new beginning. We cleanse ourselves –mind, body and soul– through the physical and spiritual fast, keeping a Christian *attitude* in all that we do. All this is done to prepare us for the Great Feast of Pascha – the Resurrection of Christ.

May God bless you and guide you, and may you reach your Paschal destination with the joy of renewed faith in Christ.

### **Repentance & Confession**

Repentance has its roots in the apostles. In the Book of Acts the Apostle Peter says, “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” (Acts 2:37-38)

When we fall away from God, we have removed ourselves from His communion – with Him and with other Christians. We have *excommunicated* ourselves. To re-enter communion with God is the on-going activity of all Christians. We fall away daily in some way or another. No one is exempt.

Often, when children play in competitive games, one will call out “that’s a *do over!*” Haven’t we all wished for that chance to undo the past and start over? Repentance offers us this new beginning.

We are telling God that we have *changed our mind* about our past direction and want to be back in communion with him. The Greek work for repentance, *metanoia*, implies a very deep change in the way we see ourselves, our world, and our relationship to God.

To change our mind in repentance is the starting point in our Lenten journey. We leave behind

regret as we move toward hope. Repentance is not a single action but an attitude, a frame of mind.

Think back over your life of things which you regret having said or done – hurtful, inconsiderate, selfish, deceitful. Think also of those things which you have done which may not have directly affected others, but which you know to be wrong according to the teachings of the Church. Bring them to mind as if they were occurring right now. Think of how it would have been if you had acted differently. Take this regret and turn it into repentance. Acknowledge that you have offended another person or the Church, and in doing so you have offended God.

If we are to be forgiven by God, He requires of us that we also forgive one another. For many of us, this is the most difficult aspect of repentance and confession. Yet we say it each time we pray the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Just as God's love for us is personal, so must ours be for Him. As the Christian grows from child to adult, his or her personal response to God becomes crucial. This personal response is the act of confession.

### **Guidelines for Fasting**

*The fast for the forty days of Lent is indicated below, though many are not able to hold to the strict fast. We offer the following guidelines to be considered prayerfully with the guidance of your spiritual father and in consideration of any medical condition or dietary requirements.*

#### **STRICT FAST**

*No Meat, Fish, Milk, Dairy Products, Oil, or Oil Products*

#### **PALM SUNDAY**

*Fish, Oil & Wine permitted*

#### **FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION/MARCH 25<sup>TH</sup>**

*March 25<sup>th</sup> - all day: Fish, Oil & Wine Permitted*

Shellfish are permitted throughout Great Lent

#### **St. John Chrysostom on Fasting**

Do you fast? Give me proof of it by your works.

If you see a poor man, take pity on him.

If you see a friend being honored, do not envy him.

Do not let only your mouth fast, but also the eye and the ear and the feet and the hands and all the members of our bodies.

Let the hands fast, by being free of avarice.

Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin.

Let the eyes fast,

by disciplining them not to glare at that which is sinful.

Let the ear fast, by not listening to evil talk and gossip.

Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism.

For what good is it if we abstain from birds and fishes,  
but bite and devour our brothers?

May He who came to the world to save sinners strengthen us to complete the fast with humility,  
have mercy on us and save us.

### **Jesus' Instructions on Fasting**

*“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.”*

Gospel of Matthew Chapter 6:16-18

### **Prayer**

*Have no anxiety about anything, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Jesus Christ.*

-St. Paul's letter to the Philippians

One key to a more fulfilling life is prayer. For Orthodox Christians, the aim of prayer is to enter into conversation with God. Prayer is sometimes referred to as *dialogue with God*. Often it is a *waiting on God in silence*. In the church it is defined as the *lifting of the mind and heart to God, and also as walking in the presence of God*. We turn our mind and thoughts toward Him. We mentally gaze at Him and speak with Him in reverence, fear, and hope. At times we speak to Him with words and at other times we stand in reverent silence, saying nothing, but being aware of His presence. In this dialogue with God we praise Him and thank Him. We ask Him for what we need. Our mind and our heart are opened to Him. Prayer is not only repeating words, it is trust in God that he hears and directs us in His Way involving spiritual growth and development.

### **The Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian**

*Read each week-day during Great Lent*

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth,  
despair, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility,  
patience, and love to Thy servant.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother, for  
blessed art Thou,  
unto ages of ages.  
Amen.

### **Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth,  
present in all places and filling all things,  
the treasury of blessings and Giver of life:  
come and abide in us.  
Cleanse us from all impurity, and save our souls,  
O Gracious Lord.

### **Holy Communion**

*The Sacrament of Holy Communion—the Eucharist—which literally means “Thanksgiving,” is the Mystery whereby the bread and wine of offering are changed, actually, not symbolically, into the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is at the very center of the Church’s life, and from it flows the prayer of believers in a sacrifice of entreaty for the peace of the world, for all those who ask for help, and for all men and women ‘’The Eucharist unites us in the most intimate fashion with the Lord; it nourishes our soul and body, and aids our strengthening, increase, and growth in spiritual life. According to the promise of the Gospel, “He that eats this bread will live forever.” (The Gospel of John 6:58)*

The cup which holds the wine that becomes the blood of Christ is the *chalice*, the cup of salvation. When we kneel during the liturgy, we pray with the priest that God the Holy Spirit may change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus. This means that when we receive Holy Communion, Jesus comes to live in us.

How do we prepare to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus? We pray. We should have love in our hearts for all people. We should ask forgiveness from God and from our parents, brothers, and sisters, and from anyone we may have hurt.

When we come before the priest for Communion, we make the sign of the cross, tell the priest our baptismal name, hold the Communion cloth under our chin, and open our mouth wide. After receiving, we wipe our lips with the Communion cloth, make the sign of the cross, and hand the Communion cloth to the person next to us.

Once we have received Communion, we must remember that we have become one with Christ and with all those who received Communion with us. Christ now lives in all of us. We are all living *icons* of Jesus. It is by loving one another that we love Jesus. After receiving Communion our bodies become holy chalices. God lives in us.

times. Encourage your children to fall asleep with this verse on their lips.

† Get a modern translation. The Revised Standard translation or the one by J. B. Phillips or the translation in paperback «Good News for Modern Man.»

† As you read, try to have an icon of Jesus before you if you are reading the Gospels; one of St. Paul if you are reading his epistles, etc. This will help you realize who it is who is speaking to you.

from *Making God Real in the Orthodox Home*  
by Fr. Anthony M. Coniaris / Light & Life Publishing

Jesus wants to use our hands, which have now become His hands, to help those in need. When we receive Communion, we become members of Christ's Body, the Church. This means that Jesus has no eyes but our eyes, no feet but our feet to do His work in the world today. What kind, thoughtful act will you do for Jesus today?

From *Let's Take a Walk Through Our Orthodox Church*

by Fr. Anthony M. Coniaris / Light & Life Publishing

### **How to Read the Bible**

*In private study, when a Christian profitably reads the Bible, receiving inspiration and strength from it, family members, friends, relatives and even acquaintances will inevitably notice the difference. Any person who comes into contact with such a Christian cannot help but notice the growing peace, love and inner assurance - the spirit of Christ - in that Christian, and will frequently ask (if not ask, certainly think) what gives that person such strength and radiance. God will provide many opportunities to the growing Christian for sharing with others his or her experience with the Bible. What better witness for the truth of the Christian faith than a solid Christian life nourished by Holy Scripture and radiating true Christian love at home, at Church and at work? The Christian's own life becomes a kind of gospel, a living Bible, in which other people observe, read and experience the truths of God in action.*

From *Bread for Life*, by Father Theodore Stylianopoulos  
Department of Religious Education

### ***Suggestions for family Bible reading:***

Set aside a regular time for daily reading preferably in the evening at the supper table when the whole family is together. When the children are young, mom or dad can do the reading. When the children grow older, they may share in the reading. Reading to children is one of life's greatest joys. Children treasure it.

† Don't read too much or too fast. One chapter a day is sufficient. Let what you read sink in slowly. If the children are young, read from a Bible story book-one that has pictures which you can show the children.

† Start with the biographies of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John).

† Read with the faith and the expectation that God will really and truly speak to you through what you read.

† Don't worry about the passages you do not understand. Concentrate on what you do understand. The more you read, the more you will understand. One passage explains another.

† Each day memorize at least one verse that grips you. Say it out loud as a family three or four