

March 12, 2008



*From:*  
**Great Lent is  
Here – What  
Will You Do?**

by Father David Barr

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## Notes from Bishop THOMAS

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[...] So what will you decide to do this year for Great Lent? First, you can decide to do nothing and let Lent pass you by as if it does not exist. The real advantage of taking this stand is that it is easy — nothing is required. Yet this is also its greatest disadvantage because nothing can be expected either. Put nothing into Great Lent, and that's exactly what you will get out of it — nothing! You really can't expect a return without an investment. Come judgment day, though, chances are you would prefer somewhat better of a return, so perhaps this is the time to look at this a bit deeper.

**FASTING:** There are many things that you can do during Great Lent that will benefit your soul and body. You can keep the fast or at least part of it. By participating in the Lenten Fast and watching what goes into your mouth, you have a much better chance of controlling what comes out of it. Fasting and abstinence teach self-discipline, an important aspect of our lives as Orthodox Christians. In addition, the practice of asceticism (self-denial) helps us to become more aware of ourselves as we really are. Asceticism enlightens our senses, enabling us to see our sins and shortcomings. So do not be afraid of being hungry. Be willing to experience it, realizing that it can bring more than a mere empty feeling in the stomach. It can help you to be aware of who you really are — and who you can be.

**ALMSGIVING:** While you are practicing fasting and abstinence, remember the hungry and poor in the world. 'Take the money you would have spent on meat and dairy products and give it to the Food For Hungry People Program. When you go shopping, buy extra items for the poor and donate them to a worthy cause. Fasting and almsgiving go hand-in-hand — together they make a complete act. One without the other is like a peanut butter and jelly sandwich without the jelly. Fasting without almsgiving is selfish — only looking to yourself. Almsgiving demonstrates your love for your neighbors.

**PRAYER:** During the time of Great Lent, discipline yourself to pray more — or if you are not keeping a regular rule of prayer in your life, begin to pray regularly. When you say your prayers, take a bit more time and be silent, meditating upon all that God has done for you and what you should do in return. Pray that God would reveal to you how you can better serve Him. Look around and pray for the needs that you constantly see, but fail to pray — for a friend in need, someone who is ill, some particular circumstance in need of God's intervention. Your fasting will enable you to be more aware of what is going on around you. Use your prayer time to intercede in behalf of that which you have become aware.

**REPENTANCE:** As you fast, take account of your life and see where you need to repent. Each of us has sins that we have never conquered. We also have sins with which we have become comfortable. Great Lent affords us the opportunity to look at ourselves honestly that we may

repent of those sins that we find. In conjunction with this time of introspection, take the opportunity to go to confession and finally confess those things that have been weighing on your mind all too long. See confession in a positive light — as an opportunity to do something about those secret, hidden or even embarrassing sins which constantly bite at your conscience. Great Lent is a traditional season for going to confession. And if it has been over a year since, or you cannot remember your last confession, it has been too long! Do something about it!

**WORSHIP:** Go to the extra services at Church. Every Wednesday evening we have Presanctified Liturgy and the Akathist to the Virgin Mary is held on the first 5 Fridays of Lent. Try to go to Great Vespers on Saturday nights. Plan to attend the parish Lenten Retreat. Make every effort to participate in the increased liturgical life of the Church. You could even come early on Sundays and attend Matins. Worship is a very important part of life — something most of us should do more often.

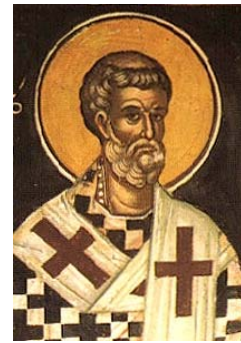
Now is the time for you to respond to what Great Lent has to offer. Do not let this wonderful and important season of the year pass you by. Take advantage of our Holy Tradition — a tradition that teaches us the way to love God and others. Prepare yourself for the joy of Christ's Resurrection through prayer, fasting, almsgiving, repentance and worship. To do nothing is easy — and its reward is the same: nothing! Enter into Great Lent and allow yourself to draw nigh unto God the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The joy will be indescribable.

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**St. Gregory  
The Dialogist**  
March 12

Troparion of St Gregory Tone 3

Thou didst excellently dispense the Word of God, endowed with discretion of speech, O Hierarch Gregory; for by thy life thou didst set the virtues before us, and dost radiate the brightness of holiness. O Righteous Father, pray to Christ our God to grant us His great mercy.



Kontakion of St Gregory Tone 8

We praise thee, God-inspired harp of the Church and God-possessed tongue of wisdom; for thou didst prove to be an image and model of the Apostles and didst emulate their zeal. Wherefore we cry to thee: Rejoice, O Gregory the Dialogist.

