

Readings of the Great Holy Lent

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Aim

- ✠ The Importance of the holy lent
- ✠ How do we enjoy the most spiritual period of the year?

Key verses

*“With Christ I have been crucified; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”
(Gal 2:20)*

Introduction

Great: Because it is the longest fast in the Church.

Holy: Because the Lord did fast it.

The Great Holy Lent is 8 weeks and it consists of three combined fasts:

1. Preparation Week:

It is compensation for the Saturdays and Sundays since there is no abstaining of food. Saturday is the Holy day in the Old Testament and Sunday is the day of the Lord's Resurrection.

2. 40 Holy Days:

The lord fasted for 40 days with no food or drink

3. The Passion Week:

- Ends with the Joys Saturday. This is the only Saturday in the whole year that should be abstained fasting.

How the fasts were combined

Passion Week: In the old days (early days of Christianity) the fast of the Passion week was separate and used to be fasted before the Resurrection (Easter) which usually comes in different date every year (has to be the Sunday after the Passover of the Jews).

Forty Days: The rest of the fast used to be started straight after the Epiphany – This is because the Lord have fasted it straight after he was baptised (Mt4:1, Mk 1:12, Lk 4:1)

Combining the fasts: During the days of Pope St Demitrous El-Karam (the vine dresser), the holy fathers of the Church decided to join the two fasts to end it up with the feast of the Resurrection.

The reason for combining the fasts:

Explain the spiritual reasons behind it.

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The Church and the Holy Great Lent:

The Holy Lent is considered as the most Holy period during the year and that explain why the Holy Church through the inspiration and the guidance of the Holy Sprit have put a strong program for the Gospel readings that can very useful for us if we follow it. It is like a ladder that takes us one step higher every week if we really understand and live it.

- **The Journey to the Bosom of the Father:**

Some of the fathers call it the “Holy feast journey” or “The journey to the Bosom of the Father”. The Journey starts in a clear invitation in the Gospel of the Preparation Sunday for the entry into the secret (private) for a dialogue with the Father.

We will try to cover only the frame and just mention the main points in each of the Sundays Gospels and try as much as the time allow to understand why the Church have arranged the readings in this order. Obviously we cannot cover everything in depth because of the time factor.

- **The acceptance of the Saviour to the repentant:**

During the journey of the readings we will see how the Saviour accepts everyone in a very compassionate and loving way no matter what is our situation.

The Preparation Week: (Matt 6:1-18)

- Almsgiving, Prayer and Fasting are main core of the readings for the Preparation Week.
- Almsgiving, Prayer and Fasting, These are the foundation or the point of departure of the Holy journey.

Almsgiving:

1. The Lord teaches us to give the needy, and there are a lot around us in need (children, the old, the sick, someone sad, next door neighbours...). It does not mean money only; we could give some of talent, material resources...
2. Almsgiving is not just for the rich. Poor or rich, we all have something to give.
3. Keep in mind to do this if you get a chance or look for the chance yourself.

Prayer:

1. **“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut YOUR door, pray to your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly”.**

Here the Lord teaches us to go into our room and close our door not the room’s door. To close our heart from all the worldly matters or to close the door that looks at the world.

Fasting:

This can be a separate topic but we will try to touch on some of our daily and practical fasting issues.

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1. Today's consumer society and our world have made fasting unfashionable. Urging and encouraging everyone to eat, drink, and buy more and more. Yet the gospel message says more and more can ruin human life.
2. As one of the Saints said **“A mouth that does not drink water will not ask for wine and a stomach does not get the bread will not ask for meat”**. What does this mean, we need to have some control on our selves, food and drink are not a sin or something bad but some control will help our spiritual life **(the story of the Pig and the Eagle tide together by St Makarious)**
3. The alarming numbers of people addicted to drugs and alcohol today prove the taste for too much can destroy and having no control on can destroy.
4. Food and drink, clothes and amusements - the good things of life - can turn into your captors; in fact fasting is a way of keeping ourselves free.
5. This Lent, let us try, with God's help, to keep them in their right place. Some reasonable abstaining from food, drink and entertainments can help us do that (it is recommended to discuss this with your confession father)

The First Week: Treasures Sunday (Mt 6:19-33)

In this Gospel the Lord teaches us few important things:

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| 1. Lay UP Treasures in Heaven. | 2. Lamp of the Body. |
| 3. You Cannot Serve God and Riches. | 4. Do Not Worry |

1. Lay Up Treasures in Heaven:

Being a rich is not a sin and we have examples in the Bible of a rich people and they were very rich and righteous.

- Our father Abraham
- Job the righteous
- Joseph of Ramah and Nicodemus
- Moalem Ibrahim El Gohary (died 1795 A.D)

The problem is to have all your life and heart in your earthly treasures.

- The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:19-21)
 - ❖ Active
 - ❖ Intelligent
 - ❖ Hard worker
 - ❖ Clever
 - ❖ But he is relying on the money and forgot about his eternal life
- The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31) – **Where was his treasure?**
- Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10: 17-31) – **“Children how hard it is for those who TRUST in riches to enter the kingdom of God!”**

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2. Lamp of the Body:

The eye is the lamp of the body and through the eyes we see and desire (new fashion ...) and then this will be the treasure and will capture our hearts.

3. You Cannot Serve God and Riches:

“No one can serve two mastersYou cannot serve God and MAMMON”

Mammon: the force which makes people try to become as rich as possible and the belief that this is the most important thing in life

4. Do Not Worry:

“Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things”

If the Lord teaches us not to rely on treasures, and “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink.....” who can we rely on???

He answers “For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things”

To conclude this point, every one of us should ask himself what is my treasure and where I want to have my treasure??????

But do not worry if the devil fights you, and remember that he also tempted the Lord

Second Week: The Temptation (Mt 4: 1-11)

The lesson of the first week was to rely on our heavenly Father, so obviously in the second week the temptation will doubt **God’s Love**

If you are the son of God, why does he leave you hungry, why does God allow the presence of disease, failure,..... ??????

Never give up when you are tempted and just remember that the Lord has conquered the devil however you have to remember that the victory has to be through the **stead fasting (Perseverance)** in the Lord.

If we feel that the temptation is hard and we lost the way, let us remember **“The Lost Son”**

Third Week: The Lost Son (Luke 15: 11-32)

Repentance in the Father’s Bosom: Be sure that when we repent and come back to the Father’s Bosom He will be waiting for you as long as we do what the Lost Son (the clever son) did.

- He returned to himself
- He did not delay his repentance
- He understood that the sin converted him from a Son to a hired servant

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And here we can see the kindness and love of the Father, He gave him the best robe (the sonhood) and put a ring on his hand and sandals (the ways of salvation that can help him to walk in the ways of the Lord) on his feet and slaughtered the fat calf (Holy Communion)

Remember that the Father is always waiting for you and His Hands are always open

- If you still feel that your situation is worse than the Lost Son, look at the [Samaritan Woman](#).

Fourth Week: The Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-42)

The story (Briefly):

The story talks about the Lord Jesus Christ left Judea and he was going to Galilee and he had to go through Samaria (explain who are the Samaritans). It took him about 6 hours walking and he got tired and sat by the well.

It was about 12:00 PM and he met the Samaritan woman. (Explain the rest of the story).

Some point to notice:

The Lord started the conversation – as always with everyone – will talk to you through different means and ways (story, Bible, Cremorne, incident...)

- St Anthony got the message through the readings of the Gospel
- St Paula got the message through a rich dead man
- St Paul got the message from the Lord when he appeared to him
- Every one of us needs to have the sensitivity that he can recognize the Lord's message in every aspect or situation.

The Samaritan Woman:

- She was living in a the sin
- She was not polite (**How is it that you, being a Jew, ask a drink from me....**)

However the Lord found something good in this woman “you have well said I have no husband”

The Lord will always look for something good in everyone and will encourage you to keep it up. As for us if you feel you are really weak against the sin and the way is too hard and you keep falling, just remember

“Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:11)

So Hold fast what you have (a small prayer, confession, mass, Bible readings,.....) and the Lord will help you and if you feel that the sin has been there for a long time and overcome you for a long time do not give up because the God healed the Man at the [Pool of Bethesda](#)

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Fifth Week: A Man Healed at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5 1:1-18)

- Bethesda (House of mercy)
- The story briefly
- 38 Years – a symbol for someone live in the sin for a very long time however the chance is there to be saved and leave your sin but the question is “Do you want to be made well”
- “Do you want to be made well” – a question to everyone – as one of the Church father said – God created you without you, saved you without you BUT will never get you to heaven without you.

If you feel that your situation is more difficult than this and you cannot see the Lord Jesus Christ do not lose hope and think of what happened to the “**Man Born Blind**”

Sixth Week: A Man Born Blind Receives Sight (John 9)

- The story.
- The man was born blind
- Creation of the eyes (a proof on the Power and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ)
- Go to the pool of Siloam and wash – Baptism
- Then he said, “Lord, I believe” and he worshiped Him – Live of thanksgiving.
- Finally the blind man met with the Lord and worshiped Him – when you meet the Lord you will rejoice to see him **entering Jerusalem (your life – your heart) as a KING**

Palm Sunday: (Mt 21: 1 – 17)

We pray in a Joyous tune

We should ask ourselves who is the KING in my heart (mammon, money, a friend, wrong relationship with someone,) – as we discussed, God would not accept another king to share your heart with Him “**My son, give my your heart,**” – **Proverbs 23: 26** – “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt 22: 37)

After this Joyous day, the Church will start the Passion Week to remember the sufferings of the Lord for our sake “**If indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together**” – **Romans (8 : 17)** – as a result we will rejoice for the Holy Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Glory is to God forever. Amen.