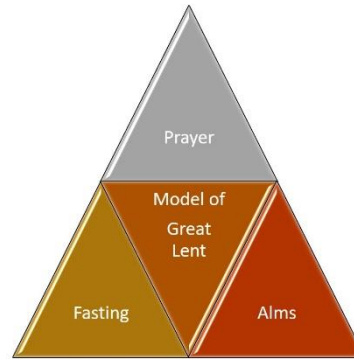


The Journey to Pascha and the Lenten Triangle

Today we once again begin the season of Great Lent in preparation for our Lord's glorious resurrection. As we hear in the hymn of Χριστός Ανεστή (Christ is Risen) His resurrection conquers death and grants to all Mankind freedom from the eternal death that began with our expulsion from Paradise.

But this freedom is not automatic, we must ask for and desire it...and we must be prepared to receive it.

Great Lent is the Church's model of preparation. You have often heard me speak of the "Triangle Model of Great Lent. While Fasting is a help to us; we should understand that any expectation of spiritual improvement is impossible without the other two corners of the Triangle. Without a full immersion in all parts of the Triangle our fasting effort is reduced to just another diet plan. So how do we apply these three aspects of fasting.



Fasting The "fasting" part of the triangle serves to ready the body for the struggle of the Lenten journey. To show the importance of fasting, St. Basil offers the example of the pilot of a merchant ship.

You would surely agree that the pilot of a merchant ship is better able to safely guide it to port if it is not fully loaded, when it is in excellent condition and light. The ship completely loaded down is sunk by a minor swell in the waters. But the boat that has a captain smart enough to toss overboard the extra weight will ride high above even surging waves. This is like people in burdened down bodies. A person gets absorbed with filling up, getting weighed down until finally falling into ill health. They are like the boat in stormy weather that goes right over a dangerous rock.

In this way as Orthodox we do not reduce the idea of fasting into popular ideas such as "fasting only from our favorite things, like chocolate, or cutting out desert, but a true fast from the "burden" of heavy foods and large meals that weaken our focus on the other two critical aspects of Great Lent. While we should abstain from certain foods during the fast, we should also pay attention to how much we eat.\

Prayer With the body properly prepared "prayer" is the next important component of the triangle. As a spiritual endeavor, the true Lenten Fast is inseparable from unceasing prayer and genuine repentance. Repentance without fasting is fruitless. Time spent in silent prayer helps us recognize what in our own character requires repentance. St Basil again,

"While fasting physically, brethren, let us also fast spiritually. Let us loose every knot of iniquity... Let us fast in an acceptable manner, one that is pleasing to God. A true fast is one that is set against evil, it is self-control of the tongue. It is the checking of anger, separation from things like lusts, evil-speaking, lies, and false oaths. Self-denial from these things is a true fast, so fasting from these negative things is good.

Prayer also must include corporate worship as we strive to be more attentive to the various services during Great Lent.

Alms St Basil offers us this admonition, **Do you fast? Give me proof of it by thy works!** In this statement St. Basil tells us that this aspect of the Lenten Triangle is critically important but unfortunately

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is the most overlooked aspect of the Lenten Triangle. Fasting without merciful deeds is dead, especially today when so many are in need. Thus St. Basil tells us,

“If thou sees a poor man, take pity on him! If thou sees an enemy, be reconciled to him! If thou sees a friend gaining honor, envy him not! For let not the mouth only fast, but also the eye, and the ear, and the feet, and the hands, and all the members of our bodies. I have said these things, not that we may disparage fasting, but that we may honor fasting.”

As we enter this season of Great Lent let us truly honor the Fast by actively participating in each of the three aspects of the Lenten triangle so that when we complete the fast we may, as we hear in the Divine Liturgy, *“approach the sacred and spiritual table with a clear conscience for the remission of sins, the forgiveness of transgressions, the communion of the Holy Spirit, the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven, and boldness before You, not unto judgment or condemnation.”*