

Fasting 101

with Fr. Kapusta



a resource for Ukrainian Catholics

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Much of this booklet was taken from

- the Orthodox Church in America website: oca.org
- A Popular Presentation of Byzantine Christianity by God with us Publications
- Articles from RoyalDoors.org
- Winnipeg's Archeparchial website: www.archeparchy.ca
- The Divine Liturgy Anthology by MASI
- and probably a few other sources I can't remember.
- Plus a lot of my own stuff.

It is intended for the education of my parishioners and those who are curious in and around our church.

Not for sale.

The gospel reading that follows, which is read at the Divine Liturgy of Saturday during the first week of the Great Fast reminds us that we are not made to follow rules for the sake of the rules themselves, but rather the rules are there to assist us in the movement towards our ultimate goal: becoming one with God (becoming holy).

Mark 2:23-3:5 (NRSVCE)

One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

Fasting is an exercise that is intended to strengthen us so that we can better focus on God.

The next few pages are intended to inform us about the current and traditional fasting guidelines of the Church, and hopefully the right attitudes towards fasting.

I hope you find it useful.



FOCUS ON THE SPIRIT: FASTING

An important part of the Church's worship is fasting. Fasting is an ancient and universal practice of abstinence from all or certain foods.

For us, fasting is NOT:

- An exercise of self-punishment
- A matter of keeping the church "laws"
- A means of displaying our religious piety
- A way to acquire physical benefits or spiritual powers.

Fasting is a means of self-discipline.

In fasting ...

- We gain strength over the passions, wayward impulses and impure desires.
- We prove to ourselves that 'Man does not live by bread alone' (Matthew 4:4), but true life consists of and depends on the life-giving grace-bestowing Word of God.
- We grow in the grace of repentance, turning our whole lives away from evil and commending our whole selves to God.
- We prepare for the worthy reception of the precious gifts of God given in the Eucharist and in the great Feasts such as Pascha.

Another reason for fasting is to save on our grocery bills, so that we can spend the money on the poor of our community. Can you simplify your diet and support the poor with your savings?



There are many things, including food, which are within our control. Many times we allow such things to control us instead. Our lives become imbalanced in order to put aside such preoccupations and to allow us the time and spirit to look more deeply within ourselves, the Church prescribes times of fasting.

Fasting is not merely refraining from certain foods. St. John Chrysostom asks: “What good is fasting from food if we do not fast from sins? What good is it to be careful not to eat meat and yet be unconcerned about the violence we are doing to the poor? What gain have we if we avoid wine but still are drunk with pleasures?”

Fasting often results in clarity of mind and warmth of heart. Fasting helps us concentrate on the will of God and develops compassion for the plight of our neighbour.



Is fasting just another obsession?

Anything good can be perverted to its opposite. That's why fasting is a matter to be worked out with one's spiritual advisor and should be practiced together with the Sacrament of Repentance.

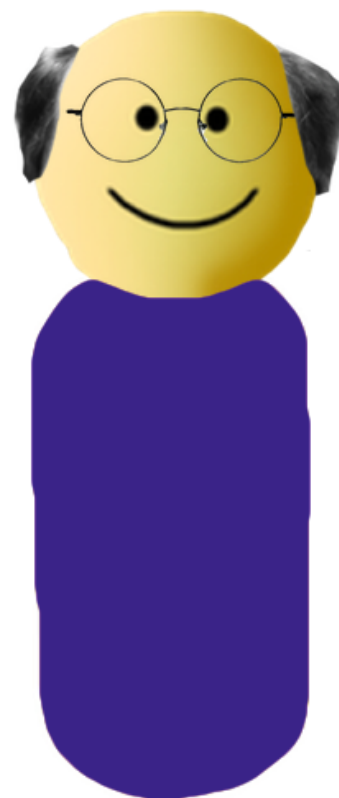
Fasting should free us up to concentrate on more important matters than food and drink. These include works of charity and caring.

If you are concentrating more on food and food preparation in the Lenten season, you might ask yourself what purpose your fasting is achieving.

Am I supposed to fast?

Yes. All of us are supposed to fast as part of our worship in some way. However the “rules” are relaxed or simply dispensed for those who are seriously ill, injured, elderly, a child, pregnant, nursing, traveling (long distance, not just in town), those forced to do heavy labor or something else that might negatively influence our health.

Our society tends to say: “Do what ever you want. Self-denial is for hyper-religious fanatics.” But reality is, self-control, which is strengthened by self-denial, is necessary for all people. We all need to be responsible for our actions.



How should I fast?



There are many sets of guidelines within the Church for “How to Fast”. As your pastor I strongly encourage all of you to take fasting seriously and thoughtfully however you choose to do it.

On the following pages I am printing **A:** the prescribed Synodal “Minimum” rules for fasting, **B:** the traditional “Maximum” rules for fasting during Lent for you eager and curious people, and **C:** “Fr. Kapusta’s suggested” rules for fasting for parishioners during Lent.

I hope that you and your families do your best to grow through this prayerful discipline this Lenten season. God always rewards those who faithfully struggle to grow in holiness.



Did you know that there are 3 other fasting periods besides the Great Fast?

In addition to the Great Fast (Lent) there are also these three fasting periods. It normal not to have events such as weddings, parties and other festivities during these fasting times.

- **The Nativity Fast** (also known as St. Philip's Fast and Advent) starts 40 days before Christmas (the feast of the Nativity) on November 15th.

- **the Apostle's Fast** starts on the Monday after All Saint's Sunday. All Saint's Sunday is the Sunday after Pentecost. Pentecost is 50 days after Easter. Easter is... well, you get the point. Each year it begins on a different date depending on the date of Easter. It lasts until the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul which is on June 29th.

- **The Dormition Fast** begins August 1st and continues till the feast of the Dormition on August 15th.

SECTION “A” - THE PRESCRIBED MINIMUM

Fasting and Abstinence Rules Prescribed for the Average Person in the Ukrainian Catholic Church as of 2015

We all have an obligation to:

All Fridays

Abstinence from meat and foods that contain meat (except during periods of dispensation).

Great Fast (before Easter)

- **First Day of the Great Fast (Forgiveness Monday)**
 - Abstinence from meat, dairy and eggs, and foods that contain these ingredients
- **First Week of the Great Fast**
 - Abstinence from meat and foods that contain meat
- **Mondays, Wednesdays, Friday of the Great Fast**
 - Abstinence from meat and foods that contain meat
- **Great and Holy Week**
 - Abstinence from meat and foods that contain meat
- **Great and Holy Friday**
 - Abstinence from meat, dairy and eggs, and foods that contain these ingredients

Apostle's, Dormition & Nativity Fasts

- **Wednesdays and Fridays**
 - Abstinence from meat and foods that contain meat

Specific Days of Fasting

- **September 14 Exaltation of the Holy Cross**
 - Abstention from meat and foods that contain meat
- **December 24 Vigil of the Nativity**
 - Abstention from meat, dairy and eggs, and foods that contain these ingredients
- **January 5 Vigil of Theophany**
 - Abstention from meat, dairy and eggs, and foods that contain these ingredients
- **August 29 Beheading of John the Baptist**
 - Abstention from meat and foods that contain meat

Periods of Dispensation

There is no fasting or abstinence during these times.

- December 25 to January 4 (Nativity to the Vigil of Theophany)
- Sunday of the Public and Pharisee to Sunday of the Prodigal Son
- Pascha to Thomas Sunday
- Pentecost to All Saints Sunday

All of the days of fasting and abstinence listed above are considered “**obligatory**”. This means that if we don’t fast we are leaving out an important part of our faith... and that’s bad.

Ideally however we should have an attitude where we want to fast on these days because we see the merit in it. We should do it because it is good to do.

SECTION “B” - THE TRADITIONAL MAXIMUM

Although these rules can be followed by anyone, typically they are followed today mostly by monks and nuns.



So this following description of strict fasting is long, technical and tedious to read? Am I actually going to gain something by reading this?

If you want you can skip to page 12. This section is here for those who are curious.

Within this developed pattern of Lent, what precisely do the rules of fasting demand? Neither in ancient nor in modern times has there ever been exact uniformity, but most authorities agree on the following rules:

- **During the week between the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee and that of the Prodigal Son**, there is a general dispensation from all fasting. Meat and animal products may be eaten even on Wednesday and Friday.
- **In the following week, often termed the 'Week of Carnival'**, the usual fast is kept on Wednesday and Friday. Otherwise there is no special fasting.

- **In the Week before Lent**, meat is forbidden, but eggs, cheese and other dairy products may be eaten on all days, including Wednesday and Friday.
- **On weekdays (Monday to Friday inclusive) during the seven weeks of Lent**, there are restrictions both on the number of meals taken daily and on the types of food permitted; but when a meal is allowed, there is no fixed limitation on the quantity of food to be eaten.
- **On weekdays in the first week**, fasting is particularly severe. According to the strict observance, in the course of the five initial days of Lent, only two meals are eaten, one on Wednesday and the other on Friday, in both cases after the Liturgy of the Presanctified. On the other three days, those who have the strength are encouraged to keep an absolute fast; those for whom this proves impracticable may eat on Tuesday and Thursday (but not, if possible, on Monday), in the evening after Vespers, when they may take bread and water, or perhaps tea or fruit-juice, but not a cooked meal. It should be added at once that in practice today these rules are commonly relaxed. At the meals on Wednesday and Friday xerophagy is prescribed. Literally this means 'dry eating'. Strictly interpreted, it signifies that we may eat only vegetables cooked with water and salt, and also such things as fruit, nuts, bread and honey. In practice, octopus and shell-fish are also allowed on days of xerophagy; likewise

A term you may not know:

“XEROPHAGY” means ‘dry eating’. In some instances, this means bread and water only - particularly if being used as a form of discipline. In other cases, such as the Lenten fast, vegetables cooked with water and salt can be eaten, and also such things as fruit, nuts, bread and honey.

This word is also very good for those who play Scrabble!



vegetable margarine and corn or other vegetable oil, not made from olives. But the following categories of food are definitely excluded:

- meat;
 - animal products (cheese, milk, butter, eggs, lard, dripping);
 - fish (i.e. fish with backbones);
 - oil (i.e. olive oil) and wine (i.e. all alcoholic drinks).
- **On weekdays** (Monday to Friday inclusive) **in the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth weeks**, one meal a day is permitted, to be taken in the afternoon following Vespers, and at this one meal xerophagy is to be observed.
 - **Holy Week.** On the first three days there is one meal each day, with xerophagy; but some try to keep a complete fast on these days, or else they eat only uncooked food, as on the opening days of the first week.
 - **On Holy Thursday** one meal is eaten, with wine and oil (i.e. olive oil).
 - **On Great Friday** those who have the strength follow the practice of the early Church and keep a total fast. Those unable to do this may eat bread, with a little water, tea or fruit-juice, but not until sunset, or at any rate not until after the veneration of the Epitaphion (Burial Shroud - Plaschanytsia) at Vespers.
 - **On Holy Saturday** there is in principle no meal, since according to the ancient practice after the end of the Liturgy of St. Basil the faithful remained in church for the reading of the Acts of the Apostles, and for their sustenance were given a little bread and dried fruit, with a cup of wine. If, as usually happens now, they return home for a meal, they may use wine but not oil; for on this one Saturday, alone among the Saturdays of the year, olive oil is not permitted.
 - The rule of xerophagy are relaxed on the following days:
 - **On Saturdays and Sundays in Lent, with the exception of Holy Saturday**, two main meals may be taken in the usual way, around mid-day and in the evening, with wine and olive oil; but meat, animal products and fish are not allowed.
 - **On the Feast of the Annunciation (25 March) and Palm Sunday**, fish is permitted as well as wine and oil, but meat and animal products are not allowed. If the

Feast of the Annunciation falls on the first four days of Holy Week, wine and oil are permitted but not fish. If it falls on Great Friday or Holy Saturday, wine is permitted, but not fish or oil.

- Wine and oil are permitted on the following days, if they fall on a weekday in the second, third, fourth, fifth or sixth week:
 - **First and Second Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist** (24 February)
 - **Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste** (9 March)
 - **Forefeast of the Annunciation** (24 March)
 - **Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel** (26 March)
 - **Patronal festival of the Church or Monastery**
- Wine and oil are also allowed **on Wednesday and Thursday in the fifth week**, because of the vigil for the Great Canon. Wine is allowed - and, according to some authorities, oil as well - **on Friday in the same week**, because of the vigil for the Akathistos Hymn.

It has always been held that these rules of fasting should be relaxed in the case of anyone elderly or in poor health. In present-day practice, even for those in good health, the full strictness of the fast is usually mitigated. Only a few Orthodox today attempt to keep a total fast on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday in the first week, or on the first three days in Holy Week. On weekdays - except, perhaps, during the first week or Holy Week - it is now common to eat two cooked meals daily instead of one. From the second until the sixth week, many Orthodox use wine, and perhaps oil also, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and less commonly on Mondays as well. Permission is often given to eat fish in these weeks. Personal factors need to be taken into account, as for example the situation of an isolated Orthodox living in the same household as non-Orthodox, or obliged to take meals in a factory or school canteen. In cases of uncertainty each should seek the advice of his or her spiritual father. At all times it is essential to bear in mind that 'you are not under the law but under grace' (Rom. 6: 14), and that 'the letter kills, but the spirit gives life' (2 Cor. 3: 6). The rules of fasting, while they need to be taken seriously, are not to be interpreted with dour and pedantic legalism; 'for the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14: 17).

The end of section "B"

SECTION “C” - SOMETHING IN THE MIDDLE

FR. KAPUSTA’S SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR FASTING FOR PARISHIONERS (AND HIMSELF) DURING LENT:

Okay, I admit it. If you look at my figure... you probably know that I struggle with fasting.

But this year is a good year for us all to give it a serious effort. Fasting is good for us spiritually and physically after all.

If we fall down and eat something which is not on our list... let’s not give up... let’s get right back up and get back at it.



I don't recommend that anyone jump into the most strict fasting rules "cold turkey", nor do I believe that doing the minimum allowed is the right attitude. It is best to talk to your spiritual director / confessor / pastor personally and make a plan with them. But for the sake of making a general suggestion for most of my parishioners, let's all consider trying to do something like the following:

- Eat simply and healthy all days of Lent. Including vegetables. Never over-eat.
- Do at least the minimal fasting rules set out by the Synod (section A)
- If you are visiting someone during the fast, eat politely whatever they serve you even if it is not on your fasting list, and be gracious and thankful.

- It is better to eat simple, cheaper food that may technically not be allowed in the minimum rules, than to eat fancy expensive food that technically is allowed (for example; a bologna sandwich is probably more “fasting like” than a lobster supper, even though even the strict rules allow lobster any day.)
- Give up candy, soda pop, desserts and other sugary foods. Perhaps a treat on Sunday is permissible.
- If you smoke, or drink excessively, consider giving it up for Lent (and beyond?).
- Turn off your TVs & other unnecessary electronics at least on weekdays. (Computer Games, Cell Phones, Social Media, Internet Surfing...)
- Pray together as a family and read the day’s Gospel every day. (I suggest the prayer of St. Ephrem)
- Spend some quality time playing with your family. At least twice a week, hopefully more.
- Set some money aside and/or work with the poor each week.
- Visit a shut-in, nursing home, or sick person when the opportunity allows.
- Do something nice for your neighbours.
- Try to attend Church services during the week, at least once a week. Make every effort to attend the parish mission. If possible volunteer at the parish.
- Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once during the fast, consider doing it multiple times.



**You have suffered
the passion for us,
O Lord Jesus,
Son of God,
have mercy on us.**