

The Great Fast

Objective: Students will be able to review that 1) the Great Fast is the forty-day preparation for Pascha; and 2) the Great Fast helps us remain faithful to God's love through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving

For the Catechist

Christian life is a struggle—a constant battle in which we choose to remain faithful to God or fall under the power of sin. As Christians, we continually come back anew to Christ and deepen our response in faith. Through prayer, fasting and almsgiving, our Church calls us to internalize our commitment to follow Christ.

In the early Church, the catechumens who were preparing for Baptism used the period of time before Pascha as one of intense preparation. Fasting, prayer, instruction, and the sincere wish to repent of past sins characterized those who were to be baptized. Also, for those already baptized as Christians, the weeks before Pascha was a time of renewal, repentance, and reaffirmation of their baptismal vows; they used this time period for fasting and prayer. Today the Church asks us to prepare as did the early Christians for Pascha

In this lesson the children are led to see their response to God's call in terms of a lifelong vocation. We are Christians in more than name. We must live the Christian life which means we must strive to become Christ-like. Because of evil and sin, this is not easy. Fourth grade students know about struggle, especially in remaining dedicated to a small job, hobby or talent. Emphasize the dedication and perseverance that is needed to live out their life as Christians. Help the children begin to understand their own life in terms of a continual struggle to remain faithful to God. When planning the year, have lessons 21-23 and this lesson scheduled before Pascha. These lessons work together to help the children understand our need to see the Great Fast as a time for repentance and renewal. Since the Grade 2 book, the children have learned that one way we turn back to God is by receiving the Mystery of Repentance. Because formulas for Confession vary, no lesson in this *God With Us* series includes a format. Practice the formula used in your jurisdiction.

Lesson Plan Overview

Opening: Prayer of Saint Ephrem

Introduction: Discussion of preparation

Need: paper and pencils

Read Text Aloud: Have the students volunteer to read the text aloud or have the students read sections silently.

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

- *Basic:* The Great Fast
- *Group:* Class Psalm
- *Craft:* "Thank You, Jesus" Journal

Closing: Prayer of Saint Ephrem

Icon Packets:

Come Bless the Lord:

The Crucifixion, The Holy Shroud

Teaching Pics

Great Lent (GL 1-16)

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).

Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving

"At the beginning of our spiritual journey, personal prayer will tend to be vocal, using set formulas. It will be used frequently to create recollection, fight temptation and keep God in mind. The most important aspect of prayer at this stage of the spiritual life is that we grow from praying when we feel like it to establishing a "discipline" or regularity in prayer.

"The beginner in fasting may see himself as accomplishing great feats in the spiritual struggle. However, as the Fathers insist, 'Fasting, while of value in itself, is not something to boast of in front of God for it is simply a tool for training those who desire self-restraint. The ascetic should not feel proud because he fasts; but with faith in God, he should think only of reaching his goal....' The Christian must come to see fasting as primarily a means to acquire self-control and discipline, to break attachments.

"Almsgiving will tend to be somewhat mechanical and depersonalized, viewed as what a good Christian ought to do rather than an expression of the communion existing between all God's creation. A commitment to practicing these 'tools' at this level helps us grow to a more mature perception of their true value by developing self-discipline in us.

"As we continue our spiritual journey, things begin to happen inside: a new world of awareness of God starts to unfold. First of all, we hopefully develop a sense of *penthos*: compunction. We begin to realize how much God loves us, and how little we care in return. We are much like the teenager who is totally overwhelmed when he finally realizes how much his parents really love him. The result is often tears of joy and sorrow mixed together. This cleanses us and moves us to do more to get closer to God" (*LLIII* 63-64).

The Presanctified 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 pray the "Prayer of Saint Ephrem." [Distribute the handout from the back of this lesson.]

Introduction

Today I am going to ask you to think about the Great Fast. How many days is it? (40) It is a time of preparation. For what are we preparing? (Pascha) On your paper I want you to list all the things that you think about when you think of the Great Fast. (Pray more, fast from certain foods, go to Confession, go to church more, save money for those who need our help) Now let's read our lists. [Depending on the class size, have everyone read everything they wrote or have everyone read just one or two ideas.]

Last year you learned that during the Great Fast our church and the liturgical services change in certain ways. What are some of them? (The altar covers and priest vestments are a darker color; the liturgical songs are sung slower; we have more church services.) Would you say our church life and our own life changes during the Great Fast? (Yes) Why? [Let the children share.]

Before we turn to our lesson, let's think about other times our lives have changed as we wait for something special. [Possible answers: before a baby arrives, before we move, before we celebrate the Nativity of Jesus, before someone gets married] In all these good examples we spend a lot of time changing things in our house and getting everything ready for the celebration. That preparation time is very important because we have to be ready to celebrate. That is why we prepare ourselves during the Great Fast. We are getting ourselves ready to celebrate Pascha.

Okay, let's turn to our lesson.

25

The Great Fast



Did you ever want something so much that you said, "I'll do it if I don't get this"? Even though we do not mean it, we believe certain things are that important to us.

Sometimes we get so attached to games or TV that we forget about our school-work and our family. Those are the times we are looking at what we think is important and not looking to Jesus to learn how to keep the New Commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

We must learn to put aside things and activities that take us away from living Jesus' way. But sometimes it is very hard to say "No." We have to practice often. One way we can practice is by following the fasts given to us by our Church. During the fasts we are to follow Jesus' example on how we are to grow closer to God.

Each year we have learned about the Great Fast that prepares us for Pascha. Our Church gives us three other fasts during the year: one before the Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, one before the Feast of Saint Peter and Paul, and one before the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos. Following each fast we celebrate a feast day for which we have prepared.

122

God With Us Grade 4

Unit 6: Observance

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).

... for which we have prepared.

How many fasts does our Church give us to follow? (4) Why do you think we are to fast so often? (We are very busy and we need to be reminded to follow Jesus; we need the practice to help us live that way always.) Name the four feast days that have a fast before them. (Feast of the Nativity of Jesus—December 25; the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul—June 29; the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos—August 15; and Pascha.)

....God, our Father.

We pray "Thy will be done" in the Lord's Prayer. Every time we pray those words, we tell God He knows best for us and we will follow whatever He says. Let's think of times we might think we know what is best. Is anyone willing to tell us about a time you thought you knew what you wanted? Sometimes what we want and what God sends are the same, but when they are not we must trust God to know better.

What are some of the ways your Church family comes together to pray during the Great Fast?

[The answer to this question will vary according to jurisdictions. One common answer is celebrating the Presanctified Liturgy.]

We observe the Great Fast to prepare for Holy Week and Pascha. During this 40-day period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we take time to follow Jesus in everything we do as we promised at our baptism. At the end of the Great Fast, we follow Jesus during Great and Holy Week. We continue our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving as Jesus prepares to offer Himself totally for us on Great and Holy Friday. By spending time with Jesus and following His ways, we are ready to celebrate His resurrection on Pascha.

One way we spend time with God is in prayer. Jesus frequently spent time praying to His Father. He always listened to His Father—He always did what the Father asked of Him. Before Jesus was taken away to be crucified, He prayed to His Father. As you read from the **Gospel of Matthew 26:36-44**, count the number of times Jesus prayed that night. Each time He prayed that God's will be done. In what prayer do we tell God "Thy will be done"? Just as Jesus spent time in prayer with His Father, we pray so that we could be with God, our Father.

During the Great Fast our Church gives us many services in addition to the Divine Liturgy on Sunday to pray with other people. We join together with our Church family to prepare for Pascha.

What are some of the ways your Church family comes together to pray during the Great Fast?

This year we have been reading from the New Testament. Every time we read Scripture, we are spending time with God and listening to God's Word. During the Great Fast, we can spend more time with God by reading the New Testament often.



123

....preparation for Pascha.

What is almsgiving? (Sharing what we have with those who have less.) How did they take care of each other? (By putting their money together and sharing it completely) Let's think of some ways we take time to focus on following Jesus during the Great Fast. [Let the children share.] Why don't we do this all year? (We get too busy; we forget; no one else is.)

Words to Remember: [Read the words together, and use them to introduce, summarize, and/or review the lesson.]

Fasting is another way we prepare for Pascha. When we fast, we remind ourselves that only God will be able to make us happy. Fasting is a way of saying that we choose God above anything else. When we give up eating certain foods or doing something we like, we become hungry for the foods and anxious to do the activity. But this feeling should be a sign of how much we need God and His love—even more than we need anything on earth. We are learning to make God most important in our lives by turning away from those foods and activities. **Read Matthew 4:2** to learn why we fast for 40 days.

Also, our Church asks us to share what we have with those who have less. We call that almsgiving. Almsgiving is one way we show our love for God and each other. Let's read **Acts 4:32-35** to learn how the early Christians took care of each other.

By donating food, clothing, and money, we are sharing what we have with those who have less. But we can share more than our possessions. We can share our time to help with projects around our church and our neighborhood.

During the Great Fast we take time to focus on following Jesus. We thank our Church for giving us this time of preparation for Pascha.



Words to Remember:
The Great Fast: Our 40-day period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in preparation for Holy Week and Pascha.
Prayer: Talking and listening to God.
Fasting: Doing without certain foods and activities we like. When we fast, we do not feast. It helps us to prepare for the Feast of Pascha.
Almsgiving: Sharing what we have with those who have less.

124

Activity Tracks

Basic: Great Fast

[This worksheet is in the student text.]

Remember to think about what you will be doing throughout the Great Fast so that you will grow closer to God. Just as these letters help us discover the word, our activities during the Great Fast should help us discover how much we love Jesus.

The Great Fast

I. Complete the following sentences. Then write the first letter from each answer in order on the lines below.

- The time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving in preparation of Pascha is called the Great Fast.
- Pascha can be called the Feast of the Resurrection.
- Another name for this feast day is Easter.
- We remain faithful to God's love through prayers, fasting, and almsgiving.
- We venerate the Holy Cross on the third Sunday of the Great Fast.
- We call the day of Jesus' crucifixion Great and Holy Friday.
- We have learned that God is faithful to us always.
- We can come together often to pray during the Great Fast by attending the different Church services.
- Even though we are sad on Great and Holy Friday, we know we will celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ in three days.

G R E A T F A S T

II. Write the question for which the words above are the answer.
What do we call the 40-day preparation for Pascha?

125

Group: Class Psalm

Materials: Large piece of paper, markers

We have been learning about preparing for Pascha. But we have learned this year that we need God's help in everything we do. Today we are going to write a class psalm in which we thank God for helping us pray, fast, and give alms in the world today [Look to the psalms in Lesson 10 and 11 to help get started.]

Craft: "Thank You, Jesus" Journal

Materials: Journal books that were started in lesson 15.

Let's turn to the next page in our journals. We haven't written anything in these journals for a few weeks. Today we are going to think about what we could do during the Great Fast to help prepare for the celebration of Pascha. At the top of the page write the following Scripture: "Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect" (Romans 12:2). Before you start writing, let's define discern. Does anyone know what that means? (To be able to figure out, to understand) Now write on this page what you think Jesus is saying to you and write a prayer in your own words thanking Jesus for telling you that.

Closing:

Prayer of St. Ephrem [Add this to their booklets if they are doing that activity.]

*The Great
Fast*

Prayer

Fasting

Almsgiving

Talking and listening to God.

Our 40-day period of prayer, fasting,
an almsgiving in preparation
for Holy Week and Pascha.

Sharing what we have with
those who have less.

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

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
Metropolitan
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