

# **FASTING IN THE ITALO-GREEK BYZANTINE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Unless a fast-free period has been declared, Italo-Greek Byzantine Christians are to keep a strict fast every Wednesday and Friday. The following foods are avoided:

Meat, including poultry, and any meat products such as lard and meat broth.

Fish (meaning fish with backbones shellfish are permitted).

Eggs and dairy products (milk, butter, cheese, etc.)

Olive oil. A literal interpretation of the rule forbids only olive oil.

Especially where olive oil is not a major part of the diet, the rule is sometimes taken to include all vegetable oils, as well as oil products such as margarine.

Wine and other alcoholic drink. In the Slavic tradition, beer is often permitted on fast days.

## **How Much?**

Sad to say, it is easy to keep the letter of the fasting rule and still practice gluttony. When fasting, we should eat simply and modestly. Monastics eat only one full meal a day on strict fast days, two meals on “Wind and oil” days (see below). Laymen are not usually encouraged to limit meals in this way: consult your priest.

## **Exceptions**

The Church has always exempted small children, the sick, the very old, and pregnant and nursing mothers from strict fasting. While people in these groups should not seriously restrict the amount that they eat, no harm will come from doing without some foods on two days out of the week – simply eat enough of the permitted foods. Exceptions to the fast based on medical necessity (as with diabetes) are always allowed.

## **Communion Fast**

So that the Body and Blood of our Lord may be the first thing to pass our lips on the day of communion, we abstain from all food and drink from the time that we retire (or midnight, whichever comes first) the night before. Married couples should abstain from sexual relations the night before communion.

When communion is in the evening as with Presanctified Liturgies during Lent this fast should, if possible, be extended throughout the day until after communion. For those who cannot keep this discipline, a total fast beginning at noon is sometimes prescribed.