

Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving

Objective: The students will be able to explain how we use prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to help us prepare for Pascha.

For the Catechist

Children in Grade 3 observe the Great Fast in the ways their parents do. They want to please their family so they follow the practices in the home. But this year they might want to consider their own additional prayers, fasting, and almsgiving as they prepare for Pascha.

Praying. Prayer enables us to see God as the Merciful, loving Father. By praying we acknowledge our dependence on God and our need to be with Him. The Great Fast gives us many beautiful prayers and services to grow closer to God. All of us catechists need to take the time to attend these services and to acknowledge the children and parents who are also in church. Lesson 17 teaches the children that praying means talking and listening to God. During the Great Fast we should pray aloud and meditate silently as we wait for Pascha.

Fasting. Fasting helps us see that material things alone are not the source of existence. Life is more than eating and acquiring goods; it is dependence on God. Fasting means that we do not feast; the experience is one of hunger. We hunger for what is true. In fasting our entire being is involved as we humbly stand before God, declaring our own sinfulness. Remind the children of the fasting practices of the Church and encourage them to fast from other foods and from the radio or television. **[Fasting practices for the jurisdictions are included in "Part 2—Liturgical Prayers" (page 55) in this Teacher Manual.]**

Almsgiving. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. That means we take care of each other as family. The Great Fast asks us to share food, clothing, and money with those who have less.

Lesson Plan Overview

Opening: Prayer of St. Ephrem

Introduction: Discussion of promises

Read Text Aloud: Have students volunteer to read.

Activity Tracks:

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

- *Basic:* The Great Fast
- *Group:* "The Great Fast" Acrostic
- *Craft:* "Prayer of St. Ephrem" Prayer Page

Closing: Prayer of St. Ephrem

[For next week's lesson, ask your priest for the "Prayer for Forgiveness" used for Confession in your church.]

Icon Packets:

Come Bless the Lord: Christ Pantocrator

Teaching Pics:

St. Gregory Palamas (GL6)

Remind the children that they can share what they have, and they can offer kind words and deeds to those who need their help.

Pascha. For Christians the word "Pascha" identifies the yearly commemoration of Christ's glorious resurrection. The term "Pascha" is used throughout this series.

Background Reading

(Direct quotations from the sources noted)

Children and Fasting

"Our society teaches constant and unchecked consumption: if you want it, get it now! Children quickly absorb this principle from television, especially from the commercials aimed at them during children's programming. By teaching them to fast we provide a check on the untrammelled spirit of acquisition our culture endorses.

"While we may not want to deprive children of something nutritious such as milk, there are a number of foods from which they would do well to abstain (candy, cookies, artificial breakfast cereals, soft drinks and the like, i.e. junk food). Not only foods but entertainment has been a traditional subject for fasting. Young people could be brought to fast from TV or the stereo and replace them with the bible games and videos mentioned above. Many people regulate these items anyway; certainly fast times are ideal for suggesting such activities to honor the Lord" (*DC 34*).

Christian Prayer: When to Pray

"As did the Jews before them, the early Church taught that believers should pray through the day, because they never stopped living in the heavenly realm. As a rule, Christians might gather once or twice a day for common prayer, but in addition to that personal, private prayer—the communication of each believer with the Lord—was considered indispensable. The usual times for prayer even then were in the morning, before the day's tasks were begun, at the evening at their conclusion, and before retiring" (*DC 23*).

Christian Prayer: How to Pray

"When you have determined a time and place for prayer, you then may wonder how to pray. The Fathers of the Church noted that what we have to say to God usually falls into four basic categories. First of all, we **adore God**: we express our worship of Him, we praise Him, we bless Him, we glorify Him. In other words, we tell Him how great we think He is. Besides this, we **confess our sinfulness** expressing sorrow for having failed His love. We tell Him that we know we are not so great. A third kind of prayer is **thanksgiving**, expressing gratitude for the many good things God has given us. We reflect on our blessings and thank Him for His generosity to us. A fourth style of prayer is **supplication**, asking God's blessings on the world, our loved ones, our community. Every prayer we know or may come across or which may spring spontaneously from our heart will include one or more of these elements. A well rounded prayer life will include them all" (*DC 24*).

Almsgiving

Almsgiving is the logical result of fasting and prayer and a verification of their authenticity (a sign that they 'worked', they took').... As we are emptied of all that is dead in us by fasting and filled with God and His life by prayer, we are to pass Him and it on to others by sharing our very selves (expressed in our time, talent and treasures). We become communion and make things become communion as we share all in God with others" (*LLIII 46-47*).

The Lesson Plan

Opening

Last week we learned a prayer for the Great Fast. Does anyone remember the name? (The Prayer of St. Ephrem) What do we do when we say this prayer? (We bow to the floor, a profound bow.) Let's begin by making the sign of the cross. [Distribute the prayer sheets from last week. Have the children say the words and make the profound bow.]

Introduction

Today I want you to think about a promise you made to your mom or dad recently. Let's hear some of them. [Give them a few minutes to share examples such as a promise to clean their rooms, wash dishes, listen in school.] I made a very special promise to our priest. I promised I would be here to teach you every week. Your parents are keeping their promise to have you here in class every week. But sometimes it is hard to keep promises. We have to be reminded about what we are to do. That is what the Great Fast does for us. It reminds us to keep our promise to love God. Even though we get very busy throughout the year, we know that we should think about God first. The Great Fast helps us keep our promise.

Let's see—Is anyone doing anything differently now that we are in the Great Fast? Did anyone attend any church services this week? [Take a few seconds to praise the students who did.] What did you see at church? Do you remember any of the songs you sang? Is anyone making the profound bows at home when you say your prayers? Remember the Great Fast gives us the chance to show God with our whole body we worship Him and we want to be with Him.

What did we put on the floor last week? (Footprints) Why did we do that? (To remind us of the 40 days of the Great Fast) Today we are going to look at the 40 footprints. [Use the ones from last week's group activity.] We are traveling together for these 40 days, and we are heading toward what feast? (Pascha)

Let's look at our steps around the room. [The footprints might have to bend around the room depending on the size. Have the last footprint stop at the icon corner.] Each week we will walk our path to the Resurrection. Let's count the steps as we walk (or I point to) the footsteps. [See the group activity for the last lesson. Hold up the guidepost and ask:] What Sunday of the Great Fast is today? (The Second Sunday) [Write the Second Sunday on the pointer.] Let's add this guidepost at the 14th step.

Let's turn to our books to learn what we should be doing on our journey.

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Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving



The Church gives us the holy season of the Great Fast to help us remember the promise we made to love God. We made that promise at our baptism when we became members of the Church. Through the Mysteries of Baptism and Chrismation, we became united to God. The Church wants us to stay close to God and to love Him always. The Great Fast is very important for us because it gives us the chance to learn to love God more each day.

During these forty days of the Great Fast, the Church asks us to pray, fast, and give alms to the poor. This way we will think about God more often. We will take time to remember all God has done for us. We will grow closer to God and be prepared to worship and praise Him at Pascha.

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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).

... be prepared to worship and praise Him at Pascha.
How do we prepare for Pascha? (Through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving) What did we promise God at our baptism and chrismation? (To love Him) What does the Great Fast remind us to do? (To love God)

Also, we pray through the words and songs of our church services.

What do we do when we pray? (We talk and listen to God) What are some ways we pray? (Reading the Bible, praying and singing in church)

Praying is our way of talking and listening to God. Jesus talked and listened to God also. In the Gospel we read that Jesus spent forty days praying in the desert. Now it is our time to spend forty days praying often to God.



We can talk and listen to God in many ways. One way is by saying our prayers and by being silent while thinking about God. Another way is by reading and thinking about the stories in the Bible. Also, we pray through the words and songs of our church services.

Fasting is another way we grow closer to God. We fast to remind ourselves we depend on God for everything. We are willing to give up certain foods and activities during these forty days because we love God, and we need only His love. Fasting helps us stay focused on God.



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Fasting helps us stay focused on God.

What does focused mean? (To think only about God; to depend on God) How does fasting make us think about God? (We aren't busy doing other things.) Fasting helps us get control over our bodies. We want to be good. We don't want to be angry with our bodies. We can use the Great Fast to help us control our anger.

Through almsgiving we learn to love each other as God loves us.

What does almsgiving mean? (To share what we have with those who have less) How does almsgiving help us think about God? (We think about everything God gave us, and we share it.) Everything we have is a gift from God to be shared with others.

Let's review: *What is the Great Fast? (The Great Fast is our 40-day period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in preparation for Holy Week and Pascha.) Our Church gave us the Great Fast so we can remember to be with God as often as possible as we prepare for Pascha.*

We learned this year that Jesus told us to love each other as God loves us. God takes very good care of us. That means we must take good care of each other. One way is through giving alms and doing other good works. We give alms when we share what we have with those who have less. In the Bible we read many stories about the people of God taking care of each other. We must do the same.

During the Great Fast we share money, food, and clothing with people who have less than we do. We know that all we have has been given to us by God. We thank God for all He has given us by sharing what we have. Through almsgiving we learn to love each other as God loves us.

We are praying, fasting, and giving alms as we journey to Pascha.



Words to Remember:

Praying: Talking and listening to God. We pray at home, at play, and at church. We must always remember to pray.

Fasting: Doing without certain foods and activities we like. When we fast, we do not feast. It helps us to prepare for the feast.

Almsgiving: Sharing what we have with those who have less.

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Activity Tracks

Basic: The Great Fast

[This worksheet is in the student text.]

During the Great Fast, we are to fast from certain foods and activities. Let's try to find the names of some and add some of our own to the bottom of the page.

The Great Fast

Find the names of foods from which you might fast. Only the first letter and the number of letters in the word are given at the bottom of the page. Complete the words and find them in the scramble.

I	C	E	C	R	E	A	M	I
Z	F	I	E	G	G	S	R	C
Q	E	I	P	V	G	O	P	O
W	C	M	G	O	P	D	M	O
C	A	N	D	Y	K	A	T	K
R	S	T	E	L	M	X	Z	I
H	O	P	I	Z	W	R	N	E
H	A	M	B	U	R	G	E	R

h e t d e g s

e g g s

m i l k

h a m b u r g e r

c a n d y

i c e c r e a m

s o d a

c o o k i e s

Circle the ones you will fast from this year. Add any other foods or activities from which you might fast.

Group: "The Great Fast" Acrostic

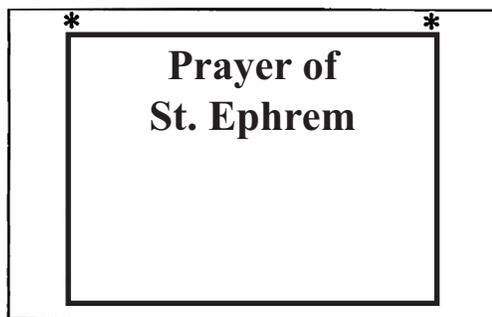
Materials: Poster board, markers, paper

Today we are going to remember all the ways we can make the Great Fast special. We are going to do this with an acrostic. An acrostic has the letters of a word printed down the side of a page. I have Great Fast listed on this poster board. We are going to add phrases and words that start with those letters to help remind us about everything we should think about during the Great Fast. Lets first think of some words before I write them on the poster board.

The following are possibilities for Great Fast:

<i>Give alms;</i>	<i>Follow fasting practices</i>
<i>Read the Bible;</i>	<i>Ask for forgiveness</i>
<i>Eat less;</i>	<i>Sin less</i>
<i>Always pray;</i>	<i>Take time to go to church</i>
<i>Try harder.</i>	

Let's list this on the poster board and hang it in our room. [You can make acrostics from other words: Prayer, Fasting, Repentance.]



Craft: Prayer of St. Ephrem" Prayer Page

Materials: "Prayer of St. Ephrem" prayer pages from Lesson 16 in this Teacher Manual, heavier white paper or construction paper, markers, stickers or stars, hole punch, scissors, and glue

[Have sample ready to show children.] *Today we are going to make another prayer page. What is the name of the prayer we have been saying at the beginning and end of class? (Prayer of St. Ephrem)*

Paste the words on a half sheet of construction paper. You can draw pictures around the words, or you can add the stars or stickers I have here. Punch two holes to match the ones on the prayer cover. Untie the yarn on your prayer book cover and add this new page. Now pull the yarn through the holes and tie.

Closing

Let's Say the Prayer of St. Ephrem