

Archbishop Nicolae's Meditation at the Dormition Fast, 2014

Most Reverend Fathers,
Beloved Faithful,

Between August 1st and 14th the Orthodox Church has the Dormition of the Mother of God fasting period. This fast precedes the great Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God and was established by the Church as a special period for remembering the precious virtues of Virgin Mary and the fasting period with which, according to the Tradition, the Mother of our Lord prepared herself for her falling asleep. This fast was strictly kept by the athonite monks honoring both the Transfiguration and the Dormition, because, as we know, the Mother of our Lord is the Protectress of the Holy Mount Athos.

This is the newest fast of our Church. Its origin is founded in the 5th century, when the veneration of the Mother of God was growing and the Christians began to keep a fasting period before the Dormition Feast. The date and length of this fast (two weeks) were established for the whole Orthodox world in 1166 in Constantinople at a local Synod convened by the Ecumenical Patriarch Loukas Chrysovergis. The St. Savva's Typicon and Teaching about Fasts from the Great Horologion establish a strict fast, with total fasting on Monday, Wednesday and Friday until the IXth Hour (3.00 pm) when we eat dry food. On Tuesday and Thursday we eat boiled vegetables, without oil and Saturday and Sunday we are allowed oil and wine. Fish is allowed only on August 6th on the Transfiguration Feast.

In this fasting period there is a special prayer rule: we read daily the two Paraklesis of the Most Holy Theotokos. In this office we ask the help and protection of the Mother of our Lord in all our sorrows and weaknesses. We call her "protection, treasure of healings, fervent intercessor and firm rampart, defender of Christians". We confess our faith in her supplications towards her Son, supplications that will help all those in distress.

The Dormition Fast is the proper time for us to read the Service of the Small and Great Paraklesis to the Most Holy Theotokos and to ask fervently her help and support. Our world is troubled by war and many Christians are persecuted for their faith. The Syrian conflict has led to the destruction of many churches and monasteries as well as to the killing of many Christians. Two bishops, Metropolitan Paul and Archbishop John of Aleppo have been held hostage for more than one year. In Iraq Christians suffer great persecutions and banishment to the point that in the city of Mosul the whole Christian population has disappeared. The conflict in the Holy Land has restarted and the first victims are the Christian communities. The same state of conflict exists also in the Orthodox world at the border of Ukraine.

My paternal advice is that we use this fasting period for prayer to the Most Holy Mother of God asking for peace in the world, understanding between the different religious communities, and good thoughts for all those responsible, leaders of this world. With her motherly love and her great mercy She will help and protect us.

Archbishop NICOLAE