

## Fasting

Fasting is a fundamental spiritual discipline in the Orthodox Christian life. It is not merely an external practice but a means of drawing closer to God through self-denial, repentance, and spiritual vigilance. **Orthodox fasting guidelines generally call for abstaining from meat, dairy, wine, oil, and marital relations during designated fasts.** However, the specific details of fasting can vary based on the day, season, and personal circumstances. For guidance on particular fasting days, Orthodox Christians refer to a liturgical calendar or seek advice from their spiritual father.

Fasting is observed every Wednesday and Friday throughout the year (with a few exceptions). These weekly fasts serve as a continual reminder of Christ's betrayal (Wednesday) and His crucifixion (Friday), keeping His passion ever before us.

In addition to these weekly fasts, the Church sets aside several extended fasting periods to help the faithful prepare for major feasts:

- **Great Lent:** This is the most significant fast of the year, lasting for forty days before Holy Week and culminating in the celebration of Pascha (Easter). It is a time of intensified prayer, repentance, and almsgiving.
- **The Apostle's Fast:** This fast begins after the Feast of Pentecost and continues until the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul (June 29th), varying in length depending on the date of Pascha.
- **The Dormition Fast:** A two-week fast (August 1-14) preparing for the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, emphasizing prayer and devotion to the Mother of God.
- **The Advent Fast (St. Philip's Fast):** Beginning on November 15th and lasting until Christmas, this fast readies the faithful for the Nativity of Christ, emphasizing spiritual renewal in anticipation of His birth.

While fasting prepares us for feasts, its deeper purpose is the purification of the soul. It is an ascetical discipline that teaches self-control, helping us to overcome the passions that seek to dominate us. The Church Fathers emphasize that if we can discipline our physical appetites, we can apply the same spiritual strength to combat other temptations, such as pride, anger, greed, and lust. Fasting is not simply about avoiding certain foods but about acquiring a mindset of humility, repentance, and dependence on God.

Olivier Clément beautifully expresses the transformative power of fasting:

*"Fasting therefore signifies a radical change in our relation with God and with the world. God – not the self – becomes the centre, and the world is his creation, a dialogue amongst ourselves and with the Creator. Fasting prevents us from identifying ourselves with the world in order merely to possess it, and enables us to see the world in a light coming from elsewhere. Then every creature, every thing, becomes an object of contemplation. Fasting puts between ourselves and the world a wondering and respectful distance. It enables us to hunger for God as well, and to welcome our bodily hunger as an echo, the 'sighing' of creation." (The Roots of Christian Mysticism)*

Thus, fasting is not simply a personal struggle but a communal and cosmic one. It is a way of realigning ourselves with God, restoring a proper relationship with creation, and preparing our hearts to receive His grace. It is an offering of love, an act of humility, and a means of deepening our spiritual life.