

Living Lent: Cheese Week Weekly Reflections by Metropolitan Tikhon

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon offers a series of reflections on the themes contained in the Triodion hymns sung on Tuesday of each week during Great Lent.



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On the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, the Orthodox Church begins to use the Lenten Triodion, which is the book containing the liturgical texts for the Sundays of Great Lent, as well as those for every day of the First Week and of Holy Week. In their English version, the texts for the other weekdays of Lent are contained in the book known as the “Lenten Triodion Supplement.” Last year, I shared with you some reflections on texts taken from the Mondays of Great Lent and this year I will focus on the texts from the Tuesday services that I have found meaningful.

We find ourselves now in Cheese Week, a pre-lenten period during which Orthodox Christians already begin to abstain from meat, which is our second ascetical exercise in fasting. The first fasting discipline was given to us in the week following the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, which was a fast-free week.

It may seem counter-intuitive to say that the fast-free week was an ascetical exercise, since we had the opportunity to eat everything we wanted, without any restrictions. But precisely because of this gastronomic freedom, we were being called to direct our full attention to the inner labor of attaining humility, patience, and love, while also being watchful for the pride that might arise from the external fulfillment of bodily labors during the days Great Lent.

The fast-free week was pointing us of the real purpose of our fasting and reminding us, in the words of the hymns, that: “This should be the manner of our fasting, not with hatred of contention, not in envy and strife, not in self-glory and with hidden deceit, but like Christ, in humble-mindedness.”

The labors that we offer are part of our stewardship as we “offer the King a tenth part of the year.” What we offer back to God is not simply abstinence from food but rather abstinence from the passions and a striving for the virtues. At the same time, we are asked to “give bread to the hungry” and “abstain from all hatred of our neighbor, from lust and falsehood and every evil.” Though we are asked for a tithe, the purpose is not to accomplish these things for a limited time only, but rather to receive God’s mercy throughout our lives.

May God strengthen us all of the good combat that lies ahead.