

Guidelines for Great Lent, which begins on Pure Monday, also known as Clean Monday

Let us strive to do the following during the period of Great Lent and Holy Week:

1. **Increase in the three Christian duties outlined by Christ in Matthew chapter 6:** Charitable giving, Prayer, and Fasting. Fasting should always be accompanied by prayer.
2. **Seek to weed out every immoral practice we have in our lives so that the good things of God make grow within us and work within us.**
3. **Spend more spiritual time with family: pray more, spend more quality time with family interacting, praying together, talking about the faith,** do family bible readings/study, readings books or listening to more things on faith, attending extra church services together (such as on the bottom of the home page of the www.orthodoxchristianed.org). Play edifying games and engage in common activities also that involve physical activity as well.
4. **Abstain completely from any habit or pastime that has you in its grip or is not spiritually profitable** (video games, some form of social media, etc.), and instead do things to help your neighborhood, projects that you have let sit around the house, look to help out a church, etc.
5. **Attend Church regularly, and when possible penitential midweek services,** be engaged in the prayers at Liturgy and other services, praying from the heart, realizing we are working together with God offering the sacrificial Liturgy for the life of the world.
6. **Monday-Friday say the Lenten prayer of St. Ephraim of Syria:** “Lord and master of my life, take from me the spirit of laziness, despair, lust for power, and idle talk. Give, rather, the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to me, your servant. Yes, Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother, for you are blessed to the ages of ages. Amen.”
7. **On Fridays say this prayer in addition** (either before eating or at some other time): “Lord, who on this day suffered on the cross that all people might be drawn to You, I commit myself to you on this day of your salvation. Accept my fast, increase in me the desire to do good and love for your commandments, help me entrust my life to you daily, and teach me how to love as I should. Amen.”
8. **In Orthodox practice,** and this has sadly fallen away over the past several years, traditionally Great Lent **excludes** secular music and secular entertainment, dancing, parties (birthday parties and all other celebrations are moved to Saturday or Sunday as the two festive days of the week), and all other distractions from spiritual life and spiritual growth, and above all from repentance. We are to replace them with listening to spiritual music, reading or listening to Scripture and other edifying books, exchanging youtube videos on secular matters with ones on matters of faith, etc. Buy some new spiritual books to read. If you will not do this on all days, then do it at least on Wednesdays and Fridays (when Christ was betrayed and when Christ was crucified).
9. **Prepare for and go to a meaningful and well-prepared Confession at least once during the 40 day fast of Great Lent (i.e. before Holy Week).** Well prepared means doing a full examination of conscience, such as found in prayer books, or the following on our website (www.holyorthodox.org) under “Christian Life”. **Why before Holy Week?** Great Lent and Holy Week are distinct from one another and have different purposes. Think of it this way: For the 40 day fast, Jesus gives each of us “me” time to work out our own salvation. So Great Lent is “us time”, but Holy Week is “Jesus time.”

Great Lent extends from Clean Monday until the Friday before Palm Sunday, and that is the time where we are to focus on us getting right with God so that we can rightly celebrate Holy Week and Pascha. All of the midweek services are penitential in nature, and it is a natural setting for the “big” confession of the year. But from Lazarus Saturday/Palm Sunday onward, the focus is on Christ.

In other words, the Church gives us 40 days to deal with our “own issues” and sins, and get them out of the way so that we can at least give one week (Holy Week) focusing solely on Christ. We should have already laid our sins at Christ’s feet *before* Holy Week, during the Great Fast itself (again, from Clean Monday to the Friday before Palm Sunday), because *the purpose of the confession is so that we are ready for Holy Week when it gets here!* Thus, we should have already made our “big confession” during

Great Lent, and any confession during Holy Week should be rather brief and supplementary. Good times to do one's Lenten great confession is before or after the midweek penitential services such as the Penitential Canon and Presanctified Liturgies (it is best to give the priest a "heads up" if you want confession more than a half hour before the service starts by email or text, since he has preparations to do and has to adjust these preparations to hear confessions). Also, Sundays prior to 9:35am.

10. **Choose a Fasting Plan that works for you during Great Lent and Holy Week.** Many want to fast, but cannot do the strictest levels of fasting for various reasons. Do not "just give up" and do nothing! As St. Isaac of Syria teaches us: "If you cannot fast for two days at a time, at least fast till evening. And if you cannot fast until evening, then at least keep yourself from eating too much."

Amount of Food: Monday-Friday of Great Lent we restrict not only the kind of food that we eat but also the amount of food. But there is no restriction of the amount of food eaten on Saturdays and Sundays as we still have abstention from certain kinds of foods, that there is no limitation on the amount of food that you can eat since they are feast days within the fast, with Great Saturday alone being the exception in the year, where we fast until afternoon, as we, through fasting and prayer, participate in Christ's life-saving death and descent into Hell and then eat following the "First Resurrection" Liturgy of St. Basil in the afternoon (but we still do not eat meat eggs and cheese until after all the services are served for Pascha, meaning until after the midnight festal Liturgy).

Below are four plans so that you can fast with some continuity throughout Great Lent and Holy Week on a level that is possible for you that maintain continuity within Church tradition.[*See note 1 for further explanation below]. If you generally have found yourself not fasting at all year after year, at least practice the Basic Fasting Level. If you have no health impediments, are prepared to increase prayer and charitable deeds then try one of the more strict plans.

- **STRICT ASCETIC FASTING:** On Monday-Friday, refrain from eating a full meal until after noon. The full fast prescribed in the Typikon of the Monastery of St. Sabbas--no meat, eggs, dairy through the whole period. One may eat olive oil and small portion of wine only on Saturdays and Sundays and Annunciation, and eat fish with backbone only on Annunciation, Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday. One may eat shellfish through the period. No hard liquor (strong drink). During Holy Week, fast as strictly as possible, and especially from Thursday evening after supper until Saturday night from meat, eggs, cheese, fish with backbone, olive oil, and alcohol, eating no full meals but only collations (small meals for health) until after the final Resurrection Liturgy (late Saturday/early Pascha Sunday).
- ***STANDARD PARISH FASTING (this is the standard set by the Pan-Orthodox Conference of 1976 and is standard practice for many jurisdictions):** On Mon-Friday throughout Lent and Holy Week, refrain from eating a full meal until after noon (i.e. a light fasting food breakfast or no breakfast). Abstain from all meat throughout Great Lent and Holy Week. Abstain from eggs and dairy when possible (but at least Mon-Fri of Pure Week, on Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the period, and Mon-Sat. in Holy Week). Note, as in the history of the Church, so also in many jurisdictions dispensation is given for dairy or eggs for sustenance in our modern context, especially on Sat/Sun. Shellfish may be eaten at any time. On Mon-Fri of the first week of the Great Fast and Mon-Sat. of Holy Week abstain from vertebrate fish. Throughout the rest of Great Lent, in the Holy Canons of the Church, vertebrate fish is not restricted on any days except for Wednesdays and Fridays (unless Annunciation falls on one of those days, since fish is allowed on Annunciation no matter what day it falls as it is a Great Feast). These may be observed as the biblical day (6pm Tues-6pm Wed and 6pm Thurs-6pm Fri). It is only in the monastic typikon that we find a restriction of fish throughout most of Lent. However, as Canonist Matthew Blastaris taught, and is printed in the Rudder, whenever the typikon disagrees with the canons, the canons supercede the typikon. This would be true in the case of the laity.

Hard liquor is to be abstained from throughout all of Lent. A modest amount of wine/beer is allowed on Saturdays (except Holy Saturday) and Sundays and on Annunciation (except for those addicted to alcohol, who should abstain from all alcohol anyway). Beer is often allowed on prominent saints days. During Holy Week (from Holy Monday to Great Saturday), try to fast as

strictly as possible, and especially from Thursday evening after supper until Saturday night, abstaining from meat, eggs, dairy, fish, and alcohol. Eat no full meals but only collations (small meals for health) from Thursday night after supper until Saturday after the Basil Liturgy, but then still eat only fasting foods. Following the midnight Liturgy we break the ascetical fast and eat all kinds of foods as it is the Feast of feasts, with a completely fast-free week following. Beer is

- **INTERMEDIATE FASTING:** Mon-Friday throughout Lent and Holy Week eat less food than normal (intermittent fasting works as it is traditional not to eat until noon on at least Wed and Fri). Eat no meat, eggs or dairy on Pure Monday, nor on Wednesdays and Fridays throughout. For the whole of Lent abstain from a whole meat group (mammal meat, for example, since mammals are closest to humans, or at least from a whole group such as beef or pork). Hard liquor is to be abstained from throughout all of Lent. A modest amount of wine/beer may be partaken on Saturdays (except Holy Saturday) and Sundays (except for those addicted to alcohol, who should abstain from all alcohol anyway). During Holy Week, try to fast as strictly as possible, but especially from Thursday evening after supper until Saturday night from meat, eggs and cheese, eating no full meals but only collations (small meals for health) until after the final Resurrection Liturgy.
- **BASIC FASTING:** Eat less food Mon-Fri throughout Lent and during Holy Week. Give up at least one type of mammal meat (pork, beef, etc.) throughout the whole period, and all meat and dairy on Pure Monday and on all Wednesdays and Fridays throughout. Give up at least one type of food from the “dairy” group (cheese, chocolate, ice cream, eggs or egg yolks, etc.) during the whole period—try picking one that you may find indulgent or may have an addictive drive toward. Hard liquor (“strong drink” in biblical language) is to be abstained from throughout all of Lent. A modest amount of wine/beer may be partaken on Saturdays (except Holy Saturday) and Sundays (except for those addicted to alcohol, who should abstain from all alcohol anyway). During Holy Week, try to fast as strictly as possible, but especially from Thursday evening after supper until Saturday night from meat, eggs and cheese, eating no full meals but only collations (small meals for health) until after the final Resurrection Liturgy.

11. In general, the words of St. Isaac of Syria are pertinent for exceptions, where he states: **“If you cannot fast for two days in a row completely, at least fast until evening. And if you cannot fast until evening, then at least keep yourself from eating too much.”** (Homily 51).
12. **For Presanctified Liturgy**, fast until midday, eat fasting foods as needed after that, and abstain from all food for 4 hours prior to Liturgy. Obviously if a person gets sick or has some sort of health requirement where they need to eat, they should do so, and may still commune.
13. **Exceptions to particular fasting rules:** Orthodox Christians must always fast in ways that are *not a detriment to one’s health* (to do things that harm the body goes contrary to the faith). Fasting is relaxed or dispensed with when a person is ill, when they are travelling (such as a trip), when receiving the hospitality of others who are not Orthodox (if someone invites you to dinner, for example, go and receive with thanksgiving what is set before you). Those who are traveling have dispensation, but should still try to fast Fridays (at least until evening—after the period when Christ was on the cross) abstaining at least from meat. **For those who live in households where not everyone is Orthodox**, for example, modifications will need to be made for everyone to be able to eat as a family. For any other questions please discuss with priest.

So, for example, it is Friday, you can fast during the day, and then for the evening meal eat with them what they are having (whether it is fasting or not). If you have not already, consult the priest and maybe make a good fasting plan that works for you. **For those who have special health needs**, for example diabetes, modifications need made to fasting rules. In such a case, fasting from all foods that are unhealthy may be your form of fast. Likewise, those who take medications that require a certain pattern of eating should do so as needed.

For More information please see our fasting guideline page on www.holyorthodox.org