Pastoral Guidelines Regarding Fasting

Just as there are times for feasting, there are also times set aside for fasting.

During these periods, certain foods are prohibited. These are, in order of frequency of prohibition, meat (including poultry), dairy products, fish, olive oil and wine. Fruits, vegetables, grains and shellfish are permitted throughout the year.

Of course, the Orthodox Church never reduces the practice of fasting to a legalistic observance of dietary rules. Fasting that is not accompanied by intensified prayer and acts of charity, inevitably becomes a source of pride.

The Church also recognizes that not everyone can fast to the same degree, and assumes that individual Christians will observe the fast prescribed for them by their Spiritual Fathers.

The following are fasting days and seasons:

- All Wednesdays and Fridays, except for those noted below;
- The day before the Feast of Theophany (January 5);
- Cheesefare Week (the last week before the Great Lent, during which meat and fish are prohibited, but dairy products are permitted even on Wednesday and Friday);
- Great Lent (from Clean Monday through the Friday before Lazarus Saturday, olive oil and wine are permitted on weekends);
- Great and Holy Week (note that Great and Holy Saturday is a day of strict fasting, during which the faithful abstain from olive oil and wine);
- Holy Apostles’ Fast (from the Monday after All Saints' Day through June 28, inclusive);
- Fast for the Dormition of the Mother of God (August 1-14, excluding August 6, on which fish, wine and olive oil are permitted);
- Beheading of St. John the Baptist (August 29);
- Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14); and
- Nativity Lent (November 15-December 24, although fish, wine and olive oil are permitted, except on Wednesdays and Fridays, until December 17).

The following are fasting days on which fish, wine and olive oil are permitted:

- The Feast of the Annunciation (March 25, unless it falls outside the Great Lent, in which case all foods are permitted);
- Palm Sunday;
- The Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6); and
- The Feast of the Entry into the Temple of the Mother of God (November 21).

On the following days, all foods are permitted:

- The first week of the Triodion, from the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee through the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, including Wednesday and Friday;
- Diakainisimos (or Bright) Week (the week following the Sunday of Pascha);
- The week following Pentecost; and
- From the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord (December 25) through January 4.