

*Pastoral reflection for November 2025: Fasting in preparation for the Nativity of our Lord.* The Philip's or Nativity Fast is the second major fast in our church after the fasting during Great Lent. It is designed to help us in struggling with and hopefully subduing the passions that lead us away from God and to assist with drawing near to God. I found an excellent article about the true meaning of fasting. The author, Dr Phipip Kariatlis, draws on several hymns from the Triodion about the purpose of fasting. I find no similar hymns during the Nativity Fast. But they can certainly be applied to this fast. He begins by noting that simply focusing on the foods to be prepared and when they are to be eaten is not the true meaning of purpose of fasting as part of our spiritual journey towards meeting Christ and our deification. By way on contrast he cites several hymns from the Triodion about fasting along with his own comments that I would encourage you to ponder as you prepare to engage in the Nativity Fast:

Let us fast in a way that is acceptable and pleasing to the Lord. True fasting is flight from evils, temperance of the tongue, refrain from anger, separation from lustful desires, and from lies, from falsehood and from perjury. The absence of all these makes our fasting true and acceptable (Great Vespers of Pure Monday).

Dr Kariatlis observes: "This hymn 'is an injunction for purity.' The meaning of purity, like fasting, ought not to be impoverished... Accordingly, purification is understood as internal consistency or integrity of character which, in the face of temptation, remains totally devoted to God."

Let us observe the fast, not only by abstinence from food, but also by separating ourselves from every bodily passion... so that we may be counted worthy to partake of the Lamb... the Son of God... (A troparion from Tuesday during the first week of Great Lent).

Dr. Kariatlis observes: "fasting finds its true meaning when the outward abstinence of food is connected with the inward struggle to intensify our longing for God through the dynamic of purity and repentance – the consummation of which is realized in Holy Communion."

While fasting with the body, o brethren, let us also fast in spirit; let us loosen every connection with injustice... Let us give bread to the hungry and introduce into our house the poor who have no roof to cover them, that we may receive from Christ our God the great mercy (From the first liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts).

Dr Kariatlis observes: "True fasting requires not only fasting from foods but also practical works of compassion which, in this case, include working towards overcoming injustice and extending hospitality – *philoxenia* – especially to those in need. In simple terms, the hymn underscores that there cannot be genuine fasting without love towards the 'other, especially those in most need.'" ("The True Meaning of Fasting in the Orthodox Church" <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2018/02/17/true-meaning-of-fasting/>)

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