

## A BYZANTINE UNDERSTANDING OF GREAT LENT

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This is a condensation of an original March, 2009 program on Immaculate Heart Radio's Bishop's Hour, Hosted by Bob Dunning. This program was developed and given by Fr. Theodore Wroblicky, a Ukrainian Greek Catholic Priest who serves Holy Wisdom Parish in the Greater Sacramento area.

### A BYZANTINE UNDERSTANDING OF GREAT LENT

It's always a good practice to pray before we contemplate repentance and get serious about Great Lent. So let's begin with the Lenten prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian.

O Lord and Master of my life,  
drive from me the spirit of indifference,  
despair, lust for power and idle chatter.

Instead, bestow on me, Your servant,  
the spirit of integrity, humility,  
patience and love.

Yes, O Lord and King,  
let me see my own sins  
And not judge my brothers and sisters,  
For You are blessed for ever and ever, Amen.

### Most Important – focus on our relationship with God!

In the Great Lent we focus on our relationship with God. This is key. We do this by getting into the atmosphere of Great Lent --that brilliance of the Light of Christ which comes to us more brightly when we take ourselves away from that which destroys or diminishes our focus. Some of our Fathers have characterized this as placing our selves into that "dark closet or room in order to have the Light of Christ that Enlightens the World" shine more brilliantly to us.

In other words, we place ourselves in a place where it is possible to meditate on Christ and His teachings, **without distraction**, and bring Him into our hearts. Set aside quality time in which one can focus on the Father and His Son to let them talk to us. This is why we fast, refrain from music, abandon parties and avoid other celebrations and things we like to do in our every-day lives.

Our personal spiritual warfare then becomes more intensified. The objective of Great Lent to us is to restore our own personal "Robe of Incorruptibility", that image of Christ that was restored with the washing of water when we were baptized. We work on Metanoia – A "Bright Sadness" An atmosphere, an attitude we build within ourselves. Metanoia means repent. We must build an atmosphere in which we can repent – and repent we must!

Now, a few words on this "Atmosphere" or "bright sadness" which we should develop in Lent.

## **Atmosphere – Attitude. Weekdays & Weekends**

Because the Church is important to us and our relationship with God, let's begin with Church Celebrations – The greatest of which is the Eucharistic Liturgy. We call it the Divine Liturgy. The western church calls it the Mass. No doubt about it, It is our most important celebration. But we are in the midst of our personal spiritual battle, focusing on our relationship with God and we have built up and wish to sustain this Lenten attitude within ourselves through our fasting. Byzantine Catholics do not celebrate the Eucharistic Divine Liturgy Monday through Friday of Lent as these days are devoted to the Fast and the Divine Liturgy is not compatible with fasting because it is the biggest celebration in the Church. The weekdays of Great Lent are the actual days of Lent. Saturdays and Sundays are, in effect, outside Lent as they are celebratory days – the days when we celebrate the Eucharistic Divine Liturgy and minimize fasting.

In Matthew 9:15, we find Christ telling us: “You cannot fast while the Bridegroom is with you.” The Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, is with us when we celebrate the Divine Liturgy so we do not celebrate the Divine Liturgy, the Mass, the Eucharist, during the weekdays of the Great Lent. Why? Because it would break the fast – that “Lenten Atmosphere.” This is the time in which we must fast – the Bright Sadness atmosphere of Lent. But this seems to put us in a dilemma – How do we keep up our spiritual fight with the evil one, the devil, if we break the fast? We simply don't set aside that “Bright Sadness” atmosphere we have developed and celebrate the most important celebration of the Church – the Eucharist. But then again, don't we need the Eucharist to sustain us in the spiritual warfare of the Great Lent? The answer to that question is – Yes, always need the Eucharist

We reinforce ourselves in mid-week by receiving the Eucharist that has been reserved from the previous Sunday for this purpose. We serve the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts during mid-week to receive the Lord's Body to sustain us through the fast during these aliturgical days. This Liturgy is one of our more ancient services. It is a beautiful but subdued evening service that sustains us with the most Holy Body of Christ which is essential for us to be victorious in our confrontations with the Evil One. Mince no words, the devil has not given up on us and continues to work steadily to corrupt our Lenten efforts and bring us to spiritual ruin. The Byzantine Church knows this and provides us with the Body of Christ in the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts in mid-week, to sustain us in our spiritual fight to lead us to eventual victory over the devil.

We invite you to join us in worship this Lent. Everyone is welcome!

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