

ORTHODOX FOOD FOR THOUGHT: During a time when many practice “social (physical) distancing” in the face of the Covid19 virus, we do well to think about the nature of what we have lost (temporarily). Individualism feels easy until loneliness begins to set in. I pray this article will find you well and be of use. +Father Constantine

During your prayer time consider these petitions:

“We pray to You, Lord Our God, for mercifully releasing us from the destructive contagion that has fallen upon us and free Your faithful people from spiritual and bodily death, give health to those who are suffering, give all of us Your divine protection and intercession, we pray to You, merciful Lord, hear us and have mercy.

Again protect Your faithful people with firm hope, fill our hearts with peace and quiet, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.”

Have mercy on us, Your humble and unworthy servants, who are praying to You, Our merciful and good God, with heartily repentance and warm faith hoping for Your mercy.

It is You, Who has mercy on us and saves us, Our God, we glorify You, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and always and forever and ever. Amen!

"FOR THE HEALING OF SOUL AND BODY: LET US PRAY TO THE LORD"

Fasting possesses great power and it works glorious things. To fast is to banquet with angels.
+St. Athanasius the Great

Fasting is an important spiritual struggle that carries us into the Kingdom of God. Combined with increased prayer and almsgiving, fasting helps us to say ‘no’ to the bodily desires in order to say ‘yes’ to the spiritual riches of the virtues of Christ. St. Seraphim of Sarov writes,

“Fasting, prayer, alms, and every other good Christian deed is good in itself, but the purpose of the Christian life consists not only in the fulfillment of one or another of them. The true purpose of our Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God.”

There are two basic categories of fasting within the Church: the Ascetical Fast and the Eucharistic Fast. The Ascetical Fast refers to the prescribed days and seasons during the year in which we refrain from consuming all meat, meat products, dairy products, fish, olive oil and alcoholic beverages. The Eucharistic or Communion Fast refers to the period of time in which we abstain from all food and drink after midnight before receiving Holy Communion the next day. We should also observe Wednesdays and Fridays in abstaining from meat. In certain circumstances, your priest or spiritual father may relax the traditional fasting guidelines at his discretion due to health concerns, very young children, pregnant women, or nursing mothers and the elderly depending on their health. In this way, fasting can be a spiritually fruitful practice for everyone for the healing of both soul and body.

Saint John Cassian (+435) offers us a vision of a rightly ordered relationship to food.

- Consume enough food to sustain a healthy life.
- Practice self-control so as not to overeat and become physically & spiritually lethargic.
- Combine fasting with prayer, almsgiving, spiritual reading, remembrance of death and the coming judgment, and a desire for the kingdom of heaven!

As the Holy Orthodox Church recognizes our human person as an integrated being of soul and body, made in the image and for the likeness of our Creator, it should come as no surprise that fasting is not only a spiritually profitable exercise but also a physically fruitful one. Conversely, neglecting ascetical practices prescribed by the Church cannot only take a spiritual toll, but a physical one as well. Choosing healthy ingredients for our meals that serve to sustain life, and limiting our food intake, so as not to put us at further risk for obesity, heart disease and even cancer, are all important ways that we maintain a healthy body to serve the Lord.

It is most important that the parents are good role models for their children in joyfully fasting out of love for God and a desire to grow into His likeness. Reading examples from the Holy Scriptures and the lives of the Saints are also important ways to help children understand and embrace the fast.

In this way, children come to understand the full life of the Church and their participation in it, motivated by a loving desire to become saints. St. Basil writes,

“Fasting protects children, chastens the young, makes seniors venerable.... If all were to take fasting as the counselor for their actions, nothing would prevent a profound peace from spreading throughout the entire world.”

Whether we be a child or an adult, we should not neglect, under the guidance of our priest or spiritual father, the fasting practices of the Church. As St. Anthony the Great reminds us,

“Do not neglect the Fast; it constitutes an imitation of Christ’s way of life.”

This life in Christ is indeed the path back to union with God that was tragically lost at the fall. In this regard, we should not approach our fasting with a frown. As we recall what was lost at the fall, the very wholeness of man, we can both look back upon it and forward to the restored fullness of life that awaits those who seek it. Fasting is thus not only a taste of what once was, but a foretaste of what is again to come. This practice reminds us that while all things are possible, only One is necessary. It is in this context that we heed the following words of St. Theophan the Recluse, wherein he instructs,

“Fasting appears gloomy until one steps into its arena. But begin and you will see what light it brings after darkness, what freedom from bonds, what release after a burdensome life.”

By Bishop Joseph, Antiochian Orthodox Church