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This publication is a treasure trove of information on the
Holy Orthodox Christian faith — both for you and your family.)

From the Introduction of the next issue of *The True Vine*

ON FASTING

By Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

His Grace, Bishop Demetrius wrote the following about one of his recent trips to Guatemala:

In February of 2008, the St. Paul's Fellowship of Labor travelled to Guatemala for a week's visit. This trip coincided with the feast day of St. Xenia of Petersburg, the patron saint of our mission there. During the week, children from a nearby school passed by the church daily and stared at the Fellowship workers and the work being done. On the Sunday that followed, three of the children came to church for Liturgy. Ever since that Sunday, they have refused to go to the Roman Catholic church that their mother attends, and they are presently attending our church faithfully.

Last October, I went as well and found these same three children in church all dressed in white and waiting to be baptized (we had another baptism that day). I told them that I could not baptize them until I met at least one of their parents and had the consent of both parents. The mother came to the church and said that the children really wanted to be baptized in our church, and that both she and her husband had no problem with that. I felt that we should still wait a while before going ahead with this, so I told the mother that, for now, the children should try to fast from meat on Wednesdays and Fridays. She laughed and said, "Meat?" At that point it was explained to me that, because of their poverty, these people hardly ever eat any meat at all. The same occurred with another family that wanted to become Orthodox and were told that they should refrain from meat on fast days.

Such is the state of *billions* of people on our planet. While most of us who live in North America and Europe will find this simply incomprehensible, hunger and want are the bitter reality for the vast majority of the Earth's inhabitants.

One may ask: "What can I do about it? I'm just one person."

The answer: "Fast!"

As this issue of *The True Vine* will demonstrate, the Church's traditional understanding of fasting and abstinence is the solution for many of the world's problems in both the material and the spiritual realms. Since all of us, without exception, are a combination of body and soul, we know from experience that these two components of our human nature interact and influence one another in marvelous and mysterious ways. Self-restraint can work wonders, both for each of us individually and for society in general. It is the mother of self-respect, the basis of civilization, the firm foundation of happy marriages, the begetter of grateful and respectful children, and the establishment of safe neighborhoods where everyone can live in peace and security with their windows and doors unlocked.

Such are but a few of the boons of self-restraint.

Alas, however, we know that this is not the current state of affairs, chiefly because few of us have learned to practice the virtue of restraining our harmful passions, nor have we tapped into the secret source of that godly and invincible strength that was given to the Saints as a reward for their being good stewards of their senses: divine grace.

Again, fasting and abstinence are the *first steps* toward this blessed goal.

This is why we have dedicated this issue to this vital subject. This is why St. Seraphim of Sarov, one of the greatest men of God to arise in the recent centuries, can say: "Before all else, ensure that the one whom you choose as your companion for life keeps the fasts. If they do not keep the fasts, then they are not Christians, whatever, they may consider themselves to be."

Profound words with profound implications.

People who observe the holy fasts will also be more likely to be better and more responsible individuals in other matters as well: people aware of their shortcomings, but willing to struggle to overcome them.

To state our case in words that every Orthodox Christian can understand: people that struggle against their passions will draw God's grace to themselves.

This issue of *The True Vine* will help us understand fasting's varied history in the Church, and its true purpose.

We will learn also of the many variant forms of fasting. In this particular instance, St. John Chrysostom's words are most appropriate:

Fasting is a medicine; but a medicine, though it be never so profitable, becomes frequently useless owing to the unskillfulness of him who employs it. For it is necessary to know, moreover, the time when it should be applied, and the requisite quantity of it;

and the nature of the country, and the season of the year; and the corresponding diet; as well as various other particulars; any of which, if one overlooks, he will mar all the rest that have been named. Now if, when the body needs healing, such exactness is required on our part, much more ought we, when our care is about the soul, and we seek to heal the distempers of the mind, to look, and to search into every particular with the utmost accuracy.

(On the Statues 3:8)

With this important advice in mind, let us proceed with discernment.

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