

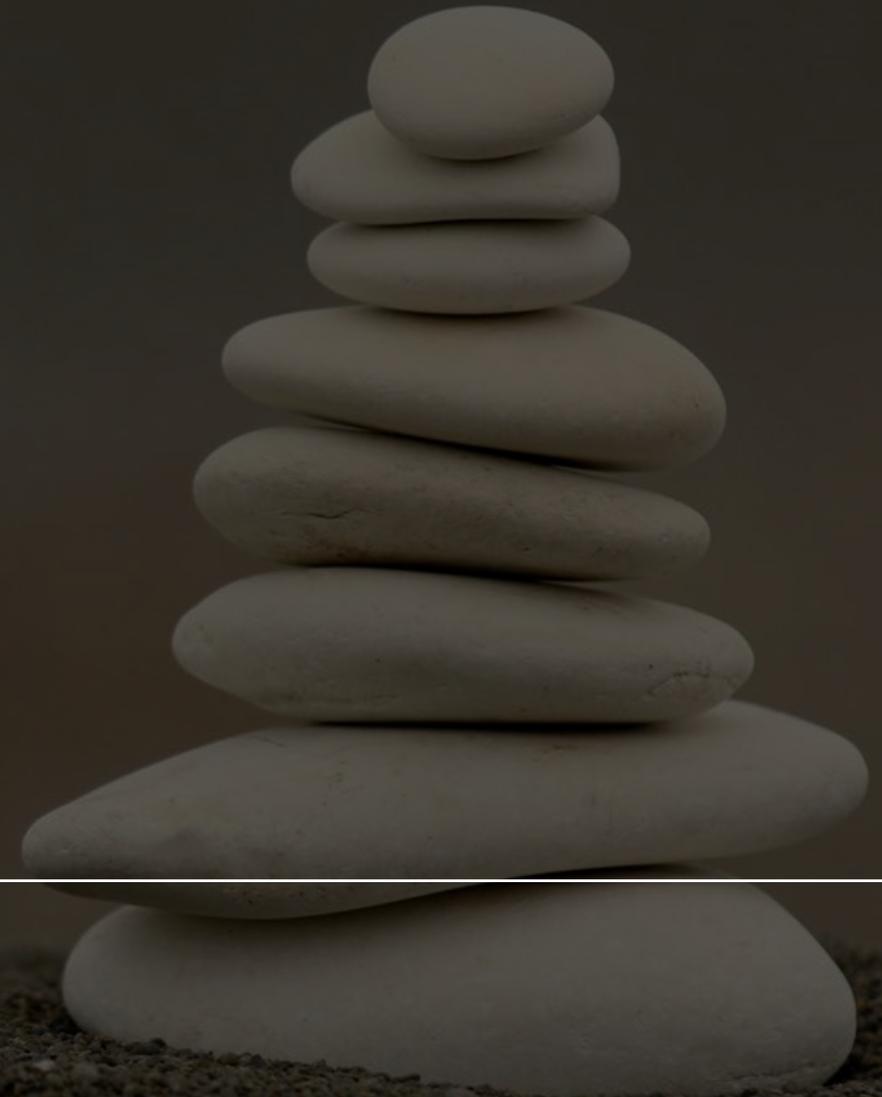
How to Benefit from the Great Lent

**BUT GROW IN THE GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE OF
OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST...**

2 PETER 3:18

IN HIM WE LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE OUR BEING.

ACTS 17:28



Why do we call this special fast, GREAT?

1- Jesus Christ Himself was the one who established and fasted this fast. Almost the only fast the Bible mentions that Christ had fasted.

2- It is followed by the commemoration of how Our Lord Jesus Christ in LOVE suffered for the salvation of my soul and that of the whole world.

3- We celebrate the DEATH and Resurrection of Christ

3- The length and the nature of the fast. Fish is not allowed during this period. There is a period of strict abstention during fasting. It is refraining from eating and drinking for a period, followed by eating vegetarian food.

4-It has its own special tunes, longer period of abstention, special readings and responses, a special rite of burning the morning incense, and special prostration in the Mass before absolving the deacons.

During Lent, a special Katamarus of biblical readings is used and contains readings from the Old Testament to create a special spiritual atmosphere all of its own.

History of the Great Lent...

In the early church, the holy fathers began fasting the Great Lent on the day after the Feast of the Theophany (12 Tobe).

This forty day fast was originally kept after Theophany to follow the example of Christ who immediately went into the wilderness after His baptism for forty days and was tempted.

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil” (LK. 4:1,2)

Then there was a separate fast of Pascha celebrated one week prior to the Resurrection.

Pope Demetrius, the 12th Patriarch of Alexandria, in the 4th century was the one who instituted the eight week -55 days- Holy lent that we observe present day and he also appointed the time for the Holy Feast of Passover.

Baptism of Catechumens

The time of the Great fast used to focus on preparation of catechumens (those who were new in the faith and could not partake in the Divine Liturgy) to be baptized on Resurrection.

In matins during Lent, we find a supplication that is prayed after the prophecies in which the whole congregation participated in prostrations as they pray for God's mercy concluding with a litany for the catechumens: "Confirm their faith in You, uproot all traces of idolatry from their hearts. Your law, Your fear, Your commandments, Your truths and Your Holy precepts, establish in their hearts.

Grant that they may know the steadfastness of the preaching they have received. And in set time, may they be worthy of the washing of the new birth for the remission of their sins as You prepare them to be a temple of Your Holy Spirit"

Great Lent is a time to rescue our souls

The human soul encounters her Bridegroom and is united to Him during the Great Lent. It is an opportunity for the soul to know the Bridegroom, not intellectually, but by experience. It is during Great Lent that the soul transcends time to live with the Eternal One; the limited soul unites to the Infinite One.

It is a journey characterized by joy, which is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, Who guides the human spirit throughout this journey to unit her to the Bridegroom.

1) Preparing for the Joyous Journey:

The gospel reading of the Preparatory Sunday is from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:1-18), which revolves around the joyful worship. Our Lord Jesus Christ reminds us that our worship, whether through prayer, fasting, or alms giving, is directed towards God and not to impress people, as hypocrites do. God is our Heavenly Father, Who sees what is done in secret and rewards us openly. When He talks about fasting, our Lord exhorts us during fasting not to have a sad countenance, but a cheerful and happy face, "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting... But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father Who is in the secret place; and your Father Who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matt. 6:16-18).

2) Where do We Go?

The gospel reading of the first Sunday of Lent (Matt. 6:19-33) starting of the main 40 days defines the direction of the journey. Our Lord Jesus Christ tell us, "But seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt 6:33). The Kingdom of God means that Christ rules over us and that we have communion with Him. "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed" (Luke 10:41).

-

3) The Joy of Victory Over Satan:

The gospel reading of the second Sunday of Lent (Matt. 4:1-13) give us the joy of victory over the one who tempts us. For our sake and on our behalf, our Lord was victorious over Satan. The Church reminds us that the journey has many temptations, because Satan, our adversary, "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Despite the difficulty of the trials, yet we are joyful, because our powerful God conquered the devil. Regardless of how strong our enemy may seem, and despite the numerous trials, yet he is a defeated enemy compared to our Lord's might and the power of His life-giving Cross.

4) The Joy of Repentance:

The gospel reading in the third Sunday of Lent (Luke 15:11-32) helps us experience the joy in heaven when one sinner repents. Even if we wander away from our Heavenly Father, and even if we journey to a far country, waste our possession with prodigal living, and become in need to eat the pods that swine eat, yet we can look up to our Heavenly Father. The gospel tells us how the father received his returning son, "But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him... But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his and hand sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry" (Luke 15:20-24).

5) The Joy of those Disdained and Rejected:

Every soul that feels rejected by society, the family, or the church looks up with hope to Christ, the Savior of the entire world, without exception. He will lead her to knowing Him and will restore her to the sheepfold. A life of distance and isolation begets hardness and pride as it did to the Samaritan woman, who refused to give Christ water to drink and told Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (Jn. 4:9). The Samaritans also refused Christ, because "His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:53). But the encounter with the Lord, the Savior of the world, melts the stony hearts and changes them to hearts full of love. Thus, during Holy Lent, the Church teaches us that there is joy in changing the stony hearts into compassionate hearts

6) The Joy of Complete Healing:

A person is humbled by illness, for he feels his weakness and disability. The cruelty of illness increases when it is connected to sin. The gospel of the fifth Sunday recounts the story of the paralytic at Bethesda (Jn. 5:1-18). This man was paralyzed for 38 years and suffered from loneliness; he said that he had “no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up” (Jn. 5:7). Our Lord changed this man’s sorrow to joy. At a time when he felt desperate in finding someone to care about him, or that he may be healed, our Lord went to him not by means of water of the pool, but by His word; He told him, “Rise, take up your bed and walk” (Jn. 5:13).

7) The Joy of Illuminations:

The soul that has been purified by repentance and lived away from sin needs illumination through knowing God. Our spiritual life is not merely abstaining from sin but is growth in the knowledge of God and coming closer to Him. The gospel reading of the sixth week of Lent (Jn. 9:1-41) presents to us the story of a man whom Christ testified that “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (Jn. 9:3). He lived in darkness, which was not only the inability to see, but also more importantly the ignorance of not knowing the Son of God. Christ granted him spiritual sight. Our Lord met him and asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” and the man answered, and said, “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” to which Christ answered, “You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you” (Jn. 9:35-37).

8) The Joy in Christ Our King:

With the gospel reading of Palm Sunday (Jn. 12:12-19), we rejoice with the multitudes, because Christ the King enter into our hearts to rule over them. We carry the branches of the palm tree and go out to meet Him chanting, "Hosanna! Bless is He Who comes in the name of the Lord" (Jn. 12:13)

Let us pray that during Holy Lent our Lord may grant us a joyful journey and help us live with Him through His journey of love during His Passion. May our Lord grant us victory with Him, through His glorious resurrections.

Key aspects of the fast God desires

- 1- FOCUS ON GOD:** use the time and energy saved from food to deepen your relationship with God. Pray more earnestly and seek His guidance.
- 2- Humility and Repentance:** it's about humbling yourself before God, confronting our own sins and allowing God to work in our hearts.
- 3- Practical applications:** Our faith should translate into actions bringing light and healing to others, not just personal spiritual gain.