

The True Spirit of Fasting

Fasting is more than abstaining from certain foods.
FAST from self-concern and FEAST on compassion for others.
FAST from discouragement and FEAST on hope.
FAST from lethargy and FEAST on enthusiasm.
FAST from suspicion and FEAST on truth.
FAST from thoughts that weaken and FEAST on promises that inspire.
FAST from shadows of sorrow and FEAST on the sunlight of serenity.
FAST from idle gossip and FEAST on purposeful silence.
FAST from problems that overwhelm you and FEAST on prayer that sustains.
FAST from criticism and FEAST on praise.
FAST from self-pity and FEAST on joy.
FAST from ill-temper and FEAST on peace.
FAST from resentment and FEAST on contentment.
FAST from jealousy and FEAST on love.
FAST from pride and FEAST on humility.
FAST from selfishness and FEAST on service.
-- Abbot Tryphon, Christ the Savior Monastery, Vashon Island, Washington

Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian

*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.*



APRIL 2019

The Historical Development of the Great Fast, Part 2

The choice of the number forty for the days of Lent has obvious Biblical precedents. The people of Israel spent forty years in the wilderness (Exod. 16:35); Moses remained fasting for forty days on Mount Sinai (Exod. 34:28); Elijah abstained from all food for forty days as he journeyed to Mount Horeb (3 [I] Kgs. 19:8). Most important of all, Christ fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1).

But how are the forty days to be computed? In the fourth and fifth centuries, the manner of reckoning varied. Some kept a fast of six weeks, some of seven or even eight. Three points arose:

- Is Holy Week included in the forty days, or treated as a distinct and additional period?
- Is Saturday regarded as a day of fasting?
- Are the forty days reckoned continuously, including Saturdays and Sundays? Or is Sunday excluded from the calculation and Saturday also, if this is considered not to be a day of fasting?

Divergent answers to these three questions account for present-day differences between the Western and the Orthodox Lent. At Rome Holy Week was included as part of the forty days, Saturday was regarded as a day of fasting, but in calculating the number forty all Sundays were excluded from the reckoning. This produced a six-week fast of six days in each week, constituting a total of thirty-six days. To make up the full measure of forty days, four further days of fasting were then added at the beginning, with the result that Lent in the West commences on a Wednesday.

At Constantinople, on the other hand, Holy Week - together with the Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday - was not regarded as part of the forty-day fast in the strict sense. At Vespers on Friday evening in the sixth week, immediately preceding the Saturday of Lazarus, the distinction between the forty days and Holy Week is very clearly marked in the existing text of the Triodion:

*Having completed the forty days that bring profit to our soul,
We beseech Thee in Thy Love for man:
Grant us also to behold the Holy Week of Thy Passion. . . .*

At Constantinople and in the East generally, Saturdays, with the one exception of Holy Saturday, were not considered days of fasting. But in reckoning the number forty it was the custom to count continuously, including Saturdays and Sundays in the calculation. Thus the forty days began on the first

Monday in Lent and ended on Friday in the sixth week; then came Lazarus Saturday, Palm Sunday and Holy Week, which, while distinct from the forty days, were treated as part of the Lenten Fast in the broader sense. In this way the forty days and Holy Week together constituted a fast of seven weeks. So it is that Lent begins on Ash Wednesday in Western Christendom, while commencing in the East two days earlier on Monday.

Christians in the Greek East, however, while as a rule counting the forty days continuously, have sometimes chosen to exclude Saturday and Sunday from the calculation. With Holy Week included in the reckoning, this resulted in seven-week fast of five days in each week, adding up to thirty-five days. But since Holy Saturday is a day of fasting, this also was included, bringing the total number of days to thirty-six. As we have seen, the West before the addition of the four preliminary days likewise had a thirty-six day fast, although computed in a somewhat different manner. In both East and West this number of thirty-six has been given a symbolical meaning. Just as the Israelites dedicated to God a tithe or tenth of their produce, so Christians dedicate the season of Lent to God as a tithe or tenth of the year. The part is offered in token of the whole: rendering back to God a tenth of what He has given to us, we call down His blessing upon the remainder and acknowledge that all material goods and all moments of time are a gift from His hand. This notion of Lent as a *tithe or first-fruits of the year* is not much emphasized in the existing text of the Triodion, but it is mentioned in the Synaxarion for the Sunday of Forgiveness.

(3) *The Completion of the Pattern.* In Constantinople from the sixth or seventh century onwards, there arose the practice of adding, before the seven weeks of the fast, an eighth or preliminary week of modified fasting. In our translation, we have termed this the ‘Week before Lent’; it is often styled ‘Cheese Week’ or the ‘Week without Meat’, because during these days meat is forbidden but cheese and other dairy products are permitted. This preliminary week was added, among other reasons, from the same motive as led to the addition of four extra days at the start of Western Lent: so as to make up the full number forty. In the West, a six-week fast of six days in each week left four days missing from the requisite total. At Constantinople, on the other hand, the days of Lent were (as we have seen) reckoned continuously, and so there was no need of a further preliminary period to produce the total of forty days. But Christians in Palestine calculated in terms of eight weeks, with five days of fasting in each week (no special account being taken of Holy Saturday for the purposes of this reckoning); and so they needed an additional week at the beginning of Lent. The observance of ‘Cheese Week’ in the existing Triodion represents a compromise between the Constantinopolitan and the Palestinian practice: for ‘Cheese Week’ is to be considered part of the fast, and yet it is not fully within Lent.

During the sixth-eleventh centuries, the season of pre-Lenten preparation was gradually expanded to include three other preliminary Sundays: the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, ten weeks before Easter; following it, the Sunday of the Prodigal Son; and then the Sunday of the Last Judgment immediately before the beginning of ‘Cheese Week’. Together with the Sunday of Forgiveness at the end of ‘Cheese Week’, this makes four preliminary Sundays in all. In this way the full pattern of the Lenten season was completed.

excerpted from The Lenten Triodion, translated from the original Greek by Mother Mary and Archimandrite (now Metropolitan) Kallistos Ware, published by Faber and Faber (1984).

Charity of the Month



Begun in 2003, under the direction of Archpriest Alexander Tkachenko, the **St Petersburg Hospice for Children**, the first of its kind, provides “physical, psychological, social, and spiritual care” for children with incurable diseases. Palliative care was added to the Hospice’s work in 2011. Round-the-clock care is provided for 20 terminal patients and an additional 10 receive care from the daycare station. The Hospice is staffed by doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, and clergy. A decorated work by both government and ecclesiastical agencies, two facilities house over 300 live-in children and in-home support is provided for many others. This very worthy charity has increased its work and continues to touch the lives of thousands of ill children and their families.

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

(unaudited)

	Feb. Actual	Feb. Budget	YTD Actual	YTD Budget
Income	7,046.34	5,112.50	15,665.24	9,725.00
Expense	4,794.92	5,226.00	10,084.70	9,202.00
Cash Flow	2,251.42	(113.50)	5,580.54	523.00
Building Fund (Net of Rent Reserves)			23,397.51	