



# The Apostle

St. Aidan's Orthodox Church  
Issue 127 March 2009



## What Fasting is NOT!

What is commonly called "fasting" often is no such thing so perhaps we should list those things fasting isn't ...

(1) Fasting is not refraining from eating meat and additionally sometimes, dairy products. This is not fasting but rather abstaining from certain foods. Fasting is actually removing something entirely from one's diet as a meal or part of a meal. It's actually eating less.

(2) Fasting is not a religious way of losing weight. We should respect the body and neither waste it through neglect nor pamper it. Fasting has as its intention not the "body beautiful" but the soul-beautiful ... it is to bring the body into harmony with the spiritual and mental / emotional through a redirection of attention from carnal desires to God Himself who is the Great Physician.

(3) Fasting is not a protest. We fast not so as to be noticed (even if it is a good cause which is prominent) but to do some serious personal work in our spiritual lives. Fasting helps us match what we are to what we do by giving God control of both.

(4) Fasting may help us to raise money for worthy causes but it has its own purpose and benefit and should be embraced in the first place for that.

(5) Fasting is not an end in itself. That way pride and legalism lies. If the purpose of fasting is to gain mastery over wayward elements of our lives then its goal must be to make us stronger as disciples of the Lord. Fasting must make us more loving or it is little worth.

**Fr. Gregory**

## The Fathers on Fasting

IF THOU, O man, dost not forgive everyone who has sinned against thee, then do not trouble thyself with fasting. If thou dost not forgive the debt of thy brother, with whom thou art angry for some reason, then thou dost fast in vain - God will not accept thee. Fasting will not help thee, until thou wilt become accomplished in love and in the hope of faith. Whoever fasts and becomes angry, and harbors enmity in his heart, such a one hates God and salvation is far from him. - **Venerable Ephraim the Syrian.**

It is necessary most of all for one who is fasting to curb anger, to accustom himself to meekness and condescension, to have a contrite heart, to repulse impure thoughts and desires, to examine his conscience, to put his mind to the test and to verify what good has been done by us in this or any other week, and which deficiency we have corrected in ourself in the present week. This is true fasting. - **Saint John Chrysostom.**

An excellent faster is he who restrains himself from every impurity, who imposes abstinence on his tongue and restrains it from idle talk, foul language, slander, condemnation, flattery and all manner of evil-speaking, who abstains from anger, rage, malice and vengeance and withdraws from every evil. - **Saint Tichon of Zadonsk.**

Seest thou what fasting does: it heals illnesses, drives out demons, removes wicked thoughts, and makes the heart pure. If someone has even been seized by an impure spirit, let him know that this kind, according to the word of the Lord, "goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21). - **Saint Athanasius the Great.**

By fasting it is possible both to be delivered from future evils and to enjoy the good things to come. We fell into disease through sin; let us receive healing through repentance, which is not fruitful without fasting. - **Saint Basil the Great.**

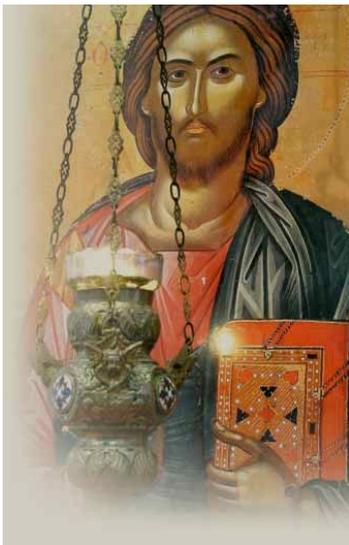
The strictness of the Quadragesima [the Forty Days] mortifies the passions, extinguishes anger and rage, cools and calms every agitation springing up from gluttony. And just as, in the summer, when the burning heat of the sun spreads over the earth, the northern wind renders a benefaction to those who are scorched by dispersing the sultriness with a tender coolness, so fasting also provides the same, by driving out of bodies the burning which is the result of overeating. - **Saint Asterius of Amasia.**

As bodily food fattens the body, so fasting strengthens the soul; imparting it an easy flight, it makes it able to ascend on high, to contemplate lofty things, and to put the heavenly higher than the pleasant and pleasurable things of life. - Saint John Chrysostom.

Fasts do not shorten a man's life, on the contrary.

Venerable Symeon the Stylite lived for 103 years, Saint Cyril the Anchorite lived 108 years, Saint Alypius the Stylite - 118, Venerable John the Silent - 104 years, Anthony and Theodosius the Great - for 105 years, Venerable Paul of Thebes - 113, Paul of Komel - 112, Venerable Macarius of Alexandria - 100, Venerable Sergius of Radonezh - 78, Venerable Cyril Belozersky - 90, Macarius Zheltovodsky - 95.

## On Fasting



**by His Eminence Metropolitan  
Maximos of Pittsburgh**

Fasting, in our days, has become one of the most neglected spiritual values. Because of misunderstandings regarding the nature of fasting, because of confused and reversed priorities in its use, many of today's Orthodox Christians fast very little, or disregard fasting altogether.

The Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church which is scheduled to be convened in the near future has placed the problem of fasting as one of the first items on its agenda. It is hoped that through this Council the age-old practice of the Church to use fasting as one of the important means of spiritual growth will regain its proper place in the life of the Church.

Fasting was practiced by the Lord Himself. After prayer and fasting for forty days in the wilderness, the Lord victoriously faced the temptations of the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). The Lord himself asked the disciples to use fasting as an important spiritual weapon to achieve spiritual victories (Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29; Luke 2:37). The example of the Lord was followed by His disciples (Acts

14:23; 27:9; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Corinthians 6:5, 11:27, etc.). What is fasting? Why is it so important? Why does fasting precede such important feasts such as Easter and Christmas?

The importance of fasting depends on its meaning. Many of the Fathers have written on fasting. Among others, St. Basil has left us with most inspired comments on fasting. St. Basil tells us that fasting is not abstaining from food only; it is first of all, abstaining from sin. Grounded in the teaching of the Fathers, the Church in its hymnology describes fasting as the mother of chastity and prudence, as the accuser of sin and as the advocate of repentance, the life worthy of angels and the salvation of humans (The Lenten Triodion, trans. Kallistos Ware, London 1978, p. 195). Fasting becomes all of these when observed in the proper spirit.

First of all, fasting is abstinence from food. By detaching us from earthly goods and realities, fasting has a liberating effect on us and makes us worthy of the life of the spirit, a life similar to that of angels. Second, fasting, as abstinence from bad habits and sin, is the mother of Christian virtues, the mother of sound and wholesome thinking; it allows us to establish the proper priority between the material and spiritual, giving priority to the spiritual.

Fasting is the advocate of repentance. Adam and Eve disobeyed God; they refused to fast from the forbidden fruit. They became slaves of their own desires. But now through fasting, through obedience to the rules of the Church regarding the use of spiritual and material goods, we may return to the life in Paradise, a life of communion with God. Thus, fasting is a means of salvation, this salvation being a life we live in

accordance with the Divine will, in communion with God.

Because of the liberating effect of fasting, both material and spiritual, the Church has connected fasting with the celebration of the major feasts of our tradition. Easter is, of course, our main feast. It is the "feast of feasts." It is the feast of our liberation from the bondage of sin, from corrupted nature, from death. For on that day, through His Resurrection from the dead, Christ has raised us "from death to life, and from earth to heaven" (Resurrection Canon), Christ, "our new Passover," has taken us away from the land of slavery, sin and death, to the promised land of freedom, bliss and glory; from our sinful condition to resurrected life.

It is most appropriate to prepare for this celebration through a liberating fast, both material and spiritual. This is the profound meaning that fasting takes during the Great Lent. Let us allow ourselves to take advantage of the spiritual riches of the Church. Let us use the precious messianic gifts offered to us through its sacramental life, through its celebrations of the central mysteries of our salvation in Christ. Let us use the spiritual weapons,

"to fight the good fight, to walk the way of fasting, to crush the heads of the invisible dragons, to prove ourselves victorious over sin, and without condemnation to reach our goal of worshiping the Holy Resurrection" (Prayer of the Presanctified Liturgy).

This is the challenge of the Great Lent: to use fasting to obtain the resurrected life, to unite with the Risen Lord. Who could refuse to accept this challenge?