

Order of the Service

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts weaves together vespers and the Eucharistic portion of the Divine Liturgy. All the while maintaining the weekday chant of the Great Fast, preserving the “Bright Sadness” of the season. Since this is a Eucharist service we begin with “Blessed is the Kingdom.” But the mode immediately switches to vespers with the normal vesper’s psalm of creation. The evening prayer of the Church connects the setting of the sun to God’s creation in Genesis. From here we go to the Great Litany of the Divine Liturgy. We pray for God’s mercy for all things.

As we proceed to the antiphon Psalms of Liturgy the Church selects the Step-peni, or Psalms of ascent (Psalms 120-134). These were originally composed for the Hebrew pilgrimage to the temple. As Jewish pilgrims go to the temple on great feasts they sing these Psalms. The Church selects these Psalms as a reminder that we are on a pilgrimage to Pascha during this Great Fast. Just like the Hebrew’s before us we are marching to the new temple, Jesus Christ.

During the first Passover pilgrimage in the Gospel of John, Jesus drives the money changers from the Temple. “His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’ The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of

the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” (John 2:17-22). By singing the Psalms of ascent we affirm Jesus’ claim.

The vesper’s stichera proclaim the themes for the day. The daily dose of Genesis and proverbs bring us the next step closer to Pascha in our reading cycle.

We pick up the communion service with the Great Entrance, not of the bread and wine, but the real body and blood of Christ. The hymn for the entrance affirms this truth and the entrance is made in silent awe for the true body and blood of Christ that enters our midst. In the east we do not pour out elaborate services of adoration to the Eucharist, we fall silent in awe when this real presence is brought forth.

Following the pattern of the normal Divine Liturgy we prepare to receive the Eucharist. There is no anaphora (offering) for the gifts are already the body and blood of Christ. But we prepare to receive them as we do during the Divine Liturgy. At the same time we maintain the character of the Great Fast with the special melodies that strike that mode of Bright Sadness.

After breaking our fast with the perfect food for our pilgrimage to Pascha, we conclude as we do every Great Fast prayer service, with prostration’s singing “Having suffered the Passion for us.”

O God of unspeakable and invisible mysteries, with whom are the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge, who has revealed to us the service of this liturgy and who, through your great love for mankind, has appointed us sinners to offer gifts and sacrifices to You for our sins and the faults of the people.

Prayer before the Our Father

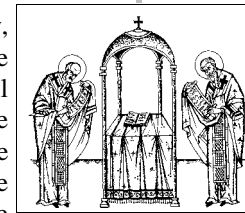
“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

John 6:51

Communion

Eucharist breaks our fast. Traditionally, I would fast from the evening before the celebration of the Divine Liturgy until after the reception of communion. The Church asks for this fast to express in the strongest possible way the perfect nature of the Eucharist as food and that the Divine Liturgy is the ultimate celebration. The Divine Liturgy is the extension of Pascha throughout the year. In each celebration of the Divine Liturgy we have a mini-Pascha. The joy and radiance of the Resurrection spreads through the entire year through this celebration. When approaching the Eucharist in the Divine Liturgy Saint Paul tells us to approach with respect and awe.

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.” (1 Cor 12:27-29)



Today the word of the prophet is fulfilled: Behold, we bow before your footstool, O Lord; having tasted the tree of salvation, we have been freed from our passion and sin, by the prayers of the Mother of God

Tone 6 Wednesday
Sessional Hymn

themselves.”

Journey to Pascha

Presanctified Liturgy: Chapter 3

Great Lent by Fr. Schmemmann

These pages contain amplifications and additional reflections on the themes presented in the book **Great Lent—Journey to Pascha** by Father Alexander Schmemmann. Copies can be obtained from the publisher St. Valdimir’s Seminary Press at 800-204-book or their website at <http://www.svots.edu>.

Saint John Chrysostom comments in his homily 24 “I say these things, not to keep us from approaching, but to keep us from approaching without consideration. For as the approaching at random is dangerous, so non-communicating in those mystical suppers is famine and death. For this Table is the sinews of our soul, the bond of our mind, the foundation of our confidence, our hope, our salvation, our light, our life.”

The Divine Liturgy is the ultimate celebration of our faith and as a celebration is not compatible with the spirit of “Bright Sadness” during the Great Fast. We suspend the weekday Divine Liturgy. We forgo this daily celebration of Pascha

to create a better environment for the fast.

But at the same time, Eucharist is source of

strength for this pilgrimage. Eucharist breaks the fast BECAUSE Eucharist is the perfect food. The Eucharist is our union as a people of God and our experience now of God's future kingdom. While the celebration of the Divine Liturgy is the joyous experience of the Resurrection, the reception of communion is the food that sustains us on our earthly pilgrimage. The Great Fast is the pilgrimage to Pascha. The Eucharist is our food for the journey.

This is why we forego the Divine Liturgy on weekdays during the Great Fast, but we still receive the Eucharist at the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. We leave behind the celebration of the joy of Pascha but we retain the food for the journey. The week days for the Great Fast bring us the themes for our change of heart metanoia (μετάνοια). The Eucharist washes us clean and gives us the strength for the journey.

Fasting

Fasting is a physical metaphor for the spiritual life. When we fast from food we place our body into physical hunger. This should remind us of the spiritual hunger our soul experiences for God. For the brief times of our fast our physical reality matches the spiritual one. Both our body and soul hunger for the Lord. For the fast to be fruitful we must use the physical hunger as a call to prayer. During the moments of the day when we feel the strong hunger pangs we should direct our thoughts to God.

Armed with fasting, the prophet Elijah was wondrously carried away by a fiery chariot; for Moses, the Fast brought ineffable visions; and by fasting, we ourselves shall see Christ.

Having eaten the forbidden food, Adam was expelled from Paradise for his gluttony. O Lord and Lover of Humankind, may fasting bring us the worth fruits of repentance.
Canon Ode 1

Monday First Week

The Jesus prayer is a good tool for moments like this. The Jesus prayer, or resting in the Holy Name of our Lord, is an ancient monastic practice. This centering prayer places one in the presence of Jesus and invites him into our lives. The name Jesus is the center of the prayer and those who practice the Jesus prayer for a long time often end up simply invoking his name. As an assistance to starting the process of centering on the name of Jesus the following form of the Jesus prayer is commonly used.

Lord Jesus Christ
(while slowly breathing in)
Son of God
(while slowly breathing out)
Have mercy
(while slowly breathing in the mercy of Jesus)
On me, a sinner. (while slowly breathing out our sins)

Typically the prayer is said a hundred times in a single meditation session before an icon of Christ. This is a good private meditative prayer practice. But the prayer is short and can be used throughout the day to sanctify moments of our time. Using the Jesus prayer to fill in the

moments of our day as we walk from place to place, as we wait for that elevator, while sitting in traffic, this prayer COULD become a habit. The automatic response we take as our mind wanders in the empty moments of our day. This is how some monastic have seen the command of St. Paul to "pray without ceasing".

The Jesus prayer combined with fasting is a weapon of peace to drive away temptation from our lives.

Evening Communion

The practice of fasting intensely on Wednesday and Friday emerged because these are the days dedicated to the Cross of our Lord. Even during normal time fasting is observed on these days of the week, with the exception of the period from Pascha to Pentecost. There is the long standing tradition to keep a total fast before receiving communion, Eucharist breaks this fast. These two fasting practices come together during the week days of the Great Fast on Wednesday and Friday. While the entire Great Fast is a period of rigorous fasting, Wednesday and Friday are especially so.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is celebrated in the evening on Wednesday and Friday. Since I receive communion during this evening service, I traditionally would forego eating from the previous day's dinner until after this service. This twenty four hour total fast on Wednesday and Friday become the focal point of my fasting efforts for the week. At the same time the evening communion becomes the much anticipated breaking of this total fast. While few can practice such a rigorous fast, the Church suggests fasting from noon until after the evening communion.

In the monastic tradition, the number of meals is reduced to two per day on weekends and one per day during the week. The farewell to meat occurs one week before the Great Fast and the Sunday before the fast is designated Cheesefare. With such a rigorous fasting schedule in place the total fast broken by the evening communion is the only way to intensify the fasting experi-

ence on Wednesday and Friday.

But I must be careful not to approach the season of the Great Fast as a series of rules to follow. This experience of the fast is to touch my soul with prayer and guide me on the path towards Christ. The specific fasting practices do not need to be this intense. But they should reflect a realistic call to prayer in my own life. They should also follow this natural rhythm of fasting outlined by the Church. My weekdays should have more fasting than my weekends. My Wednesday and Friday should provide my peak fasting experience. My reception of communion on Wednesday and Friday should serve to "break the fast".

Holy Master, infinitely Good, we beseech You who are rich in mercy to show compassion on us sinners and make us worthy to receive your only-begotten Son and our God, the King of Glory. For behold, his most pure body and life-giving blood are about to be brought and placed on this mystical altar at this time, escorted by invisible angelic hosts.

Second Prayer for the Faithful

Whatever the specific fasting practices I choose, the efforts are combined with prayer, almsgiving and good deeds. The prayers provided by the Church for this period will naturally lead me down the road to repentance, metanoia (μετάνοια). Fasting along the road will intensify the experience and provide that call to prayer throughout the day.

Receiving the Eucharist at the end of these intense days of fasting will fill me with the spirit of joy.

During this Great Fast the Bright Sadness of the season provides a manifestation of the kingdom of God. Jesus tells us that the kingdom has already come, but the kingdom has not yet arrived. Already, but not yet, Bright but Sad, this is our Christian experience as a whole. This is our special experience during the Great Fast.