

FASTING

By: The tripple blessed Pope Kyrillos

The late Pope Kyrillos VI of triple blessedness, wrote this moving message to his children that had emigrated to other countries on the occasion of holy Lent. It was written shortly before his departure. We are reproducing it on the occasion of Lent and also on the occasion of the anniversary of his Holiness' departure on March 9, 1971.

Peace to you from the Lord and grace and blessing. Our Good and Compassionate God, Who preserves His children everywhere and in all ages, Who gave us His promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.", the same be with you in your sojourn, preserve you from every offense, from every wickedness and from every vile thought, confirmed in His love and keeping His commandments, grounded in your Orthodox dogma and in the traditions of your church, which we have received from our fathers the Apostles and from the holy Saints of the church. May the Lord grant us to hear all good news concerning you, at all times.

I write you in these holy days wherein our Lord has fasted forty days and forty nights on our behalf, wishing you on the occasion of the Fast, the fullness of the blessing and the fullness of Grace. May you complete it in purity and in righteousness, that ye may rejoice in the resurrection of the Lord and in it's effectiveness in your life.

Fasting was the first commandment:

Fasting, my children, is the first commandment that God has delivered unto mankind, when He commanded our fore-parents Adam and Eve that they should not eat certain fruits in the Garden. And fasting was the first deed that our Lord and Master Jesus Christ did after being baptized, even before He started His preaching ministry among the people.

And fasting was the first deed that our fathers the Apostles did when the Bridegroom was taken from them. And while they fasted and prayed, the Holy Spirit spoke unto them (Act 13:2).

Fasting is the weapon by which we defeat the devils, for the Lord said, "this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." (Mat 17:21).

Fasting is a necessary weapon:

Fasting is a weapon the Prophets have used, for Moses, Elijah, David, Ezra and Nehemiah have all fasted.

Even the Gentiles fasted, entreating the mercy of God, like the inhabitants of Nineveh who fasted and the Lord did cast His wrath away from them.

And Daniel the Prophet fasted even as he sojourned, and how beautiful is the saying of the Bible concerning him, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat." (Dan 1:8) And he did eat vegetables. The three holy children also fasted with him and while they fasted, God gave them favour in the eyes of every one and granted them health and strength, so that "their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat." (Da 1:15).

Fasting, my children, is a weapon by which we subdue the lusts of the flesh, that the spirit may be lifted up and strengthened. That is why fasting is laced by spirituality, for it is not a virtue of the flesh. Indeed christian fasting is abstaining from all food for a period of time, followed by eating food that is devoid of animal fatness, however, in addition to this, fasting has to be accompanied by spiritual virtues that would give it it's spiritual nature.

The importance of repentance:

Fasting must be accompanied by repentance, compunction and confession of sins. When the Ninevites fasted, they put on sackcloth and they turned, every one, from his evil ways and from the violence that was in their hands. And they cried mightily unto God. And God saw their repentance and showed mercy unto them. The importance of repentance to accompany fasting is expounded for us fully in the Book of Joel, where the Lord exhorts us, "Turn ye even to me with all your heart and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning....sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly." (Joel 2:12-15).

In the same manner did Daniel the Prophet fast, "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. And I prayed unto the Lord my God and made my confession." (Da 9:3,4). In the like manner did Nehemiah, Ezra and David fast. God desires this repentance while fasting, when the spirit has victory over the flesh, when we subdue the flesh and crucify it with all it's affections. (Gal 5:24).

So, make your fast, my children, pure and holy, that it may be acceptable before God like the fasts of the saints. Preserve your purity in the land of your sojourn. Live the life of repentance that is pleasing to God. Let this season be a season for confession of sins and communion of the holy Mysteries, that ye may abide in the Lord and He abides in you, even as the living branches that bear fruit abide in the True Vine. And the God of all mercies preserve, confirm and strengthen you.

Fasting and other spiritual means:

Let your fast be also accompanied by prayer and by reading the Bible and spiritual books and the lives of the saints. Let your fast be also accompanied by meditation, especially concerning the holy and precious memories with which this blessed season abounds.

Celebrate the holy Pascha, with all it's profound chants and lections and moving memories, with all befitting ascetism and compunction, knowing that this season, so profound in it's spiritual rituals and prayers, is but a fountain for the spirit, that satisfies and satiates man and provides him with a wonderful provision that is profitable unto eternity.

Set your minds on all the spiritual means that avail unto your edification. Walk worthy of the Gospel of Christ, according to the vocation wherewith ye are called. (Eph 4:1).

Be a light unto the world:

Be a light wherever ye dwell, that men may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Mat 5:16), showing in your lives a good example and a living testimony to the Spirit of God that works in you.

Offer unto all a bright image of your holy church, her true orthodox faith, her glorious and wonderful history and her profound and ever-felt influence in the christian world.

And our Loving God, Who was with Abraham in the land of his sojourn and preserved him bound with His obedience, and Who was with Daniel and the three children in the land of their sojourn and preserved them in their faith, in their fasting and in their prayer, and Who was with Joseph the righteous in the land of his sojourn and preserved him in his purity and truth, the Same be with you also in the land of your sojourn. May He preserve you with His strong right hand, holy and perfect and abounding in every good work.

Fare ye well in the Lord, my blessings and earnest prayers accompany you. May you enjoy a holy season and a happy and blessed feast.