

Holy Ascension Orthodox Christian Mission

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made;

Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from the heavens, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man;

And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried;

And arose again on the third day according to the Scriptures;

And ascended into the heavens, and sits at the right hand of the Father;

And shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life; who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

In One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

I confess one baptism for the remission of sins.

I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come. Amen.

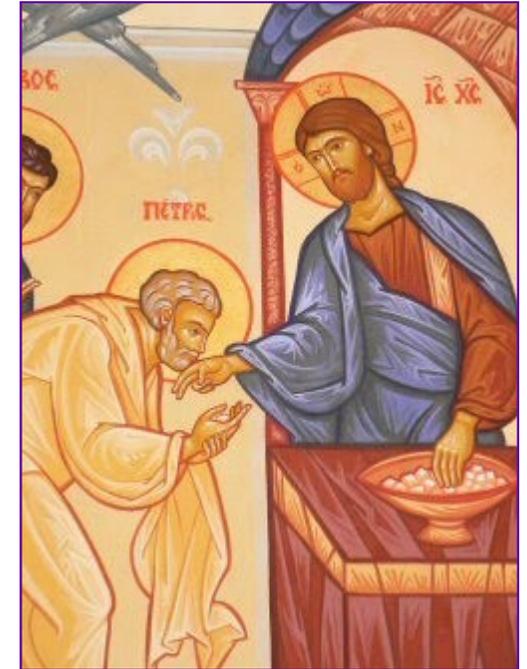
So the exterior food fast, without the corresponding interior spiritual fast of the mouth, the heart, the eyes and the mind is useless.

So it should be of no surprise now to us that we fast so much in the Orthodox Church. About 2 thirds of the year is spent in fasting if you take into account the 4 major fasts of Great Lent, the Apostles Fast, The Dormition Fast and the Nativity Fast, as well as most Wednesdays and Fridays which are days where we commemorate the Cross and the Crucifixion, as well as the Beheading of St John the Baptist Aug 29/Sep 11, and the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14/27, and the eve of Theophany. It goes to show how much importance we place on the person as a whole, mind, soul and body especially when it comes to refining ourselves through fasting for the sake of enhancing our worship, our prayer and spiritual life.



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Why Fasting?



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The purpose of fasting is to gain control of yourself and to conquer the passions of the flesh. It is to liberate yourself from dependence on the material things of this world in order to concentrate on the Kingdom of God. Fasting empowers our soul so that we do not give in to temptation and sin.

According to Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers like St Basil the Great, Adam, the first-created man, loving God of his own free will, dwelt in the bliss of paradise in communion with God, which was an angelic state of prayer and fasting.

The cause of this first man's fall was his free will; by an act of disobedience he violated the vow of abstinence and broke the living union of love with God. How? By being disobedient to the command that God gave which was a commandment of abstinence, of fasting, when Adam ate of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. So lack of abstinence, then, was the cause of the Fall.

Our Lord Jesus Christ calls all of us to salvation through self-denial (Luke 14: 26) and this is addressed to our free will of us fallen sinners: "If anyone wants to follow Me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and keep on following Me (Matthew 16: 24)." Fasting is a way of self-denial which then helps us to more easily take up our Cross.

The personal example of the Lord Himself bears witness to the absolute necessity of bodily fasting. He fasted for forty days and nights after His baptism to prepare for His earthly ministry (Matthew 4: 2). Jesus Himself taught that some forms of sin and evil cannot be conquered without prayer and fasting (Matthew 17: 21, Mark 9: 29).

Fasting, however, is not to be done out of pride or self-will. It must be observed in the praise of God and must be in accordance with the canons of the Orthodox Church, with the help and guidance of our spiritual fathers and mothers, since it consists in the complete renunciation of self-will.

So repentance without fasting is of no effect since fasting is the beginning of repentance. Again we have the example of our Lord who said, "when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites with their gloomy faces. For they disfigure their faces so that people may see that they are fasting. Truly, I tell you: they have received their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that people may not see that you are fasting. Only your Father who is in secret will see, and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you openly." (Matthew 6: 16 – 18)



So we fast not because it pleases God if we do not eat. Demons themselves never eat, and that is a line from one of our Church Hymns during Lent. Also we neither fast just so we afflict ourselves with suffering and pain. God takes no pleasure in the discomfort of His people. Neither do we fast with the idea that our hunger and thirst can somehow serve as a way of making amends for our sins. There is nothing in Scripture nor in the writings of the saints to say this except for the Crucifixion of Christ as a reparation for our sins. Salvation instead is a free gift of God and cannot be achieved through good works no matter how good they are or how good we think they are.

So why do we fast then? We fast so we can be delivered from evil, sin, the passions and so on so that this free gift of salvation in Christ might produce great fruit in our lives for the glory of God and His Heavenly Kingdom and for the salvation of those around us. We fast so we may more effectively serve God.

Fasting is not only the abstinence from food, but also from evil thoughts and all passion. Jesus said, "Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and so passes on? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person... (Matthew 15:17 - 20)."