

Unit 5 "Observances" Lesson 26

The Great Fast

Objective: The students will be able to state that Great Fast is 40 days in preparation for Holy Week and Pascha.

For the Catechist

This lesson on the Great Fast identifies it as the 40 days before Holy Week and Pascha. Both Holy Week and Pascha are mentioned in the lesson so that the child sees the whole picture. The lesson presents prayer, fasting and almsgiving as activities during the Great Fast; however, it is not until the Grade 1 text that the child is expected to identify the Great Fast with these activities.

If you wish to expand the discussion on these activities, use examples from your own journey during the Fast. These may help the students see that in their own homes life changes during the Great Fast.

How Should We Fast? The answer to this question must be seen on three levels: the most complete tradition of the Byzantine Churches, the popular adaptations which developed in the past, and the directives of each particular jurisdiction which generally speak of the minimum of fasting allowed in that Church.

The fullest tradition consists of two parts, each with a scriptural basis. The first calls for complete fasting from food and drink from rising until noon or the time of receiving the Eucharist (in the evening on the weekdays of Presanctified Liturgy or in the morning on the weekend days of Divine Liturgy). This alludes to Christ's image of fasting as inappropriate when the Bridegroom is with His disciples (Mt 9:15). The second part of this tradition says that when we do eat, we do not eat animal products (meat, fish, dairy). What is left (grains, vegetables, fruit, etc.) is often called "the Food of Paradise," referring to God's gift described in Genesis 1:29. "And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.'" We restrict ourselves to this diet to express our desire to return to Paradise, the aim of the Fast.

Lesson Plan Overview

Opening: "Lord, have mercy."

Introduction: Discussion of living the Great Fast
Need: Macaroni, Church service book, coins or dollars; icons of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection (provided)

Read Text Aloud: Hold text up for students to see as you read each page aloud. After each page, use the questions in the shaded box at the bottom of that page to discuss the lesson with the students.

Activity Tracks:

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

- **Basic:** Jesus Prayed
- **Group:** Great Fast Game
- **Craft:** Great Fast Centerpiece

Closing: Prostrations and the Sign of the Cross

Come Bless the Lord Icon:

- Packet I: The Crucifixion, The Descent into Hades
- Packet II:

This program of fasting would be observed daily for 40 days, from the first Monday of the Great Fast until the Friday before Lazarus Saturday, in preparation for the observances of the Great Week and Pascha. In the Eastern computation, the Great Week is a distinct fast period, not part of the Great 40-day Fast.

Over the years popular practice has tended to find ways of reducing the Great Fast for various reasons. In some places it became the custom to observe the first week and the fifth week (when the Great Canon would be sung) more strictly than the other days. In other places people tended to concentrate their fasting on the Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays of each week. These were never legislated by the Church and people were always urged to fast as best they could, preferably with the guidance of their spiritual father.

Today, under Western influence, many bishops or jurisdictions have issued fasting precepts, which usually follow the direction taken by the Roman Church. In any case, these only outline the barest minimum that one could keep and still be said to be observing the season. We are still urged to fast as best we can given the particular circumstances of our spiritual lives. And so these guidelines resemble the precept of receiving the Eucharist at least once a year. They set the minimum while encouraging a fuller experience for our spiritual growth.

Background Reading

(Direct quotations from the sources noted)

The Great Fast in the Calendar

“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).

Forty Days

“The number forty appears frequently in the Bible as a period of preparation before the entry into a mission given by God. Moses fasts on the mountain for forty days before receiving and handing over the law to the Israelites; Elijah fasts forty days before his vision of God telling him to anoint Hazael as king of Aram, Jehu as king of Israel, and Elisha as prophet; the Israelites themselves wandered for forty years in the desert as a penance before entering the Promised Land; and Jesus fasted forty days after His baptism before beginning His public preaching” (LLII 40).

A Time of Renewal

“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).

The Lesson Plan

Opening

Remember that Jesus wants us to be good. Jesus gave us a special prayer to ask God for His forgiveness and for His blessings. The words are "Lord, have mercy." Let's gather around the icon corner, put our hands in prayer position and say "Lord, have mercy." Now let's say "Lord, have mercy" three times in a row: "Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy." I hope you are practicing this prayer by singing or saying it during the Divine Liturgy.

Introduction

[Modify if the Great Fast has already begun.] Today, in the evening our lives will change. We will begin a journey, a spiritual journey of 40 days. The journey will prepare us for Holy Week when we remember Jesus' crucifixion [Show icon]. Then, three days later will come Pascha—Jesus' resurrection [Show icon.]. Our journey has a name. Do you know what it is called? [Allow responses.] Our journey of 40 days is called "The Great Fast." Our lives will change in three ways. Here are your clues. [Spread out macaroni, service book, and money. Let children comment.] First, Christians change what they eat during the Great Fast. We eat more foods like macaroni and peanut butter. We don't have any treats during the Great Fast. Second, the money that we don't spend on meat and treats goes to the poor. We give to the poor during the great fast. Finally, there are many special Church services during the Great Fast. We want to become closer to Jesus, so we pray more and go to church more. Let's read more about the journey we are about to begin.

Reading of Text

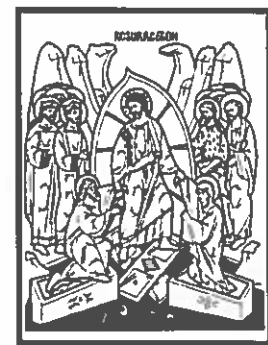
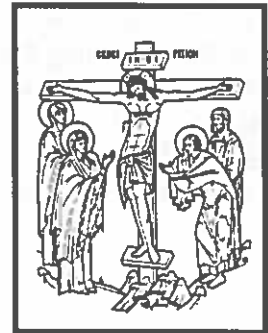
Hold text so that children can see the page as you read it to them. Read slowly and draw their attention to the illustrations. After reading each page, use the questions below (given also on the bottom of the student text) to review what you have read.

Page 1

- Our lesson today is about the Great Fast. It comes every year, and we are about to begin the Great Fast now. How long does it last? (40 days) It ends with Holy Week and Pascha.
- We eat special foods during the Great Fast. Can you tell what this family is having for supper? (Pasta with tomato sauce and bread)

Page 2

- What is happening in the top picture? (The girls are doing prostrations.) Have you done prostrations? When you are on the ground before God it says you know God is so great, and you worship Him.



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- *What is happening in the second photo? (The boy is giving to the poor.) Helping the poor shows our love for our neighbor.*

Page 3

- *The Great Fast prepares us for Holy Week. Do you know what is happening in the top photo? (The people are walking under the burial cloth of Jesus and are kissing the Gospel book that the priest is holding. This happens on Holy Friday.)*
- *What are the children holding in the bottom photo? (Candles) We hold candles on Pascha. [Modify according to the custom in your church.]*
- *The Great Fast is a quiet time, but Pascha is a joyous time.*

Activity Tracks

Basic: Jesus Prayed

The basic activity is the fourth page of each student text. It is a paraphrase of the story of Jesus praying in the garden. Read the title and the story. Then read the following:

- *Our Bible story today tells us about the day before Jesus died. Jesus went to a special garden to pray. He wanted God to help Him be strong. We, too, can pray to God when we need to be strong.*
- *You may color the picture.*

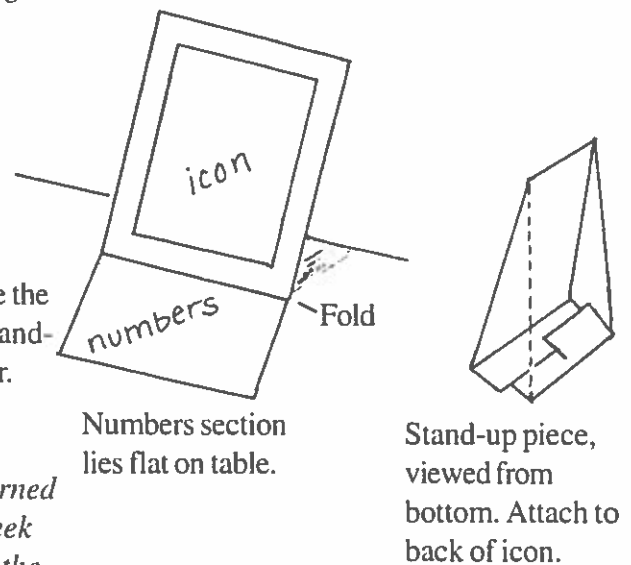
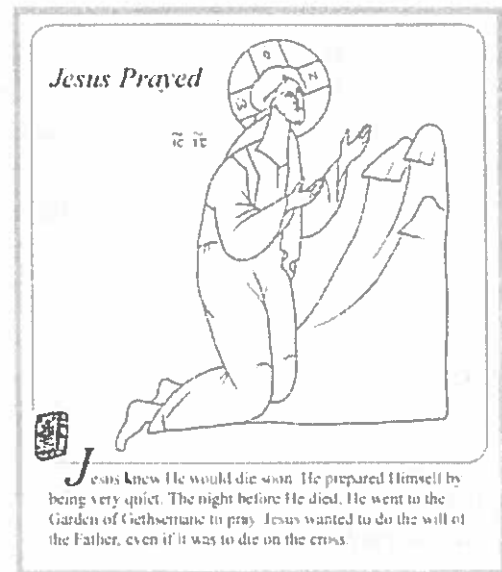
Group: The Great Fast Game

Today we learned that the Great Fast is 40 days before Holy Week and Pascha. Let's think about how many days that is. Let's put up 10 fingers. When we have four of you together [have four stand next to you with their fingers showing 10], we have forty days. [Count the fingers.] Here is a game to help us remember what we learned. It goes to the rhyme: "The Great Fast is 40 days before Holy Week. To get closer to Lord Jesus, this is what we seek." We'll form a circle around one person who will represent Jesus. As we say the rhyme, we'll move in a circle. When we stop, the one in the middle will choose someone to come close to him or her. That person will hold up his or her fingers to form 10. After four people have been chosen, we will have the number forty showing in the middle of the circle. Then we'll choose someone else to represent Jesus, and we'll begin again.

Craft: Great Fast Centerpiece

Materials: Great Fast Worksheet, markers, scissors, construction paper or heavy paper, tape, blue

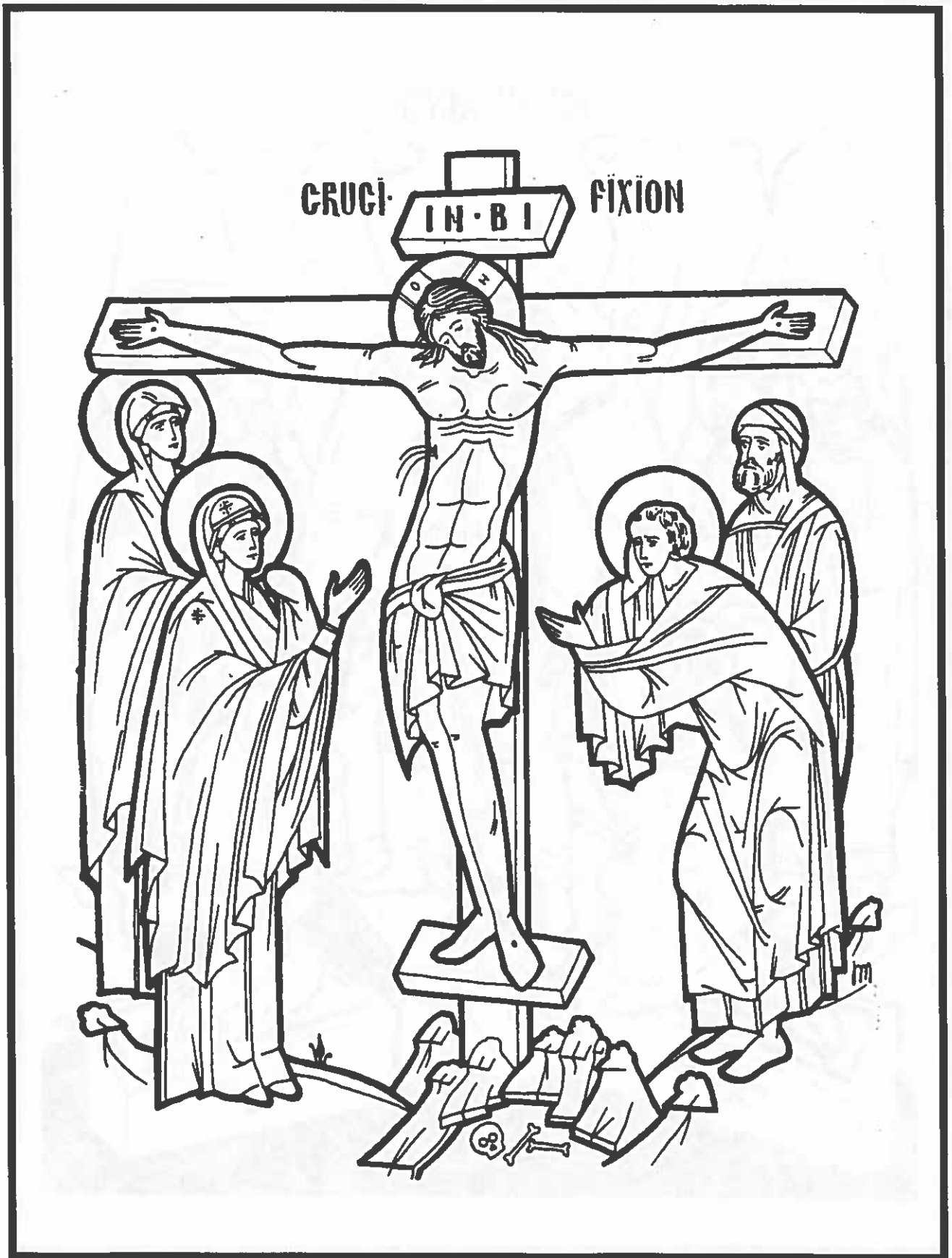
[Ahead of time you may wish to make or partially make the stand-up pieces that attach to the back. To make the stand-up piece, use either construction paper or heavier paper. Cut lengthwise down the middle. Fold in half. Snip at bottom center, about 1/2 inch. Fold each bottom edge about 3/4 inch. Make snips connect, and tape.] *We learned today that the Great Fast is 40 days before Holy Week and Pascha. We eat different foods, give money for the poor and pray more. To help your family remember that we are in the Great Fast, we'll make a centerpiece.*

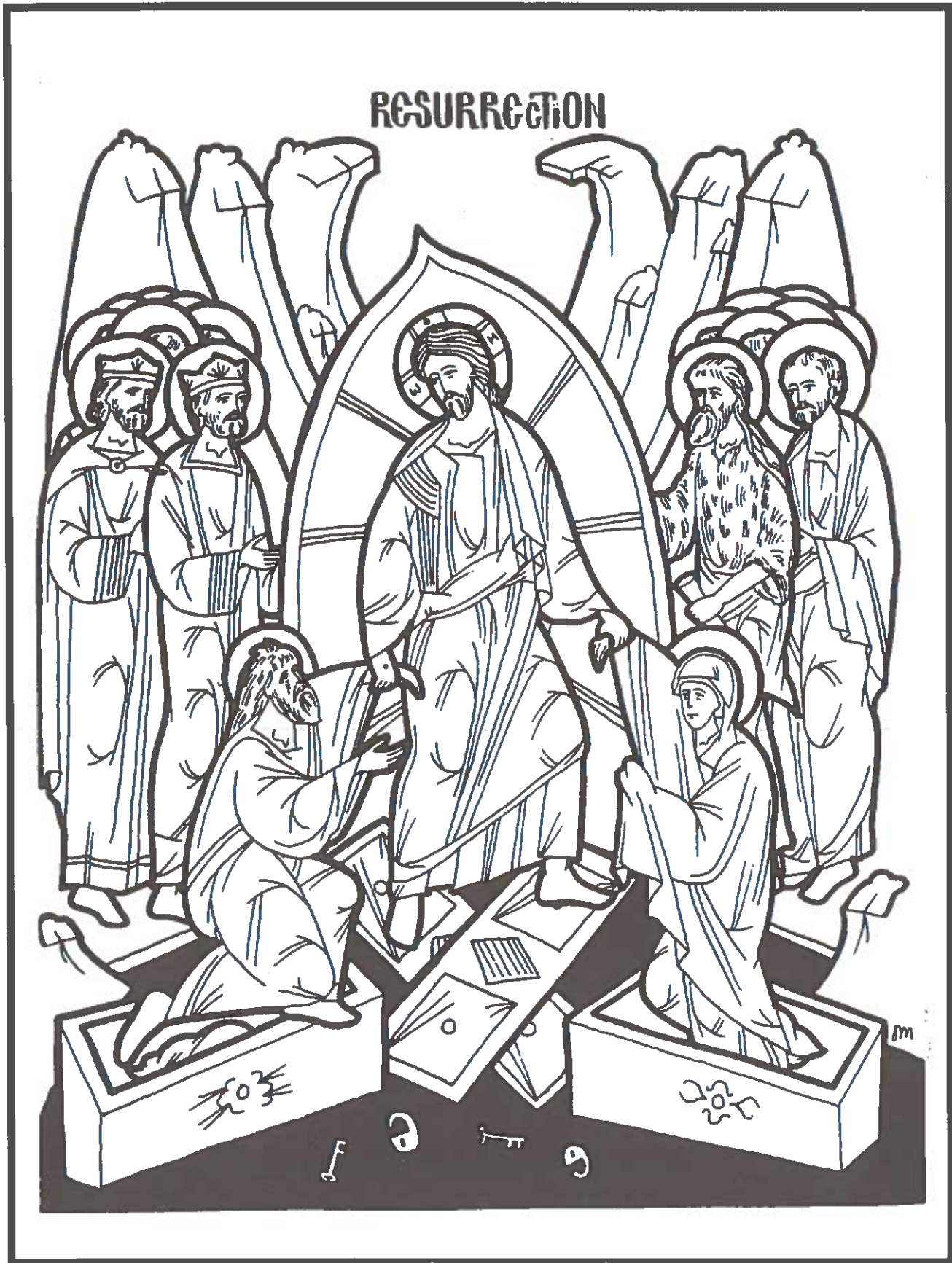


[Show example.] *It reads, "The Great Fast is 40 days before Holy Week. To get closer to Lord Jesus, this is what we seek." It has an icon of Jesus at the top. On the paper under the icon are numbers. What do the numbers remind us of? (The forty days of the Great Fast) As you eat your dinner together each day, you can color over one of the numbers. After you color the icon, I'll help you make it into a centerpiece. [If the Great Fast has begun, children may color over the appropriate numbers. Paste stand-up pieces to the back of the icon.]*

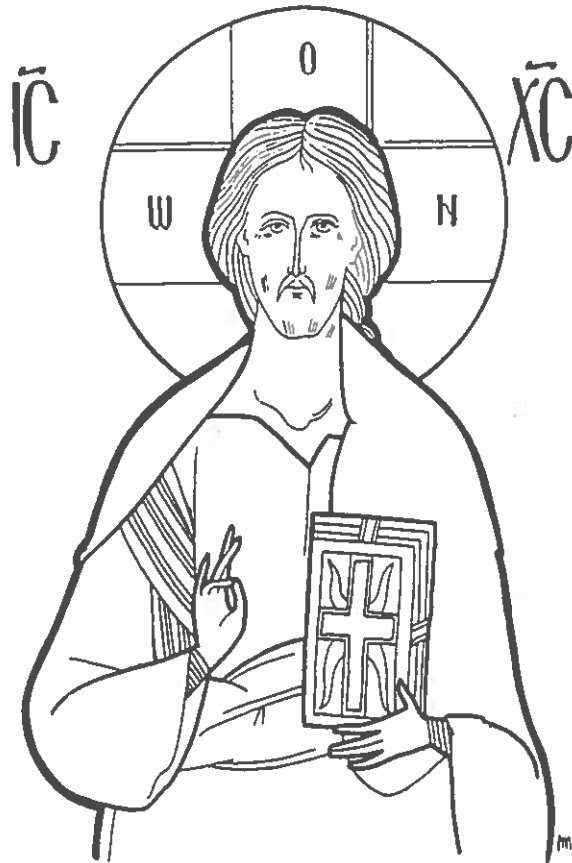
Closing

The Great Fast is a special time of the year. We should be praying more than we usually do. One way to pray more is by using our body. During Lent we pray by bowing all the way to the floor. This is called a deep bow or a prostration. Let's try to do a deep bow. Follow me as I make the sign of the cross and a prostration. [As you make the sign of the cross, say "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Then go to your knees and bow your head to the floor. Stand up. You might want to ask the children to practice by doing two more prostrations.]





*“The Great Fast is 40 days before
Holy Week. To get closer to Lord
Jesus, this is what we seek.”*



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30
31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40