

Session Two: Preparation

Main Ideas: Pascha is such an important time in the life of the Church that we are expected to prepare. The Church provides many ways in which to get ready for this special day.

Supplies needed: chart paper or whiteboard, writing utensils, tape measure, handouts from Antiochian Orthodox Department of Religious Education (ww1.antiochian.org/LetUsAttend) choose the four Sessions that correspond to the Sundays listed in the Session, Participant Workbooks for each youth (This will be used during each session and should be kept with you after sessions are completed.)



(5 minutes) Before reading on, have students use a new piece of chart paper to make a list of important events in their lives. Answers may vary, but encourage them to think of things like a birthday party, wedding, graduation, musical performance, game or other sports competitions, an art show, etc.

(10 minutes) When you feel like you have a variety of answers, move back to the workbook (page 4) and have students take turns reading and completing the next sections. Look at the list of important events your class has created. Choose one of the events, perhaps one that recently occurred in your life or will be happening soon, and make a list of ways in which people will prepare for that event. Think about who might be involved, what they will need to do, will they need any items, how far in advance will they begin to prepare?

Whether it's a personal celebration like a birthday party, a competition, a performance, or some other event, it's likely that if it is important to you or to someone else, you put effort into getting ready.

Time to prepare- the Triodion (tree-OH-dee-uhn)

Pascha is the most important day, ever. The Church knows that none of us are as ready for the day as we could be, and provides us with a special time and tools to help us prepare. This special time is called the Triodion, and it begins with three weeks (four Sundays) of preparation for Great Lent, Great Lent itself,

and Holy Week. A special book called the Triodion, or Lenten Triodion, includes all of the special songs and readings for the services during this time period.

(Have the reader pause for a minute here. Ask for a volunteer or two. The goal is to illustrate how taking a running start can help you to jump farther, which is mentioned in the next section. You could do this a number of ways, but consider using a chair or another object to mark the starting line. Have them jump as far as possible one time, starting right on the “line.” Mark their distance with another object then have them jump again with a running start to see how much farther they can go. Depending on how much time you have, you could give everyone the opportunity to jump at once, or a few at a time to compare their distances.) Continue reading.



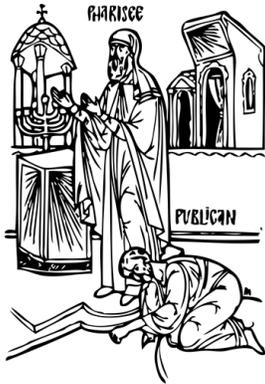
Preparing for Great Lent

During Great Lent we are asked to make some significant changes to the way we live our lives such as fasting, praying more, and attending more church services so that we can get ready for Pascha. The Church knows that if we try to jump right into something difficult, we are less likely to be successful. Competitors in track and field competitions often receiving a warning bell or siren to let them know the race is about to start so that they are mentally prepared for the event. Competitive jumpers take a running start- it would be nearly impossible to jump as far without one. The four Sundays before Lent are like our warning bell and our running start so that we are ready to be successful during Great Lent. Most years, there are only a few weeks between the end of the Nativity season and the beginning of the Triodion. The Church knows we may still be putting Christmas decorations away and humming carols for the last time, so the warning bell is sounded- it's time to get ready!

(20 minutes) Read the following paragraph, then break students up into four groups. Assign each group one of the four Gospel readings. Ask them to read the handout and fill in the blanks in the corresponding box (handouts downloaded from the Antiochian Orthodox Religious Education noted in *Supplies Needed*). Once each group is ready, have them take turns paraphrasing their assigned reading so that all groups fill in all blanks. Younger classes may need to read through each one together. The teacher can read and students can fill in the blanks as they go to save time. Consider having students move around the room as they work so that they get a physical break.

Tools to prepare- the Gospels

The Gospel readings for the four Sundays at the beginning of the Triodion alert us to the coming of Great Lent. They are also a tool that we can use in our preparation for Great Lent and Pascha- this is our running start to be ready for a successful Great Lent. Each gospel contains a message that can be used as a guideline to remind us what is important to focus on during Great Lent. After reading each Gospel, fill in the blanks on the following chart to explain the main ideas of each story.



The Publican and The Pharisee (Luke 18: 10-14)

The Pharisee worshipped with 'himself', focusing on the good things he had done and not on his relationship with God.

The Publican was so sad about the things he hadn't done right, that he 'bowed' to the floor asking God's mercy.

This Gospel reminds us that no one is perfect, but the person who humbles himself and asks for forgiveness will be lifted 'up'.



The Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32)

The younger son asked his father for his portion of his inheritance. Since this was usually given when the father died, it was an insult to his father to ask before it was time. When he realizes his many mistakes and returns for forgiveness, not only is he forgiven, his father 'celebrates'. The older son does everything his father asks but feels like his brother got more of a reward for making mistakes. This Gospel teaches us two important things: No one is perfect, but if we ask for forgiveness when we make a 'mistake' God will be happy to have us back and we will all be rewarded in heaven.

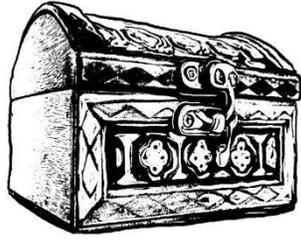


The Last Judgement (Matthew 25: 31-46)

No one is perfect, but we will all be judged. Jesus uses this Gospel to explain the criteria that will be used at our judgement.

First, we will be judged by what we do for 'others'. Not just what we do for ourselves.

Second, we are all made in the image and likeness of God, so when we do good things for others, we are doing them for 'God'. No exceptions.



Forgiveness Sunday (Matthew 6: 14-21)

The messages in this Gospel set the tone for Great Lent:

1. God will 'forgive' us in the way we forgive others. None of us is perfect, so we should forgive others freely.
2. How we 'fast' is even more important than following the rules of fasting. We should fast to become closer to God, not to show how holy we are.
3. Focus on doing good here to build 'treasure' in heaven.

(10 minutes) Finish reading this section. The teacher may read to move things along if you are short on time. If you finish with more time, consider allowing students another opportunity to share a memory about Pascha.

At this point you can end the Session or choose to continue with the following text on fasting and confession. Alternatives for this information could be to send the workbooks home and ask families to review this information together or inviting your parish priest to come and briefly discuss these tools with the class and parents. You may also choose to leave this information to be covered during the Praxis Session 1 - Fasting and Cooking as a Family.

Tools to prepare- Fasting

The Gospel on Forgiveness Sunday gives us a reminder about fasting quietly, not broadcasting our success with everyone. But what is fasting? Most people think of it as not eating, or not eating specific foods. While this is true, there is more to the idea of fasting in the Orthodox Church. Fasting is a tool that we can use to try to be more in control of both what comes into our body and what we use our bodies for. We all need to eat. Think about the special events you listed earlier in the Session. Food



probably plays an important role in many of them. Athletes who are preparing for a big game or race often change what they eat so that their body has the right fuel to play their best. Singers performing in a show or musical are very careful about what they drink so that their voice is at its best. You might plan a special meal or have cake for a party or celebration. Parents and teachers encourage us to eat a good breakfast before a test so our brains have the nutrition they need.

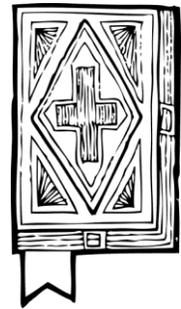
There's nothing wrong with eating- obviously, choosing not to eat would be very damaging! But, because we all eat, it's something the Church can use to help everyone. The Church suggests fasting from specific foods because saying 'no' or 'wait' to those foods helps us to practice saying no to temptations that can hurt our souls, like getting angry with friends and family, judging others, disobeying parents and teachers, etc. It helps us practice following the rules. We know that fasting is something that pleases God because Jesus did it. He fasted in the wilderness before He began His ministry on earth so that he was focused on his mission. We also know that fasting is the opposite of

what Adam and Eve did. Adam and Eve were told they could have anything they wanted in the Garden of Eden, except the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Instead of doing what God asked, they gave in to the temptation of the serpent (the Devil) and did what made them happy instead.

There are some exceptions for special days during Great Lent, but generally the Orthodox Church prescribes fasting from foods that come from animals- meat, dairy, fish, butter, eggs, olive oil (which used to be stored in the skins of animals so it had come in contact with animal blood). It is important to make decisions about fasting with parents and your Spiritual Father or parish priest. Just like a doctor prescribes medications and doses specifically for each patient, your parents and priest know what's best for you. For example, fasting very strictly if you've never done it before would be very difficult. Many priests recommend starting with an easier rule to follow, then working up, or suggest different rules depending on how old you are.

Tools to prepare- Confession

Another tool that the Church gives us to prepare for Great Lent and Pascha is the sacrament of Holy Confession. In any part of our life, if we are going to be successful in our goals, we need to fix mistakes from the past. To use some of our examples from before, athletes watch videos of past games with their coach to change their plays or their technique. Musicians and singers make notes on their music to remind them of tricky spots that have tripped them up in the past. Teachers have students correct their mistakes from a test to learn the right answer to the information. We will learn a little more about Confession in later Sessions, but the Church reminds us that Lent is a good time to come to Confession so that when we celebrate the Resurrection, we are free from the sins that separate us from God.



Finish each Session with CHRIST IS RISEN! And ask students to respond with INDEED HE IS RISEN!