

The First Week of Great Lent

The first week of the Holy Forty Day Fast are "the days beginning the holy fast". The Holy Church during this week, inviting its children to begin "the all honorable abstinence", to work "for the Lord with fear", to fast "the pleasant fast pleasing to the Lord", to fast not only "in body" but also "in spirit" opens the purpose and meaning of "the all honorable fast". "The Fast has come", sings the holy Church in its hymns, "mother of chastity, accuser of sins, advocate of repentance, life of the angels and salvation of men". "For by this Moses was glorified, and he received the Law written upon tablets", "Elijah having fasted, was enclosed in heaven", "through fasting the youths were delivered from the furnace and the Prophet Daniel from the jaws of the lions"; and "taking as shield the strong armor of the Fast, let us repel every delusion of the enemy. Let us not be led astray by the lusts of passion, let us not flinch before the fire of temptation"; "let us quench the burning passions of the flesh", "Let us be pure before the Pure One, and seeking purity from all before the Only Savior of our souls"; "illuminated by divine virtues, let us gaze with faith upon the radiance of the Passion of the Savior", and "let us receive from Christ God great mercy". Together with this the holy Church finds out in detail also the properties of true lent, as valid means for the cleansing of sin, as the basis of repentance, as the beginning of the return of the person to God. According to the teaching of the holy Church, "true fasting is to put away all evil, to control the tongue, to forbear from anger, to abstain from lust, slander, falsehood and perjury. If we renounce these things, then our fasting is true and acceptable". Therefore, inviting its children to true repentance and lenten ascetic efforts, the holy Church also sings: "Clothing ourselves in the shining raiment of the Fast, let us cast off the dark and hateful garment of drunkenness"; "let us love chastity, and let us flee from fornication, let us gird our loins with temperance", "let us wash our faces in the water of dispassion", "let us loose every bond of iniquity, let us terminate the knots of every contract made by violence; let us tear up all unjust agreements; let us give bread to the hungry and to our house welcome the poor who have no roof to cover them"; "let us brightly begin the all honorable abstinence; and let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments of Christ our God, with the brightness of love and the splendor of prayer, with the purity of holiness and the strength of good courage."

There are prescribed prayers for the beginning of the Holy Forty Day Fast in the Book of Needs, which **the priest, vested in an epitrachelion, should read in church to his parishioners on Monday or on another day of the first week of Great Lent, after Matins or the Hours** (see Book of Needs (Trebnik))

in 2 parts, part 1, chapter 23). Where there is the custom to go to the homes of parishioners to read the **Lenten Prayer**, one may support this custom because the more often the priest visits parishioners with pastoral reasons the better. It is not necessary to make this visitation every Sunday. This prayer is intended for the beginning of Lent and is why its reading should be during the first days of the Holy Forty Day Fast. Thus in the church the dismissal is done with a hand blessing; in the home it may be done with a cross. Thus, the priest should remember that his visitation with the prayer is not a simple visitation, but a pastoral review of his parish, a father-like and instructive visitation of parishioners entrusted to his care by the Lord. That is why he should do this for pastoral purposes. During this time it is quite convenient for the priest **to remind his parishioners about their Preparation for the sacrament, especially those who have not prepared themselves for a long time. After all since the priest is one of the clergy who can offer his positions and observations without any constraints on those facets of the lives of his flock about which** it may be inconvenient for the clergy to speak, as for example, concerning disagreements between husband and wife. In order that the visitation of the priest be not unexpected, or if a feast day falls on Sunday, the priest should make known to the parishioners in church the intention to visit them in their homes with the prayer, having explained to all the spiritual **purpose** of the visitation and the meaning of the prayer read during lent, and for the most important advantage to make known what time what parts of the parish will be visited by him (See Rukovodstvo dlia seljskikh pastirej (Manual for Village Pastors) 1860, Vol. 1.).

According to the decision of the Most Holy Synod January 31 - March 11, 1897, **priests** during the First and Passion weeks of Great Lent **cannot be called into court at all**, neither as witnesses nor in the capacity of contending parties. (Tserkovnyi Vestnik (Church Messenger), 1894, 9).

During the first four days of the first week of Great Lent **during Compline the Great Canon** of St. Andrew of Crete is read, but on Wednesday and Thursday the Canon of the Ven. Mary of Egypt is also read. The Canon of St. Andrew, as noted in the Synaxarion: "incites every soul to emulate and imitate to the best of its power all the good things, and to flee from all that is bad, and always to come back to God by repentance, by tears and confession and by every other way of well-pleasing". The Canon of Ven. Mary of Egypt teaches "not to despair, if sometimes certain sins have taken hold". The Canon of St. Andrew is called great because of the set of ideas and commemorations that the prolific creator included in it, and because it has more troparia than any other

canon. Where in other canons there are about 30, this canon has about 250 troparia.

Kontakion (after the 6th Ode of the Great Canon)

My soul, my soul, arise!

Why are you sleeping?

The end is drawing near, and you will be confounded.

Awake, then, from your sleep,

That Christ our God may spare you,

Who is everywhere and fills all things.

As the **Great Canon** adjusts the soul to repentant praying and that it is read right at the beginning of Compline, instead of at the third part where there is the psalm: "O God, attend unto my help". That is why when we read the Great Canon this psalm is read at the beginning of Compline before the canon. The Compline of the first four days of the first week of Great Lent is called the "little standing". The name "standing" indicates both the duration of Compline and its prayerful repentant character. The characteristics of this Compline especially remind one of the ancient *stationes*. It is called the little standing as opposed to the St. Andrew of Crete or St. Mary of Egypt great standing which comes on Thursday of the Fifth Week or at Matins of Great Friday. The same Compline still has its own name "meteimon" or "ethimneion". Some believe that this name comes from (the Greek) words: μετ' ἡμῶν (with us). These words are repeated a few times in the songs of the Prophet Isaiah sung at Compline. But the same hymns are sung in every Great Compline in Great Lent, and these Complines are not called metheimon. Therefore a more accurate etymology than the word *metheimon* is represented by the word *ethimneion*, from εφῆμνειον (refrain). According to this etymology this explanatory term designates the Great Compline of the first week, which has only one canon with a refrain for each verse.

If the feast of the **Meeting of the Lord** or a **temple feast** falls in the first week then the service for them is done either on Cheesefare Sunday or on Saturday of the first week. When a saint in the **Order of the Menaion** occurs on Saturdays and Sundays of the Holy Forty Day Fast, it is sung in Compline, or whenever the ecclesiarch wishes.

Friday begins the commemoration of St. Theodore the Recruit. At the Presanctified Liturgy, after the Prayer before the Ambo, the Molieben with the Canon to St. Theodore is sung before the "offered Koliva" and the Koliva is blessed. The Order of the Blessing of the Koliva is in the Typicon (Ustav), in the order for Friday of the First Week. The prayer for the blessing of the Koliva is

found in the Priest's Service Book (Sluzhebnik), in the order of blessing of the Koliva on feasts. Concerning food on this day the Typicon (Ustav) reads: "Entering **the refectory**; we partake of wine and oil for the holy saint. For this is done in the Laura of our Father among the Saints Sabbas and in the Coenobium of the Ven. Euthymius the Great. But we do not do this now in honor of the day, and moreover we eat plum preserves without oil and food. They also voluntarily eat xerophagy as on Wednesday.

Saturday of the First Week

On this day the Holy Church commemorates St. Theodore the Recruit, "great among martyrs, spiritual athlete, illustrious and renowned, glorified for his miracles, from one end of the earth to the other" (see page 87). By this commemoration the Holy Church inspires the faithful that lent is pleasing to the God and that fasting is under the special protection of God.

On all Saturdays of Lent, except for Passion Saturday, there is **a liturgy** of St. John Chrysostom. On Sundays, except for Palm Sunday, the liturgy is that of St. Basil the Great.

In the refectory on Saturday of the First Week "we eat scalded beans, with white and black olives and preserves with oil. We drink a cup of wine in honor of the Saint. This practice agrees with that of the Laura of Our Venerable Father Sabbas and with our God-bearing Father Euthymius".

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 0508-0511
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