

# Fasting Periods

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There are four fasting periods and a number of fasting days within the Church Year of the Ukrainian Catholic Church.

## Great and Holy Fast

The 40 day preparation for the glorious feast of Pascha beginning on Clean Monday and ending on the day before Lazarus Saturday. Associated with this fast is the week of Cheesefare and the Great and Holy Week Fast, the week long fast leading up to the glorious feast of Pascha. It is the most ancient fast.

*Because we did not fast we were banished from paradise.  
So then let us fast so as to return back to paradise.*  
- St. Basil, On Fasting I

Although our time has brought with it many changes in church laws, traditions, and discipline, and the Second Vatican Council has relaxed the rules for fasting, including the Great Fast, nevertheless, the Forty Days Fast still has significance for our spiritual life. For various reasons, today we may be unable to fast in the same way as our ancestors did; yet even today we are obliged to a spiritual fast - that is, we are obliged to refrain from sin, and from giving in to our evil inclinations. We are also obliged to pray and to practice virtue and good deeds. In reality then, the most important goal of the Great Fast is our spiritual renewal.

We shall speak now about the purpose of the Great Fast as recorded in three different periods of history:

### 1. Apostolic Times

For the Apostles and First Christians, the day of the Jewish Pasch was a sorrowful day commemorating the death of Jesus Christ, therefore, they celebrated this day with prayer, contrition and fasting. This association of the Pasch with fasting lasted a long time. Even in the second century one may find the word "Pasch" used to denote "fasting". This practice seems to echo the time when the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ took place on one and the same day. This association of the sad event of Christ's death with the joyful event of His resurrection has left its traces in our Great Saturday services in which the lenten service is merged with the resurrection service.

### 2. The Paschal Fast and the Catechumenate

The third and fourth centuries witnessed the greatest flourishing of the catechumenate. Catechumens were those who were being prepared for the sacrament of Baptism. This preparation extended over a period of three years and terminated solemnly during the Great Fast. The concluding acts of this preparation were: the giving of a name to the catechumen at the beginning of the Great Fast, an exorcism of evil spirits which took place daily throughout the whole lenten period, the last instructions in the truths of the holy faith, the final examination and then, the Baptism itself which took place on Great Saturday. Some of these acts were incorporated into the daily service.

To become a Christian and a member of the Church through Baptism was regarded as an important event in the life of the newly-baptized and in the life of the Church. For this reason, this joyful event was usually celebrated on the great feasts of the Pasch (Resurrection), Pentecost or the Theophany. In the third century, the rite of baptism was associated above all with the feast of the Pasch. The catechumens prepared themselves for baptism by fasting and prayer. Under the influence of the catechumenate the pre-paschal fast was extended to forty days. As time went on, the rest of the faithful also began to observe this fast together with the catechumens. St. Justin the Martyr (+167) speaks about this custom of the faithful observing the fast together with the catechumens. He says that those who embraced the Christian faith "were taught to implore God by fasting and prayer for the forgiveness of past sins, and we pray and fast together with them" (Apol. 1,61).

### 3. The Great Fast - An Endeavor of Soul and Body

The institution of the catechumenate contributed not only to the extension of the Great Fast to forty days, but also to the fact that, in time, all the faithful adopted this fast so that it became the pre-paschal fast for the whole Church. Later, when the institution of the catechumenate lost some of its meaning, the Forty Days Fast became an independent ritual. Today, it is observed by the faithful as a time for special prayer, fasting and penance, and as a spiritual preparation for the feast of the Pasch (Resurrection). This attitude of the Church finds its most beautiful expression in our lenten services, customs and practices. We shall mention certain ones here.

#### Lenten Services

The lenten services differ from the ordinary church services in that they include more prayers, more psalms and more readings, especially from the Old Testament. During lenten services the entire Psalter is read twice a week. Predominant throughout these services is the spirit of penance and sorrow for sins. The Lenten sticheras in Vespers and Matins either lament the fall of man into sin, summon us to penance and sorrow, extol the benefits of fasting and good works, or inspire us to master our senses and to practice virtue. "Let us fast in a manner pleasing and acceptable to God," says one of the stichera of the aposticha in the Vespers of the first Monday, "genuine fasting is alienating oneself from evil, restraining the tongue, putting aside hatred, parting company with concupiscence, falsehood and the breaking of oaths, - abstaining from all these things is real fasting." In the aposticha of Matins of the first Monday, we sing: "The fast has arrived, the mother of purity, the discoverer of sins, the preacher of penance, the companion of the Angels and the salvation of man: Let us, the faithful, cry out: O God, have mercy on us."

#### Lenten Penances and Prostrations

In the first centuries of Christianity the practice of public penance for various sins and offences prevailed in the Church. Following the wishes of the Church, many penitents performed their penance during the Great Fast. Just as the faithful adopted the Forty Days Fast from the catechumens, so too, under the influence of Church discipline they began to regard themselves as penitents and to perform various penitential acts during the Great Fast. From this stems the profound penitential spirit of our lenten services.

Closely connected with our lenten services are inclinations. These inclinations are made either by bowing from the waist or to the ground (the low, profound bow or prostration), and they are performed at all lenten services from Monday through Friday.

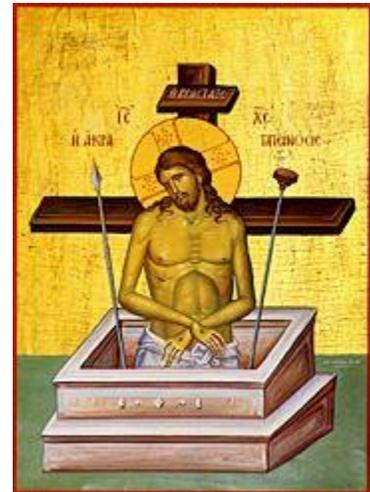
The prayer of St. Ephrem (+373) with accompanying prostrations merits special consideration. This prayer, repeated at every lenten service, can be regarded the official lenten penitential prayer of our Church, expressing, as it does, the whole content and purpose of the Great Fast. We give it here in its entirety:

O Lord and Master of my life, drive  
from me the spirit of discouragement,  
negligence, ambition and idle talk. (Prostration).

"Grant me, your servant, the spirit of  
chastity, humility, patience and charity. (Prostration).

"Yes, my Lord and King, grant me to see my  
own sins, and not judge my brother, for  
you are blessed forever, and ever. Amen. (Prostration).

The Kievan Metropolitan George (1073) in his "Rules" for priests and laity prescribes for all the faithful to make three hundred prostrations daily (during the Forty Days Fast).



## The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

A typical lenten service is the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. Already in the first centuries there was a custom during the Forty Days Fast to omit the celebration of the Divine Liturgy because, at that time, it was still linked with agape, that is the love banquet, and this was not in keeping with the spirit of fasting. Furthermore, the Divine Liturgy was regarded as a joyful mystery; for this reason, its celebration was limited to Saturday and Sunday. On the other days of the week, to give the faithful an opportunity to receive Holy Communion, the Divine Liturgy was replaced by other services, from which the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts developed in time. Actually, this is not a Liturgy in the sense of the word, for it does not have the consecration of bread and wine; but rather, it is a Vespers service combined with the rite of Holy Communion, for which the bread was previously consecrated. Hence the name of Presanctified Gifts.

The Council of Laodicea (c. 364) prescribed: "It is not permitted during the Great Fast to offer up the Bread (that is the Holy Liturgy), except on Saturday and Sunday" (rule 49). The Sixth Ecumenical Council of Trullo (691) decreed: "On all the days of the Great Fast, with the exception of Saturday and Sunday, and the feast of the Annunciation, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts must be celebrated." (rule 52).

When the zeal of the first Christians gradually began to diminish and the custom of daily and frequent Holy Communion was abandoned, the Great Fast became also the time of preparation for a worthy reception of Holy Communion on the feast of the Pasch.

## Lenten Sermons

In former times, the faithful attended services even twice a day during the Great Fast. At these services, sermons were delivered. St. Basil the Great, during one week in lent, delivered in nine homilies a series of beautiful discourses on the "Hexameron" that is, on the six days of the creation of the world. It was then that he preached twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. He has left us two beautiful discourses on the meaning and benefits of fasting.

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## Apostles' Fast (Petriwka)

The lenten period of variable length in preparation for the feast of the holy apostles Peter and Paul beginning on the Monday following the Sunday of All Saints and ending on June 28.

*Who ever prays and fasts has two wings  
lighter than the wind itself.*

- St. John Chrysostom

The holy Apostles prepared themselves for the coming of the Holy Spirit with prayer and fasting. They prayed and fasted much before they went out to preach the Gospel. After prayer and fasting they ordained new presbyters for apostolic work, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles. "And when they had ordained to them priests in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, in whom they believed" (Acts 14,22). St. John Chrysostom said that "the Apostles almost always fasted." (Sermon, 57 on St. Matthew)

So also holy Church from earliest times has prepared her faithful with prayer and fasting for the great feast of the Major Apostles, SS. Peter and Paul whose memory we celebrate on June 29, along with the Synaxis of the Twelve Apostles the following day. Because this fast occurs after the holy season of Pentecost, in ancient times it was sometimes called the fast of the Pentecost. Other titles are also given to this fast; it is known as the fast of the holy Apostles, the Apostolic Fast, the Fast of Peter (Peter's Fast) and the Summer Fast. Our people call it Petriwka (i.e., the Fast of Peter or Peter's Fast). When was the Fast of Peter instituted? How long did it last? What are its prescriptions?

## The Institution of the Fast of Peter

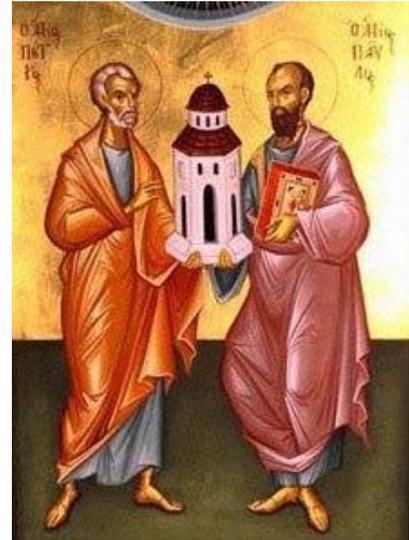
The fast of the holy Apostles is very ancient, dating back to the first centuries of Christianity. We have the testimony of St. Athanasius the Great, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Leo the Great and Theodoret of Cyrrhus regarding it. The oldest testimony regarding the Petriwka fast is given to us by St. Athanasius the Great (†373). In his letter to Emperor Constance, in speaking of the persecution by the Arians, he writes: "During the week following Pentecost, the people who observed the fast went out to the cemetery to pray." "The Lord so ordained it," says St. Ambrose (†397), "that as we have participated in his sufferings during the Forty Days, so we should also rejoice in his Resurrection during the season of Pentecost. We do not fast during the season of Pentecost, since our Lord Himself was present amongst us during those days ... Christ's presence was like nourishing food for the Christians. So too, during Pentecost, we feed on the Lord who is present among us. On the days following his ascension into heaven, however, we again fast." (Sermon 61)

St. Leo the Great (†461) says: "After the long feast of Pentecost, fasting is especially necessary to purify our thoughts and render us worthy to receive the Gifts of the Holy Spirit ... Therefore, the salutary custom was established of fasting after the joyful days during which we celebrated the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, and the coming of the Holy Spirit."

The pilgrim Silvia Egeria in her Diary (fourth century) records that on the day following the feast of Pentecost, a period of fasting began. The Apostolic Constitutions, a work of the fourth century, prescribes: "After the feast of Pentecost, celebrate one week, then observe a fast, for justice demands rejoicing after the reception of the gifts of God and lasting after the body has been refreshed."

From the testimonies of the fourth century we ascertain that in Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch the Fast, of the holy Apostles was connected with Pentecost and not with the feast of the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul. In the first centuries, after Pentecost there was one week of rejoicing, that is Privileged Days, followed by one week of fasting.

The canons of Nicephor, Patriarch of Constantinople (806-816), mention Peter's Fast. The Typicon of St. Theodore the Studite speaks of the Forty Days Fast of the holy Apostles. Simeon of Thessalonica (†1429) explains the purpose of this fast in this manner: "The Fast of the Apostles is justly established in their honor, for through them we have received numerous benefits and for us they are exemplars and teachers of the fast ... For one week after the descent of the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the Apostolic Constitution composed by Clement, we celebrate, and then during the following week, we fast in honor of the Apostles."



## The Duration of the Fast of Peter

The Fast of Peter came into practice in the Church through custom rather than law. For this reason there was no uniformity for a long time, either in its observance or its duration. Some fasted twelve days, others six, still others four, and others only one day. Theodore Balsamon, Patriarch of Antioch (†1204), regarding the Fast of Peter, said: "All the faithful, that is the laity and the monks, are obliged to fast seven days and more, and whoever refuses to do so, let him be excommunicated from the Christian community."

From the work "On Three Forty Days Fasts", which is credited to a monk of the monastic community of Anastasius Sinaite (sixth-seventh centuries), we learn that the Fast of the holy Apostles lasted from the first Sunday after Pentecost to the feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God. Later, however, the Fast of the Dormition was separated from it and the month of July was excluded from the Fast of Peter. Simeon of Thessalonica speaks of Peter's Fast as of one week's duration. The Syrian-Uniates reduced this fast to four days; the Syrian-Jacobites kept this fast along with the Greeks.

In our Church the Fast of the holy Apostles lasts from the Sunday of All Saints to the 29th of June, the feast of the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul. This fast may be of longer or shorter duration depending upon which day the Pasch (Easter) is celebrated. If the feast of Easter occurs sooner, then the Petriwka is longer; if Easter comes later, then the Petriwka is shorter. At its longest it could last six weeks, at its shortest, one week and one day. The duration of the Fast of Peter has remained the same as today since the beginning of Christianity in Ukraine.

## Prescriptions of the Fast of Peter

The Fast of Peter is somewhat more mitigated than the Great Fast before Easter, The Kievan Metropolitan George (1069-1072) in his "Rules" does not allow meat or dairy products to be eaten during the Petriwka. On Wednesday and Friday, he prescribes dry food, that is, bread and water or dry fruits. On Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday he permits fish twice a day and wine. In addition to this, he directs that one hundred prostrations (profound bows to the ground) be made daily, excepting Saturdays, Sundays and holy days. Since Metropolitan George was a Greek, we may assume that he prescribed for our Church the same practice on the Fast of St. Peter as prevailed in the Greek Church at that time.

The Synod of Zamost (1720) mentions that in our Church the Petriwka (Peter's Fast) lasted from the first Sunday after Pentecost, that is, from the Sunday of All Saints to the feast of the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul. The Synod notes that laborers and villagers may be dispensed from the fast either partly or completely, since the fast occurs during the harvest season. During the Petriwka, the Synod of Lviv (1891) allows dairy products on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and meat on the other four days of the week; however, it imposes upon the laity the obligation of praying five "Our Father's" and five "Hail Mary's" before and after the noon day meal and supper; religious must recite Psalm 50 [LXX].

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## Dormition Fast

The 14 day preparation for the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, August 1-14.

## St. Philip's Fast (Pilipiwka)

The 40 day preparation for the feast of the Nativity of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ beginning on November 15 and ending on December 24. This period is sometimes called Advent.

The oldest Christian feast is the Resurrection of our Lord or Easter. This Holy Day includes a whole cycle of feasts such as the Ascension and Pentecost. It is the great feast of our redemption and sanctification. Later Holy Days followed slowly until the fourth century. After the Church won official recognition and full freedom of worship and evangelization, our present calendar of festal celebration began to develop. This development was motivated by the Church's desire to honour both events in the life of our Lord and the memory of the holy martyrs. Eventually the Church established a full year Christian calendar.

We are familiar with the preparatory period before the Resurrection. This is the Great Fast or the Holy Forty Days' Fast. The celebration of the birth of our Lord cannot be ascertained before the middle of the fourth century. The church of Rome was the first to celebrate our Lord's birth. Many think that the date of December 25 was chosen to supplant the feast of the god Mithra and the solemn celebration of the birth of the invincible sun god. Others think that the date was chosen for the same reason that the Roman pagans honored the victory of the sun. It is around this date that the sun overcomes the darkness and the days become longer. Several times the prophets call Jesus Christ "Sun of Justice." It was deemed proper to choose the day when the sun begins its victorious cycle of light by shortening the duration of the night.

According to some sermons of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, he introduced this feast into the eastern Church about the year 379 or 388. After his departure from Constantinople the celebration of Christ's Nativity on December 25 was neglected. In 395 Emperor Honorius re-instituted the celebration. St. John Chrysostom tells us how he introduced this feast at Antioch sometime around 380. He explicitly says how he introduced it in imitation of the church of Rome. St. John believed that the Roman Christians know the date of Christ's birth better than anybody else since the imperial city archives were accessible to them.

The first mention of a preparatory period before Christmas is mentioned in a decree of the Council of Saragossa (380). The Council Fathers stated that every Christian should daily go to church from December 17 until the Theophany. At the Synod of Mac (581) in present day



France it was decreed that from November 11, the day of St. Martin, until December 24 every Christian should fast 3 times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday).

The pre-Nativity period of preparation developed rather late. Scholars do not agree about the exact time when it began. Some hold that it began in the sixth century. Others believe it began in the seventh or the eighth century. The present liturgical pre-Nativity season was finally established at the Council of Constantinople (1166). The Council decreed that the fast would begin on November 15 and last until December 24 inclusive. Thus, there was created another 40 day fast. [...] As far as our liturgical texts are concerned, the period of preparation for the feast of the Holy Nativity of the Lord still begins on November 15.

The pre-Nativity fast is often called the Phillipian fast because it begins on the day after the feast of St. Philip. The fast was introduced to prepare the church for a worthy celebration of the great and holy day of the birth of Christ. The regulations for the fast were far more lenient than for the Great Fast. Only Monday, Wednesday, and Friday were days of strict fasting without meat, dairy products or oil. On Sundays fish was permitted. Lay people were at first permitted to eat fish on other days too until the monastic rigoristic influence prevailed. It is interesting to observe that the famous 12th century Byzantine canonist Balsamon expressed the opinion that it would be enough if the lay people fasted only one week before Christmas. In 1958 a modern Greek author, Christos M. Enislides, welcomes Balsamon's suggestion and believes that the best solution would be for the Church at large to abstain from meat and dairy products for 33 days. During the last seven days of the fast everybody should observe the strict fast.

To worthily meet our Lord and Savior, we should sanctify this pre-Nativity season of Saint Philip's Fast. Sanctifying means spending our time in faith and in the service of God and in kindness towards our neighbor, especially those who are in need of our assistance. And we should think of what we would have been had Christ not come to our lowliness and poverty. Together with the whole of the Byzantine Church we should try to meet Christ as he deserves to be met and as it will, in His mercy, best serve our spiritual benefit!

Rev. Msgr. Russell A. Duker

## Particular days

- Wednesdays and Fridays
- Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14)
- Eve of the Nativity of Christ (December 24)
- Eve of the Theophany of Christ (January 5)
- Beheading of St. John the Baptist (August 29)

## Exempt Times from Fasting

- December 25 to January 4
- Between the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee and the Sunday of the Prodigal Son
- From Pascha to Thomas Sunday
- from Pentecost to the Sunday of All Saints

## Fasting and Abstinence

We often use the word "fasting" to refer to both fasting and abstinence. There is a difference between the two. Abstinence refers to the practice of not eating certain *types of food*. For example, on Wednesdays and Fridays, we abstain from meat. Fasting refers to the *amount of food* we eat. As a general rule, when fasting, the main meal of the day should equal in quantity less than the two other meals through the day. The "rules" for fasting and abstinence should always be regarded as means to obtaining a greater goal. Bishop Kallistos has an excellent article entitled, "[On the Nature of Fasting](#)," and Subdeacon Adam DeVille (Eparchy of Toronto) offers an excellent [Catechesis of Fasting](#). When practicing fasting and abstinence, it should always be done under the care of a spiritual father or mother or your parish priest. Ask them for assistance.