

# A Guide to Fasting and Abstinence in the Orthodox Church



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# Fasting in the Orthodox Church

In order to help you to fast during Lent and the fasting seasons and days during the year, the following is a brief description of fasting and abstinence in terms of categories of food as well as times of abstinence of foods from the various categories. The purpose of this outline of the guidelines on fasting is to help educate you on fasting and abstinence in general. This is the “letter of the law”. It is important for you and your family to participate in the “spirit of the fast”, working this out with your priest and family for your salvation. *Don't take all this on without speaking with your priest. He can help guide you in fasting.*

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**Fasting** literally means not eating. In some monasteries, one fasts during the day, taking one light meal of abstinence in the late afternoon, although food is usually available if a monk/nun feels weak and in need of sustenance.

**Abstinence** is abstaining from certain types of food such as in the categories below.

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## Categories of Foods:

- Category I** **Meat and Meat Products** (includes beef, pork, chicken, etc., as well as items which have byproducts)
- Category II** **Dairy Products** (includes butter, eggs, milk, cheese, yogurt, etc.)
- Category III** **Fish** (seafood with backbones which includes sardines, tuna, trout, bass, shark, etc., but not shellfish such as lobster, shrimp, crab, oysters, scallops, clams, mussels, etc.)
- Category IV** **Wine (and Oil)** Abstinence from oil is a monastic rather than lay practice.

## Foods Permitted throughout the Year:

**Shellfish** (such as lobster, shrimp, crab, oysters, scallops, clams, mussels, squid, etc.)

**Vegetables, Vegetable products and Fruit** (including grains [rice, wheat, flour, pasta, etc.] bread, vegetable gelatins, etc.)

**Vegetable Based Protein:** TVP and plant based protein

# **Fasting during Great Lent**

**Weekdays during Lent**     Abstinenence of Categories I, II, III, & IV  
No Abstinenence of Shellfish, Fruit, Vegetables and Vegetable products. During this period, we should regulate both the amount of food we consume as well as the frequency of eating. In modern practice at meal times, one might choose smaller quantities than normal and no food eaten between meals.

**Saturdays & Sundays during Lent**     Abstinenence of Categories I, II, & III  
No Abstinenence of Category IV or of Shellfish, Fruit, Vegetables and vegetable products. On Saturdays (except Great Saturday on which a strict fast is kept) and Sundays during the Great Fast, the quantity and frequency of meals are not restricted.

**Feast of the Annunciation (3/25) and Palm Sunday**     Abstinenence of Categories I & II  
No Abstinenence of Categories III & IV or of Shellfish, Fruit, Vegetables and Vegetable products. On these Great Feasts of the Church, the quantity and frequency of meals are not restricted.

# **Fasting during the year:**

**Wednesdays & Fridays**     Abstinenence of Categories I, II, III, & IV  
No Abstinenence of Shellfish, Fruit, Vegetables and Vegetable products.

# ***Fasting Prior to receiving Holy Communion*** *(throughout the year)*

**Sundays & Morning Liturgies**     Complete fast from all food and drink from bedtime on Saturday evening (this includes coffee, tea, etc.). Ideally, Saturday evening should be a quiet time of prayer and preparation for communion.

**Evening Liturgies**     Complete fast from all food and drink from the noon meal (or 6 hours before the Liturgy).

# Fasting Seasons and Days in the Orthodox Church

*(not an exhaustive list)*

<b>Wednesdays &amp; Fridays</b>	Abstinence of Categories I, II, III, & IV No Abstinence of Shellfish, Fruit, Vegetables and Vegetable products.
<b>Cheesefare Week</b>	One week prior to the beginning of Great Lent. Abstinence of Category 1.
<b>Great Lent</b>	Forty Days prior to Holy Week, beginning on Pure Monday.
<b>Apostle's Fast</b>	Begins on the Monday after All Saints Day (Sunday after Pentecost) and lasts until the Feast of Ss. Peter and Paul on June 29. The fasting regulations are slightly less than that of Great Lent.
<b>Dormition Fast</b>	August 1-14 inclusive. Broken on the Feast of the Dormition on August 15. The fasting regulations follow that of Great Lent, with the exception of the Feast of Transfiguration (August 6) on which Categories III & IV are allowed.
<b>Beheading of John the Baptist</b> August 29	A strict fast day on whatever day of the week it occurs. Abstinence of Categories I, II, III, & IV.
<b>Elevation of the Holy Cross</b> September 14	A strict fast day on whatever day of the week it occurs. Abstinence of Categories I, II, III, & IV.
<b>Advent Fast</b>	November 15-December 24 inclusive. The fasting regulations follow that of Great Lent, with the exception that the regulations are a bit more relaxed up until December 20 with Categories III & IV allowed on all days except Wednesdays and Fridays.
<b>Eve of Christmas and Epiphany</b> Dec. 24 & Jan. 5	A strict fast day on whatever day of the week it occurs. Abstinence of Categories I, II, III, & IV.