

Apostles Fast (the Monday after the Sunday of All Saints to June 28) and the Dormition Fast (August 1-14).

For the complete fasting calendar you can speak with your parish priest or visit the Online Chapel at <http://www.goarch.org/chapel>. You should also consult your parish priest about how to incorporate the discipline of fasting into your religious life.

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. Pascha is, of course, the most important feast of the Church. 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 both material and spiritual fasting.

Faith and Life is a new booklet series from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America that provides an introduction to a wide range of spiritual and theological issues. Drawing from the beauty and wisdom of Orthodox Christianity, the series addresses the challenges of contemporary life and offers guidance to help you grow in your relationship with God and in your commitment to His will for your life.

# Fasting



Fasting



**F**asting, or abstaining from food, was a discipline practiced by our Lord himself. It was after forty days of prayer and fasting in the wilderness, that Jesus victoriously faced the temptations of the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). He asked his disciples to use fasting, coupled with prayer, as a means to achieve spiritual victories (Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29; Luke 2:37), and the example of the Lord was followed by the disciples in their apostolic ministry and instruction to the early Christians (Acts 14:23; 27:9; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Corinthians 6:5, 11:27).

The practice of fasting is rich with meaning. Many of the Holy Fathers throughout the history of the Church have written about the significance of fasting. Saint Basil, for example, tells us that fasting is not simply abstaining from food; it is, more importantly, the avoidance of sin. The Church in her 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. Fasting becomes all of these when observed in the proper spirit.

In its most basic sense, fasting is abstinence from food. But it is far more than that. Through a very natural process created by God, we consume food for sustenance, energy, and life. However, we can be inclined to take more than we need or to be so controlled by our physical desire that we focus only on what we eat, neglecting our relation-

**Let us set out with joy upon the season of the Fast, and prepare ourselves for spiritual combat. Let us PURIFY OUR SOUL and cleanse our flesh; and as we fast from food, let us abstain also from every passion. Rejoicing in the virtues of the Spirit may we persevere with love, and so be counted worthy to see the solemn Passion of Christ our God, and with great spiritual gladness to behold His holy Pascha.**

Vespers on the Sunday of Forgiveness



ships and our spiritual needs, and even endangering our well-being. By subordinating the desires of the body, fasting helps us reestablish a proper order in our lives as Christians. It helps us to open our minds and souls to the guidance of the Spirit and to break away from our captivity to bodily appetites and selfish desires. Through fasting we overcome the burdens and pressures of physical gratification that are placed upon us in our world, and through our faith in Christ we are renewed and transformed into the holy people God created us to be. In addition, through fasting we move away from an entanglement and conformity to sinful passions and desires,

into a blessed life filled with the presence, power, and grace of God.

By fasting, we also demonstrate the sincerity of our repentance. Adam and Eve disobeyed God by refusing to fast from the forbidden fruit. They were controlled completely by their own desires. But now through fasting, through obedience to the discipline 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, the discipline of fasting is a means to salvation. It aids our journey from sin and death to eternal life by helping us focus on our need for God's grace and forgiveness. Through fasting we are engaged in the struggle against sin, and through discipline and abstinence, the sincerity of our repentance is affirmed.

This is why fasting is a regular practice for Orthodox Christians. Fast days and periods have been established by the Church throughout the year to help us direct our hearts and minds toward the life of prayer and worship, our spiritual needs, and the condition of our souls and relationship with God. During most weeks, Wednesday and Friday are fast days. On these days, we are guided to abstain from meat, dairy products and oil and wine. On some days, fish, wine, and oil may be permitted if a specific feast falls on a Wednesday or Friday or a portion of a fast is not as strict as other times. For example, wine and oil are permitted on the Saturdays and Sundays of Great Lent as we continue to commemorate Sundays as the day of our Lord's Resurrection. The calendar and practice of the Church has fasting periods, which include the forty days of Great Lent and Holy Week, before Pascha, the Nativity Fast (November 15-December 24), the

