

Wednesday and Friday fast days:

“But do not let your fasts fall on the same days as ‘the hypocrites’ (cf. Matt. 6:16f.; Lk. 18:12), who fast on Monday and Thursday. Rather, you should fast on Wednesday and Friday.” (*Didache* 8.1; late 1st century) – [The fast days of Wednesday and Friday go back to apostolic times.]

“If any bishop, presbyter, or deacon, or reader, or singer, does not fast the holy 40-day fast of Pascha, or the fourth day (Wednesday), or the day of Preparation (Friday), let him be deposed, unless he be hindered by some bodily infirmity. If he be a layman, let him be excommunicated.” (*Apostolic Canons*, Canon 69; ca. 300 A.D.) – [The fast days of Wednesday and Friday and Great Lent are considered equal in importance.]

“Wednesday is to be fasted, because then the Jews conspired to betray Jesus; Friday, because he then suffered for us. We keep the Lord’s Day as a day of joy, because then our Lord rose. Our tradition is, not to kneel on that day.” (Canon 15 of the Hieromartyr Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria, ca. 310 A.D.) – [Fast days have theological importance relating to the life of our Savior Jesus Christ Himself.]

The Fast of Great Lent:

“For the controversy is not only concerning the day (date of Pascha), but also concerning the very manner of the fast. For some think that they should fast one day, others two, yet others more; some, moreover, count their day as consisting of forty hours day and night. And this variety in its observance has not originated in our time, but long before in that of our ancestors. It is likely that they did not hold to strict accuracy, and thus formed a custom for their posterity according to their own simplicity and peculiar mode. Yet all of these lived none the less in peace, and we also live in peace with one another; and the disagreement in regard to the fast confirms the agreement in the faith.” (St. Irenaeus of Lyons [ca. 190 A.D.], quoted in Eusebius, *Church History* 5.24.12-13 [ca. 324 A.D.])

“The fasts before Pascha will be found to be differently observed among different people. Those at Rome fast three successive weeks before Pascha, excepting Saturdays and Sundays. Those in Illyrica and all over Greece and Alexandria observe a fast of six weeks, which they term ‘the forty day fast.’ Others commencing their fast from the seventh week before Pascha, and fasting three five-days only, and that at intervals, yet call that time ‘the forty days’ fast’...One can see also a disagreement about the manner of abstinence from food, as well as about the number of days. Some wholly abstain from things that have life; others feed on fish only of all living creatures...some abstain from eggs, and all kinds of fruits; others partake of dry bread only; still others eat not even this while others having fasted until the ninth hour, afterwards take any sort of food without distinction...it is evident that the apostles left each one to his own free will in the matter, to the end that each might perform what is good not by constraint or necessity.” (Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History* 5.22 [ca. 440 A.D.])

Fasting before Holy Communion:

“That the Sacraments of the Altar (Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper) are not to be celebrated except by those who are fasting...” (*African Code*, Canon 41; *Quinisext*, Canon 29).

What it means “to fast”:

“Therefore, just as the fast of Great Lent consists in the eating of dry foods,* namely, to eat but once a day, at the ninth hour (~3:00 PM), without consuming oil or wine, likewise, the fast of Wednesday and Friday is to be conducted in the exact same manner. St. Epiphanius also says: ‘We fast on Wednesday and Friday until the ninth hour.’ Likewise, Philostorgios says that the fast of Wednesday and Friday does not consist in the abstention from meat, but it designates that one is not to eat any food until the evening. St. Benedict (Canon 41) also designates that the fast of Wednesday and Friday is until the ninth hour. And Balsamon forbids the consumption of shellfish on Wednesday and Friday just as during Great Lent...

“Therefore, because the fast of Great Lent is equal to the fast of Wednesday and Friday it follows that, for those who are sick or weak, the relaxation of the fast is also to be equal during these fasts. For this reason, as Canons 8 and 10 of Timothy allow a woman who is pregnant during the Great Fast to consume as much wine and food as is necessary for her condition, this also applies to the fast of Wednesday and Friday. The same holds for those who have become weak from excessive sickness, that is, they are allowed to consume oil and wine during these fasting periods. So says the divine Jerome: ‘The fast of Wednesday and Friday is not to be broken unless there is great necessity.’

“We must also note the following, that just as there must be a fast from food on Wednesday, Friday, and Great Lent, there must also be a fast from pleasures of the flesh. For this reason weddings cannot take place on these days, because the divine Paul commands that married couples are not to come together during a time of prayer and fasting (see 1 Cor. 7:5; Joel 2:15-16; *Laodicea*, Canon 52 which also prohibits the celebration of birthday feasts – extravaganzas, not just parties - during Lent).” (St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite [ca. 1800], *A Manual of Confession* [Uncut Mountain Press, 2006], pp. 270,271, 272)

* Gk., *xerophagia*; that is, nothing from what is killed or produced by an animal, meaning meats, fish (with and without a backbone), eggs, milk, cheese, etc. (*Laodicea*, Canon 50; *Quinisext*, Canon 56).

Standardized (Canonical) Fasting Rules of the Church:

1. Abstain from food on the day of receiving Holy Communion.
2. Abstain from food until evening on Wednesdays and Fridays outside of a fasting season (e.g., Great Lent), and then eat whatever you want.
3. During a fasting season (e.g., Great Lent), practice “dry-eating” (see note above) including abstinence from fats (olive oil) and alcoholic drinks.
4. Since fasting is a tool for self-control, abstain from sinful passions and pleasures of the flesh; thus marriages are not performed during fasting seasons (e.g., Great Lent).
5. Young children, the elderly, pregnant mothers, and persons with bodily infirmity eat whatever is necessary for their health.

But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Matthew 6:17-18)

Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him...One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. (Romans 14:3, 5)