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The relationship between food and religion in Christian Orthodox law

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Maria Rosaria Piccinni

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOOD AND RELIGION IN CHRISTIAN
ORTHODOX LAW*

ABSTRACT	
<p>Fasting is an essential aspect of Orthodox Church teachings, being intended as a spiritual preparation to experience a deep communion with God.</p> <p>The rule of fasting, which is dependent on the Church's cycle of feasts and fasts, is contained in the Church's Typicon, especially in chapters 32 and 33, and is repeated in the appropriate places of the Divine service books, the Menaia and Triodion. In general, fasting days for orthodox Christians include all Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the years (in remembrance of the betrayal of Christ and of his crucifixion and his death); the four canonical fasting periods are: Great Lent, Nativity fast, Apostles' fast, Dormition Fast and a few special days.</p>	<p>Il digiuno è un aspetto essenziale della pratica liturgica Ortodossa, da intendersi come un periodo di preparazione spirituale ad una profonda comunione con il divino. Le regole alimentari, strettamente legate al calendario liturgico delle festività, sono contenute nel Typicon, specialmente nei capitoli 32 e 33, e nei testi liturgici Menaia e Triodion. In generale, i giorni di digiuno per gli ortodossi sono il mercoledì ed il venerdì, (in ricordo del tradimento di Cristo ad opera di Giuda e della sua crocifissione). I quattro periodi di digiuno canonico sono: la grande Quaresima (in preparazione alla Pasqua), la Quaresima della natività, il digiuno degli Apostoli e della Dormizione. Per ognuno di questi periodi sono previste diverse regole di continenza alimentare, che costituiscono per il fedele un obbligo giuridico.</p>
Orthodox Church - fasting rules - food	Chiesa Ortodossa - digiuno - alimentazione

SUMMARY: 1. The ascetic and social meaning of fasting in Orthodox religion. – 2. The origin of dietary rules in liturgical and canonical tradition. – 3. Fasting rules during Lents and penitential periods. – 4. Eucharistic fasting and presanctified liturgy. – 5. Dietary rules in Coptic Orthodox Church. – 6. Summary of food rules in Orthodox Church.

1. At the beginning of Old Testament there is God's command to Adam not to eat the fruit of a certain tree (Gn. 2, 16-17), while in the New Testament Jesus Christ prepares himself for public life with a period of forty

* Saggio sottoposto a referaggio secondo il sistema del doppio cieco.

days of fasting, in which «he ate nothing» (Luke 4,2)¹. For this reason Christianity from its origins gave great importance to dietary rules, that are not an act of mortification, but rather tools to invigorate the spirit, fortifying it, and have at the same time a social and communitarian value: these rules, in fact, must be followed not only by individual believers, but by the whole community².

Food for Christianity has a relevant importance as a tool of relationship that improve spiritual connection with God: the food sharing has in fact a deep meaning in Christian liturgy, whose founding rite is the Eucharist, that is a meal with the Divine and the spiritual sacrificial action in which the faithful enter into communion with God. Anyway, religious dietary laws and detailed sets of rules that impose prohibitions and fasting, (which often mark the course of religious time and are fundamental to the preparation for celebration of central events in faithful life), have always belonged to the life and practice of the Church, because they respond to the permanent need of Christians to participate in the mystery of Christ through prayer and works.

Fasting from foods is intended as spiritual preparation for an experience of deeper communion with God. Each person is a unity of body and soul.

A right spiritual diet and a discipline of fasting go together and strengthen each other. Prayer benefits not only the soul but also the body, and at the same time fasting from foods benefits not only the body, but also the soul. Fasting and prayer make people more sensitive to God's personal presence.

Fasting in the Orthodox Church is usually considered abstaining from certain foods during specific days or periods: for example, on Wednesdays and Fridays, to commemorate, respectively, Christ's betrayal by Judas Iscariot and his crucifixion. Daily fasting is more rigid for orthodox christians, abstaining from meat (anything with a backbone), dairy products (eggs are in this or the previous category), olive oil, and wine. Are considered foods permitted without restrictions (in greek *νηστίσιμα*) flour products, legumes, fruits and vegetables.

Fasting for a Christian should be a joyful experience, because fasting is a self-discipline which we voluntarily impose upon ourselves in order to become better persons and better Christians.

Don't fasting is a sin, because represents the refuse of a practice which is absolutely necessary to a sinful person in his struggle to overcome his sins and to gain the love and communion of God. Spiritual effort presumes that we are in control of our bodies.

¹ In Old and New Testament there are many references to the practice of fasting. For a complete analysis see J. F. WIMMER, *Fasting in the New Testament, a Study in biblical Theology*, New York, Paulist Press, 1982.

² See C. BENDALY, *Jeûne et oralité: Aspects psychologiques du jeûne orthodoxe et suggestions pour une éventuelle réforme*, in «Revue Française de l'Orthodoxie», 37, (1984), pp. 163-229. The author identifies the origin of fasting rules in the symbolism related to original sin. For this reason abstaining from forbidden food becomes a personal training, which aims to keep men free from material to return to its divine origin.

Beyond this, fasting is the ideal preparation for spiritual celebration, such as a Easter, Christmas, and other Feasts.

Clement of Alexandria argued that religion itself could be considered a form of diet, with the purpose of healing the whole human body and to help men to purify their inner³, and therefore in Orthodox Church, practice the observance of dietary rules is the prerequisite for a serious spiritual life, as it represents the way in which the body, not separated from the soul, purified through prayer, is preparing for the celebration of the feast, where the Kronos (time considered as a mere succession of events) becomes Kairos (time of salvation and grace in which is realized the full conjunction between the human experience and God).

In Orthodox tradition, fasting are planned on the eve of important holidays (such as the Transfiguration, the Beheading of St. John the Baptist and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross). If the holiday falls on a day of fasting (such as the Feast of the Transfiguration, which falls on August 6, during the period of the Dormition Lent), this rule suffers exceptions. The strict and articulated rules about food, and the role they assume in religious believer life is one element that distinguishes Orthodox Christianity from Catholicism.

Already in the year 867 St. Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, complained because of deviations from fasting rules made by the Roman Church (as the grant to eat dairy products in the first week of Lent), which constituted a deviation from the practice of the old Church. The difference between the Church of the East and West increased after the schism.⁴

Today's remnants of the old food abstinence in the Roman Catholic Church are limited to prohibition of meat on specific days of Lent.⁵: in Catholic Church, fasting

³ See AA.VV., *Testi dei padri latini, greci e orientali scelti e ordinati per temi*, Roma, Ed. Città Nuova, 1982, vol. V, p. 275.

⁴ "To be acceptable to most people, they made the rules of fasting less stringent and granted a certain moral laxity; instead they instituted the fast on Saturday in the church and introduced many new practices. They could not, however, hurt more than they did by preaching the new Western heresy who considered the Holy Spirit as the Son to the Father without the slightest worry of altering the Holy Catholic Creed of Nicaea". See P. POPOVIC, *Vita di San Fozio, Patriarca di Costantinopoli*, in «La Lumière du Thabor, Revue internationale de théologie orthodoxe», 4, (2002), pp. 37-67.

⁵ Catholic Church legislation finds its source in the canon 1249 of the current cjc: «For God's law, all faithful must respect penitence, in their own way; but they may all be joined together by a common observance of penance». This provision concerns the general penitential discipline of the universal Church, that according to can. 1251 and 1253, relies on bishops' conferences. Fasting and abstinence must be observed on Ash Wednesday (or the first Friday of Lent for the Ambrosian rite) and on Friday of the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and are recommended on Holy Saturday until the Easter Vigil. Abstinence from meat must be observed every Friday during Lent, unless it coincides with a day of solemnity (like 19 or 25 March). In all other Fridays of the year, unless they coincide with a holiday, fasting can be replaced by other activities, as prayer or charity. Fasting rules must be observed by all adult people, until the 60th year began, starting from 14 years of age. Observance fasting law and abstinence can be avoided if there is a right reason, such as health. Moreover, «the pastor, for a cause and in accordance with the provisions of the diocesan bishop, can grant a dispensation from the obligation to observe the day (...) of penance, or imposing other charities. The same can do the superior

practices changed especially after Vatican II: in the post-conciliar reform, in fact, changed the ways to do penance, because of the mutation of social and cultural contexts, and have been highlighted other important practices in Christian life, such as almsgiving, prayer and the regular approach to sacraments⁶.

Without considering the excesses of certain groups, like the ascetic encratites⁷ (or «self-controlled»), continence food has always been considered, in Eastern Christianity, as a means to establish psycho-physical balance. This doctrine is reflected in monastic Rules and in St. Basil and St. John Cassian comments.⁸

Orthodox Christians live fasting as participation in the paschal mystery of Christ: the event of the death and resurrection of Christ inspired the choice of days and times of fasting.

2. Including people with very different legal traditions, Orthodox Church does not have, differently from Roman Catholic Church, an unified text of canon law. However, there is a rich set of collections of canons, among which emerges the Pedalion of St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, published in 1800, and the canonical collections of first millennium seven ecumenical councils and the broad collection the Council of Trullo (or Quinisext), which is the oldest codification of canon law orthodox law⁹.

For Christians the week, from the beginning, has been characterized by two days of fasting, called “days of station”¹⁰, Wednesdays and Fridays, which from the third century onwards became obligatory fast days¹¹. As we read in *Decretum Gratiani*:

of a religious institute or a society of apostolic life, if they are clerical and of pontifical right with regard to his own subjects and “others who live day and night in their house» (can. 1245 cjc). For observance of fasting in Catholic Church, see also CEI, *Il senso cristiano del digiuno e dell’astinenza*, Roma, Ed. Paoline, 1994.

⁶ See PAOLO VI, Apostolic Constitution *Paenitemini*, 17 febbraio 1966, II, in «Acta Apostolicae sedis», 58 (1966), p. 184 ; II Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 110, in «Acta Apostolicae sedis», 56 (1964), p. 99.

⁷ The Encratites (people who practice continence), called by Irenaeus of Lyons *Egkrateis* and by Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus of Rome *Egkratetai*, were a gnostic eastern current spread between the late third and early fourth century. They led an austere life by abstaining from wine and meat, and rejecting, as illegal, both marriage and the relationship between spouses. See A. CECCARONI, *Dizionario Ecclesiastico*, Milano, A. Vallardi Editore, 1897.

⁸ See G. BEDOUELLE, *Dizionario di Storia della Chiesa*, Bologna, Ed. Studio domenicano, 1994, p. 53

⁹ For a more detailed examination of orthodox rules see E. CATTANEO, G. DE SIMONE, C. DELL’OSSO, G. LONGOBARDO, *Patres Ecclesiae, un’ introduzione alla teologia dei Padri della Chiesa*, Trapani, Ed. Il Pozzo di Giacobbe, 2008; L. PATSAVOS, *Spiritual Dimensions of the Holy Canons*, New York, Orthodox Press, 2007; P. VISCUSO, *Orthodox Canon Law: A Casebook for Study*, New York, InterOrthodox Press, 2007; H. R. PERCIVAL, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church: Their Canons and Dogmatic Decrees, Together with the Canons of All the Local Synods Which Have Received Ecumenical Acceptance*, USA, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956. To see all canons of seven ecumenical councils see the website <http://aggreen.net/canons/canons.html>

¹⁰ See S. FARRUGIA, *Digiuno*, in G. EDWARD, S. FARRUGIA (ed. by), *Dizionario dell’Oriente Cristiano*, Roma, Ed. Orientalia Christiana, 2000, pp. 228-230.

¹¹ See *Const. Ap.* 5, 14.

«The canons about fasting, Wednesday and Friday, must be observed, except that in case of real need: on Wednesday Judas conceived the betrayal of the Lord, and on Friday the Savior was crucified. And is clear that those who refuse to fast these days, except for a necessity, are betraying the Savior with the traitor or crucifying him with those who crucified him»¹².

Already in the first century. A.D. the Didache stated: «Fasting on the fourth day (Wednesday), and the Preparation Day (Friday)» (VIII, 1)¹³.

In St. Hippolytus Apostolic Tradition,¹⁴ one of the most ancient juridical orthodox sources,¹⁵ there are strict rules regarding how to observe the fast: «The widows and virgins have to fast and pray for the Church, priests when they want, and so the laity. A bishop can not fast except when it is expected, however, if someone offers him something that he can not refuse, in this case the fast is broken and the bishop can eat what is offered».

This rule seems to suggest that primitive Christianity invited to fasting and praying as a general rule, as a general rule, not only for a few days and during particular periods of the year. Otherwise it would seem incongruous that a bishop, who must take care of souls, is allowed to break the fast in order to be polite if someone offers him some food.

In the contemporary Orthodox Church, fasting it is not only related to the preparation for events such as Easter or Christmas, but it is a spiritual aid which disciplines the body and soul and allows the man to approach God.

The importance of these precepts in faith experience is also evident from penalty system that is imposed on the non-observants. According to can. 69 of the Apostolic Constitutions, in fact: «If any Bishop, or Presbyter, or Deacon, or Subdeacon, or Anagnost, or Psalt fails to fast throughout the forty days of Holy Lent, or on Wednesday, or on Friday, let him be deposed from office. Unless he has been prevented

¹² See APOLLO MONACO, in RUFINO DI AQUILEIA, *Historia monachorum*, VII. Cfr. *Corpus iuris canonici, Decretum Gratiani*, III, 4, 16.

¹³ The *Didache* is a collection of uses of the early church starting from the second half of the first century. The text, parts of which constitute the oldest surviving written catechism, has three main sections dealing with Christian ethics, rituals such as baptism and Eucharist, and Church organization. It is considered the first example of the genre of the Church Orders. The work was considered by some of the Church Fathers as part of the New Testament but rejected as spurious or non-canonical by others, eventually not accepted into the New Testament canon. Lost for centuries, a Greek manuscript of the *Didache* was rediscovered in 1873 by Philotheos Bryennios, Metropolitan of Nicomedia in the Codex Hierosolymitanus. A Latin version of the first five chapters was discovered in 1900 by J. Schlecht. The *Didache* is considered part of the category of second-generation Christian writings known as the Apostolic Fathers. See U. MATTIOLI, *Didachè. Dottrina dei dodici apostoli*, Ed. Paoline, Roma, 1984, pp. 96-102; G. VISONÀ, *Didachè, L'insegnamento degli Apostoli*, Roma, Ed. Paoline, 2000.

¹⁴ See HYPOLITUS OF ROME, *La tradizione apostolica*, Ed. Paoline, 1995, p. 86. Apostolic Tradition of Saint Hippolytus is a fundamental legal source for the Orthodox religion. Together with the *Didache* is the most important and ancient constitution of the first centuries Church. The first and the second chapter have as unified theme church hierarchy, the third, reserved to the rules of Christian life, concerns various topics including the rules on daily prayer and fasting.

¹⁵ See A. AKAKIOS, *Fasting in the Orthodox Church*, Etna (California), Center for Traditionalist Ed., 1996, p. 5.

from doing so by reason of bodily illness. If, on the other hand, a layman fail to do so. Let him be excommunicated». ¹⁶ For this reason, the violation of fasting rules, unless related to the psychological and physical conditions, is considered a “mortal sin”.

Equally strict rules are provided for those who fast on Saturday or Sunday: the prohibition of the Sabbath comes from the need to differentiate from the Jews, and that Sunday must be lived as a holiday. This was expressly provided by canon. 55 of Trullo Council, which stated that «if a representative of the clergy will fast on Saturdays or Sundays, will be deposed from his office. If a layman does it, he will be excommunicated». This rule applies in ordinary times of the year, but also during the Lents, when there are more restrictive rules: during Saturday and Sunday of Lent, in fact, except Holy Saturday, which is a day of total fasting, is allowed to consume oil and wine.

It is not allowed, instead, to eat eggs and cheese during Saturday and Sunday of Lent in preparation for Easter (so-called big Lent). Canon 56 of the Council of Trullo, in fact, confirms this rule and invites to the unity of the Churches in the observance of dietary rules, referring to members of the Armenian Church who do not observe this ban¹⁷.

About the duration of fasting, the can. 89 of Council of Trullo also provides that the faithful who observes Lent, must stop fasting on Holy Saturday midnight, in obedience to what is written in Matthew and Luke Gospels, which show that the time of the Resurrection was “the end of Sabbath” (Mt 28: 1) and «the early morning» (Luke 24: 1).

3. We can find the first clear reference to Lent intended as period of forty days in preparation for Easter in the fifth canon of the Council of Nicaea, which, as noted by Bishop Callistus, refers to the practice of Lenten fasting as if it were a practice already consolidated, more than an innovation¹⁸, implying that it is a practice already common for all Christian communities. Starting from this moment, the old fasting period of six days in preparation for Easter¹⁹ is incorporated into the Lenten fast in imitation of the fast of Christ, imposed to those who aspired to baptism and who administered it²⁰.

This model of fasting, established in the fourth century, consists of a few days of abstinence from certain foods, followed by other days of total fasting. It is still observed in Orthodox Church, which has four Lents: the Advent, Great Lent (in preparation for

¹⁶ See S. NICODEMO AGIRITA, *Concerning fasting on wednesday and Friday, an excerpt from Exomologetarion (Manual of confession)*, Thessalonica, Uncut Mountain Press, 2006, consultabile sul sito www.Orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/exo-fasting.asp.

¹⁷ See G. NEDUNGATT, M. FEATHERSTONE, *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, Chicago, Oriental Institute Press, p. 370. Trullo Council canons are also available on the website <http://www.intratext.com/X/ENG0835.HTM>

¹⁸ CFR. A. AKAKIOS, *Fasting in the Orthodox Church*, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁹ See ATANASIO DI ALESSANDRIA, *Ep.* 1, 10.

²⁰ This is affirmed in Didachè, 7, 4, and in Apostolic Tradition of Saint Ippolitus of Rome, 20.

Easter) the Fast of the Apostles and of the Dormition. The obligation to observe abstinence from meat, dairy and fish with the possibility of consuming wine and oil, also exists in a few days of celebration, as the Exaltation of the Cross (September 14) and the Beheading of St. John the Baptist (August 29).

Fasting periods related to the Four Lents are variable, being closely linked to the cycle of festivities: its discipline is contained in Typicon²¹, particularly in chapter 32 e 33, and in Liturgical text Triodion²². Great Lent is the longest and strictest fasting season of the year: the preparation period, as envisaged in the Triodion, starts ten weeks before Easter. Three weeks of preparation, and six of Lent itself, to which follows the start of Holy Week. In the week before the Great Lent, that is called “week of dairy products”, meat and dairy products are forbidden, but eggs and dairy products are also allowed on Wednesdays and Fridays. In the first week of Lent we provide two meals a day during the first five days, that on Wednesdays and Fridays are consumed after the Liturgy of the Presanctified²³, avoiding meat and dairy products, eggs, dairy products, fish, wine and oil.

Saturday of the first week begins the observance of usual rules for Saturdays and Sundays of Lent: are avoided daily meat and meat products, eggs, dairy products, fish, wine and oil, except Saturdays and Sundays from the second to the sixth week Lent, where wine and oil are allowed.

Fish, oil and wine are also allowed on the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25) and Palm Sunday. The evening of Holy Thursday is ideally the last meal before Easter, when is allowed to consume wine and oil, before the fast of the Great Friday, which is the more rigid of the year, and ends on Saturday night after the resurrection, or after the Divine Liturgy of Easter.

The first text that established the fasting in preparation for Easter is Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus, who is the oldest canonical collection after the Didache: «No one can eat before Easter. Pregnant women or sick people who can not fast for two days, have only to fast on Saturday, according to their means, feeding on bread and

²¹ The Typicon is a collection of rules concerning life and liturgical ceremonies. Every church had its own main Typicon, but the most common is that of Jerusalem, written by St. Sabas (439-532). The Typicon of San Saba was destroyed during the destruction and desecration of the monasteries of Palestine, and was taken up by St. Sophronios, Patriarch of Jerusalem (550-638), which assembled and reconstituted it. Some changes were made by the Church of Constantinople in the nineteenth century to accommodate the harsh rules of monastic life, still observed in the Greek monasteries, and by secular clergy. Despite these changes, however, the basic statutes of the Orthodox churches are the same in accordance with the Typicon of Saint Saba.

²² The Triodion (Τριώδιον κατανυκτικόν) is a liturgical text that contains the discipline that the church observed during Lent in preparation for Easter. See K. WARE, *The Lenten Triodion translated from the original Greek*, London, Faber, 1978, p. 30.

²³ Liturgy of the Presanctified is celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent and during the first three days of Holy Week. It consists essentially in the office of Vespers to which is added the Eucharistic liturgy, with the exception of the consecration which occurs earlier. See C. GIRAUDO (ed. by), *Liturgia e spiritualità nell'Oriente cristiano*, Roma, Ed. San Paolo, 1997.

water».²⁴ From this citation it is clear that fasting in preparation for Easter consisted of two days of total abstinence from food, with an exception for pregnant women and ill people, who could eat bread and water²⁵. In another legal source of Syrian origin, dating from the third century, the Apostolic Constitutions, we find confirmation of this principle in addition to other rules about food restrictions to be observed in the four days preceding the Friday and Saturday before Easter, and that regard total abstinence from food: «fasting begins from Monday until Friday before Easter; in these days it is allowed to eat bread, water and vegetables. Those who are able, must observe complete fasts on Fridays and Saturdays until midnight, and who can not fast, at least must observe the fast of the Saturday before Easter. God said that when the bridegroom will be taken away, in those days faithful should fast».²⁶

From the fourth century onwards, rules on fasting in preparation for Easter have been modified, with reference to way of observance and duration of fasting periods in long-term. Have been established rules based more on the limitation of certain foods than on total deprivation.

Fasting rules, very strict during the Great Lent and Lent of the Dormition (wine and oil are allowed only on Saturdays and Sundays, except for a few holidays and eves), are less restrictive, but equally rigorous during the Fasting Nativity and the Fast of the Apostles, which are regulated by law, is to lay people who for religious in chapter 33 of Typicon: «It should be noted that in the Fast of the Holy Apostles and of the Nativity of Christ, on Tuesday and Thursday we do not eat fish, but only oil or wine. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday, we eat neither oil nor wine.... On Saturday and Sunday we eat fish. If will occur on Tuesday or Thursday a Saint who has a [Great] Doxology, we eat fish; if on Monday, the same; but if on Wednesday or Friday, we allow only oil and wine.... If a Saint who has a Vigil on Wednesday or Friday, we allow oil and wine and fish.... But from the 20th of December until the 25th, even if it be Saturday or Sunday, we do not allow fish».

And, in chapter 34: «During fasting before the holidays of the Holy Apostles and the Nativity of Christ, the fish can be eaten on Saturdays and Sundays. However, lay

²⁴ G. J. CUMMING, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students*, Bolton Abbey, Grove Books, 1976, p. 26.

²⁵ Are completely exempted from the obligation of fasting the weak people, like pregnant women, old and ill people. This was repeatedly and clearly emphasized by the Fathers of the Church, as John Chrysostom, who in his Homilies on Genesis says: «If there is anyone here who can not fast for physical weakness, can not be deprived of the meal. I urge you to cure this weakness organic, but not for this is lack of spiritual doctrine, but you will spend with greater commitment. (...) Therefore, those who can not fast, should do most abundant, fervent prayers, with the alacrity in listening to the word of God». See. AA.VV, *Testi dei padri latini, greci e orientali scelti e ordinati per temi*, Roma, Ed. Città Nuova, vol. III, p. 173. Also Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Catechesi*, 4, 26-27, exhorted «not to despise those who because of the weakness of their bodies eat, nor to blame those who drink wine because of the frequent diseases».

²⁶ See A. SCHEMEMANN, *La Grande Quaresima. Ascesi e liturgia nella Chiesa Ortodossa*, Genova, Ed. Marietti, 1986.

people can eat it on Tuesday and Thursday and at the weekend, sometimes twice a day». ²⁷

The rules about food in Orthodox religion, as we have seen from this brief discussion, consists of restrictions particularly hard and prolonged (over 210 days of the year are burdened with food limitations), whose strict compliance may in some cases influence health of the faithful. For this reason, especially in places with cold climates, (think for example to Russian winters), and in contexts where it is also objectively difficult to find alternative food to ensure proper nutrition, the application of food rules, despite its universal validity, can be mitigated by the spiritual fathers who may, without altering the essence of the precept, modify its application in relation to specific cases.²⁸

4. A particular form of fasting, as well as those related to penitential periods and in preparation for the celebrations, is Eucharistic fasting, which must be followed before receiving Eucharist. From the beginning of the Church Eucharist requires an appropriate period of preparation and purification, representing the presence of the divine in human experience. Eucharistic fasting is a precept that has ancient origins whose traces can be found already in third and fourth centuries writings²⁹, as Saint Hippolytus Apostolic Tradition³⁰ and Saint Augustine letters³¹. Fasting is a practice that is provided for all the sacraments: the Didache states that to be baptized must be observed fasting (VII, 4) and during Council of Trullo, in can. 39, it was determined that the priests should be fasting before giving any sacrament. As St. John Chrysostom writes: «Who wants to approach this divine altar, must do it with fear and trembling, with a clean conscience and fasting»³².

Fasting was initially considered so restrictive to be considered violated even after drinking a sip of water, and some Fathers of the Church also recommended to extend

²⁷ See S. ROSE, *The rule of fasting in the Orthodox church*, in <http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/father-seraphim-rose-fasting-rules.aspx>.

²⁸ See A. DUNCAN, *Fasting guidelines during Great Lent*, in <http://www.orthodox.net/articles/fastrule.html>.

²⁹ See II Braga Council (572), can. X; Auxerre Council (578), can. XIX; II Macon Council (585), can. VI; VII Toledo Council (646), can. II.

³⁰ See HYPOLITUS, *Traditio apostolica*, XXXVII.

³¹ «As they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it; taken in connection with the words in the preceding context, and it is clear that when the disciples first received the body and blood of the Lord, they had not been fasting. Must we therefore censure the universal Church because the sacrament is everywhere partaken of by persons fasting? Nay, verily, for from that time it pleased the Holy Spirit to appoint, for the honor of so great a sacrament, that the body of the Lord should take the precedence of all other food entering the mouth of a Christian; and it is for this reason that the custom referred to is universally observed. For the fact that the Lord instituted the sacrament after other food had been partaken of, does not prove that brethren should come together to partake of that sacrament after having dined or supped, or imitate those whom the apostle reproved and corrected for not distinguishing between the Lord's Supper and an ordinary meal». S.AUGUSTINE, *Epistulae*, LIV, 6 (7,8).

³² J. CHRYSOSTOM, *Sermo In diem Natalem Domini Nostri Iesu Christi*, I.

the fasting for a few hours after receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist. It 's always been uniformly intended Eucharistic fast as total abstinence from all food and drink: the first to allow water, saying that water doesn't break the fast, was Pope Pius XII in 1953, with the Constitution *Christus Dominus*³³. Until the pontificate of Pope Pius XII the Eucharistic fast started at midnight. Pope Pius reduced it to three hours³⁴, and after Vatican II, Pope Paul VI reduced it to one hour³⁵. The current Code of Canon Law states, can. 919, that «One who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain from any food or drink, with the exception only of water and medicine, for at least the period of one hour before Holy Communion. A priest who celebrates the Most Holy Eucharist two or three times on the same day may take something before the second or third celebration even if the period of one hour does not intervene. Those who are advanced in age or who suffer from any infirmity, as well as those who take care of them, can receive the Most Holy Eucharist even if they have taken something during the previous hour». Differently, in Orthodox Church, Eucharistic Fast involves total abstinence from any food or drink in the morning prior to receiving the Eucharist. If therefore, someone keeps the Eucharistic Fast, and there exists no moral reason to stay away from Chalice, is obligated to come forward and receive Christ as He is offered at the liturgy³⁶.

Particular rules are provided for Holy Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts. As the name suggest, is a liturgical service on the weekdays of Great Lent where communion is received from Gifts (Body and Blood of Christ) that are sanctified (consecrated) in advance; this Divine Liturgy has no anaphora (eucharistic prayer). Traditionally his institution is attributed to Pope Gregory the Great and in Catholic Church is preserved in similar form in the liturgy of Holy Friday.

In accordance with canon 62 of the Council of Trullo, it is celebrated «in all the days of holy Lent fasts», although according to an consolidated practice, is celebrated only on Wednesdays and Fridays during the six weeks of Lent, the Thursday of the Fifth Week (the Great Canon), the Great Monday, Great Tuesday and Big Wednesday, and on the anniversary of Saint Caralampus (10 February), the First and Second Finding of the Head of St. John the Forerunner (24 february)³⁷, the Feast of Forty

³³ PIUS XII, Cost. Apostolica *Christus Dominus*, 6 january 1953, in «Acta Apostolicae Sedis», (1953), pp. 15-24.

³⁴ PIUS XII, Motu proprio *Sacram Comunionem*, 19 march 1957, in «Acta Apostolicae Sedis», (1957), pp. 177-178.

³⁵ PAUL VI, Rescriptus *Attentis multarum de tempore eucaristici ieunii servandi*, 21 november 1964, in «Enchiridion Vaticanum», (1964), pp. 40-41.

³⁶ See D. TESSORE, *Il digiuno*, Roma, Ed. Città Nuova, 2006.

³⁷ Orthodox Church celebrates the Feast of the First and Second Miraculous Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist on March 8 (i.e. February 24 on the Old Calendar). After the Beheading of the Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John (August 29), his body was buried by disciples in the Samarian city of Sebaste, and his head was hidden by Herodias in an unclean place. St Joanna (June 27), the wife of King Herod's steward Chuza (Luke 8:3), secretly took the head and placed it into a vessel and buried it on the Mount of Olives in one of Herod's properties. During the days of St Constantine the Great (May 21), St.

Martyrs (March 9) and possibly on the days dedicated to other Saints commemorated in liturgical calendar, whose feast does not fall on Saturday or Sunday.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is a special rite of communion of the Eucharistic gifts already consecrated and is celebrated in the evening, so that believers may receive Eucharist after a longer fasting. This liturgy is joined to the Vespers, to be accomplished in the evening; however, fasting until 18.00 or 19.00 in the evening, can be difficult for most of the faithful. For these reasons, Church introduced some special rules for determining the length of fasting before communion, without abolishing the rule of fasting and the tradition of celebrating liturgy in the evening³⁸.

To better understand the nature of the Eucharistic fast, it should be clarified the distinction between two different ways of fasting, both rooted in Tradition and the Scriptures, which correspond to two distinct needs: the first is a total fast, which is a complete abstinence from food and drink, while the second can be defined ascetic fasting, and is an abstinence from certain foods. The total fast, for obvious reasons of survival, has short duration and generally is limited to a day or even just a part of it.

In Orthodox tradition the total fast is the final preparation for a great feast, as the eve of Christmas and Epiphany, and, above all, before the Eucharist, is a necessary condition to receive Holy Communion.

Ascetic fasting aims to free man from dependence on material needs and strengthen its spiritual dimension, based on the example of Christ. The canons that forbid fasting on Sunday, remember that Sunday is a break in the time of repentance and purification to enter a dimension of grace and joy.

5. Partially different are dietary rules practiced by Coptic Christians who belong to Orthodox Church of Alexandria and who follow Coptic calendar identifying periods of fasting and respecting prescriptions different from other Christian communities.

Copts fast for more than 210 days a year, during which it is forbidden to eat any type of animal products (meat, poultry, fish, milk, eggs, butter etc.) and drinks, from sunrise to sunset. These are very strict rules, but is possible to do exceptions in order to safeguard particular health conditions.

Lent, considered “the Great Fast”, begins with fasting from the pre-Lent week (or preparatory week), followed by a 40-day of fast in memory of the 40 days spent by Christ on the mountain. Two weeks before Lent, in Orthodox liturgical calendar there three days called the “Fast of Nineveh”, of total abstention from food and drink from midnight to noon. It commemorates the three days that the people of Nineveh fasted in repentance, after Jonah the Prophet's call for them to repent. For Christians, these 3 days are a direct parallel of and a prophecy about the three days that Christ spent in the

John the Baptist appeared twice to two monks journeying to Jerusalem on pilgrimage to the holy places, and he revealed the location of his venerable head.

³⁸ See P. A. SCHMEMANN, *Great Lent*, New York, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002.

tomb, just like the 3 days Jonah the Prophet spent in the belly of the fish³⁹. The fast of Nineveh begins on a Monday, two weeks before the Monday that marks the beginning of the Great Lent. After these three days there is allowed to eat, but excluding foods and animal condiments.

This fast, taken over from Syriac tradition at the time of the Syriac Patriarch Abraham, (patriarch of Alessandra from 975 to 979), begins on Monday, two weeks before the Monday of Lent, and is observed by most of Copts. The fourth day (Thursday) is celebrated the feast of the prophet Jonah, the “Easter Jonah” commemorating his liberation from the belly of the whale⁴⁰.

In Coptic Orthodox Church, Great Lent (al-al-arba'in muqaddasa) or the Great Fast (al-sawm al-kabir) is therefore divided into four phases: the first week is called Week of Heraclius⁴¹, the second period Holy Quarantine, which initially followed the feast of Theophany, beginning on 12 tuba (20 January), the day after Epiphany, and ended on 22 amshir (March 1). Christians then celebrated the “Fasting Easter”, or the end of the Great Quarantine. Easter (Resurrection of Christ) was preceded by six days of fasting, coinciding with Holy Week. Under the government of Athanasius of Alexandria, around 330, Holy Quarantine was joined to the Holy Week, making it one only period in preparation for Easter.

Great Lent, therefore, lasts from Monday of the first (or second) week until the fifth (or sixth) Fridays of Lent, called “Friday of fasting seal” (Gum'at Khitam al-sawm) or “Friday the Qandil” (al-Gum'at Qandil).

The Great Quarantine and the Great Holy Week are separated by two days: Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday, before entering the last period of fasting that includes the six days of Holy Week, from Monday to Holy Saturday, said Saturday of lights, the Saturday during which is expected fasting. During Great Lent are avoided marriages and suppressed the festivities, except two: the feast of the Holy Cross on 10 baramhat (March 19) and the Annunciation, on 29 baramhat (April 7).

With reference to dietary laws, during this period in not allowed food until noon (time of the Crucifixion), or until three in the afternoon (time of Christ's death), or even until sunset (time of deposition of the Lord in tomb). It is a strict fasting, called the

³⁹ See JONAH, 3,1.

⁴⁰ V. IANARI (ed. by), *I cristiani d'Egitto nella vita e negli scritti di Matta el Meskin*, Brescia, Morcelliniana, 2013.

⁴¹The preparation week was originally called the week of Heraclius. According to the history of the Patriarchs, in the year 613 Heraclius the Roman Emperor was besieged in Constantinople by Kessra the king of Persia. After six years he went to Persia, killed its people and defeated the army of Kessra ending the siege of his own country. When he entered Jerusalem he found it desolate. Christians of Jerusalem asked Heraclius for his protection and help in order to kill the Jews and promised that they and all Christians in all countries would fast for him for a whole week every year to the end of the ages. Heraclius accepted their offer and ordered them to kill all the Jews. The patriarchs and the bishops wrote to all the countries declaring that week of fast to be the first week of fasting before the Holy Forty days. Pope Andronicus the 37th Patriarch of Alexandria acknowledged this request and so the week of Heraclius was instituted in Coptic church. It is preparation for the holy forty days of the Great Fast.

“first degree” because it is forbidden to eat meat, fish and dairy products (eggs, dairy products, honey, etc.). Allowed food is called *siyami* (from «*siyam*», Arabic for fast), while forbidden food is called *fitari* (from “*fitar*” in Arabic)⁴².

Another fasting period is the Nativity Fast (Advent or Winter Lent), the 40 days before the Nativity of Christ (Christmas) on 29 Koiak (January 7, which also falls on 28 Koiak in leap years). This 40 days correspond to the 40 days that the Prophet Moses fasted on the mountain, before receiving the Ten Commandments from God, considered the word of God. Christ is considered the living word of Word of God. For this reason, in coptic church, Christians fast those 40 days in preparation of receiving the Word of God at the Feast of the Nativity⁴³. Other three days were added at the beginning of the 40 days of Advent during the 10th century AD to commemorate the three days that the copts fasted before God awarded them the miracle of moving the Mokattam Mountain, which lies within a suburb of Cairo on the hands of Saint Simon the Tanner during the ruling of the Muslim Fatimid Caliph Al-Muizz Li-Deenillah⁴⁴. Thus, the fast of Advent begins on 16 Hathor (November 25, which also falls on 15 Hathor in leap years). The three added days are considered a separate fast rather than part of the fast of Advent.

Prescriptions for the Fast of the Apostles and the Dormition don't differ from rules observed by other Orthodox Churches. Others fasting periods observed by Coptic Orthodox Church are those that precede the Nativity (Paramon) and Theophany (Epiphany), where must be observed a completely vegan diet in preparation for the festivities: if the holidays fall on Tuesdays, Wednesdays Thursday or Saturday, fasting is observed on the day immediately preceding.

Otherwise, if the holiday falls on Sunday or Monday, pre-holiday fasting is observed as ordinary Friday fasting. So, on Saturday and Sunday, can be followed

⁴² See G. VIAUD, *La liturgie des Coptes d'Egypte*, Parigi, Librerie d'Amerique et d'Orient, 1978, pp. 25-69.

⁴³ See M. KUNZLER, *La liturgia della Chiesa*, Milano, Jaka Book, 2003, p. 520 ss.

⁴⁴ According to a traditional story, Caliph al-Muizz, who reigned during 972-975, used to invite religious leaders to debate in his presence. In one of those meetings in which the patriarch Abraham, also known as Pope Abraam, and a Jew named Yaqub ibn Killis (and in another account of this story was known as Moses) were present, Ibn Killis quoted the verse where Jesus Christ said in Gospel of Matthew, replied: «Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you». (Matthew 17:20), and demanded that the Pope prove that his religion is right by means of this. Abraam answered yes and the caliph demanded that this very miracle be performed by Abraham's hand or else he and all the Copts would be killed by the hand of the sword. It was then after hearing this that the patriarch asked for three days to complete the miracle. St. Simon the Shoemaker (10th century A.D.), also known as Simon the Tanner (Sama'an el-Dabbagh in Arabic), is the Coptic Orthodox saint associated with the great miracle of moving the Mokattam (Muqattam) Mountain in Cairo, Egypt, during the ruling of the Muslim Fatimid Caliph Al-Muizz. C. TAMAGNO, *Mokattam, la montagna del santo conciatore*, in www.terrasanta.net, 22 november 2010; J. A. LOUBSER, *How Al-Mokattam Mountain was moved*, in G.O. WEST-M.W. DUBE (ed. by), *The Bible in Africa*, Leiden, Brill, 2000, p. 107.

regular diet (this is because the general rule for the Orthodox Churches, as mentioned above forbids fasting on Saturdays and Sundays).

Finally, if the feast falls on Friday, pre-holiday fasting is the sum of the ordinary Wednesday and the day before the feast, so the days of fasting become two.

Then there are seven days in the year where it is forbidden to fast, even on Wednesday and Friday: these are the seven days between Easter and Pentecost, considered holidays because of the Resurrection of Christ.

Regarding Eucharistic fast, like other Orthodox Churches, Coptic Orthodox Christians who wish to keep Eucharist must avoid eating any food in the nine hours before or from midnight of the day before⁴⁵.

SUMMARY OF FOOD RULES IN ORTHODOX CHURCH:

FASTING PERIODS	MEAT <i>Beef, swine, sheep, poultry, eggs</i>	DAIRY PRODUCTS <i>Milk, cheese, butter, yogurt, cream, etc.</i>	FISH <i>Every kind of fish with bones (allowed crustaceans and shellfish)</i>	WINE <i>Wine, beer and alcoholic drinks (Allowed on Saturdays and Sundays)</i>	OIL <i>Olive oil and other vegetable oils (Allowed on Saturdays and Sundays)</i>
Nativity Fast From 15 november to 24 december	Forbidden	Forbidden	Allowed on Sundays until December 20	Allowed on Tuesday and Thursday until 20 December	Allowed on Tuesdays and Thursdays until 20 December
Great Lent And Holy Week	Forbidden	Forbidden	Allowed on the Feast of the Annunciation and Palm Sunday	Allowed on the Feast of Annunciation and holy Thursday	Allowed on the Feast of Annunciation and holy Thursday

⁴⁵ B. ANGAELOS, *The Altar in the Midts of Egypt*, Coptic Orthodox Church, Stevenage, U.K., 2000.

<p>Fast of the Apostles</p> <p>From Sunday of All Saints Feast to 28 June;</p>	Forbidden	Forbidden	Allowed on Saturday and Sunday	Allowed on Saturday and Sunday	Allowed on Saturday and Sunday
<p>Fasting of Dormition</p> <p>from 1 to 15 August</p>	Forbidden	Forbidden	Allowed on the Feast of the Transfiguration	Allowed on the Feast of the Transfiguration	Allowed on the Feast of the Transfiguration (6 august)
<p>Hebdomadarius fasting</p>	Forbidden	Forbidden	Forbidden	Forbidden	Forbidden