

The Great Fast: A Holy Season

Objective: The students will be able to identify the Great Fast as our 40-day period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in preparation for Holy Week and Pascha. The first Sunday of the Great Fast is called the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

For the Catechist

The Great Fast is the time of the Church's renewal and our personal renewal. We need to come back to God and repent for our sins by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The Great Fast is that time when the whole Church strives to do something positive as we open our minds and hearts to God's Word.

The Great Fast is a positive experience! It deepens our faith and improves our lives. There is a note of optimism that pervades all Great Fast celebrations. The end is in some small way already in view although the melodies are somber, the prayers are longer and penitential, and the bright vestments are replaced by dark ones.

The six lessons in this unit on the Great Fast emphasize the journey we must take during this 40-day preparation. Also, the lessons identify the liturgical services, songs, and prayers of the Great Fast. Encourage the children and their families to participate in the many ways our Church gives us to prepare for Pascha.

Prayer of St. Ephrem. St. Ephrem was a fourth century monk from Syria known for many spiritual writings. If any single prayer were to be designated the *Prayer of Great Fast*, this is it. This brief prayer combines beauty with simplicity as it reminds us to be faithful to the spirit of the Great Fast. When we say this prayer, we make a profound bow at the end of each stanza.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. This Liturgy is one of the most characteristic services of the Great Fast season. It consists of vespers to which a Communion Service has been added.

Lesson Plan Overview

Opening: Prayer of St. Ephrem

Introduction: : Discussion of preparation
Need: toy car and a map, forty sheets of paper, sign that says The Great Fast

Read Text Aloud: Have students volunteer to read the text.

Activity Tracks:

Choose a basic, group, or craft activity to reinforce the lesson (detailed on the pages that follow).

- *Basic:* Our Journey
- *Group:* Forty Footprints
- *Craft:* My Forty-day Calendar

Closing: Prayer of St. Ephrem

Icon Packets:

Come Bless the Lord: Christ Pantocrator

Teaching Pics:

Presanctified Liturgy (GL3)
Orthodoxy Sunday (GL5)

Sunday of Orthodoxy. The first Sunday of the Great Fast is called the Sunday of Orthodoxy. On this day we remember the victory of orthodoxy in the controversy over the holy icons. The term Orthodoxy finds its roots in the Greek word *orthodoxia* (*orthos* that means right and *doxa* that means praising) which signifies the true faith and the true worship of God. The Byzantine Church during the 8th and 9th centuries battled against the heresy of iconoclasm (i.e., literally "breakers of icons"). This day honors the validation and restoration of icons in the life of our Church. Some parishes honor this Sunday with a procession of children and adults carrying icons.

Saint Basil's Liturgy. We know that we have special Lenten services like the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts during this season. In addition, all the usual services are longer, with additional prayers, psalms and hymns. The Liturgy of St. Basil is used on the Sundays of the Great Fast and during the Holy Week for this reason. The priest's prayers, especially the anaphora, are longer. The anaphora reminds us of the whole plan of God for our salvation. As we listen to these prayers, we realize the greatness of God's love for us which we recall during this time.

Background Reading

(Direct quotations from the sources noted)

The Great Fast

"In addition to the fifty-day period of joyful celebration after Pascha, the Church has a forty-day period of penitential preparation for Pascha, called the *Great Fast (Lent)*. In the Eastern Churches Lent begins on the Monday after Cheesefare Sunday (always the seventh Sunday before Easter) and ends on the Friday before, Lazarus Saturday, a period of exactly forty days" (*LLII* 40).

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

"The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is one of the most characteristic services of the Lenten season. It consists of vespers to which a Communion Service has been added. It does not have an oblation or an anaphora and so is not a complete celebration of the eucharistic Liturgy. An anaphora commemorates our Lord's resurrection. In the Gospel story of Christ's appearance at Emmaus, we see that the disciples 'recognized' the Lord when 'he took bread, pronounced the blessing, then broke the bread and began to distribute it to them' (Lk 24:30). This four-fold action is certainly the celebration of the Eucharist, and in the Gospel story we see that the Christian faithful always discover the risen Lord in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

"The whole season of the Great Fast has a different symbolism. Here instead of celebrating the Resurrection, our prayers, fasting, almsgiving and acts of penance symbolize the forty year journey of the people of Israel through the Sinai desert to the Promised Land. The 'Promised Land' of the Christian is the Resurrection of our Lord giving the fullness of life to all who believe in Him. The Byzantine Churches came to consider it inappropriate to pray the anaphora on the weekdays of Lent and formulated another service, 'revealed by the God of unspeakable and invisible mysteries' (Prayer Before the Our Father). It consists of an entrance with the Holy Gifts that have been consecrated the previous Sunday, and their distribution in Holy Communion.

"Today the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is prescribed for Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent, though originally it was celebrated every day of the Great Fast, including Good Friday" (*LLII* 70-71).

The Lesson Plan

Opening

Today we are going to begin learning the Prayer of St. Ephrem, a special prayer we say during the Great Fast. This prayer includes profound bows. To do a profound bow we kneel and bow our forehead to the floor. How many of you remember doing this bow last year? This is our way to show God we offer ourselves to Him. The Prayer of St. Ephrem has three profound bows. [Use the prayer sheet for your jurisdiction at the end of this lesson. These sheets will be the prayer page used for the craft in Lesson 17.] Let's begin with the sign of the cross.

Introduction

[On the wall tape a map and a picture of a car.] If you or I were to use these two items today, what would we probably be doing? (Going on a trip) Another word for a trip is a journey. Do you like to go on a journey in your car? Where are some of the places we might go?

Today we are going to pretend that we are going on a journey. On the wall are taped three sheets of paper with the following words: CAR, FAMILY, JOURNEY. [Divide the class into three groups. Each group goes to the sheet assigned and writes suggestions of what should be done before going on the journey. Suggestions: Car—Get the car checked, fill it with gas ; Family—Pack clothes, prepare and pack food; Journey—Decide where to go, mark out the roads] This is done before you go on a journey. What is necessary before we are able to begin our journey? (Preparation) To go on a journey, you prepare. We did a similar activity for another lesson. Does anyone remember what feast day we were preparing for then? (The Nativity of Jesus) What is the name of that fast? (Nativity Fast)

This time our special journey leads us to the Feast of the Resurrection or Pascha. Our Church began this journey this week. We call this time of preparation the Great Fast. How many days are there in the Great Fast? (40)

Today we are going to make a road to remind us of the journey we are on during the Great Fast. How many days does the Church give us to prepare? (40) We will use one sheet of paper for each day. [Give the children forty sheets of paper to lay on the floor to form a road symbolizing the journey. If the area in which you have class is limited, cut the paper into smaller pieces so the children can still participate in entering the JOURNEY. Place a large sign that says The Great Fast beside the first block of the road that will end at the icon corner.] Let's count to forty as we walk on this road to our icon corner. During the Great Fast we are on a journey with Jesus to the cross and His glorious Resurrection. Let's open our books to learn about the Great Fast

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Have you noticed any changes in our church this week? Maybe some of you noticed the altar covers are a dark color. Maybe some of you noticed our songs have a different melody.

Our Church uses these changes to show us we are in a time of preparation for the Feast of the Resurrection or Pascha. This special time is called the Great Fast. The Great Fast is our 40-day period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in preparation for Holy Week and Pascha. During these forty days we remember all that God has done for us, and we dedicate ourselves to serve Him more completely.

The Great Fast is a serious time. It is like a journey or a trip. When we go away, it takes time to get there. As we go on a journey, we think more and more about getting there. As we enter the Great Fast, we think more about Holy Week, Great Friday, and Jesus' saving death and Resurrection. Each day of the Great Fast helps us grow closer to God as we prepare for the death and the Holy Resurrection of Jesus.

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Reading of Text

As the children read aloud, help them interact with the text using the comments or questions below which are keyed to the text phrases (in bold type).

Maybe some of you noticed our songs have a different melody.

Did you notice these changes? How many of you were in church this week? [Discuss the services you have in your church.]

... for the death and the Holy Resurrection of Jesus.

What is this holy season of preparation called? (The Great Fast) How long is it? (40 days) What is the Great Fast? (Our 40-day period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in preparation for Holy Week and Pascha.)

Our journey began last Sunday with Forgiveness Sunday. That is the day we ask each other to forgive us for anything we have done that was hurtful. Some churches have special services during which the priest and the members ask each other for forgiveness. Our Great Fast journey starts on the Monday after Forgiveness Sunday. To help us prepare for Pascha, our Church gives us fasting practices. We have special fasting practices during the Great Fast.

The first Sunday of the Great Fast is called the Sunday of Orthodoxy. This is the day we thank God for the beautiful icons we have in our Churches. Some people bring their special icons to church this day for a procession around the church.



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We have special fasting practices during the Great Fast.

What do we do on Forgiveness Sunday? (We ask each other for forgiveness.) What fasting practices are we to follow? [For the fasting practices for your jurisdiction, look to "Part II—Liturgical Texts" in this teacher manual]

... for a procession around the church.

What is the first Sunday of the Great Fast called? (The Sunday of Orthodoxy) On this Sunday we venerate our icons. Do you have a special icon? [If your church has the tradition of a procession, let the children show the icons they brought.]

... during the week to pray the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.

What is the name of this special liturgy? (The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts) When do we pray this liturgy? (On week days during the Great Fast.)

... dedicate ourselves to serve Him more completely.

What is a prayer we can say during the Great Fast? (Prayer of Saint Ephrem) How do we bow during this prayer? (A profound bow, a prostration) We will say this prayer and we will bow at the end of class.

Let's review: How many days do we have for the Great Fast? (40) What are we preparing for? (Pascha) What is the Great Fast? (Our 40-day period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in preparation for Holy Week and Pascha.)

During the Great Fast we join together often as a Church family to pray. Our Church gives us many beautiful services to help us pray together. One service is the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. This is a special Liturgy we attend on weekdays during the Great Fast. This service includes special prayers to help us grow closer to God during these 40 days. In some areas the Church family comes together during the week to pray the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.

Another special prayer we can say during the Great Fast is the Prayer of Saint Ephrem. Saint Ephrem was a holy person who lived many years ago. He gave us this prayer to remind us to follow God in everything we do. We are asked to make a profound bow called a prostration during this prayer. We bow to thank God for all that He has done for us and to dedicate ourselves to serve Him more completely.



We call the Great Fast a 40-day holy season. We use these days to prepare for the celebration of Pascha.

Words to Remember:
Great Fast: The Great Fast is our 40-day period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in preparation for Holy Week and Pascha.
Sunday of Orthodoxy: The first Sunday of the Great Fast.
Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts: A special Liturgy celebrated on weekdays during the Great Fast

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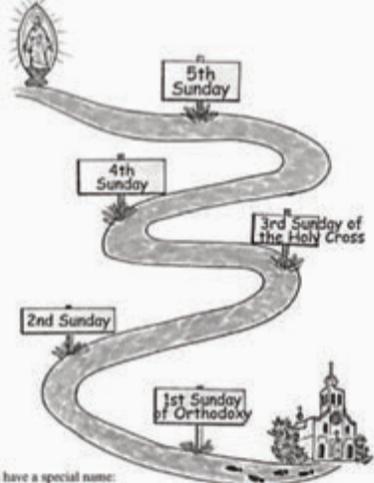
Activity Tracks

Basic: Our Journey

Let's draw forty footprints on the path of our journey. Why are there forty? (For the forty days of the Great Fast)

Our Journey

I. We have forty days of the Great Fast to prepare for Pascha. Let's begin our journey to Pascha by drawing forty footprints on this path to Jesus. Leave some space for steps you will take during the final week of preparation called Great and Holy Week. We will draw our path for that week in another lesson. Write the number of each Sunday on the guideposts.



II. Two Sundays have a special name:
First—Sunday of Orthodoxy
Third—Sunday of the Holy Cross
Add these names to the guideposts for that Sunday.

Group: Forty Footprints

Materials: construction paper, glue, markers



We are going to make a reminder of the forty days we must travel. We are going to make forty footprints, which are pasted toe-to-heel. [Depending on the size of the class, the children can trace and cut out one or two sets of their own footsteps—the footsteps are pasted toe-to-heel. Do this on a long table or the floor.]

Now that all the steps have been pasted together, let's print the following message in large letters: LENT IS OUR JOURNEY TO THE RESURRECTION! [1 letter per footprint. Allow one blank footprint between words.]

[Make guideposts for each Sunday of the Great Fast. Directions: Cut a 2" x 6" sheet of construction paper to form a pointer. Attach a post 1" x 4" cut from a sheet of construction paper. Each week write the name of the Sunday on the pointer and paste the sign post to indicate the number of steps traveled.]

These are guideposts that we will add each Sunday. Does anyone remember the name of this first Sunday? (Sunday of Orthodoxy) I'm going to write "First Sunday" on the pointer, and we will add the guidepost next to the seventh step.

[The completed project should be placed on the wall or somewhere that is easily visible and can be seen as a reminder each week. If you do not have a permanent classroom, roll up the steps carefully and be sure to bring them to class each week.]

Craft: My Forty-day Calendar

Materials: Construction paper, glue, markers, and "Calendar" Worksheet that can be modified for any year

[Have sample ready to show children.] *We are going to make our own reminder of the forty days. Glue our white grid onto construction paper. At the top write the month and the dates for this year. On this calendar we will draw smaller footsteps. Where can you keep this calendar at home to help you remember to use each day to walk closer to God? (On the refrigerator, near the icon corner) Don't forget to mark each day with a footprint.*

Closing

The Prayer of St. Ephrem has three profound bows. After we say each section, we make a profound bow. Have a prayerful Great Fast.

The Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, grant that I may not be infected with the spirit of slothfulness and inquisitiveness, with the spirit of ambition and vain talking
(prostration).

Grant instead to me, Your servant, the spirit of purity and humility, the spirit of patience and neighborly love
(prostration).

O Lord and King, bestow upon me the grace of being aware of my sins and of not thinking evil of those of my brethren (prostration) for You are blessed forever and ever. Amen.

Melkite
Greek
Catholic
Church

The Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, grant that I may not be infected with the spirit of slothfulness and inquisitiveness, with the spirit of ambition and vain talking
(prostration).

Grant instead to me, Your servant, the spirit of purity and humility, the spirit of patience and neighborly love
(prostration).

O Lord and King, bestow upon me the grace of being aware of my sins and of not thinking evil of those of my brethren (prostration) for You are blessed forever and ever. Amen.

Romanian
Greek
Catholic
Diocese of
Canton

The Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, keep from me the spirit of indifference and discouragement, lust of power and idle chatter (prostration).

Instead, grant to me, Your servant, the spirit of wholeness of being, humble-mindedness, patience and love (prostration).

O Lord and King, grant me the grace to be aware of my sins and not to judge my brother (prostration) for You are blessed now and ever and forever. Amen.

Ruthenian
Byzantine
Catholic
Metro-
politan
Province

The Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian

Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of discouragement and insensitivity, of domineering others and idle talk (prostration).

Give me, Your servant, the spirit of integrity, humility, patience and love (prostration).

Yes, Lord and King, let me see my own sins and refrain from judging my brothers and sisters, (prostration) for You are blessed unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Ukrainian
Catholic
Diocese of
St.
Josaphat

The Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, drive from me the spirit of discouragement, negligence, ambition and idle talk (prostration).

Grant me, Your servant, the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and charity (prostration).

Yes, my Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins and not judge others (prostration) for You are blessed forever and ever. Amen

Ukrainian
Catholic
Synod

The Great Fast
