

About Lenten Services

Weekends

The Saturday and Sunday services during Great Lent differ very little from the usual Saturday and Sunday services. On Saturday nights after the Gospel we sing “Open unto me the doors of repentance” instead of the usual “By the prayers of the apostles...”. On Sundays, we serve the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great instead of that of St. John Chrysostom. Since the authors of the Liturgy wrote the priest’s prayers, and not the texts that the choir sings, this is not very noticeable. However, the priest’s prayers at the Liturgy of St. Basil are more detailed. Instead of “It is truly meet...”, the choir sings the beautiful “All of creation rejoices in thee...”. Basically, we do not feel any of the liturgical features of Great Lent if we come to services only on Sunday mornings. We do not do prostrations in church from Friday after the Presanctified until Sunday evenings.

The First Week

At the evening services on the first four days of Great Lent, we read in four parts the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete. This is a penitential canon filled with scriptural references. We read it to enter into the penitential state of mind in which we spend Great Lent. Lent is not a time of sadness, but a time of changing our lives to live more in accordance with God’s will. As such, we find that with more prayer and less attention to rich foods, our souls and bodies are lighter, and Lent is a joyful time. These services of the first week in the evenings (where we also sing the Great Compline) are essential to starting of Lent.

In the first week there are also morning services every day. These are lengthy services punctuated with the prayer of St. Ephraim which is characteristic of Great Lent. For those who are able to take the time, these services also attune a person to Lent. The departed are commemorated at each of these services.

On Saturday of the first week, we commemorate the miracle of St. Theodore the Tyro. This begins after the Presanctified Liturgy on Friday morning, where we read his canon and bless kollivo (boiled wheat with honey). It is a long tradition of the Church that everyone prepare Friday evening to come to communion on the first Saturday of Lent, having prepared throughout the week. Unfortunately, many ignore this tradition in our days and allow themselves to be caught up in other bustle on this day. We should work to return to the traditions of our church and prepare ourselves throughout the first week and commune on Saturday morning.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

The full Liturgy with transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ was considered by the Church fathers to be too festive for Lenten days. However, so that we would not be deprived of communion on these days, twice a week (plus some additional holidays) the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts is served. At this Liturgy, we commune of communion reserved at the previous Sunday Liturgy. The Presanctified Gifts differ in no way from ordinary communion, and we prepare to receive them in the same way. Since there is no consecration, there is no commemoration, and we do not send in commemoration slips and prosphora at these Liturgies.

The Other Weeks

The Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts continues to be served with preparatory services. On Friday evenings, we remember the departed. In the fifth week on Wednesday we read the Great Canon in full, and on Friday we sing the Akathist to the Mother of God.