



THE RULE OF FASTING

Pre-Lent

Week 1

Beginning Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee

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.

Week 2

Beginning Monday following Sunday of the Prodigal Son

During this week, often termed the 'Week of Carnival', the usual fast is kept on Wednesday and Friday. Otherwise, there is no special fasting.

Week 3

Beginning Monday following Sunday of the Last Judgement (Meatfare)

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.

Lent

Beginning the Monday following Forgiveness Sunday (Cheesefare) until Holy Week

General notes:

*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 (termed xerophagy); but when a meal is allowed, there is no fixed limitation on the quantity of food to be eaten.

*Xerophagy: 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 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)

Week 1 (weekdays)

- Only two meals- Wednesday and Friday (xerophagy)
 - After the Liturgy of the Presanctified
- If able- absolute fast on the other days

- If unable- one meal on Tuesday and Thursday after Vespers
 - bread and water
 - perhaps tea or fruit-juice
 - not a cooked meal

Week 2-7 (weekdays)

- One meal a day (xerophagy)
 - After Vespers

Holy Week

On the first three days...

- one meal each day (xerophagy)
 - 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 (xerophagy), with wine and oil (i.e. olive oil).

On Great Friday...

- If able- total fast.
- If unable-eat bread, with a little water, tea or fruit-juice
 - not until sunset, or at any rate not until after the veneration of the Epitaphion at Vespers.

On Holy Saturday...

- After Liturgy
 - One meal at home
 - May use wine but not oil

Variations

The rule of xerophagy is 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 (mid-day and in the evening)
- wine and olive oil allowed
- No meat, animal products or fish

On the Feast of the Annunciation (25 March) and Palm Sunday

- fish allowed
- wine and oil allowed
- No meat and animal products

**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.

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).