



Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria

ST. MARY AND ST. MOSES COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Amshir / Baramhat

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How Should You Fast?

By Fr. Gabriel Wissa

One of the most common misconceptions these days is that fasting should be done in the spirit only meaning there is no need to fast in the body. For some this is a logical idea after all Christians ought to be spiritual people so we should fast in the spirit, but is that how we should fast? Then again the opposite extreme is also practiced by many Christians where the fast is purely our bodily exercise, although it is often done unintentionally it is something that needs to be addressed. I would like to tackle both of these common misconceptions and to explain what an Orthodox fast consists of.



First, I would like to emphasize that forgiveness of sins in the Orthodox Church happens through the cross and the resurrection of Christ and our participation in these events through the mysteries of the church.

Fasting on the other hand is a tool for repentance- this is needed because human sin and as sin separates us from God and the repentant fast reunites us with Him when this is coupled of prayer and the Eucharist. But fasting also has another purpose-

St. Paul says; “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself to me” (Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)). Here St. Paul says that he no longer lives

but Christ lives within him, this is the true purpose of a Christian which is sainthood. As true Christians want to be in the true likeness of God.

A Christian like St. Paul wants [riceChrist](#) to shine within him and that is precisely the other purpose of fasting. Although we have hopes to be saved through a cross and resurrection and a life of repentance fasting is a tool that grants us to overcome sin and to become Saints ~~for more on this I suggest you watch a video by father Anthony Murad on fasting the which I will put the link to in the description now the question is can I imitate st.~~

Now [the question is can I imitate St.](#) Paul and have the fullness of Christ living in me without fasting in the body? Is spiritual fasting enough? Remember, St. Paul is a man that travelled the world for Christ to preach the gospel. He was severely beaten on many occasions he suffered a lot but at the same time he was led by the Spirit throughout his service, so he was full of the spirit and he even when he entered Heaven, but even him said that the following “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate that I do” (Romans 7:15 (NKJV)). So, this first century Saint admitted that he lacked control over his body, and that is precisely why he struggled against it. He says in 1st Corinthians 9:27, “but I discipline my body and bring it into subjection lest when I have preached to others I myself should become disqualified”. This great Saint made it a point to discipline his body so he can bring it into subjection so even in his highest spiritual state he did not ignore the discipline of the body and

this is seen in 2nd Corinthians 11:27 where he says that he fasted often and was often in sleeplessness. St. Peter also agrees with St. Paul, he says “Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he was suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” he was suffering the flesh which includes fasting ceases from sin. When we see these great Saints admitting to fighting the fleshly desires of the body we should simply imitate them, more importantly there is a reason behind Christ's fast in the body. Although Christ himself did not need to the fast He did it for our sake, does it make sense for Christ the fast and the body while we don't? The misconception comes from the idea that the spirit the soul and the body are separate from one another- this is not sure we are human beings, and a human being has a body soul and spirit and these three are intertwined with each other. That is why when we eat a lot we have trouble praying, eating here is definitely a bodily function and prayer is obviously a spiritual function yet one effects the other. It is the same when our bodies are tired at night we are not capable of praying or reading the Bible and if we force ourselves to do it the quality of

the prayer is simply not the same. So, although it is a convenient idea to fast only in the spirit, it is a wrong one and this idea is usually preached by people that have no desire to fast

because fasting is not easy. Yes, fasting is difficult because eating is such a strong human impulse but this is precisely the point if I can overcome the strong human desire, I am capable to overcome other desires as well whether physical or spiritual by the practice of overcoming this physical desire, we can also overcome sin which in turn leads to sainthood. It is said about St. Basil that he didn't eat meat during his entire time of service as a bishop, Saint John Chrysostom also eats soaked beans. These Saints are Saints through fasting and prayer our objective should be to imitate those people that Christ may also fully live within us and that we might enlighten the world around us.

Although fasting does require the participation of the body it would be a big mistake to assume that this is the end of it. True orthodox fasting goes beyond the body again if the objective of fasting is to be like Christ then my behavior needs to be transformed to be like Christ's. One of the most beautiful biblical passage discussing fasting can be found in Isaiah 58.

There are two of the most prominent Church Fathers that talk on the subject. First St. Basil says “Do not say to me that I fasted for so many days, that I did not eat this or that, that I did not drink wine, that I endured what; but show me if you from an angry man have become gentle, if you from a cruel man have become benevolent.. Do not show forth a useless fast; for fasting alone does not ascend to heaven”. Again, the ultimate objective of fasting is to become a benevolent person and a gentle spirit just like Christ who said to take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart. Similarly, St. John Chrysostom says “Do not let only your mouth fast but also the eye, the ear, and the feet, and the hands, and all members of our bodies, Let the hands fast, by being free from avarice. Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin. Let the eye fast, by disciplining them not to glare at that which is sinful. let the ear fast, by not listening to evil talk and gossip. Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism, for what good is it if we abstain from fowl and fishes, but bite and devour our brothers”. In other words, all of our sense ought to fast, because our senses feed the soul. Also, our hands have the fast evil works, and our legs have the fast from going to sinful places. so I pray that we take the advice of all the saints and use the remainder of this great lent to offer a true fast that is acceptable to our God and to be transformed from glory to glory in His image and likeness.

SAINT OF THE MONTH:

“Whose faiths follow, considering the outcome of their conversation?” Heb 13:7

St. Sedhom Bishay

Sedhom Bishay endured the torture for the Name of the Lord Christ and his martyrdom made the rising of the Cross during the Christian funeral processions openly, for it was forbidden before. This martyr was a clerical employee in the government of the port of Domiat during the days of Mohammed Ali Basha the Governor of Egypt. A revolt of mobs in the port arose, they seized Sidhom Bishay and accused him falsely that he cursed Islam and witnessed against him before the religious judge a low uncivilized person and a donkey driver. The judge decided either he would forsake his faith or be killed, he whipped him and then sent him to the Governor of the city. After the Governor had examined his case, he issued the same judgement against him as the judge did. Sidhom was steadfast in his Christian faith, not caring to be killed. They whipped, dragged him on his face down the stairs in the Governor palace, then they put him on a buffalo facing the tail and went around with him in the streets of the city insulting and degrading him. The Christians in the city became afraid and locked themselves in their houses.



The mob continued to insult him and tortured him in different ways until he was about to deliver his soul; so they brought him to the door of his house and left him there. His family went out and brought him inside and five days later he departed to heaven. His departure was a great martyrdom, and the Christians counted him

among the holy martyrs. They gathered regardless of their denomination and joined in his funeral in a celebration that there was nothing like it before. The Christians carried their arms and the priest put on their vestments headed by the Archpriest Yousef Michael who was the head of the Coptic congregation in Domiat and accompanied by the priests of the other denominations. They marched in his funeral in the streets of the city and in front of him the deacons carrying the banners of the Cross, and they arrived to the church where they prayed the funeral rites. The people went on objecting this reprehensible and painful incident and talking about the patience and endurance of the different kinds of torture in silence and the steadfastness of Sidhom the martyr. The prominent people of the Christian community in Domiat deliberated as how to avoid these incidents in the future. They decided to ask the consuls of the foreign countries to mediate with the ruler of the country and the Pope the Patriarch of the Copts and sent to them detailed reports. Mr. Michail Sorour the official representative of seven countries in Domiat was in charge of this mediation. The ruler of Egypt was concerned about this incident and sent two official representatives to examine the case. So they reopened the inquiry and they realized the injustice and the ill-treatment that befell the great martyr and convicted the judge and the governor for their wrong doing, stripped them from their honor then exiled them. They asked, as a good will and to comfort the people, to allow the raising of the Cross publicly before the Christian funerals, and the ruler allowed that in Domiat. This was allowed later on all over the country during the Papacy of Pope Kyrellos IV.

May his prayers and blessings be with us all, and Glory be to God forever. Amen.

Question and Answer:

Question

Non-Copts often ask why is it that during some fasts, the church allows eating fish. Also, why has the church started this

practice which did not exist before?

Answer

Fasting is an integral part of spirituality. It includes a period of abstinence and a modified vegetarian diet. Fasts of the first degree, which include the Holy Great Fast, the paramoun, and Jonah's Fast, strictly exclude fish. Although Wednesdays and Fridays are fasts of the second degree, yet, just like Jonah's fast, they are directly related to the Holy Great Fast and salvation. Therefore, these four abstaining categories or periods of fasting are observed without eating fish. The remaining fasts are of the second degree, and do include fish, as a supplemental protein source, just as fish was our Lord's preference. Our church is consistent, but not rigid. While in the early church, first- and second-degree fasts were observed more ascetically, excluding fish; overtime, the church uses wisdom and prayer in making ritual adjustments as long as they do not impede the sound faith, dogma, doctrine, or teachings of the church Fathers. Fish was introduced first to help children, elders, pregnant and nursing women, and the sick in order to help them fast. Gradually, fish was allowed to all the Christians during the second-degree fasts.

VERSE OF THE MONTH:

For whosoever shall call upon the name
of the Lord shall be saved. Roman 10:13

Sayings of the Fathers:

- ❖ The graces that come through fasting are countless.....Saint Nikolai of Zicha
- ❖ The more you deny the flesh, the more you render the soul
radiant with spiritual health..... St Basil the great

- ❖ Fasting cleanses the soul, raises the mind, subjects one's flesh to the spirit, renders the heart contrite and humble, scatters the clouds of concupiscence, quenches the fire of lust, and kindles the true light of chastity Saint Augustine

THE CHURCH COMMEMORATES THIS MONTH “SYNAXARIUM”

- ❖ *Departure of St. Hosea the prophet (26 Amshir)5 March*
- ❖ *Martyrdom of St. Theodor the Roman (28 Amshir)7 March*
- ❖ *Martyrdom of St. Polycarp Bishop of Smyrna (29 Amshir)8 March*
- ❖ *Departure of Pope Kyrillos and appearance of the head of St. John the Baptist (30 Amshir)9 March*
- ❖ *Departure of At. Hadid the priest (3 Baramhat)12 March*
- ❖ *Departure of Anba Sarapamon, Archipriest of Abba Yehnis Monastery (5 Baramhat)14 March*
- ❖ *Departure of St. Matthias, the Apostle and martyrdom of St. Arianus the governor of Ansena (8 Baramhat).....17 March*
- ❖ *Commemoration of the appearance of the glorious cross (10 Baramhat)19 March*
- ❖ *Commemoration of honorable Angel Michael (12 Baramhat)21 March*
- ❖ *Commemoration of the revealing of the virginity of St. Demetrius the twelfth Pope of Egypt (12 Baramhat) ...21 March*
- ❖ *Return of the Great saints Anba Macarius the Great and Anba Macarius of Alexandria from Exile (13 Baramhat)22 March*
- ❖ *Departure of Lazarus the Beloved of the Lord (17 Baramhat)26 March*
- ❖ *Raising Lazarus from the dead (20 Baramhat)29 March*
- ❖ *Commemoration of the virgin Mary the mother God (21 Baramhat)30 March*

CHURCH SERVICES SCHEDULE:

PLEASE, CHECK CHURCH WEBSITE IN THE FIRST PAGE.

YOUTUBE SERVICE STREAMING ADDRESS:

www.youtube.com/channel/UC_MI2B3NKL1Y8P3nQR5Amw/live