

3rd Week of Great Lent – Wednesday

"Joyful celebration of the fast"

"As we continue in the joyful celebration of the fast, we cry aloud: keep us all in peace, O Lord, deliver us from every snare of the enemy, and in Thy surpassing love count us worthy to venerate with love Thy precious cross, through which thou grantest to the inhabited world Thy mercy, O Thou who alone art most merciful." Great Lent, the Third Week, Wednesday, The Sixth Hour, Sessional Hymn, Tone Two (by Theodore)

The services are enthusiastic! I love to hear their enthusiasm about the living of the spiritual life, and their frequent enraptured meditation on the truths and dogmas of our faith. I hope you do too.

This hymn is one of many during the Great Fast that count this "tithe"¹ of the year as great blessing, and joy.

This attitude is a different perspective for some of us. For some, Great Lent is a time to "give up" things, and deal with inconvenience and difficulty in planning meals.

The reason for these feelings is a serious misunderstanding of the Fast, and also the main reason for the Fast, the following of the commandments.

The Fast is not IMPOSED upon us, nor are any of the sweet commandments of the Lord imposed upon us. We follow the commandments because they are the only way of life, and because we will be changed and perfected.

Does anybody want to stay the same way they are right now? Do you still want to have bouts of laziness, depression, shame because of your behavior, intrusive thoughts that make you feel dark and cold? If you like this state, you may have it forever, and you need not do anything to achieve it!

If a person wants to change, the Fast is a joyful time, because it facilitates change. We will not always be in our current, wretched condition; we will be changed.

The joyful faster always has that "blessed hope"² within him when he fasts. The fast may truly have great difficulties and sorrows for us, but the Christian is joyful, even in

his sorrow, because he knows that he is getting better. Most of the time, we cannot “feel” that we are getting better; we will believe this only as we continue to struggle and God sends us ineffable consolation.

To those who consider the phrase “joyful fast” and oxymoron, the church hymns constantly invite: “Come and see!”

Priest Seraphim Holland 2009. [St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, McKinney, Texas](#)

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¹ Great Lent and Holy Week, including Holy Saturday is 36 days, and therefore encompasses **almost exactly a tenth** of the days of the year, and many spiritual writers have commented on this.

Here is the math:

- Great Lent is 6 weeks long, and Saturday and Sunday are not rigorous fasting days. Counting only weekdays, this gives us 6 weeks of 5 days each = 30 days.
- Holy Week is also a week of fasting, so this adds another 5 days. We are now at 35 days.

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- Since Holy Saturday is considered to be a fast day (we can have wine, but not oil), we add another day, giving us 36 days.
 - $36/365 = 9.8$ percent, or, rounded up, 10%, a tithe of the year.

² “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ⁽¹²⁾ Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ⁽¹³⁾ Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; ⁽¹⁴⁾ Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Titus 2:11-14 KJV