

What can we do to prepare ourselves for Pascha?

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the students should be able to

- explain that the Great Fast gives us forty days to come together as Church to help each other prepare for Pascha.
- identify the services that we can attend during the Great Fast.
- state that through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we prepare for Pascha.

For the Catechist

The children have been learning about the Great Fast in every book in the *God With Us* series, but most of them had experienced the Great Fast even before that—through their families. In the Eastern Churches, the Great Fast is marked by much more than a listing of changes in the church and at home. It is meant to be the total immersion of each person into a period of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Our Church calls this redirection *metanoia*.

The Great Fast asks us to put God first in everything that we do as we prepare for Pascha. Our Church helps us through the Great Fast services that include readings from the Old Testament and the New Testament. We are called to come together to pray often and to encourage each other on our journey to Pascha.

In the early Church, the catechumens used this time to prepare for their acceptance into the Church. Just as they were anticipating the day of their Baptism and their rejoicing, we are preparing ourselves for our encounter with the Risen Lord and our celebration of Christ's Resurrection. We cannot help but feel this excitement even though throughout the Great Fast we are recalling the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

Encourage the children to join the Church family often to prepare for Pascha. One way for you to witness to your ministry as catechist is by attending Great Fast services and joining with your students and their families as you pray together.

Materials Needed

Opening and Closing Prayers: Prayer page

Introduction: Construction paper, markers, pens

The Message: The New Testament, pens and pencils, note cards

Application: Colorful construction paper, markers, pens and pencils

Icons and Pictures

Come Bless the Lord: The Crucifixion

Teaching Pics: Forgiveness Sunday (GL2), Presanctified Liturgies (GL3), Akathist (GL4), Orthodoxy Sunday (GL5), Veneration of the Cross (GL7)

Connections

1. Opening Prayer (1 minute)

Have the students gather before the icon and stand (Use this space to write helpful hints silently for a few seconds. Then make the sign of the cross. Pray the Jesus Prayer. (Prayer page)

2. Review (4 minutes)

Lessons in this unit are not taught consecutively; therefore, review the last lesson taught.

3. Introduction (5 minutes)

Materials: Construction paper, markers, pens
[In the Grade 3 book, the students made footsteps for the forty days of fasting. This introduction is based on that idea; therefore, the children should be familiar with the concept.]

Separate the students into groups (about four per group). Give each group a sheet of construction paper. Tell them to draw on it some way to symbolize we are in the Great Fast and we are on a journey to Pascha. Before they begin ask: *How many days is the Great Fast?* (40)

Let the children share their symbols. If they seem to be at a loss, remind them of their Grade 3 project and the footsteps. They may use the footsteps if they cannot think of anything else. Other possibilities: crosses (symbolic of sacrifices), hands (symbolic of good things they will do). After the students have drawn the symbol, ask them to write the reason they chose it to remind them of the Great Fast. Place their papers around the room to remind everyone what they should be doing during the Great Fast.

Connect the activity to the fact that we are reminding each other to stay focused on Jesus for the next forty days.

Notes for the lesson:

(Use this space to write helpful hints to use each year)

Alternate: Use the grids that are at the end of this lesson. Have the students add the dates for the days of the Great Fast, Great and Holy Week, and Pascha. Use this grid throughout this time of preparation by having the students draw a symbol that reminds them of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving and placing it in by the date that they did prepare. Each week take time to have them reflect on the last week and write the symbol and the activity that they did to help them prepare. The goal is to have them realize that each day they can do something to help them grow closer to Jesus as they prepare for Pascha.

The Message

4. The Great Fast (3 minutes)

a) Read the first two paragraphs. Ask: *Do you agree that sometimes we forget why we are preparing for something? What are some other examples?* (Christmas, a vacation)

b) Invite the children to share the ways their houses and their lives change during the Great Fast.

5. Forgiveness Vespers (3 minutes)

Read the paragraphs and discuss how your church marks the beginning of the Great Fast.

[Some parishes have dinners and/or other services.]

Supplementary Activity:

Have the students offer each other forgiveness. First, you exchange forgiveness with one student who then stands next to you. Then a second student exchanges forgiveness with both you and the student next to you and joins the line. Continue until all the students have exchanged forgiveness with all the others. Then turn to the icon and end with the Lord's Prayer.

Supplementary Activity:

Write the question for this lesson on the board or on a poster board: What can we do to prepare ourselves for Pascha? Write the following answers when they are read in the text:

1. Attend the church services.
2. Forgive each other.
3. Participate in the processions.
4. Include in our daily lives prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

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The Great Fast

What can we do to prepare ourselves for Pascha?

The Great Fast
Did you ever help someone prepare for an important event? If you were planning a birthday party, you had to start in advance so that you could invite the guests and plan the food and games for the party. Maybe you became so tired or busy that you forgot what the party was for. You were no longer focused on what was important—the birthday person.

Sometimes that happens to us in our relationship with Jesus. We get so busy with school and activities that we forget to focus on what is most important in our lives—Jesus Christ. Our Church gives us the Great Fast to help us stay close to Jesus. For forty days we are asked to focus on Jesus through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Sometimes it is difficult to follow this plan; but when we join with other people, we help each other grow closer to Jesus.



Forgiveness Vespers
In some churches the Church family attends Forgiveness Vespers the evening before the Great Fast begins. During Forgiveness Vespers, the priest and people ask each other for mutual forgiveness. We can do the same in our family at the beginning of the Great Fast. We can give each member a hug and say the words "Please forgive me." Are you willing to try this on the Sunday before the Great Fast?

Imagine the feeling of peace knowing that you forgave other people and they forgave you. That is exactly the way the Church wants you to begin the Great Fast by following the words of the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Now that you have forgiven others, you can turn to Jesus in prayer and ask Him to forgive you of everything you have done that has taken you away from Him and His love.

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Background Reading:

(The Great Fast)

"Lent was a period of instruction in the word of God, of practicing the Christian virtues of charitable works, of being integrated into the community of faith, and of fasting as a purification of body and soul for the great mystery of adoption as children of God. This special season of preparation was not restricted just to the candidates for baptism. The whole community took part, both as a sign of solidarity with those joining the church and as a renewal of each one's personal commitment to Christ. The Great Fast, even now, is a time for us to renew our baptismal promises and our union with God. Despite (or because of) its dedication to repentance, it remains a season of great joy, a time of growing nearer to God" (LLII 40).

6. Great Fast Services

(5 minutes)

a) Read the first three paragraphs aloud or silently. Ask: *Why should we rearrange our schedules to go to church more often during the Great Fast?* (To take time to be with Jesus)

b) Read the final paragraph aloud. Ask: *Why do you think we have processions?* (They make us feel as if we are one Body, the Church, by having us going in the same direction, following a cross, and arriving together.)

Supplemental Activity

Use the icons from the *Come Bless the Lord* icon packet. After each student picks one, process around the room or the hall—wherever you have class. Ask: *What are you showing as members of the Church when you are in a procession with an icon?* (That we are one Body, the Church, and we are going in the same direction, following a cross, and arriving together.)

7. Which services do you attend?

(5 minutes)

a) After the students read through these services, ask them to star the ones that they have attended. Let them share what they remember.

Add any other services that your church has during the Great Fast.

Supplemental Activity

Encourage the children to attend as many services as possible. If possible, arrange to have your class sit by you to help them feel the spirit of coming together to pray.

Background Reading:

(The Jesus Prayer)

"This treasure of the Eastern Church is found in two forms, each of which should be maintained and valued, and shared with all the faithful. These forms are the 'desert' spirituality of St. Anthony and the 'evangelical' tradition of St. Basil. In our monastic spirituality, each individual is regarded as a person in process—on a pilgrimage. The most important element of the pilgrimage is prayer. As Evargius of Pontus noted: 'we were not commanded to work, to be diligent and to constantly fast, but it was indicated that we must pray ceaselessly. For this reason, the 'prayer of the heart' known also as the Jesus Prayer, is an important element of any catechesis about prayer" (UCD 42-43).

"Another technique to help make this prayer more and more a part of our lives is to synchronize the recitation of the prayer with our breathing. Many people say 'Lord Jesus Christ' when inhaling, then 'Son of God,' when exhaling, 'have mercy on me' when inhaling and 'a sinner' when exhaling. By tying the prayer to our bodily rhythms in this way, the Fathers sought to bring their entire being—body, soul and spirit—together, centering their entire existence on recalling the name of Jesus" (DC 27).

Great Fast Services
Eastern Christians always look forward to honoring and praising God through prayer and song. Our Church gives us many beautiful services throughout the forty days of the Great Fast to have us come together often to honor and praise God.

Our Church Fathers tell us that when we praise God, we are forgiven our sins. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem tells us that "by our spiritual hymns our sins are forgiven, and sanctify ourselves." For this reason we should try to attend many of the services during the Great Fast. We want to come together to praise God and to have our sins forgiven.

That means we might have to rearrange our busy schedule to go to church. We should want to change our usual plan because we are preparing for Pascha. Whenever we prepare for something important, the daily routine does change. What is good about the changes during the Great Fast are that they are not taking us away from God—they are helping us be with God and God's people.

Each Sunday during the Great Fast we commemorate a person or an event that leads us to God. The first Sunday of the Great Fast is the Sunday of Orthodoxy, our day to recall the restoration of icons in our Church. In some churches people carry icons and process around the church. When we honor icons, we remember that God's Son became man and could be seen.

Which services do you attend?
Forgiveness Vespers—Vespers during which the priest and parishioners ask for and offer forgiveness to each other.

Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts—A special Liturgy celebrated on weekdays during the Great Fast

Great Compline—A special night service of hymns and prayers at the end of the day.

Akathist to the Mother of God—Special prayer service honoring the Theotokos. Although not a Great Fast service, it is connected to the Annunciation that is celebrated during the Great Fast.

Commemoration of the Dead—Special Liturgy celebrated on designated Saturdays during which prayers are said to remember the dead.

Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete—Matins that recall how all the godly people in the Bible gave themselves to God.

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8. Great Fast... (continued)
(3 minutes)

c) Read the next two paragraphs. Ask the students to look at the picture on this page and to remain silent as they thank Jesus for giving us eternal life.

9. Prayers, Fasting, and Almsgiving

(5 minutes)

a) Read the first two paragraphs.

b) Have the students read the Jesus Prayer aloud 3 times.

c) Read the next paragraph. Tell the students to take their prayer pages home today at the end of class. Remind them to pray these prayers often.

On the third Sunday of the Great Fast, the Veneration of the Holy Cross, we are reminded of the suffering and death of Jesus. In some churches there is a procession to honor the Holy Cross that is decorated with flowers. The flowery cross reminds us that from Jesus' death comes life for all of us. In the middle of the Great Fast, our Church shows us the cross as a way to remember that through Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, we are granted eternal life.



Our Church family comes together often to pray during the Great Fast, and these processions show us that we are moving together as one, the Body of Christ. We are helping each other on our journey to Pascha.

Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving
Throughout the forty days of the Great Fast, we are asked to include prayer, fasting, and almsgiving as part of our daily activities. This means that each day we are to focus on being with Jesus.

Our Church knows that this is difficult in the busy world in which we live. But people have always been busy so we look to the early Christians to learn prayers that will help. One prayer, the Jesus Prayer, has been given to us by the early Christians who wanted to keep Jesus in their thoughts and

heart constantly. Pray this prayer often to find out how it can help you.

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."

Another prayer we should say often during the Great Fast is the "Prayer of Saint Ephrem." Saint Ephrem was a monk in the fourth century which means people have been praying these words for many years. This prayer, which is part of the prayer page for this lesson, reminds us how we are to live as followers of Jesus.

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Background Reading

(Fasting and Prayer)

"There is also the asceticism of fasting, abstinence, corporal works of mercy and study. These are all means to greater freedom, since freedom is what we seek in our relations with God. From time immemorial and long before Christianity, fasting and abstinence were considered the best means to master one's passions. Greek philosophers as well as our own modern scientists have established that discipline in regards to food and drink is extremely advantageous to attaining a deeper intellectual, artistic, or spiritual life. 'The prayer of one who fasts,' says St. Nilos, 'is like a young eagle that flies on high; that of the glutton is heavy and cannot fly about the clouds'" (FG 203).

10. Prayer, Fasting (continued)

(5 minutes)

d) Read the first paragraph. Ask: *Does anyone want to suggest a section of the Bible to read during the Great Fast?* [Tell them about Scripture that you would like to recommend.]

e) Complete the reading. Give each student one note card. Ask them to write on one side their name and on the other two activities that they do which do not lead them to Jesus (video games, television, overeating). Tell them to circle one that they will try to avoid during the Great Fast. Collect the cards and have them look at them each week to remind themselves of their good intentions.

Supplemental Activity

Ask the students to extend the above activity by writing a contract to themselves. In it they state a definite example of a way that commits them to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Give them good paper on which to write their contracts. Keep the contracts, and have them check each week to see if they are keeping them.

11. Which services do you attend during Great and Holy Week?

(4 minutes)

Read the description of the services and relate them to what your church does.

Another way to pray is by reading the Bible. Every time we read Scripture we are listening to God's Word—God is with us. Remember to begin all your prayers with a moment of silence to help you focus on Jesus.

Fasting is another way we grow closer to Jesus. When we say "No" to something, we are saying it does not control us. By not eating certain foods or by not doing certain activities such as watching television, we are

saying that Jesus is the only One we want in charge of our lives.

Almsgiving is our way to share what we have with those who have less. Look around your room and notice everything that you have and do not use. Think about the people who do not have even the clothes that they need to keep warm. During the Great Fast we are to offer our time, our possessions, and our money to those who need our help.

Which services do you attend during Great and Holy Week?

Anointing Service—On Great Wednesday, the people receive a blessing with Holy Oil used to anoint the sick. They receive the Mystery of Holy Unction (Anointing).

Great Thursday—A Vesper-Litany of the Lord's Supper. Some churches retell the story of Jesus' Passion in the service of the Twelve Gospels.

Great and Holy Friday—The most solemn day in the Church year. At vespers and matins the Holy Shroud is carried in a procession before being placed in the tomb.

Great Saturday—Vesper-Litany at which catechumens are baptized.



12. Action Plan

(4 minutes)

Let the students work in groups as they match the service with the correct description. Tell them to work alone as they complete the bottom section that they will share with their family.

The Great Fast is the time for you, the catechist, to set a good example for your students. Try to attend many of the services; and when you see your students and their families, greet them and thank them for joining you to pray.

13. Summary

(10 minutes)

Materials: Four sheets of colorful construction paper, markers, pens.

At the top of separate sheets of paper, write the following:
Prayer Fasting Almsgiving Church Services
Place the sheets on separate desks., Let the students divide into four groups. As a group they are given thirty seconds to write facts that they learned about the topic. Stop and have them move to a new station. Once again give them thirty seconds. Continue until every group has been at each of the four stations. The last group has to work together to prepare a sermon based on the words on their paper. Then have the students present their sermon.

14. Closing Prayer

(3 minutes)

The prayer of Saint Ephrem.
(Prayer Page)

Action Plan

The Great Fast

Our Church gives us many ways to grow closer to Jesus throughout the Great Fast. Today you can think about the services you would like to attend as you draw a line from the name of the service to its appropriate description. At the end of this page, make a Great Fast schedule that you and your family can follow to help you spend as much time with Jesus Christ as possible during the Great Fast.

Forgiveness Vespers	A special Liturgy celebrated on weekdays during the Great Fast
Great Compline	Special Liturgy celebrated on designated Saturdays during which prayers are said to remember the dead.
Commemoration of the Dead	Matins that recall how all the godly people in the Bible gave themselves to God.
Akathist to the Mother of God	The most solemn day in the Church year. At vespers and matins the Holy Shroud is carried in a procession before being placed in the tomb.
Liturgy of the Resanctified Gifts	A special night service of hymns and prayers at the end of the day.
Great and Holy Friday	Vespers during which the priest and parishioners ask for and offer forgiveness to each other.
Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete	Special prayer service honoring the Theotokos. Although not a Great Fast service, it is connected to the Annunciation that is celebrated during the Great Fast.

On the lines below, list the services that you are going to try to attend this Great Fast. Ask your parents to help you plan times that you and your family can schedule time to be with Jesus as you prepare for Pascha.

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Instructions: Use the grid to mark off as a calendar for the Great Fast. Write in the month and the days before you begin adding the following: Forgiveness Sunday, First day of the Fast, Sunday of Orthodoxy, 2nd Sunday of the Fast, Sunday of the Cross, 4th Sunday of the Fast, 5th Sunday of the Fast, Lazarus Saturday, Palm Sunday, and Pascha.

The Jesus Prayer

Lord Jesus
Christ,
Son of God,
have mercy
on me,
a sinner.

The Jesus Prayer

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Christ,
Son of God,
have mercy
on me,
a sinner.

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Prayer of Saint 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.

The Melkite Greek Catholic Church

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(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.

The Romanian Greek Catholic
Diocese of Canton

Prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian

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(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.

The Romanian Greek Catholic
Diocese of Canton

Prayer of Saint 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.

The Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic
Metropolitan Province

Prayer of Saint 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.

The Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic
Metropolitan Province

Prayer of Saint 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.

The Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of
Saint Josaphat

Prayer of Saint 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.

The Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of
Saint Josaphat

Prayer of Saint 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.

The Ukrainian Catholic Synod

Prayer of Saint 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.

The Ukrainian Catholic Synod