



## GRAMMATA ON FASTING RULES FOR OUR EXARCHATE

In the spirit of *oikonomia* we have prayerfully reviewed some of the traditional fasting regulations that have been in use for centuries in the Orthodox Church. While not abolishing this tradition, we wish to provide spiritual adjustments to the faithful and clergy in a world whose food consumption and value has become much different than that of ancient times.

The many church calendars that include the monastic rules of fasting are not, generally speaking, suitable for the laity. It is more important to give up foods that feed the passions than those that feed the body. For example, sweets and gourmet foods are more harmful to the soul than a glass of milk is to someone who engages in much physical labor. Let us keep in mind, that abstinence from food is nothing more than a means toward maintaining soul and body in a disciplined state. It is not an end in itself. Therefore, if we are invited to be someone's guest, it is unholy to display one's abstinence.

Part of our aim is to simplify these rules and apply them to all four fasting seasons equally. In general, we maintain that the consumption of meat is to be avoided during all days of any Fast. Fish, including seafood, and wine, including all beverages that contain alcohol, may only be consumed on Saturday, Sunday and Great Feast days when celebrated during a Fasting season. From Monday through Friday, only one full meal per day may be consumed. Additionally, smoking, secular entertainment (such as theatrical performance), dancing, parties and other jovial activities are to be avoided as incompatible with any serious fasting.

The Holy Church warns us that external fasting alone is not sufficient, however. We must also apply ourselves to internal fasting, which consists of shunning malice, deceit, wrath, worldly bustle and other vices. During a Fast, as at all times, we must show works of love and mercy to our fellow beings, doing all we can to help those in need and in sorrow. Only then will our fasting be genuine and not hypocritical; only then will it be God-pleasing; and only then will we know the true joy of the bright feast at the end of each fasting period.

Given on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of November in the year 2018, the beginning of the holy Nativity Fast:

Mar ✠ Melchizedek  
Patriarchal Exarch

