

A. Preparation for Great Lent

The preparation for Great Lent begins soon after the feast of the Theophany of the Lord corresponding to its historical commemoration that soon after His baptism Jesus Christ left for the desert for a fast, in commemoration of which the Holy Forty Day Fast was established. Beginning with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, the preparation for Great Lent comes to an end with Cheesefare Sunday. The Holy Church for a long time begins to prepare the faithful for Great Lent as a redemptive time for an all general spiritual cleansing and sanctification. This cleansing and sanctification are possible only under the condition of the complete remission of sins, the complete change of a life view in ideas, feelings and actions, the complete renewal and spiritual revival. But such revival requires the sustained, serious, painful and tenacious spiritual struggle, by which it gradually should revive to compel and ingrain itself. Besides this the determination for such a spiritual struggle and its persistence also depends on us, but it depends more on the mercy of God, who revives it in the heart and is accomplished by His all-acting grace. Therefore we should pray a lot and with diligence, so that the Lord will send us to the door of repentance, to break the hardness of our hearts and to stir up grief about our sins, without which there cannot be true repentance; to inflame our heart with love for Him, without Whom even the most sincere repentance would not be strong enough; to enliven and give wing to our spirit with sacred hope, without which the trembling heart would be suppressed with sorrow. That is why the Holy Church prepares us beforehand for our entrance into the sacred and redemptive days of lent and repentance, and beforehand makes an effort to remove everything that interferes with our coming to true repentance, and beforehand makes an effort to teach us that the sincere spirit of humility and contrition to be acquired is required from us. Preparing believers for the Holy Forty Day Fast, the Holy Church in its services, according to its own expression, acts as the commander who with timely and wise words encourages the warriors before doing battle with the enemy. Therefore in its preparatory services it does not forget to tell everything that may position the faithful for fasting and repentance. In its sacred commemorations it returns to the first days of the world and mankind, to the blessed condition of the forefathers and their fall, to show the beginning of sin and to awaken in us contrition for sins, and to the time of the coming on earth of the Son of God for the salvation of mankind in order to turn us to God. Continuing in the preparatory season, the Holy Church accustoms the faithful to the ascetical struggle of fasting and the gradual incorporation of abstinence.

After eating meat all during the week following the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, it reinstates the Wednesday and Friday fasts and then builds up to the highest degree of preparatory abstinence by prohibiting the eating of all meat products but with the allowance to use cheese products. The special preparation for the Holy Forty Day Fast is undoubtedly an ancient established practice of the Holy Church. Thus, the already famous preachers of the Fourth Century Saints Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria and others left us their discussions and sermons, spoken by them in view of the fast not already come, but only expected.

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp., (Kharkov, 1900) p. 0488
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