

Studies in the Faith

The Church Calendar (part 2)



GREEK ORTHODOX
CHURCH
OF THE
ASSUMPTION

1804 Thirteenth Avenue
Seattle, Washington
98122-2515

Phone: (206) 323-8557
Fax: (206) 323-1205

Email: officemanager@
assumptionseattle.org

Presented by
Fr. Dean
Kouldukis

CALENDARIUM GREGORIANVM PERPETVVM.

Orbi Christiano vniuerso à GREGORIO XIII. P. M. pro-
positum. Anno M. D. LXXXII.

1582

GREGORIVS EPISCOPVS
SERVVS SERVORVM DEI
AD PERPETVAM REI MEMORIAM.

INTER gravissimas Pastoralis officij nostri curas, ea postrema non est, ut quæ a
Tridentino Concilio deinde Apostolica reformatæ sunt, illæ ad finem operatum, Deo
adiutore perdantur. Sane eiusdem Concilij Patres, cum ad reliquam cogitationem
Brevariij quoque curam adtingerent, tempore tamen exclusi rem totam ex
ipsis Concilij decretis ad unificatum & indicium Romani Pontificis revulerunt.
Duo autem Brevario præcipue continebantur, quorum unum preces, laudesque divi-
nas festis, profectisque diebus persolvendas complectitur, alterum pertinet ad annuos
Pasche, festarumque ex eo pendens recursus, solis, & Lunæ motum metiendos: Atque illud quidem
secundum recordationis viam & prædecessor noster absolvendum curavit, atque edidit. Hoc vero, quod nu-
merum exigui sequimus Calendarij reformationem, tandem à Romanis Pontificibus prædecessoribus no-
stris, & septies tentatum est, verum absque ad exitum perducere ad hoc usque tempus non potuit, quod
rationes emendandi Calendarij, quæ a catholice doctrinæ peritis proponebantur, propter magnas, &
fere inextinguibiles dissensiones, quas huiusmodi emendatio semper habuit, neque perennes erant, neque
antiquos Theologicos vias incolentes (quod in primis hæc in re curandum erat) servabant. Dum
itaque nos quoque credidit nobis, leve indignis, à Deo dispensatione freti, in hac cogitatione, curaque
versaremur, alius est nobis liber à dilectissimo Antonio Lilio arrisum, & medicus doctore, quem quon-
dam Alexij filius germanus frater conscripserat, in quo per novum quendam Epactarum Cyclicum ab eo
excogitatum, & ad certam ipsius auri numeri normam ductum, atque ad quamcumque anni solaris
in igneudinem accommodatum, omnia, quæ in Calendario collapsa sunt, constanter ratione, & seculis o-
mnibus duratura, scriptum posse ostendere, ut Calendarium ipsum nulli iniquam mutationi in poste-
rum expugnatum esse videretur. Quam hanc reformationem Calendarij rationem, exigue volumine com-
prehensam ad Christiani Principes, celeberrimosque universitates paucos ante annos misimus, ut res,
quæ omnium communis est, communem ceteris omnium consensu perficeretur. Illi enim, quæ maxima opta-
bamus, concordēs respondissent, coram nos omnium consensione adducti, viros ad Calendarij emenda-
tionem adhibuimus in alius Fratre harum rerum peritissimos, quos longe ante ex primarijs Christiani
orbis nationibus delegavimus: Is cum annuum temporis, & diligenter ad eam lucubrationem adhi-
buissent, & Cyclorum veterum, quæ recentiorum undique conquisitis, ac diligentissime perpen-
satis inter se contulissent, suo, & doctorum hominum, qui de eis rescripserunt, iudicio hunc præ ceteris eleg-
erunt Epactarum Cyclum, cui nonnulli etiam addecerunt, quæ ex accurata circumspectione visa sunt ad
Calendarij perfectionem maxime pertinere.

THE CALENDAR OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH (part 2)

READING ASSIGNMENTS

Orthodox Worship by the Rev. Alciviadis C. Calivas, ThD.

THE MOVABLE FEASTS

The ancient Church used the Julian calendar named after the Emperor Julius Caesar under whose reign it was developed. The Julian calendar was not astronomically correct. There was a discrepancy between calendar time and astronomical time. As a result, the Julian calendar lagged thirteen days behind actuarial time per year. The new calendar was introduced by Pope Gregory XIII of Rome, after whom the calendar was named, by a decree signed on February 24, 1582.

Because the Pope of Rome approved of the corrected calendar, the western Church utilizes this calendar to this day. However, the Eastern church, initially, refused to accept the new calendar for the following reasons:

1. The Gregorian calendar, at times, places Jewish Passover with Christian Easter. The church in no way wanted to associate Jewish Passover with the Christian Easter to avoid confusion between the two.
2. Since the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 AD ratified the use of the Julian calendar for use by the Church, only another ecumenical council can change the designation of the calendar.

In 1923 an inter-Orthodox congress was convened by the then Ecumenical Patriarch Meletios IV. One of the issues discussed was the calendar issue. A unanimous decision was not reached regarding the calendar issue. However, several Orthodox Churches did agree to adopt the new calendar, though not all at the same time.

NEW CALENDAR CHURCHES since 1923

Constantinople
Alexandria
Antioch
Greece
Cyprus
Romania
Poland
Finland
Bulgaria (1968)

OLD CALENDAR CHURCHES

Jerusalem
Russia
Serbia

Mt. Athos
(19 of the 20 Monasteries)

Old Calendarists *

* The Old Calendarists were against the institution of the new calendar and therefore severed communion (broke away from) the Churches which use the new calendar.

Pascha and all movable feastdays are the only feastdays which are celebrated together by all the Orthodox Churches on the old calendar (except for the Orthodox Church of Finland which celebrates Pascha (Easter) according to the New Calendar.)

- A. This was done as a compromise to those who did not want to change calendars.
- B. This way the canons regarding the date for the celebration of Pascha would not be violated.

The determination as to when Pascha is to be celebrated was made by the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325 AD.

- A. Pascha Sunday falls on the first Sunday which follows the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox. The Vernal Equinox is the day when light and darkness are equal every place on the Earth, 12 hours.
- B. The Vernal Equinox is March 21st. However all dates for the determination of Pascha are calculated according to the Old Calendar. The Vernal Equinox occurs on April 3rd on the old calendar. Therefore Pascha can never be celebrated before April 3rd.
- C. Pascha may be celebrated only after the Jewish Passover. Even though the above is not a provision of the Ecumenical Synod, the Church follows this rule by Tradition so the two never coincide thereby avoiding confusion between the two.

THE MEASUREMENT OF TIME

In the Orthodox Church, time is measured from two points of reference. The first is the Jewish tradition of beginning each day at Sunset. We have inherited this notion from our Jewish ancestors, thus in the Orthodox Church the new liturgical day begins with the Vespers service at sunset. Under the influence of the Roman-Byzantines the day begins at midnight.

In Orthodoxy the Jewish tradition of time measurement predominates (day begins at sunset). However both traditions exist in the Orthodox Church. For example, the liturgical day begins at sunset, however the prescribed fast for a particular day usually commences at midnight.

FASTING PERIODS IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

1. The weekly fast on all Wednesdays and Fridays.
2. The day before the feast of Theophany (January 5th)
3. The feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14th) and the Beheading of St. John the Baptist (August 29th)
4. The five periods of fasting in the Church are as follows:
 - A. Great Lent, which lasts for forty days preceding Holy Week.
 - B. Holy Week
 - C. The fast of the Holy Apostles begins on the Monday after the Sunday of all Saints and ends on June 28th.
 - D. The fast of the Dormition of the Theotokos (August 1st—15th)
 - E. The fast of Christmas (November 15th—December 24th)

FAST-FREE PERIODS IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

1. The week after Pascha, known as Bright Week.
2. The week after Pentecost.
3. The period between Christmas and Theophany.

4. The first week of the Triodion, i.e., after the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee.

A strict fast consists of an abstinence from all meat, dairy products, fish, wine and oil. It is usually customary to eat only two meals a day instead of three if you are able. Some fast periods above are more strict than others.

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE GREAT AND HOLY FAST

While fasting with the body, brethren, let us also fast in spirit. Let us loose every bond of iniquity; Let us undo the knots of every contract made by violence; Let us tear up all unjust agreements; Let us give bread to the hungry and welcome to our house the poor who have no roof to cover them, that we may receive great mercy from Christ our God.

(From the Triodion: Vesper service from Wednesday of the first week of Great Lent)

In the previous sessions, we discussed the calendar of the Church. One specific area of discussion was the pre-festive and post-festive periods of the twelve major feasts of the Church. The post-festive period usually lasts for eight days for most feasts. The pre-festive period for each of the twelve feasts varies in length. The pre-festive periods can be as short as a week or, as in the case of Pascha (which as the greatest feastday in our Church stands alone and is not counted as one of the twelve), as long as fifty days.

In order to understand this pre-festive period leading to Pascha an understanding of its structure is needed. The pre-festive period leading to Pascha can be broken into three distinct sections. They are as follows:

1. **The Pre-Lenten Period:** Three preparatory Sundays (Publican and the Pharisee, the Prodigal Son, the Last Judgment), followed by a preliminary week of fasting where only abstinence from meat is prescribed throughout the entire week, ending with the Sunday of Forgiveness.
2. **The forty Days of the Great Fast:** Beginning on Monday in the first week (or, more exactly, at Sunday Vespers on the evening before) and ending with the service of the Ninth Hour on Friday in the sixth week.
3. **Holy and Great Week,** preceded by the Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday.

The most ancient of the above three preparatory periods leading to Pascha is the period of Holy and Great Week. This preparatory period was already in existence by the second century. The forty day period of the Great Fast is described in writings originating from the first half of the fourth century. The observance of the Pre-Lenten period did not become universal in the Church until the tenth or eleventh century.

HOLY AND GREAT WEEK

In the Pre-Nicene era of the Church (The period before the convening of the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in the year 325 AD), the faithful used to keep a fast on Friday and Saturday prior to the celebration of the feast of Pascha on Sunday. This was certainly the case by the second century as is evidenced by the writings of St. Irenaeus.

Following the words of our Lord "...As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day" (Mark 2:18) the Friday and Saturday before Pascha developed into days of total fasting where no food would be consumed. This is in commemoration of the Biblical account, for on the day of Christ's Crucifixion and death and the day following it (Saturday) Jesus was not with His disciples.

By the middle of the third century, many Orthodox jurisdictions were observing a fast for the entire week leading up to Pascha. However, at that time there was no uniformity in practice. Uniformity in practice was achieved in the late fourth century, after the Church was freed from persecution at the hand of St. Constantine. By the late fourth century all jurisdictions were observing a fast for the entire week leading up to Pascha. By this time as well, the special commemorations for each day of Holy Week were firmly established.

THE FORTY DAYS OF THE GREAT FAST

In the pre-Nicene period of the Church the forty days of fasting prior to Holy Week did not exist. The development and acceptance of the forty day fast did not occur until after the Church was freed from persecution in the year 313 AD and then became a standard practice throughout all of Christendom by the late fourth century.

Whereas the six-day fast of Holy Week was the pre-festive period leading all Christians to the celebration of Pascha, the forty day fast came into existence for an entirely different reason. With the freeing of the Church from persecution came the establishment of an official catechumenate, a group of people who wished to convert to Christianity. This group of individuals, the Catechumens, who were studying to become Orthodox, fasted for forty days prior to their baptism as part of their preparation for Baptism.

The choice of the number forty has obvious biblical precedents. For example Moses fasted for forty days on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28) prior to receiving from our Lord the Ten Commandments. Elijah fasted for forty days as he journeyed to Mount Horeb where he also experienced a manifestation of God, a Theophany, in his life (1 Kings 19:8). Of course our Lord fasted for forty days in the wilderness prior to being tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1). The forty day fast, from biblical precedent, came to be regarded as a period of spiritual illumination.

With time the entire church community was encouraged to share with the catechumen in "prayer and abstinence" thus renewing year after year their baptismal dedication to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So the forty day fast came to involve the whole body of the faithful, not just those preparing for baptism.

The two distinct fast periods, the six-day pre-Nicene fast which prepared the faithful for Pascha and the forty day post-Nicene fast which was originally formed as part of a preparatory period for the baptism of the catechumenate, converged on Holy Saturday due to the fact that, by Tradition, the catechumens were baptized on Holy Saturday.

THE PRE-LENTEN PERIOD

In most Orthodox jurisdictions each day of the week made up the forty days of the Great fast. The fast began on a Monday and ended six weeks later on the Friday before Palm Sunday. The Orthodox Christians in Palestine followed a different practice. They also observed a forty day fast however, they did not include Saturdays and Sundays in the calculation of their days of fasting. Therefore, in order to maintain the forty days of the fast they added two additional weeks prior to their observance of Lent. Hence, the observance of "Cheese Fair Week", from the seventh century onwards, represents a compromise between the practice of the Orthodox Christians in Palestine and the Orthodox Christians in most other Orthodox jurisdictions. This is why "Cheese Fair Week" is considered part of the Lenten fast and yet it is not fully within Lent.

Throughout the next four centuries, the season of pre-Lent was gradually expanded to include three other preliminary Sundays:

1. The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee ten weeks before Pascha

2. The Sunday of the Prodigal Son
3. The Sunday of the Last Judgment

Together with the Sunday of Forgiveness, this makes four preliminary Sundays in all which make up the pre-Lenten period. By the eleventh century the pre-Lenten period was firmly established and in practice throughout all Christendom. ■

SESSION NOTES



ORTHODOX WORSHIP

Rev. Alciviadis C. Calivas, Th.D.

Holy Cross School of Theology

Prayer is the most sublime experience of the human soul, and worship is the most profound activity of the people of God. "There is no life without prayer. Without prayer there is only madness and horror. The soul of Orthodoxy consists in the gift of prayer." (Vasili Razonov)

ENCOUNTERING CHRIST IN WORSHIP

The Orthodox Christians inhabit and measure time by a calendar itself touched by the Incarnate Word of God. The recurring rhythms of the year, the months, the weeks, and the days alternating with nights mean much more than the simple passage of time. They also constitute the decisive and supreme moments when the Word of God was incarnate and lived among us, when He was born, died, rose again and ascended into heaven. These acts, upon which our salvation is grounded, occurred once and for all. But in the very rhythm and flow of time they are remembered, celebrated and experienced anew. In every liturgical event we encounter Christ, who once was dead and now lives; who "is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13: 8). In every liturgical event he renders actual both His past saving work and its fulfillment. Amid the flux of time, worship introduces us to the end of time (Matt. 18: 20). He "who is enthroned on high with the Father is also invisibly with us" (prayer of the Divine Liturgy). *He, who is to come again to judge the living and the dead, has never left us and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age*" (Matt. 28: 20).

The Church through her kerygma, the Gospel, and the sacraments call the "lords of creation" to a union with their Creator. The new world is working itself out, but in the mystery of faith, hidden from the wise of this world (Cor. 1: 19-21, 2: 6-9). Worship in general and the sacraments in particular introduce us to the future age and kingdom. The Risen Christ is made manifest. We participate in the saving acts of His life, so that our life may be continuously renewed and refashioned in the likeness of Him who made us.

OBSERVING THE DAY IN HONOR OF THE LORD

Our common, everyday experiences of time-sunrise and sunset, and the recurring cycle of the weeks, months and seasons-have been integrated into liturgical time, in order to express and signify God's life in us and our life in Him. Time-day and night, spring, summer, autumn and winter-has acquired a new significance, a new solemnity, a new urgency. Each day has the possibility to be a day of grace and each year to be a year of the Lord. By this I mean, that each day and year can be the fitting and decisive moment (*kairos*) both to remember God and all that He did and continues to do for us, and to anticipate with joy the riches that He has prepared for us who love Him (II Cor. 2: 9). The liturgical cycle, which moves on four interrelated planes—the day, the week, the month, the year—incorporates us into the mystery of Christ, in order to transform the time (*chronos*) in which we live and act into the decisive time (*kairos*) of our salvation. Each day becomes an image of our whole existence. The ways by which we organize and utilize each day, and the priorities around which it is oriented, are the telling signs of the quality of each individual life. For a Christian each day can and must be a shared existence with eternity, with Christ, or, as the early Christian writer Origen put it: *"The Christian, who is always engaged in the words, works, and thoughts of the Divine Logos, who is by nature his Lord, is always living in His days and is constantly observing the Lord's days."*

Of all natural phenomena, none is more conspicuous and central to human life than the setting and the rising of the sun. For the Christian the appearance and the disappearance of light are more than merely natural occurrences. Since God and His saving power is always experienced as light—"the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned" (Matt 4:

16) - sunset and sunrise are the most propitious times for prayer; for the remembrance of Jesus Christ, the light of the world, who dispels the darkness of sin, corruption and death. Each evening and morning-whether in the setting of communal worship or private devotions-the faithful prayerfully light the vigil lamps, the symbol of Christ as light, and praise with gladness and thanksgiving the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, who is the *phos ilaron*, the gladsome and radiant light.

THE DAILY SERVICES

The daily non-sacramental worship of the Orthodox Church consists mainly of the Evening Service of the Vespers (*Esperinos*) and the Morning Service of Matins (*Orthros*), which are the longest and the most elaborate of the Orthodox Services. In addition to them, the daily cycle contains the following Services: a) the four services of the Hours (*Hores*); b) the Compline Service (*Apodeipnon*); c) the Midnight Service (*Mesonyktikon*). Each of the Hours is numbered in accordance with intervals of the day as they were named in antiquity: the First (our sunrise), the Third (our midmorning or 9 a.m.), the Sixth (our noon), and the Ninth Hour (our midafternoon or 3 p.m.). Of these, the First Hour is in reality an extension of Matins and is therefore usually connected with it. The central prayer of each Hour is the Lord's Prayer. In addition, each Hour has a set of psalms, hymns and a distinctive prayer for that Hour. Each Hour has a particular theme, and sometimes even a sub-theme, based upon some aspect of the Christ-event and salvation history. The general themes of each of the Hours are: the coming of the true light (First); the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Third); the crucifixion and passion of the Lord (Sixth); the death and burial of the Lord (Ninth).

Compline is a service that is recited after supper and before retiring for bed. It focuses on three things: thanksgiving for the day that has passed; protection for the ensuing night; and forgiveness of wrongs committed during the day. The Midnight Service, as its name indicates, is a service for the middle of the night. With the advancement of technology and the change in working and sleeping habits, this service is now limited mostly to monastic communities. The "middle" of the night is an important hour in Scripture; among the significant events that have occurred in the deep of night is the resurrection of our Lord. Scripture also alludes to the occurrence of the Second Coming (*Parousia*) as an event that will take place in the middle of the night (Matt. 25: 26; I Thess. 5: 2-4). The service is structured around these general themes.

The fixed elements of the seven daily services are contained in the liturgical book called the *Horologion*. The practice of daily worship at frequent intervals has had a proven salutary effect on the lives of Christians. Through these devotional practices the remembrance of Christ permeates the whole of life to preserve it from sin and to bless and sanctify all daily activity and labor. Hippolytus highlights the great benefits that accrue to the believer through the practice of frequent prayer with these words: "*if you thus act and are mindful of these things and teach them to one another, you can neither be tempted nor can you perish, since you have Christ always in your minds.*"

BEGINNING THE DAY AND THE WEEK

The Orthodox Church has inherited from Judaism two important notions concerning the measurement of time. In the first instance the day is reckoned from one sunset to the next. Accordingly, the evening marks the beginning of each day. Thus, the liturgical day commences with the service of vespers. Under the influence of the Roman-Byzantine practice, however, the idea of beginning the day at midnight has also been introduced into liturgical usage. Even so, it must be noted that the earlier Judaic notion remains dominant and in most instances determines the liturgical practices of the Church. A striking example which points to the co-existence of these two notions in the liturgical practices of the Church is the rule of fasting. All days, whether they be ordinary, feast or fast days, begin liturgically at sunset with the vesper service. The prescribed fast, however, for a particular day, or in preparation for Holy Communion at the Divine Liturgy of the day, usually commences at a point before midnight.

The second notion pertains to the adoption by the Church of the seven day week. Through its use by the Church, this system of dividing the month finally replaced all others in the gentile world. According to Jewish custom, based on the Old Testament narrative of creation, the first six days of the week were simply numbered,

while the last was called the Sabbath, the day of rest. In time, the sixth day also received a special name. Because of its proximity to the Sabbath, it became known as the day of Preparation (*Paraskeve*). In the tradition of the Orthodox Church the names of the days of the week have retained these biblical names, except for the First Day, which the Church renamed *Kyriake Hemera*—or the Day of the Lord. In the West, however, the old pagan traditions have remained intact for the most part. The days continued to be identified with celestial bodies, the sun, moon and several planets, which were themselves named after pagan deities.

THE DAY WHICH THE LORD HAS MADE

The most important day for the Christian community was and continues to be the First day of the Jewish week. For the people of the Old Covenant the First Day was a memorial of the first day of creation, when God separated the light from the-darkness. For the people of the New Covenant the first day includes this and much more. The first was the day when the empty tomb was first discovered and the risen Lord made His first appearances to His followers. The first was the day of the Resurrection of Christ and the beginning of the new creation brought about by His victory over death. By the end of the first century the Church gave to this special day of Christ's resurrection a distinctly Christian name: the Lord's Day (*Kyriake hemera*) (Rev. 1: 10).

The Lord's Day (Sunday) is a Christian institution. It is the Christian festival, founded upon Christ's resurrection. It is "*the day which the Lord has made*" (Ps. 117: 24). It is a day of rejoicing and holy convocation, when no one is permitted to fast or kneel in sorrow or in penance. In 321 A.D. St. Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, declared it a day of rest. Long before him, however, Christians were already known to observe the day with special solemnity, treating it as a holy day devoted to spiritual things. As a day of rest, the Lord's Day is not to be abused as a day of idleness and inactivity. For the faithful it is always a day for participation in the communal worship of the Church, for Christian fellowship, for the service of God through works of charity, for personal quiet and meditation, and for the discovery and enjoyment of God's presence in us, and in the people and the world that surround and touch our lives.

The principal activity of the Church on the Lord's Day is to assemble for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. The divine Liturgy stands at the center of the weekly remembrance of the Resurrection, because through it the paschal mystery is perpetuated and realized in every Christian community. There has never been a Sunday when the Eucharist has not been celebrated. In and through the Eucharistic action the risen and reigning Christ offers and distributes Himself in Word and Sacrament to every believer; and the miracle and the mystery of the new life lived in community is continuously revealed and built up.

Because the celebration of the Eucharist introduces us to the "*final day*" (*eschata*), the Lord's Day is also known as the "eighth day," i.e. the day which will have "*no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb*" (Rev. 21: 23). The "eighth day" is a term which indicates the final age, when the new creation, already begun by the resurrection of Christ, will be fulfilled and completed; when the new world will be ushered in by the general resurrection.

EMPHASIS OF EACH DAY OF THE WEEK

There is evidence, too, that the primitive Church set aside other days of the week for special consideration. Saturday (*Sabbath*) was regarded as the memorial of the creation narrative: "*so God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all His work which he had done in creation*" (Gen. 2: 3). In the liturgical tradition of the Church Saturday continues to be a festival. It recounts the creative act of God, who brought all things into being out of nothing and reminds us of the opportunity we have to share in God's perpetual Sabbath, i.e., His creative life. Hence, the Church never fasts on a Saturday, except on the one Great and Holy Sabbath, when the Church annually commemorates the burial of God in the flesh.

From the apostolic times the Church observed Wednesday and Friday as fast days. From an early date, the Wednesday fast was connected with the betrayal of Christ by Judas, while the Friday fast was connected with the death of the Lord on the cross. Both events manifest the terrible darkness and evil of this world, and the tragic and dreadful circumstance of human sin and apostasy. They are the days of this world, which lies in dark-

ness and needs to be overcome through prayer and fasting (Mark 9: 29). These two days are a special call for vigilance. Their weekly recurrence is a reminder that the Kingdom in its fullness has not yet come. They are the days of preparation and anticipation, of repentance and expectation. Except for certain seasons (e.g. Bright Week after Easter) when fasting is abolished, these two days remain penitential in substance and character. Primitive authors explain that on these days the Church also gathered together for a liturgical synaxis, i.e. for communal prayer and the public reading and exposition of Scripture by the clergy (and at certain times for the celebration of the Eucharist). During the Great and Holy Fast it became a practice to add to these synaxes the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts for the fuller spiritual nourishment of the faithful.

THE FESTAL WEEK

As liturgical practices developed and expanded, the other days of the week each received a special emphasis. Gradually the Orthodox East developed its weekly cycle, which succinctly but ingeniously summarizes the whole annual festal cycle. The weekly festal cycle begins with the celebration of the divine victory over death. The Lord's Day, as we have seen, is a weekly Pascha (Easter) a witness to the risen Lord. Monday (*Deftera hemera* or Second day) is dedicated to the Angels. On Tuesday (*Trite hemera*) the Church honors St. John the Baptist and through him all the prophets. Thursday (*Pempte hemera*) is dedicated to the Holy Apostles and to St. Nicholas, who stands as a model for all the great hierarchs, the successors to the Apostles and the teachers of the Church. On Saturday, the Church commemorates the martyrs, the ascetics, and all those who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection.

On Wednesday and Friday the Church brings into special focus the combined mystery of the cross and the person of the ever Virgin Mary, the *Theotokos*. Both days proclaim two things: (a) the immeasurable love of God, "*who so loved the world that He gave His only Son*" (John 3:16) and (b) the only possible, saving human response to this love through the free, humble and joyous acceptance of his will and purpose: "*behold, let it be done to me according to your word.*" (Luke 1: 38; cf. Mark 14: 36; see also Phil. 2: 8).

The weekly cycle of feasts is contained in the liturgical book called the *Great Octoechos* (Book of the Eight Tones) or *Paracletike* (Book of Supplication). The *Octoechos* is structured on a recurring cycle of eight weeks, one for each of the eight tones of the Orthodox ecclesiastical chant. The sequence of the weeks and tones begins on the Sunday after Pascha (Easter) and ends on the final day of Great Lent in the following year. Each of the eight tones contains a set of variable elements for the daily service of the week, beginning with Sunday. The text of the *Octoechos* is combined with other liturgical books to form the services on a given day in accordance with the rules of the *Ordo (Typicon)*, which regulates the liturgical celebrations.

THE LITURGICAL YEAR

Fused to the civil calendar, the liturgical year becomes a body of sacred signs. "*Each liturgical feast renews and in some sense actualizes the event of which it is a symbol; it takes the event out of the past and makes it immediate.. The liturgical year is, for us, a special means of union with Christ*" (Fr. Lev Gillet). As a remembrance and a means of union with Christ, the liturgical year becomes a source of grace. With its succession of feasts and fasts it commemorates on the one hand events in the life of our Lord, His Mother, St. John the Baptist and also all those men, women and children who have achieved sanctity. Each feast brings into focus a special aspect and meaning of the divine order. The feasts of the saints, beginning with those of the *Theotokos* and ending with those of the most recently glorified members of the Church "*celebrate a special grace that flows from Christ, for their sanctity is but an aspect, a shining ray of the holiness of Christ*" (Fr. Lev Gillet).

The festal calendar is a result of continuous development. Begun in Christian antiquity, it is always "in progress." Each age adds to it its own significant ecclesiastical events and its own martyrs and witnesses of the faith, who in the purity of their hearts have seen the invisible God as in a mirror, and through whom divine grace has richly flowed to us.

The Orthodox liturgical year begins in September, in accordance with an ancient custom initiated by St. Constantine in the early fourth century. The succession of the feasts and fasts of the liturgical year vary in importance and are usually divided into two large categories: "immovable" and "movable." The movable are related to the celebration of Pascha (Easter), whose date changes from year to year. The immovable feasts, however, occur on the same date each year and the text of their services is contained in a collection of twelve volumes called the *Menaia* or *Book of the Months*, one for each of the twelve months of the year. The text of the services of the movable feasts are contained in two volumes, the *Triodion* and the *Pentecostarion*, which cover a period of nineteen weeks. The *Triodion* derives its name from the fact that the majority of the Canons in this book have only three odes. It is divided into three parts: the three week pre-Lenten season (*Apokreo*); the six week period of Great Lent (*Tessarakoste* or the forty-day period); and the Holy Week. The *Pentecostarion* contains the text of the services from the Paschal Orthros to the Feast of All Saints, the Sunday after Pentecost. The cycles of the movable and immovable feasts with their manifold celebrations of sacred memories creates a rich and varied landscape and sanctifies life. Each feast, whether it be of universal or local importance, is always celebrated with a Divine Liturgy, because the celebration of the Eucharist constitutes the perpetual festival of the Church. The Eucharist makes the day a true feast, a participation in the joy of the resurrection and the Kingdom which is to come.

HOLY WEEK

The primitive celebration of Pascha (Easter) was generally preceded by a two day period of mourning and strict fast. After the celebration of an evening Eucharist on Holy Thursday, in remembrance of the Last Supper event, the faithful began a fast, which lasted until the Paschal Vigil. Gradually this fast was extended to embrace the entire week preceding Pascha. This week is called by the Orthodox Christians "Great and Holy," because of the most profound and sacred events commemorated.

The first three days of Holy Week are rooted in the events which immediately preceded the Passion of our Lord. While each day has its own distinct character, all share in common the themes of mourning, repentance, vigilance and judgment. They are focused on the *Parousia*, the Second Coming of the Lord. They are the days of the "Bridegroom," who will come in the middle of the night (Matt. 25: 6). They represent the most urgent and emphatic call to repentance, as the Church prepares to enter into the mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection.

On Holy Thursday the liturgy focuses on the Upper Room and the Garden of Gethsemane. In the setting of the meal held in the Upper Room the Lord washed the feet of his disciples as a lesson of humility, and then established and instituted the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, the greatest of sacraments, "*for in it we obtain God himself and God is united with us in most perfect union*" (St. Nicholas Cabasilas). On the same day the autocephalous Orthodox Churches, and especially the Ecumenical Patriarchate, consecrate the oils of Holy Unction, in keeping with the baptismal practices of the ancient Church.

Holy Friday and Saturday direct our attention to the trial, crucifixion, death and burial of Christ. We are confronted with the extreme humility of our suffering God. His death becomes our true birthday. And so these days are at once days of deep gloom and watchful expectation. The Author of life is at work transforming death into life: "*Come, let us see our Life lying in the tomb, that He may give life to those that in their tombs lie dead*" (Hymn of Holy Saturday).

The Saturday of Lazarus and the Sunday of the Palms are the joyous prelude to Holy Week. They are the harbingers of the resurrection and the inrush of God's Kingdom into our lives. The resurrection of Lazarus and the triumphant Entry of Christ into Jerusalem encapsulate the events and mystery of Holy Week: Christ is revealed as the source of all life and proclaimed and acknowledged King.

GREAT LENT AND PASCHALTIME

During the course of the fourth century the solemnities of Holy Week and the celebrations of Bright Week (i.e. the week after Pascha) were elaborated. The time of preparation for Pascha was gradually increased and the joyous period of the Paschaltide was lengthened. Great Lent developed chiefly as a result of the practice of the ancient Church of baptizing people at the Paschal Vigil and reconciling lapsed Christians to the Church. The weeks before baptism were, therefore, devoted to the training and instruction of the candidates for baptism and the preparation of the penitents. This intense period of preparation, which included fasting, began forty days before Holy Week. The choice of forty days came about for symbolic reasons based on Biblical precedents such as the forty day fasts of Moses, Elias the Prophet, and the Lord himself. And, thus, it gradually became a universal institution, observed by catechumens and faithful alike for its salutary effects on the life of the Christian community. *"The primary aim of Great Lent is to make us conscious of our dependence upon God"* (Bishop Kallistos Ware). It outlines the dimensions of the Christian life: through a series of special observances, inspiring services, moving penitential rites, profound hymnography and selected scriptural passages and patristic meditations Great Lent rehearses for us the facts about God's creative and redeeming entrance into the fabric of human history and into the heart of every human life. It masterfully weaves together dynamic lessons of spiritual potentialities which affirm the power and the value of repentance, and the vitality, viability and truth of the Orthodox vision of life.

PASCHA: THE FEAST OF FEASTS

Following the solemnities of Great Lent the Orthodox Church enters into the intoxicating joy of Paschaltide commemoration, the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the fundamental truth and the absolute fact of the Christian faith. From the beginning there was in the Church an annual commemoration of the decisive and crucial "three days" of sacred history, from the cross to the empty tomb, from Holy Friday to the day of the Resurrection. *Pascha* is the oldest, most venerable and pre-eminent festival of the Church. Holy Friday and Saturday, the days of the Lord's death and burial, have always been days of deep sorrow and strict fast. The day of the Resurrection has always been a day of profound joy and the festival of festivals.

The prototype of *Pascha* is the Jewish Passover (*Pesach* = *pascha* = *passover*), the festival of the deliverance of the Chosen People from the bondage of Egypt. The Lord was crucified and buried on the day before the Passover and rose again the day after it in the year we have traditionally come to number 33 A.D. On that year the Passover was on a Saturday. The crucifixion, therefore, occurred on a Friday and the resurrection early on Sunday morning, according to the Gospel accounts.

For the Orthodox, *Pascha* is more than the historical commemoration of this unique episode in sacred history. Like the Old Testament Passover, *Pascha* is a festival of deliverance, but of a wholly different and unique nature, of which the former is only the prefigurement. *Pascha* enhances the most radical, decisive, and ultimate deliverance: the defeat of Satan and death through the resurrection of Christ and the liberation and deliverance of all humanity from their malign power. *Pascha* is the feast of Christ, our true Passover, which makes possible the passage of all humanity from death to life, from this world of sin to the life of God. *Pascha* is the feast of complete joy, hope and renewal. It is the gift and promise of eternity and plenitude, through which it is learned that sin, suffering and death are not suppressed but defeated. *Pascha* is the feast of universal redemption.

The Orthodox individual receives redemption through the sacrament of Baptism, through its integration into the Body of Christ, the Church. Thus, in the early Church *Pascha* was considered the most important time for the conferring of those sacraments by which redemption is made: Baptism, chrismation (Confirmation), and the Eucharist. This practice was later extended to other great feasts, especially Pentecost, Theophany and Christmas. In later centuries, when infant baptism became the norm, the rites of Christian initiation were usually conducted on any Sunday, which is the weekly paschal festival of the Church. Some modern Orthodox theologians propose a return to the more ancient baptismal customs, and suggest limiting baptism to certain great feasts of the year within the context of the Divine Liturgy and communal worship.

THE TWELVE GREAT FEASTS

The Orthodox festal calendar contains twelve other great feasts which highlight important events in the life of our Lord and the *Theotokos*, emphasize God's plan for our salvation and accent significant theological ideas. In chronological order, beginning with the first month of the ecclesiastical year (September 1), they are: The Nativity of the Mother of God (*Theotokos*) (September 8); The Exaltation of the Life-Giving Cross (September 14); The Entrance of the *Theotokos* into the Temple (November 21); The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ (December 25); the Theophany of Christ (or Epiphany) (January 6); The Presentation of Christ into the Temple (February 2); The Annunciation of the *Theotokos* (March 25); The Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday); The Ascension of our Lord (forty days after Pascha); The Descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (fifty days after Pascha); The Transfiguration of our Lord (August 6); The Dormition of the *Theotokos* (August 15). To these feasts, some would also add the Circumcision of our Lord (January 1); the Feast of the Holy Spirit (the day after Pentecost); and the Saturday of Lazarus.

In many instances, icons of the Great Feasts have found their way to and have been placed upon the Iconostasis, adorning its "upper" level on either side of the icon of the Last Supper, which many times is placed above the Royal Gate. Of these great feasts, the Theophany of Christ, which celebrates the manifestation of the Holy Trinity at the baptism of Christ in the Jordan (Mark 1: 9-11), is, after Pascha and Pentecost, the oldest to appear in the Christian calendar. It is observed with special solemnity by the Orthodox Church as the day of the Blessing of the Waters.

The festal *menaion*, while concentrating on particular moments in sacred history, nevertheless embraces the whole truth of God's redemptive actions. Every liturgical celebration has a distinct relationship to our salvation, since every feast draws our attention to the truth of God's presence in us and in the midst of all His people.

THE FEASTS OF SAINTS

The calendar of immovable feasts is replete with festivals of varying importance that commemorate the lives of saints or memorable events in the life of the Orthodox Church. Every day of the year the Church remembers and honors one or more of the holy men and women who dedicated themselves to the Lord with exemplary faith and perseverance. Besides the *Theotokos* and St. John the Baptist, whose several feasts dot the festal calendar, the Orthodox Church honors and venerates angels, martyrs, apostles, prophets, confessors, virgins, ascetics, bishops and other clergy. The festivals of the apostles and those called equal to the apostles, the great martyrs and the great teachers and bishops of the Church are more universally observed.

The first recorded instance of a feast in honor of a saint comes to us from the middle of the second century. The primitive observance of feasts of saints consisted primarily of the remembrance of local martyrs and bishops; the feast was usually attached to their burial place. The placing of the relics of saints into consecrated Holy Tables stems from this ancient custom.

The saints are the concrete evidence of the transfiguring power of the Gospel. They are the first fruits of the heavenly life, the forerunners of the Kingdom to come. These festivals bring into clear focus for every believer the true meaning of discipleship; "grant me no more than to be a sacrifice for God...It is not that I want merely to be called a Christian, but actually to be one" (St. Ignatius of Antioch).

According to an ancient liturgical custom, Orthodox parents name their newborn infants on the eighth day after birth. The name is traditionally chosen from the list of saints, as a sign of the child's entry into the unity of the Church and into the arena of the spiritual warfare which will commence in earnest with the sacrament of baptism.

LET US OBSERVE A FAST ACCEPTABLE TO THE LORD

The liturgical year contains a number of important fast days and fast periods of varying lengths as following:

- (a) the weekly fast on all Wednesdays and Fridays (except during Bright Week, the Leave-taking (*Apodosi*s) of Pascha, the week after Pentecost, the period between Christmas and Theophany, and the first week of the *Triodion*, i.e. after the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. When a Great Feast of the Lord or of the *Theotokos* happens to fall on one of these days, the fast is normally abolished.
- (b) the day before (*Paramone*) the Feasts of Christmas and Theophany.
- (c) the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14) and the Beheading of St. John the Baptist (August 29). When these two feasts fall on a Saturday or Sunday the fast is less severe but not abolished.
- (d) the five periods of fasting.
 1. The Great Lent, which lasts for fifty days. Adherence to monastic traditions also calls for a partial fast during the week preceding the beginning of Lent.
 2. The Holy Week. A lesser fast is observed on the Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday. A strict fast is observed from Holy Monday through the Paschal Vigil.
 3. The Fast of the Apostles begins on the Monday after the Sunday of All Saints and ends on June 28, the eve of the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul the Apostles. The duration of this fast depends on the date of Pascha; however, in modern usage this fast is not observed with strictness.
 4. The Fast of the Dormition of the Theotokos (August 1-14).
 5. The Fast of Christmas (November 15-December 24). In modern usage a strict observance of this fast commences after December 12. (The celebration of the Marriage Service which is generally prohibited during fasting periods is permitted between November 15 and December 12).

Fasting is integrally related to prayer and act; of charity. When Orthodox Christians integrate these three things into their daily activity, they are like vigilant sentinels, anticipating the man of eternity, who goes beyond himself to God. The whole man, body and soul, participates in the act of fasting. The body's participation in the spiritual exercise (*ascesis*) is sought not through suffering and affliction, but in endurance through abstention and resistance to distractions.

The rules concerning fasting generally refer to the number of meals taken daily and the type of food that is permitted. On an ascending scale, the severity of the fast is measured as follows (a) abstention from meat (the least severe); (b) abstention also from animal products, such as eggs, milk, butter, and cheese; (c) abstention from fish and (d) abstention from oil and wine. The fewer meals taken daily also indicates the severity of the fast. The most severe fast is called "dry eating" (*xerophagia*), and consists in the consumption of water, bread, juices, honey, nuts, and in a less severe form fruits and boiled vegetables.

MAKE OF MY PRAYER A SACRAMENT OF YOUR PRESENCE

In the Orthodox Church, the coming to God in prayer and solemn festival is in reality the ceaseless coming of God to us in power and glory. "God," wrote St. John of Damascus, "*descends to the soul in prayer and the spirit rises, to God.*" This intimate and wondrous participation of God in our personal lives is crucial and decisive. He does not come to give orders, but to issue an invitation: "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me*" (Rev. 3: 20). ■

SESSION NOTES





Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption
Seattle, Washington