

# The Nativity Fast – Why We Fast

By Father Stephen Freeman

Fasting is not very alive and well in the Christian world. Much of that world has long lost any living connection with the historical memory of Christian fasting. Without the guidance of Tradition, many modern Christians either do not fast, or constantly seek to re-invent the practice, sometimes with unintended consequences.

There are other segments of Christendom who have tiny remnants of the traditional Christian fast, but in the face of a modern world have reduced the tradition to relatively trivial acts of self-denial.

I read recently (though I cannot remember where) that the rejection of Hesychasm was the source of all heresy. In less technical terms we can say that knowing God in truth, participating in His life, union with Him through humility, prayer, love of enemy and repentance before all and for everything, is the purpose of the Christian life. Hesychasm (Greek Hesychia=Silence) is the name applied to the Orthodox tradition of ceaseless prayer and inner stillness.

But these are incorrectly understood if they are separated from knowledge of God and participation in His life, union with Him through humility, prayer, love of enemy and repentance before all and for everything.

And it is the same path of inner knowledge of God (with all its components) that is the proper context of fasting. If we fast but do not forgive our enemies – our fasting is of no use. If we fast and do not find it drawing us into humility – our fasting is of no use. If our fasting does not make us yet more keenly aware of the fact that we are sinful before all and responsible to all then it is of no benefit. If our fasting does not unite us with the life of God – which is meek and lowly – then it is again of no benefit.

Fasting is not dieting. Fasting is not about keeping a Christian version of kosher. Fasting is about hunger and humility (which is increased as we allow ourselves to become weak). Fasting is about allowing our heart to break.

I have seen greater good accomplished in souls through their failure in the fasting season than in the souls of those who “fasted well.” Publicans enter the kingdom of God before Pharisees pretty much every time.

Why do we fast? Perhaps the more germane question is “why do we eat?” Christ quoted Scripture to the evil one and said, “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” We eat as though our life depended on it and it does not. We fast because our life depends on the word of God.

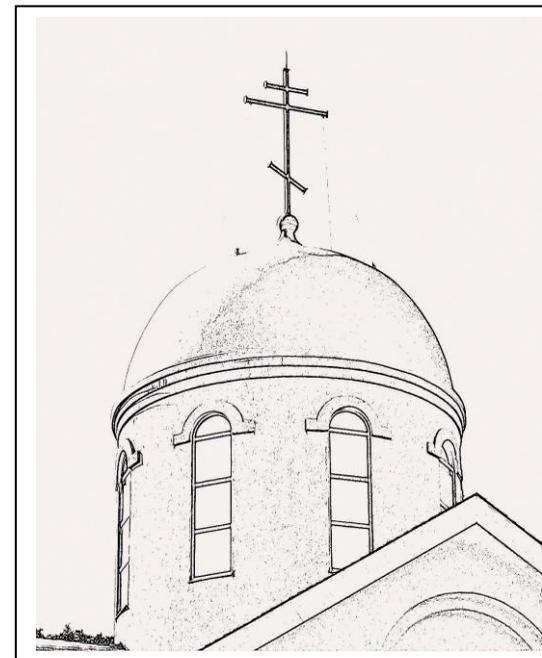
I worked for a couple of years as a hospice chaplain. During that time, daily sitting at the side of the beds of dying patients – I learned a little about how we die. It is a medical fact that many people become “anorexic” before death – that is – they cease to want food. Many times family and even doctors become concerned and force food on a patient who will not survive. Interestingly, it was found that patients who became anorexic had less pain than those who, having become anorexic, were forced to take food. (None of this is about the psychological anorexia that afflicts many of our youth. That is a tragedy)

It is as though at death our bodies have a wisdom we have lacked for most of our lives. It knows that what it needs is not food – but something deeper. The soul seeks and hungers for the living God. The body and its pain become a distraction. And thus in God’s mercy the distraction is reduced.

Christianity as a religion – as a theoretical system of explanations regarding heaven and hell, reward and punishment, is simply Christianity that has been distorted from its true form. Either we know the living God or we have nothing. Either we eat His flesh and drink His blood or we have no life in us. The rejection of Hesychasm is the source of all heresy.

Why do we fast? We fast so that we may live like a dying man – and in dying we can be born to eternal life.

WEEKLY



BULLETIN

*Today is the beginning of our salvation, the revelation of the eternal mystery. The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin as Gabriel announces the coming of Grace. Together with him let us cry to the Theotokos: Rejoice O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you!*

*Troparion of the Annunciation to the Theotokos*

## ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION

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Rev. Fr. Michael Pejovic, *Attached Priest*

Tara Paxton, *Senior Warden*

Reader Matthew Hascha, *Choir Director*

November 15, 2020

## TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

*Tone 6. Holy Martyrs and Confessors Gurias, Samonas, and Abibus, of Edessa (299-306). Martyrs Elpidius, Marcellus, and Eustochius, who suffered under Julian the Apostate (4th c.). Martyr Dēmétrios of Thrace (ca. 307). Ven. Paísii (Paisius) Velichkovsky (1794). “Fragrant Flower” Icon of the Mother of God.*

### Today’s Readings:

*Epistle:* Ephesians 2:4-10

*Gospel:* Luke 10:25-37

### Upcoming Service Schedule:

**Today @ 9am** Divine Liturgy

**Friday @ 7pm** Great Vespers (Entry of the Theotokos)

**Saturday @ 9am** Divine Liturgy (Entry of the Theotokos)

**Saturday @ 6pm** Great Vespers

**Sunday @ 9am** Divine Liturgy

### Next Sunday’s Readings:

*Epistle:* Ephesians 2:14-22

*Gospel:* Luke 12:16-21



*Entry of the Most-holy  
Theotokos into the  
Temple*

*The Distinguished Diocesan Benefactors program is an essential vehicle for funding the activities and programs of our diocese. Please consider participating in the program. Brochures are located by the bulletin board in the parish hall or at the diocesan website at [www.nynjoca.org](http://www.nynjoca.org).*

## Special Prayers

We pray for **all** our parish family members, but we pray especially for those who are ill and afflicted. Among them are: **Betty James, Manya Shark, Deryl Tczap, Rdr. John Economou, Margaret Makara, Tom Collins, Tom Kopec, Ann Marie Gahr, Dennis Gahr, Dorothy Studier, Helen Ciurczak (under hospice care), Pauline Barnowsky, Fr. Alexander Smida, and Catherine Ratushnik.**

*Keep up on OCA news by visiting [www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org), diocesan news and directives by visiting [www.nynjoca.org](http://www.nynjoca.org), and parish news by visiting [www.orthodoxbrick.org](http://www.orthodoxbrick.org).*

**Stewardship Donations** may be brought to the church or mailed to the church address: 360 Van Zile Road, Brick, NJ 08724. **On-line donations** are possible by visiting our website for a link. Many thanks for continuing to support your parish in these challenging times.

## Annunciations

**TODAY** – We are continuing a modified and controlled **Coffee Hour** ministry. The Parish Hall is set up to accommodate social distancing. Masks are required when traveling around the hall, but not when sitting and partaking of the refreshments. The hall will be sanitized after the Coffee Hour.

**TODAY** – The **Church School** program continues with classes held for the younger members of our parish after Divine Liturgy. **Next Sunday**, the teens will meet for their session after the Divine Liturgy.

**TODAY** is the beginning of the **Nativity Fast**. This time prepares us for the Son of God’s coming into the world as fully God and fully man. Please take advantage of this gift that the Church presents to us and plan to begin the fast with great joy.

**TODAY** is designated as “**Stewards of the Orthodox Church in America Sunday**”. The Stewards of the Orthodox Church in America have the special role of financially supporting the work of the nation-wide ministries and departments of our local church. The work of the Church takes place on many levels, including the national level. Please learn more about the work of the OCA by visiting [www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org), and consider becoming a Steward of the Orthodox Church in America.

**THIS WEDNESDAY** – A **group of inquirers** will meet at 7:00pm in the Parish Hall. We will discuss **essential teachings of the Orthodox Faith**. All safety precautions and preventative actions will be taken. All are welcome. Please contact Father Gary if you are interested.

**THIS SATURDAY** is the **Great Feast of the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple**. Please consult the service schedule and sign up online to participate in the services offered in commemoration of this Great Feast.

**NEXT SUNDAY** – **Group 3** is invited to attend Divine Liturgy.

Our condolences go out to the **Anderson family** in the falling asleep of Debbie’s father, **+Basil Farbanish**, this past week. May his soul dwell with the blessed, and may his memory be eternal!

Please continue to sign up online for **Great Vespers and weekday Divine Liturgy**. These services are filled on a first-come-first-served basis.

**Confessions** continue to be offered either by phone or in person (with proper social distancing). Please **contact Father Gary** to make an appointment for the Sacrament of Confession.

**Grocery Gift Cards** are available for purchase. Please contact Matushka Mary by email ([matmaryb@gmail.com](mailto:matmaryb@gmail.com)) or by phone at (848) 333-7075 to make arrangements.