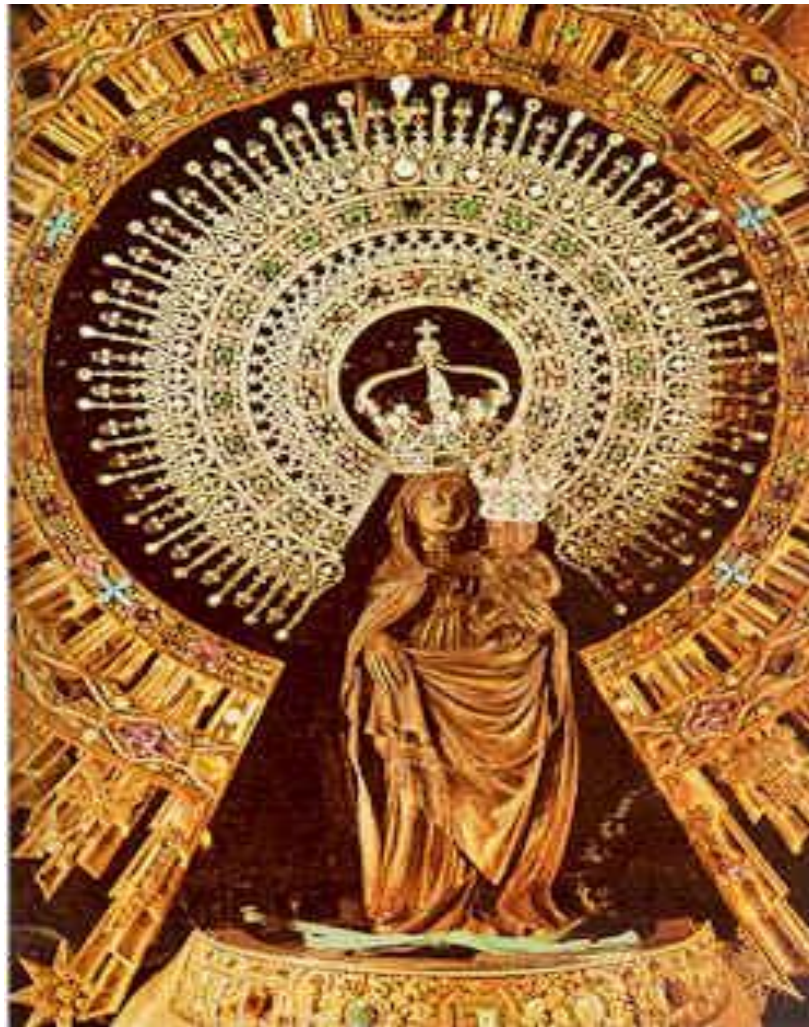


# The Great Fast (Lent)

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# Fasting

- Wednesday and Friday are traditional days of fasting for Christians (Didache, 100 AD).
- No animal products are consumed. Fish with fins are considered to have “blood” and are included in the ban (viz Pope Gregory I, +604 AD).
- Money saved is to be distributed as alms.
- Neither wine nor oil are consumed on those days. (Sacramental symbolism.)
- Fasting is obligatory for all ages.

# Fasting

- “I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” Mt 26:29; Mk 14:25; Lk 22:18
- In early monastic communities, the first three days of Lent were “clean”. No food or drink were consumed.
- Since apostolic times the Church has observed Good Friday with a total fast in preparation for the Paschal (first) meal after midnight on Pascha.
- No food or drink is consumed.

# Forty days of fasting

- Fasting customs varied among the local churches.
- Many extended the observance to the week preceding Pascha, the Passiontide or Holy Week.
- Preparation of the Catechumens for reception into the Church at Pascha took a number of weeks.
- Forty days was agreed upon at the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea (325 AD) both for preparation of catechumens as well as the for the Fast as it represented the time Jesus spent in the desert in fasting and in prayer following his baptism by John.
- By 339 AD the entire Church observed a fast of forty days prior to Pascha.

# Liturgical celebration

- The Canons of the First Ecumenical Council decreed that during the Great Fast no joyful celebrations were permitted.
- Eucharistic celebrations only occurred on the Sabbath and on the Lord's Day.
- The only exception to this rule was made for the Annunciation if that feast fell on a weekday during the Great Fast. This is a joyful reminder of the Kingdom. The Sabbath and the Lord's Day are the Kingdom.
- “The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them.” (Mt 9:15)

# Ascetical fast

- The Ascetical Fast is disciplinary in nature. It represents the pilgrim church, a repentant people. The Great Fast is a time of repentance.
- Other periods of fast, less rigorous, include the Nativity Fast (40 days), the Apostles Fast (variable), the Assumption Fast (15 days), and the celebrations of John the Baptist.

# Spiritual fast

- The Spiritual Fast is preparatory to receiving the Kingdom.
- It is total in nature.
- From the last meal of the prior day the communicant fasts from food and drink until receiving the Eucharist.
- As the Eucharist is also medicine, a pre-sanctified liturgy is celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast with the exception of Good Friday.



# Eastern liturgical practice

- The Eastern Church follows the typikon of St. Sabas (+532 AD). This reflects the practice in Jerusalem, Syria, and Egypt.
- Feasts of local saints whose relics the church possessed were not celebrated during the Great Fast. These observations were transferred to times outside the Fast.
- Apart from when the Annunciation occurs on Good Friday, no liturgy occurs on Good Friday in the East.

# Eastern liturgical practice

- The Great Fast was the period of preparation of the catechumens. Their reception into the Church was at Pascha.
- Beginning weeks before the Great Fast, a sequence of Gospel lessons are read to highlight the need for repentance and preparation for the Last Judgment. This dates from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> Centuries.
- Genesis, Isaiah, and Proverbs are read in their entirety as is the Gospel of Mark.

# Eastern liturgical practice

- The Desire of Zaccheus; the Humility of the Publican; the Return of the Prodigal Son; the Last Judgment; and Forgiveness are the traditional themes preparatory to commencing the Great Fast.
- During the Great Fast we recall the calling of the disciples; the healing of the paralytic; the conditions of discipleship; the healing of the boy with a demon; and the ambition of James and John.

# Eastern liturgical practice

- On the First Sunday of the Great Fast we celebrate the Triumph of Orthodoxy (restoration of ikon veneration).
- On the Third Sunday we celebrate and adore the life-giving Cross.
- Special services honoring the Theotokos occur each Friday of the Great Fast. (The Slav custom is to have that service the 5<sup>th</sup> Sabbath of the Great Fast).
- The dead are remembered on Sabbaths.

# Western liturgical practice

- Pope Gregory II (+732 AD) introduced the texts for Holy Thursday used in the Western Church until the liturgical reforms that followed Vatican II (1965 AD).
- The introduction of votive masses by Alcuin at the Court of Charlemagne (704 AD) began the Western practice of daily celebrations of the Eucharist, including during the Great Fast.
- No celebration of the Eucharist occurs on Good Friday in the West (a pre-sanctified liturgy is held).

# Western liturgical practice

- Western themes dating from the Middle Ages are those of the householder who hires laborers for the vineyard; the sower; healing of the blind man.
- These were eliminated with the reforms of Vatican II.
- Traditional themes retained during the Great Fast (Cycle A) are the temptation of Jesus; the Transfiguration; the Samaritan woman; healing the man born blind; and the raising of Lazarus.
- Laetare Sunday (fourth Sunday) celebrates the week when the Creed and the Our Father were given to the Catechumens.

# Western liturgical practice

- Following Vatican II, the other cycles of Gospel readings in Lent are the temptation in the desert, the Transfiguration, the expulsion of the money changers from the Temple, Nicodemus, the gentiles asking to see Jesus. (Cycle B)
- For cycle C, the readings are the temptation in the desert, the Transfiguration, the parable of the fig tree, the prodigal son, and the woman accused of adultery.
- The service of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary date from 1730 AD.

# Western customs

- The practice of limited fasting on the Sabbath was instituted in Rome in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD. The need to have 40 days in the Great Fast led to the initiation of the Fast on a Wednesday. This observance was imposed on the Western Church by Pope Urban II in 1299 AD.
- The Diocese of Milan follows the older observance and begins the Great Fast on a Monday. There is no fasting on Sabbath and the Lord's Day.
- As the East does not fast on the Sabbath, the need to arrive at 40 days led to imposition of gradual fasting during the weeks prior to the beginning of the Great Fast.



# Imposition of ashes

- Ashes were placed on the forehead of those on whom the Bishop had decreed public penance.
- With the disappearance of public penance, many Christians sought to have ashes placed on their foreheads as a sign of repentance. Pope Urban II imposed this observance on the Western Church in 1299 AD.

# Western fast rules

- Fasting was understood to entail only one meal a day, at evening.
- In the 8<sup>th</sup> Century AD, Benedictine monks in the West moved the meal to the ninth hour (3pm) and introduced a meal of bread and water at evening when collations from the Ladder of John Climacus were read.
- By the 14<sup>th</sup> Century AD, a light breakfast was also added.
- The Melkites (Church of Antioch in union with Rome) fast from midnight to noon.

# Western fast rules

- The absence of oil in Northwest Europe led to the remission of fasting prohibitions on the use of milk and butter during the Great Fast in the late Middle Ages.
- For a donation to the Church (indulgence), the observance was excused.
- The Spanish dominions were excluded from observance of the Great Fast in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.
- Irish soda bread and the German pretzel (two arms crossed in prayer) are reminders of how the Great Fast was once observed without oil or dairy products.

# Western fast rules

- Observance of the Great Fast was banned in Protestant realms in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century as being of human origin and excessively penitential in nature.
- The Anglican Church reintroduced the (voluntary) observance in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Lutheran observance (voluntary) dates from 1978.
- Current Catholic observance is that of the emergency state that applied during World War II. Meat is not eaten on Ash Wednesday or Fridays (but may be ignored on ethnic feast days at the discretion of the bishop); one meal only is taken on Ash Wednesday and on Good Friday.
- A one hour fast is sufficient prior to communion.

# Dates of Pascha

- Prior to the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea (325 AD), the local churches observed Pascha at different times, ranging from the Jewish Passover to the Lord's Day following the Passover.
- Never was it observed before Passover.
- At the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea, the Church set the current calendar, still followed in the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches.
- The date of the Equinox was fixed as was that of the first full moon after the Equinox.
- These astronomical errors have gained greater importance over the centuries.

# Dates of Pascha

- The Gregorian reform of 1582 AD followed the rules set down for the calculation of Pascha at Nicea.
- However, neither the date of the Equinox nor of the full moon after the Equinox were fixed.
- The calendar is astronomically correct.
- This is why there may be as much as one month's difference in the date of Paschal observances between the Christian communities.
- However, the failure to prohibit the celebration of Pascha prior to the Jewish Passover has led the Catholic Church to observe Pascha prior to the Jewish Passover on a number of occasions.

# Holy Week

- Holy Week serves as the ultimate preparation to face and worship the risen Lord.
- The joy of Pascha cannot be complete without reliving the events that lead to it.
- The original unity of liturgical observance is still evident in the Eastern Church.

# Lazarus Saturday

- Lazarus Saturday is the day before the Entrance into Jerusalem.
- Jesus manifests his human and divine natures and points to the resurrection of the dead as well as his resurrection.
- Martha identifies Jesus as the Messiah in the same language as did Peter somewhat earlier.



# Palm Sunday

- On Palm Sunday, Jesus manifests his authority and points to his Second Coming (Parousia).
- As with the Nativity and the Annunciation, at Pascha, the liturgy emphasizes “today”. It is a present event.
- “Today the grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us together, and we all take up your Cross and say: Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the Highest.”

# Holy Week theme

- On Sunday evening six days of sorrow begin. The service celebrates the allegory of the Church as a bride and Christ as the bridegroom (Mt. 22:1-13).
- Like a bride who must be ready to meet her bridegroom, the people must be prepared for eternal union with Christ.
- The liturgies Monday through Wednesday date from the 9<sup>th</sup> Century AD.
- Matins is shifted to the evening; Vespers, to the morning.

# Holy Week theme

- “Behold the Bridegroom comes in the middle of the night; and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching, but unworthy is the one whom He shall find in slothfulness. Beware, then, O my soul, and not be overcome by sleep, lest you be given over to death and shut out from the Kingdom. But return to soberness and cry aloud: Holy, holy, holy are You, O God. Through the Theotokos, have mercy on us.”

# Monday of Holy Week

- We commemorate the life of Jacob's son, Joseph, known as "blessed and noble." He is presented as a type of Christ. Joseph and Jesus were envied, sold, suffered, and were glorified. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers; Jesus was betrayed by his disciple.
- We remember the admonitions to James and John, sons of Zebedee.
- We remember the curse of the fruitless fig tree by the Lord (Mt. 21:18-22).

# Tuesday of Holy Week

- The parable of the Ten Virgins is read (Mt. 25:1-13). The virgins cannot meet Christ the bridegroom without lamps lit by oil, the oil of charity and love obtained only through the Holy Spirit. The believer will not be ready for Christ at Pascha without the genuine light of love.
- The parable of the Ten Talents is read (Mt. 25:14-30) to remind us to multiply the gifts God has given us and that Christ will come suddenly during the moment of our death or for all of us at His Parousia. Then we will be asked to present Him whatever progress we have made spiritually. Observance of the Law is insufficient.

# Wednesday of Holy Week

- We commemorate the anointing of Christ with myrrh by a sinful woman (Mt. 26:6-13). She is presented as an example of how to repent and be saved.
- We recall the gathering of Sanhedrin to condemn Christ (Mt. 22:15-23:9), and the betrayal by Judas to the chief priests (Mt. 26:14-16).

# Thursday of Holy Week

- Following a Russian practice, in the United States, a service of Holy Unction is held before the events of Holy Thursday are celebrated.
- Chrism is prepared (by the Patriarch or Metropolitan).
- We celebrate the washing of the feet of the Apostles by the Lord.
- We celebrate the Last Supper.

# Friday of Holy Week

- We relive the betrayal of Judas and all the events that followed the Last Supper, including His arrest and suffering at the hands of the Roman soldiers. It is the day the Paschal lamb is prepared.
- The Cross is removed from the Altar, draped (with flower wreaths), and venerated by the faithful.
- At the ninth hour we remove Him from the Cross and lay Him in a (flower decorated) tomb. We honor Joseph of Arimethea and Nicodemus. The Lamentation service is sung. Young women in white stand at the tomb representing those who prepared His Body for burial.

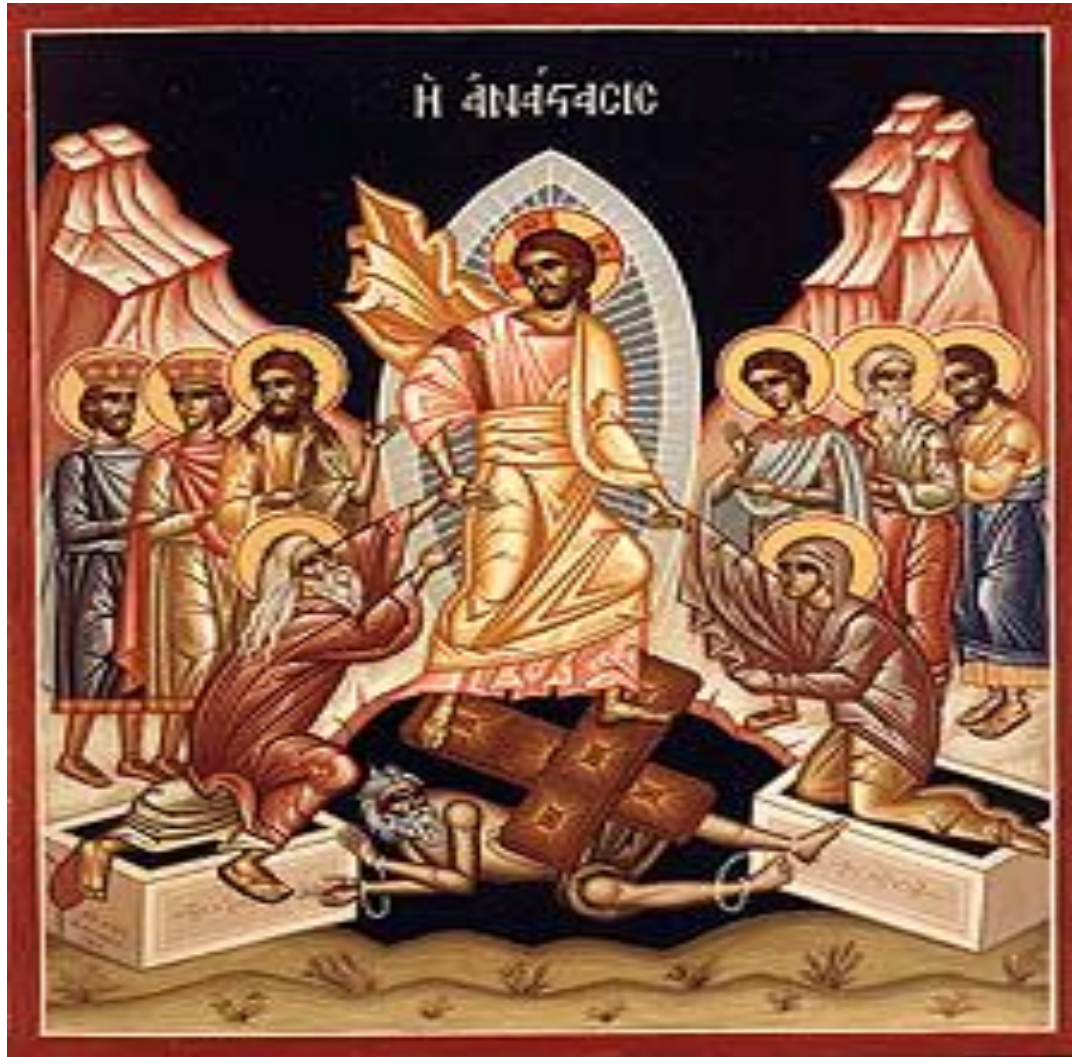


# Friday of Holy Week

- "Today He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung upon the Cross. He who is King of the angels is arrayed in a crown of thorns. He who wraps the heaven in clouds is wrapped in the purple of mockery. He who in the Jordan set Adam free receives blows on His face. The Bridegroom of the Church is transfixed with nails. The Son of the Virgin is pierced with a spear. We venerate your passion, O Christ. Show us also your glorious Resurrection."

# Saturday of Holy Week

- We commemorate the burial of the Body of Christ, which was not separated from His divinity, and the descent of His Soul into Hades. He defeated Hades and freed all the souls who believed in Him.
- “When your Body was in the tomb and your soul in the abyss, you were on the throne, Christ God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, infinite, and filling all things.”



Harrowing of Hell

# Calling forth the light

- At evening on Holy Saturday (Nicean calendar calculation) the Orthodox Patriarch approaches the tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, prays, and calls for the light to come forth as he and his predecessors have done for centuries. The faithful repeat, “Lord, have mercy.” Light comes forth. It is blue, sparkles, and does not burn (as at the burning bush, Ex 3:2). It is the Shekinah, God in His energies or operations.
- This miracle is commemorated in the lighting of the Paschal candle.



Holy Light called forth from the Tomb  
Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem  
<http://www.holyfire.org>



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Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem

<http://www.holyfire.org>



Damage suffered when a Monophysite (non-Orthodox) patriarch attempted to call forth Holy Light from the Tomb Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem

<http://www.holyfire.org>



# Pascha

- Catechesis begins after Pascha.
- The Gospel of John, a fully reflected theology of Jesus the Christ is read.
- The Acts of the Apostles are read.



Myrrh Bearing Women at the empty tomb



Pantocrator

# Holy Week observances in the West

- The Stations of the Cross (Via Crucis) began in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD, with pilgrimages to Jerusalem.
- In the 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD, Petronius (+445), Bishop of Bologna, constructed the first chapel highlighting the most important shrines in Jerusalem.
- The popular medieval devotion, however, began with the Franciscans in 1342 AD. The Stations are observed principally during Lent in the Roman Catholic Church, and, to a lesser extent, in Anglican and Lutheran churches.

# Holy Week observances in the West

- Vincent Ferrer (+1419 AD) instituted the Via Crucis as a penitential discipline in Valladolid in 1410.
- Images were carried by the penitents. This later evolved to reproduce the sequence of Passion events.
- The Spanish, the world superpower from the 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century AD, and the first empire on which the sun never set, brought these disciplines to the New World and the Philippines. Some of the more popular processions can be seen at <http://www.passionensevilla.tv>. Processions from Hispano-America may be seen at <http://www.semanasantaonline.org>

# Holy Week observances in the West

- The Oberammergau Passion Play in Bavaria began in 1634 AD.
- However, it is not a Holy Week devotion.
- The play is put on every decade in response to a promise made for relief during a time of distress.  
<http://www.passionplay-oberammergau.com>

# References

- Recommended is the book by Enrique Guevara Perez and Pedro Calleja Martín, Semana Santa in Madrid, Ediciones La Librería, Madrid (2000)