

## Avoiding Meat in Our Day

We may never be offered food that has been sacrificed to idols. Nonetheless the Church reads this passage to us as we prepare to avoid meat and other foods for a different reason. During the Great Fast Byzantine Christians are presented with an entire range of foods to be avoided: meat (including fish) and animal products, such as eggs and dairy, as well as wine and, in some traditions, oil as well.

We do not abstain from these foods because there is anything wrong with eating them, as some contemporary vegans believe. Our Church fasts from these foods, particularly at this time, because we are limiting our diet to the “food of the Garden,” the foods of the earth provided at the creation, according to Gen 1. In that Biblical book the consumption of animal products and wine are described as arising later in human history. When we fast, we eat only the food of Paradise as a sign that we wish to recover our original union with God symbolized by the Garden of Eden.

In our Tradition there is room for customizing the practice of fasting for each believer, under the guidance of his spiritual father. According to her physical strength and spiritual growth, a person may be able to fast from all foods until noon; another may be able and led to fast until evening. The individual believer who does not have a spiritual father [Type text] should follow the guidelines of their own eparchy without adapting them to personal taste.

People who envision a one-size-fits-all rule of fasting may be put off by seeing someone fast differently from them. This brings us back to the principle which St Paul taught the Corinthians: “*If food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble*” (1 Cor 8:13). Our fasting should be informed by love. This may mean fasting the way my neighbor is fasting when in his company, whether this is more or less than my own rule prescribes. Needless to say, we should not seek out such circumstances which would lessen our practice of fasting with that end in mind.

Sad to say, our fasting and other religious practices often mask our inner feelings of self-righteousness and superiority. St Paul would probably endorse these words of Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol in Cyprus (the “Father Maximos” of The Mountain of Silence and its sequels): “How is it possible to pray and still be full of bile against another person? How is it possible for you to read the Gospel and not accept your brother? ... What’s the point if I eat oil today and don’t eat oil tomorrow? Though I may not eat oil, I still eat my brother day and night! They would say on Mount Athos not to ask whether someone eats fish. Eat the fish, but don’t eat the fisherman. Have a tablespoon of oil, but don’t eat the man who draws oil. To eat one another with your tongue is much worse than eating a tablespoon of oil” (from *Therapy from the Sickness of Pharisaism*). Fasting, like feasting, should be a communal celebration of the love of God.

We hear St Paul’s teaching today to remind us that our fasting is not about right and wrong food so much as it is about supporting the faith of our fellow believers. The Church’s fasting days and seasons are shared experiences, actions that we are meant to do together. There are times when a person may fast privately and this fasting should be done in secret. Fasting seasons, however, are common activities and if I denigrate them or excuse myself from them I am weakening the resolve of others. In addition, I am missing out on an experience that will heighten the joy of Pascha, when the Bridegroom is with us again.



## MEATFARE SUNDAY FEBRUARY 12, 2023





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Divine Liturgy: Sunday 10:00 AM

### Antiphon (1st)

1: Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth, and sing praise to His name.

*Through the prayers of the Mother of God, O Savior, save us.*

2: Say to God: How awesome are Your deeds! So great is Your power that Your enemies cringe before You.

*Be shafa'ati Walidatil Eelah, ya Mukhallisu, khallisna.*

3: Let all the earth worship You and sing praises to You; let it sing praises to Your name, O Most High!

*Through the prayers of the Mother of God, O Savior, save us.*

### Entrance Hymn

**Priest:** Come, let us worship and bow down before Christ.

**People:** *O Son of God, Who are risen from the dead, save us who sing to You: Alleluia!*

### Troparion of the Resurrection (Tone 3) pg. 39

Let all in heaven rejoice, and all on earth be glad, for the Lord has exerted power with His arm: By death He has trampled upon Death, and has become the firstborn from the dead. He has delivered us from the bosom of Hades, and has granted to the world great mercy

### Patronal Troparion (Tone 1) Pg. 15

In giving birth, you have preserved your virginity and in falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Mother of God. You have passed to life being the Mother of Life. Through your intercession, save our souls from death.

### Kontakion of Meat Fare (Tone 1)

When You shall come down, O God, upon earth in Your glory, every creature shall tremble before You. A river of fire shall flow before Your judgments seat, the books shall be opened and all secrets revealed. On that day, O righteous Judge, deliver me from the unquenchable fire, and make me worthy to stand at Your right.

### **Food Offered to Idols (1 Corinthians 8:8 – 9:2)**

One of the issues facing the early Church was the question of food offered to idols, as described in the Epistles of St Paul. As the Church moved into Europe it encountered groups that observed religious meals in which food offered to deities, or even the spirits of the dead, was consumed. Consuming the sacrifice was an important part of the ritual and people would invite their relatives and friends to these meals, particularly when a large animal had been sacrificed. St Paul's converts might have been frequent guests at such meals before their baptism.

Strictly speaking, sharing in such a meal might be a sign that the participants believed in these pagan gods, which would have been unthinkable for a Christian. Eating sacrificed meat at an idol feast was equivalent to practicing idolatry and therefore could never be condoned. In Acts 15 we read how the apostles explicitly determined that Gentile converts to Christ were to "*abstain from things polluted by idols*" (v. 20).

St Paul went further and declared, "... *the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons*" (1 Cor 8:20). Some believers were scandalized to see other Christians sharing in these meals. Paul begins his response to this question by saying, "*Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge*" (1 Cor 8:1) By this he meant that we know that this means nothing because idols are nothing: "*We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one*" (v.4). In essence, then, eating this food didn't matter because all the idols in the world couldn't make food anything other than God's creation.

There was another side to the question which Paul finds even more important. Some new believers didn't understand this principle and so were shocked to see other – presumably more mature – Christians eating food sacrificed to an idol as though the idol must be real after all. So Paul recasts the question: it's not about eating food but about the effect on new believers. "*Knowledge puffs up,*" he writes, "*but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. ... for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled*" (v. 1-2,7). So don't eat, not because of the idols, but because harming the faith of the weak is more unchristian than eating this food.

As he became more acquainted with pagan practices in Asia Minor, St Paul came to make a distinction. He found that not all food sacrificed to idols was consumed in idolatrous feasts. Some was given to the poor, some was given back to the donors, and some was even sold in the marketplace. As a result, eating food offered to idols but not in an explicitly idolatrous feast was not itself idolatrous; it was the inevitable consequence of living in a pagan world.

### **Why Avoid Foods Offered to No-gods?**

St Paul understood that the Greco-Roman gods did not exist: "**We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one**" (1 Cor 8:4). Food which their devotees offered might as well have been sacrificed to the Great Oz. Yet, he counseled the Christians in Corinth to avoid eating such foods, but not for the sake of the food itself. No food is, by definition, unclean. As the Lord Jesus had said, "*Hear and understand: Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man*" (Mt 15:10, 11). Nor did any food offer communion with a pagan god. Rather St Paul taught that eating food sacrificed to idols should be avoided for another reason: the scruples of less informed brethren. As he wrote to the Romans, "*Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak*" (Rom 14:18-21). There were new Christians who would have believed that idols were real if they saw their more mature fellows eating foods from pagan sacrifices. Care for the brethren was more important than displaying one's knowledge that sacrificial meat was nothing. And so St Paul affirmed, "*If food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble*" (1 Cor 8:13).

(Continued on back page)

### DIVINE LITURGY INTENTIONS

**Today** HS Lauren Abraham, Nicholas Haddad, Elaine Foley. Requested by Antoinette Arraj and family  
**+Matta Aulo, Benham Aulo, Eliyis & Hannah Aulo, Labebe & Youseef Greige, Agavne & Saeed Bajanian.** Requested by Andy & Jocelyn Aulo

**This week's Coffee is hosted by Joe & Lorraine Lian**  
**The Cheesefare Brunch will take the place of the Coffee Hr. next week**

Please remember in your prayers: George Arraj, Jr., Ron Abraham, Peter Abraham, Vi Gazal, Robert Ghiz, Sadie Mirante, Archie Opatka, Anthony Poti, Katherine Thomas, Charlotte Stockhaus, Ruth Welsh, Richard Abraham, Sr., Daneil Sarrouf, Bob Lynch, Michael Mooradian, Michael McNeil, Jeff McNeil, Wyatt William Rahall, Lauren Abraham, Nicholas Haddad, Elaine Foley, and the people of Ukraine.

If there are people for whom you would like me to pray, please reach out and give me their names. Part of our vocation as Christians is to pray for each other, especially when someone is sick or suffering in any way.

### Last Week's Collection

<b>Weekly</b>	<b>\$1459</b>
<b>Candles</b>	<b>\$ 31</b>
<b>Coffee Hr.</b>	<b>\$ 95</b>
<b>Memorials</b>	<b>\$ 100</b>
<b>Stole</b>	<b>\$ 100</b>
<b>Donation</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>\$ 90</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,875</b>

God bless you for your generosity!



**Welcome to any visitors we have with us this morning! We are happy to have you worship with us.**

**Please join us downstairs in the church hall for the coffee hour so that we can get to know each other better and answer any questions you may have about the parish or the Melkite Church.**



### HOUSE BLESSINGS

The post-Theophany period is the traditional time for blessing homes. If you would like me to come and bless your home, please see me after the Divine Liturgy or contact me at (978) 314-1962 (Brymc56@comcast.net).

**I would love to come and spend some time with you!**  
**Fr. Bryan**

### ADULT EDUCATION

Our next adult education series will be this **Tuesday, February 14** . Our text is Fr. Justin Rose's book "Come, Follow Me." It is a Byzantine Christian approach to evangelization and disciple-making. We will meet weekly as we make our way through the book. This theme fits in well with Bishop Francois' motto: Becoming Disciples, Making Disciples. **Please bring your Bible. We have the books.**

Please plan to join us!

### CHEESEFARE POT LUCK

**Next Sunday, February 19 is Cheesefare Sunday. We are having a potluck brunch that day in place of the Coffee Hr. Please bring your favorite meatless dish to share.**

## Meatfare Sunday

SAY GOOD-BYE TO MEAT. In the fasting practice common to all Byzantine Churches Meatfare Sunday is the last day on which meat would be eaten until Pascha. This is the first step towards the fuller discipline of the Great Fast when dairy products would not be eaten as well. This is why next Sunday is called Cheesefare Sunday (good-bye to dairy products).

For the third week in a row the Church, through its selection of the Scriptures read at the Divine Liturgy, warns us against a false subjectivism or individualism in the coming Fast. First, in the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, we were warned to avoid self-righteous judging of others. In the story of the Prodigal Son we were confronted by the elder brother, whose faithfulness to his father was marred by his refusal to imitate the father's forgiving heart. We are faced with an attitude which, although the opposite in spirit to the view of the elder brother, has the same effect: casting a pall over others' attempts at repentance.

Why is meat targeted in the Fast? Certainly in most places meat is a special festive dish. We think of the fatted calf which the father ordered slain to welcome his prodigal son back home. In some disciplines other festive items like wine and oil are avoided as well. As Christ said when pressed by the Pharisees about His disciples' behavior, "*Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast*" (Mt 9:15).

In many cultures to this very day meat is a luxury. Numerous people regularly get their protein from beans or pulses, not meat. It's too expensive. One of the reasons why American fast food has become so popular throughout the world is that it makes meat affordable to more people than ever before.

There is another reason why we avoid meat on fast days. During the Lenten season we seek to focus on restoring the likeness to God within us, to stress the quality bestowed on us at the beginning and lost at the fall. During the Fast we seek to return to the Garden of Eden, as it were, to return to Paradise, and no one ate meat in the Garden.

According to the Book of Genesis, "*God said, 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food'; and it was so*" (Gen 1:29-30). We were all vegetarians in Eden. By avoiding meat we are symbolizing our desire to return to Eden, to recover our nature as God meant it to be.

The Book of Genesis paints a picture of human history in a downward spiral to the time of Noah and the flood. According to Genesis, after that catastrophe, God began restoring humanity on the earth. Part of that restoration included the addition of meat to our diet. God said to Noah, "*Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as [I gave] the green herbs*" (Gen 9:15). Our fasting from meat, then, is not to avoid something bad but to express our desire for something better. In this kind of fasting we glorify God in the body by limiting ourselves to what has been called the "food of paradise." In this way we are saying that we value above all things the communion with God that our first parents had.

As the Jewish people developed, the meat of certain animals, fish and other sea creatures was considered as "unclean," unfit for God's Chosen People. This served in part to stress their particular relationship to God and distinguish them from others. In the New Testament we see that this distinction is abolished; there would be no separation between Jews and Gentiles and no unclean foods. This is expressed in the Acts of the Apostles which records St. Peter's vision of a sheet lowered from the heavens containing all kinds of animals. Peter was told to eat but he refuses on the ground that these animals were unclean. Then a voice from heaven told him, "*What God has cleansed you must not call common*" (Gen 10:15). Gentiles and all foods were acceptable to the Creator and were to be received by the followers of Christ.

## Prokimenon

**Reader:** My strength and my courage is the Lord, and He has been my Savior.

**People:** My strength and my courage is the Lord, and He has been my Savior .

**Reader:** The Lord has chastised me through His teaching, yet He has not delivered me to death.

**People:** My strength and my courage is the Lord, and He has been my Savior.

**Reader:** My strength and my courage is the Lord,

**People:** And He has been my Savior

**Epistle:** 1 Cor. 8:8-13; 9:1-2

## Alleluia

The Lord shall hear you on the day of distress; the name of the God of Jacob shall defend you.

**Verses:** O Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance.

**Gospel:** Mt 25:31-46, Sunday of Meatfare

## LENTEN LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

Great Lent begins Monday February 20. In general, we will have Lenten services on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Mondays will be Great Compline, with the exception of February 20 when we will celebrate Forgiveness Vespers. Fridays will be Compline & Akathist. Below is the schedule for the first week of Great Lent:

**Mon, 2/20 6PM - Forgiveness Vespers**

**Wed, 2/22 6PM - Presanctified Liturgy**

**Fri, 2/24 6PM—Compline & Akathist (Part I)**

Great Lent is a time for us to renew our commitment to prayer, fasting & almsgiving. We are called to pray more, both individually and communally; we are called to fast, not like the Pharisee, who did so in a spirit of self-righteousness, but humbly. The money we save by fasting should be given as alms to those who need our material help. These three things help us to cleanse the globe of our hearts which has become dirty over the past year. Once the globe is cleansed, the light of Christ shines more brightly in us and lets us show that to the world!

Let each of us make a commitment this lent to increase and deepen our prayer lives. Let us fast not only from food, but also from gossip, slander, and the like. Let us give alms and perform acts of charity for those who need our help.

It is my prayer for all of us that we God grants us the strength, courage, wisdom and grace to have a fruitful Great Lent!

Fr. Bryan