

# **Fasting Norms**

**For Parishes in the Western Rite Vicariate of  
The Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian  
Archdiocese of North America**

Distributed by

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*These Fasting Norms take effect on Advent Sunday 2012.*

## **Fasting**

**FASTING** includes that of Abstinence, and adds special requirements of its own. It affects both the kind and the quantity of food. On Fasting days, besides the obligation of abstaining from flesh-meat, the number and quantity of meals are restricted. One may eat only one full meal in a day, and that not before twelve o'clock. A collation, or about one-fourth of a meal, is also allowed. All who have completed their twenty-first year are obligated to observe the fasts of the Church, unless exempted by their father confessor for some legitimate reason.

**DAYS OF FASTING** include:

- ✘ Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays in Advent;
- ✘ Every day in Lent (Sundays excepted);
- ✘ Ember Days, which occur four times a year (viz. The Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays immediately after the first Sunday in Lent, in Whitsun week, immediately after the 14th of September, and immediately after the third Sunday in Advent);
- ✘ The vigils of Whitsunday (Pentecost), the Assumption, All Saints, and Christmas. (Note, that when a fasting day falls upon a Sunday, it is kept on the Saturday preceding that Sunday.)

## Abstinence

**ABSTINENCE** affects only the kind of food, and has no reference to its quantity. On Abstinence days the faithful are obliged to abstain from flesh-meat only and the juice thereof (soup, etc.). The number of meals and the amount of food may be the same as on other days. All who have attained the age of reason are obligated to observe the abstinence commanded by the Church.

**DAYS OF ABSTINENCE** include all Fridays throughout the year. When Christmas falls on a Friday, abstinence is not of precept.

## The Eucharistic Fast

**THE EUCHARISTIC FAST** consists of taking no food or drink (excepting water and medicines) from midnight until the reception of the Eucharist the next morning. If the Eucharist is to be received at a Mass celebrated in the evening, the Eucharistic Fast may be modified as follows: the communicant takes his midday meal as close to noon as possible, and then takes no food or drink (excepting water and medicines) until the reception of the Eucharist.

## **Explanation of the Vicariate Fasting Norms**

These norms are those officially prescribed in the West by various local councils and episcopal decrees in and about the 9th century. The forms of norms, which we used to publish in the Vicariate, were those of the mid-19th century. When the Western Rite began in this country in the 19th century, the 19th century customs and guidelines were accepted as the rule, and this continued to be our use until the present. Because of the discussions by the clergy of the Vicariate at a special meeting in August 2012, Bishop JOHN has asked us to publish the “ancient rule” with the following explanation.

The practice of fasting as a spiritual exercise and discipline, practiced on different prescribed days throughout the year, is a matter of pastoral application. Each parish and each individual are unique in situation and adaptability. The pastor must remember that the practice of fasting is a communal discipline in which the individual submerges his will in the custom of the community. As the church and the individual fathers of the church caution us repeatedly, the pastor must find a median in which people can be challenged, yet which does not discourage the weakest among them or cause them to despair. Scripture reminds us that God has commanded that the seasons of fasting be times of “joy and gladness and cheerful feasts” (Zech 8.19). The pastor must be very careful that he is promoting this scriptural view of fasting and not binding heavy burdens, grievous to be borne, and laying them on men’s shoulders (Mt 23.4). Individuals need to be careful, each year, each fasting period, to ask the advice of their spiritual father about how they may observe the fasts. Such a discussion must take into account the context of our own Archdiocese on this continent at this time. It should also take into account our own situation: parish community, Archdiocese, regional diocese, family situation, health, and age.

Our fasting tradition, anciently and until the present, is not the same as that of our Byzantine brothers and sisters. While we respect and honor the legitimate traditions of our Byzantine brethren, we also respect and honor and practice the ancient Orthodox traditions of the West.