

“LET US BEGIN THE FAST WITH JOY!”

Although some may associate Great Lent with suffering and sacrifice, our Church gently reminds us that the 40-day Fast which precedes our Lord’s Resurrection is actually a time for us to experience a great spiritual joy. The Church service book for Lent – the Triodion – calls this period the “spiritual spring which blossoms with the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” For us to “harvest” these fruits, however, it is necessary for us to master two vital disciplines”. **PRAYER and FASTING.**

St. John Chrysostom writes that prayer and fasting are like “two wings that carry a person to the heights of God.” They are the means for us to become mentally, physically and spiritually prepared to encounter the Lord in an intimate way. Prayer and fasting Help us to become closer to God. The more time we spend in prayer, the less time we have to become consumed with the sins and temptations that are constantly placed before us. Fasting shows our willingness to cast aside the pleasure of the world, abstaining from wrong-doing as well as food.

While urging us to embrace these admirable virtues during the Lenten season, the Church reminds us of the emphasis that Christ Himself placed on prayer and fasting. There were countless times during His earthly ministry that Jesus became deeply immersed in practicing these disciplines. Indeed, when His disciples questioned why they were unable to cast out demons from a possessed young man, Christ pointed out to them that only through prayer and fasting could they ever receive the ability to do this!