

*Let us begin the fast with joy!  
Let us prepare ourselves for spiritual efforts!  
Let us cleanse our soul and cleanse our flesh!  
Let us abstain from every passion as we abstain from food!  
Let us rejoice in virtues of the Spirit and fulfill them in love,  
that we all may see the Passion of Christ our God,  
and rejoice in spirit at the Holy Pascha!*

Dear friends and faithful of Holy Cross,

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Let us begin the fast with joy! I encourage each of you to take some time to reflect on your Lenten efforts. It is essential to remember that Great Lent is a time for increased prayer and contemplation. We enter the “bright sadness” of Great Lent to recognize our need for salvation and our desire for communion with our Lord. During these life-giving days, we come to understand that all we can offer is our repentance, with tears pleading for our Lord to shower us with His loving-kindness - the healing through our Lord Jesus Christ. This year, let us take it seriously and create space for this spiritual renewal.

We tend to think of repentance as negative, but as I will mention in the homily on Cheesefare Sunday, quoting Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, *“Correctly understood, repentance ... is to see, not what we have failed to be, but what, by divine grace, we can now become; and it is to act on what we see. To repent is to open our eyes to the light.”*

The church prescribes prayer, fasting, and almsgiving as the “three-legged stool” that undergirds our spiritual effort. This year, I have once again attached a great article from the introduction to the Lenten Triodion (the prayer book the church uses during the Fast) by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware. He warns that, *“... divorced from prayer and from the reception of the holy sacraments, unaccompanied by acts of compassion, our fasting becomes pharisaical or even demonic.”* He also emphasizes that, *“... the primary aim of fasting is to make us conscious of our dependence on God.”* Let us use this approaching time of Great Lent as a spiritual springtime for ourselves.

St. Paul encourages us to *“lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* (Hebrews 12:2).

Ultimately, we want our fasting to bring us closer to Christ, drawing us nearer to this resurrected life in Him. Great Lent is the time when we identify with Christ in His voluntary Passion. It is a season in which we sincerely express, *“I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death and, and so somehow, to attain the resurrection of the dead.”* (Colossians 3:10-11).

I have attached a few articles that provide an overall view of the Great Fast, along with one prepared by a parishioner that offers valuable insight into what constitutes a true fast, complete with some Patristic quotes on fasting. Additionally, to help prepare for fasting-friendly meals, we have compiled an excellent group of recipes from our community. There are many recipes available online, as well as a few Orthodox cookbooks.

- *When You Fast: Recipes for the Lenten Season* by Catherine Mandell - <https://svspress.com/when-you-fast-recipes-for-lenten-seasons/>

Since Great Lent is a time of renewal and repentance, the journey toward Pascha should involve coming to confession. This is an opportunity for an honest, intentional evaluation of one's life and to confess where one falls short of the Gospel. *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”* states St. Paul. Confession provides a chance to rise again and seek forgiveness for these sins. It is available Saturday nights following Great Vespers and during the first three nights of Holy Week, or by appointment during the week. I have attached a helpful guide to assist in preparing for confession.

One should also increase attendance at Church services during Great Lent. Please plan on coming to Wednesday evening's Presanctified Liturgy each week, as this is the Food for the journey, where we partake of Christ. This coming week, we have a full schedule as we enter the first week of the Great Fast (Clean Week), and we attend Presanctified Liturgy every Wednesday of the Fast.

- Monday, March 3 - Great Compline with the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete - 7 PM
- Tuesday, March 4 - Great Compline with the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete - 7 PM
- Wednesday, March 5 - Presanctified Liturgy followed by a lenten potluck
- Thursday, March 6 - Great Compline with the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete - 7 PM
- Sunday evening, March 9 - Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers @ Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, Winston-Salem - 5:30 PM

Lent should also be a time for more intentional Scripture and spiritual reading. Please refer to the lectionary available on various Orthodox liturgical calendars or visit [oca.org](http://oca.org), where you can read the daily readings. Take some time to familiarize yourself with the treasure of the *Lenten Triodion*, which you can purchase [here](#). This book contains all the hymns and services for Great Lent and Holy Week. There's an excellent online version available that includes hymns for each day of Great Lent, which can be found here:

- <https://www.liturgies.net/Lent/triodion/triodion.htm>

Great Lent is a time to increase our almsgiving. It teaches us to give sacrificially as a reminder that we are not the center of the universe and that we are called to pour out our lives for others in imitation of our Lord. We can give financially to ministries that help feed the poor or serve refugees. This year, we will participate in the National Orthodox Baby Shower, collecting items for pregnant mothers through Room at the Inn in Greensboro. We can donate to humanitarian relief agencies such as IOCC. We can also contribute to the alms fund at Holy Cross, where funds are distributed to those in our community in need. Additionally, we can support ministries that evangelize and encourage the faithful. We can also volunteer our time by visiting the sick or helping those who require assistance.

Here are a few links:

- <https://www.iocc.org/ways-to-give>
- <https://focusnorthamerica.org/>
- <https://www.roominn.org/>
- <https://salempregnancy.org/>
- <https://www.oclife.org/>
- <https://newarrivalsinstitute.org/>

Here are a few books I recommend for spiritual reading. Choose one and make a concerted effort to turn off the TV, shut down the computer, and redeem the time

by reading some spiritual literature this year. This year, we will be reading and discussing "How to Read the Holy Fathers" during our Saturday afternoon Lenten book study. We have some copies available at church for purchase.

- *How to Read the Holy Fathers: A Guide for Orthodox Christians* by Father Joseph Lucas - <https://store.ancientfaith.com/how-to-read-the-holy-fathers-a-guide-for-orthodox-christians/>
- *Great Lent* by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann - <https://svspress.com/great-lent/>
- *Pilgrimage to Pascha: A Daily Devotional for Great Lent* by Fr. Steven Belonick - <https://svspress.com/pilgrimage-to-pascha-a-daily-devotional-for-great-lent/>
- *Alive from the Dead: Homilies on Great Lent* by Archimandrite Zacharias of Essex - <https://stmpress.com/collections/cave-of-essex/products/alive-from-the-dead>
- *Song of Tears: An Essay on Repentance Based on the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete* by Olivier Clement - <https://svspress.com/the-song-of-tears/>
- *Wounded by Love* by Elder Porphyrios - <http://www.amazon.com/Wounded-Love-Elder-Porphyrios/dp/9607201191>
- *Our Thoughts Determine our Lives* by Elder Thaddeus - <https://store.ancientfaith.com/our-thoughts-determine-our-lives/>
- *Toolkit for Spiritual Growth: A Practical Guide for Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving* by Fr. Evan Armatas. - <https://store.ancientfaith.com/toolkit-for-spiritual-growth/>
- *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* - [http://www.amazon.com/Sayings-Desert-Fathers-Alphabetical-Collection/dp/0879079592/ref=sr\\_1\\_cc\\_1?s=aps&ie=UTF8&qid=1330115256&sr=1-1-catcorr](http://www.amazon.com/Sayings-Desert-Fathers-Alphabetical-Collection/dp/0879079592/ref=sr_1_cc_1?s=aps&ie=UTF8&qid=1330115256&sr=1-1-catcorr)
- *Meditations for Great Lent: Reflections on the Triodion* by Archimandrite Vassilios Papavassiliou - <https://store.ancientfaith.com/meditations-for-great-lent/>

Additionally, on the theme of shutting down screens and electronics, here is an article that suggests limiting our time on social media during the fast as well:

- <https://orthodoxmeditations.blogspot.com/2019/03/great-lent-and-fasting-in-age-of-screen.html?m=1&fbclid=IwAR2yPNjs0P0TnQeg-N7Bo-PkPDHYnDLU5rngAqwe0WDuqEYclTE9k9FEQao>

Here are some online sources for spiritual reading during the Fast:

- <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2011/03/great-lent-resource-page.html>

Saint Vladimir's Seminary offers a valuable resource. *Great Lent Meditations* is an email collection of inspiring writings from holy fathers, priests, and scholars. Each daily email features a meditation along with the scriptural readings for the day.

- <https://www.svots.edu/Great-Lent-meditations-2025?bbeml=tp-Rh3aDbxbrk20OfVAv971AA.jZEOQ7bUo6U-PyyaES5pI9w.rCXgOD82Cr0W2fZDgkjPhPQ.19SkBYqI02ESIaAKGBb7fmQ>

If anyone has any questions about your Lenten disciplines, don't hesitate to contact me. I pray that this year will be a rewarding and spirit-filled Lent. We struggle together as co-laborers during these days of "bright sadness," which bring us closer to Christ's resurrection.

Forgive me a sinner.

In XC,

Fr. Christopher