



THE NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS OF ORTHODOX FASTING

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Abstract

Orthodox fasting is a restraint from certain foods and alcoholic beverages at predetermined times of the year. This article follows in the first part the history of the Orthodox Christian religion, the great schism between the Orthodox Christian religion and the Roman Catholic religion, of the types of fasting that are found in this religious doctrine.

In the second part of the paper we look at the benefits of religious fasting on health and highlight the fact that the intervals of the year in which it is recommended are closely related to harvest periods, abundance or food deficit.

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1. The history of the Orthodox religion

The foundations of the Orthodox Christian religion were laid between the 4th and 8th centuries at the 7 ecumenical synods. For religious reasons, but especially political, geographical and cultural, between the Western church (Roman Catholic) and the Eastern (Orthodox) there was, gradually, an official separation in 1054, known as the Great Schism. Thus the Christian religion was divided into the Orthodox Church centered in Constantinople, which emphasizes the purity of the faith, and the Catholic Church centered in Rome, which leans toward universality (Catholicism).

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Figure 1. The spread of the Eastern Orthodox religion in Europe

The Orthodox Church (also known as the Eastern Orthodox Church) is a community of the Christian faith. Today, Orthodox Christians are organized in autocephalous Orthodox churches (Greek, Russian, Romanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Albanian, Polish, etc.), in liturgical (Eucharistic) communion with each other. Among the autocephalous Orthodox churches, the honorary primacy is held by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. According to the number of believers, the Orthodox form the second Christian community in the world, after the Catholic Church.

The presence of the Orthodox Church is dominant in areas that were in the cultural space of the Byzantine and Russian empires: Eastern and Southeastern Europe, Asia, parts of the Middle East and Africa. Currently, the number of Orthodox believers is majority in Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro and Ukraine. Large communities of Orthodox Christians also live in Albania (about 30%), Bosnia (31.4%), as well as in some states that belonged to Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union (Baltic States and Central Asia). Significant Orthodox presences are found in many other countries in North America, Western Europe etc., mainly due to the communities formed by the emigration of Eastern Europeans.



What is fasting?

Religious fasting is a restraint from certain food groups of animal origin and alcoholic beverages or in certain situations even, total abstinence from any form of food or liquid, for certain longer or shorter periods of the year, where along with prayer and repentance it has as a goal "strengthening the powers of the soul over the lusts of the flesh".

Fasting types

Orthodox religious fasting is divided into:

- harsh fasting (or fasting) - do not eat or drink anything, at least for a day;
- regular fasting - no food of animal origin, oil or alcohol is consumed (sometimes with the exception of fish, caviar, oil and wine - on days with "marked release on the calendar").

The duration of the positions can vary:

- One-day fasts - are Wednesday (held to show sorrow for the sale of Jesus Christ) and Friday of each week (held to "remember the crucifixion of the Lord." Other one-day fasts are on January 5 (the eve of the Epiphany). August 29 (death of St. John the Baptist) and September 14 (day of the exaltation of the Holy Cross);
- Multi-day fasts - vary in length from a few days to a few weeks. Lent for seven weeks, Lent for Christmas lasting 40 days, Lent of the Assumption, placed in the two weeks from the beginning of August, Lent of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul which does not have a fixed duration, because its beginning depends on the variable date of Easter.

Fasting days - Orthodox Calendar 2020

Wednesdays and Fridays over the year, except for those with release, marked with maps

Epiphany Eve (January 5)

Beheading of St. John the Baptist (August 29)

Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14)

Lent (March 2 - April 18)

Lent of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (June 15 - June 28)

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 1 - August 14)

Lent (November 14 - December 24)

Fasting benefits (on health)

Fasting, but also fasting regularly has the effect of detoxifying the body, most often the allowed foods lead to lower cholesterol, blood pressure, increased



concentration and energy levels, restore the immune system and facilitate digestion.

Decreases blood sugar concentration, having favorable effects in some chronic diseases such as diabetes, gastric and duodenal ulcers, arteriosclerosis, certain forms of obesity and cellulite, allergic diseases (asthma, polyarthritis) and central nervous system, early senility, poisoning food and medicine, gout, some dermatological conditions. The high fiber intake resulting from the specific diet helps intestinal transit.

Permitted foods (nutritional properties)

During the fasting period, no meat, alcohol or oil or wine is consumed (the exceptions being on the days specially marked in the fish release calendar). Romanians most often eat dishes based on legumes and crucifers, potatoes, beans, cabbage, salads, mushrooms, olives, soy derivatives, peas, lentils, chickpeas, squash, cauliflower, leeks, pumpkin and fruits.

More recently, imported products such as avocados, Brazil nuts, kale, broccoli, quinoa, amaranth, millet, buckwheat, brown rice, black or red beans are increasingly common, which are healthy options to eat during Lent.

Fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables (cooked or baked) are rich in vitamins and have a rich content of trace elements. Potatoes and blueberries (contain iodine), green vegetables (iron), mushrooms (protein), beets (various minerals). **Tomato sauce** increases the absorption of iron in the body.

Unheated oilseeds (almonds, pistachios, hazelnuts, walnuts) are excellent sources of protein, fiber, vitamins (A, E, Bs), minerals (iron, zinc, magnesium, calcium, phosphorus) and essential fats (Omega -3 and Omega-6).

The seeds (flax, hemp, chia, sesame, pumpkin, sunflower) are rich in protein, fiber and magnesium.

Soy contains all the essential amino acids (lysine, glutamine, tryptophan), lipids, carbohydrates, mineral salts (calcium, magnesium, potassium, iron, phosphorus, sodium, sulfur), enzymes, lecithins, vitamins (A, B, C, D, E), Omega-3 and lecithin.

Beans, chickpeas and lentils have vegetable proteins, carbohydrates, Vitamin B and iron, eliminate the risk of asthenia and anemia.

Fish and fish caviar salad is a very good source of protein, minerals, trace elements, Omega-3 fatty acids and B-complex vitamins.

Bee honey, an unparalleled source of energy for all ages, should not be missing during this period from the daily menu of fasting people.

Sanziene **teas**, marigold, rhubarb, mousetail, marigold, chamomile, shock, red clover, sage leaves, artichoke, nettle, blueberry, strawberry, mint birch, basil, horsetail, hollyhock, sorrel galvanized, juniper fruit, blueberry, rosehip, hawthorn, black poplar buds and roots of valerian, obligeana, dandelion, sorrel, etc.



Overlapping the feasting with the crops?

The Italian peninsula, for example, in the first half of the first millennium AD, was wetter and cooler, and the arid southern area received much more rainfall. As the snow melted, even the smallest rivers swelled and turned the plains and plains into swamps.

The Roman Empire extended over three climatological periods:

- Early Subatlantic (900 BC – 175 AD);
- Mid-Subatlantic (175–750);
- Late Subatlantic (since 750).

There is archaeological evidence that the period of maximum expansion of the Roman Empire, coincided with an optimal climatic period for cultivating crops, and the period of decline coincides with the "Little Ice Age" more precisely the cooling period between 536-660 AD. due most likely due to 3 huge volcanic eruptions in 536, 540 and 547.

Climate change led to the migration of peoples living in northern Europe and the Eurasian steppe (Lombards, Slavs) to the warmer areas of the south, where they came into conflict with a Roman Empire unable to feed its vast armies.

At the same time, the Middle East has transformed from an arid area to a wetland, conducive to crops, which over time has led to a significant increase in population and Arab power in the area for centuries to come.

In addition to the beneficial effects on health and health offered by fasting, historians suspect that the appearance of long fasting is directly correlated with harvest periods, abundant or lack of food.

Ian	feb	mar	apr	mai	iun	iul	aug	sep	oct	noi	dec
		P. Paștelui					amd				P. Nașterii

Figure 2. The main seasons and religious fasts

As can be seen in Figure 2, Easter fast coincides with the period immediately after winter, when more than likely depleted supplies forced people then to eat as little as possible, wait for the first results of newly planted crops and avoid eating animals that they had not yet entered the breeding season.

Birth of Jesus fast coincides with the period before the start of the cold season, when animals were to be slaughtered and by various methods were preserved for the following winter months.

Viewed from the perspective of an efficient organization, of human and social evolution, we can understand why the leaders of those times chose long periods of fasting, giving them a religious connotation.



Conclusions

In conclusion, fasting offers people who follow it a spiritual fulfillment and an improvement in health that has been proven by science. However, we cannot overlook the Lent of Easter and the Lent of the Nativity of the Lord, two very long periods of abstinence from food.

It is observed that with the end of the harvest in autumn begins a period of almost 6 weeks of fasting, a period in which it is recommended to eat food (from the harvest) at half the normal ration, followed by a period of abundance with the slaughter of animals or pigs, goats, cows.

In the past, absolutely all parts of an animal were capitalized, stored in lard and salt. That slaughtered animal would arrive and especially could be good for consumption about 2-3 months.

With the end of food reserves we can see another period in which it is "recommended" fasting and halving food rations until the coming of spring.

Thus we can say that the post was rather created as a necessity a kind of rationalization guide for the periods of food deficit that was available, depending on the season.

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