



❖ *The Holy Synod of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East* ❖

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARIAT

Synodical Statement on Fasting

In today's world, many challenges lead Christians away from dedicated Christian living. The Holy Synod, concerned about the spiritual well-being of the faithful of the Assyrian Church of the East worldwide, has developed a guide to fasting to help them remain in the faith and engage in the spiritual labour of fasting more actively. The Synod emphasises the need for faithfulness in this matter, as it is a spiritual deed that offers more significant benefits than mere physical struggle. Fasting is an indispensable way to examine the soul, to seek repentance, and to return to God. As St Ephraim teaches us: "Fasting purifies the soul, so that it may gaze at God and grow in His presence."

Since the Holy Church has set various periods of fasting throughout the liturgical seasons, we can actively renew and grow in our faith year after year. With each passing year, we can see fasting in a new light, thus helping us to grow spiritually in the love, knowledge, and faith in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. St. Ephraim again teaches us about the effects of fasting: "For the person that fasts, it heals, profits, sets free, instructs, conquers, gives radiance, and gladdens."

The Christian fast is one of intimate union with Christ, as stated in the Gospel of Luke: "*Then they said to Him, 'Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?' And He said to them, 'Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days.'*" Luke 5: 33-35. Therefore, our fast should be bound to Christ, but if this bond does not exist, then our fast is merely a competition with ourselves and others to show that we are capable of fasting. Thus, the question about fasting should not be: how we should fast, but for whom we should fast?

There are assigned practices that we may make use of in order to offer our fasting. These have been assigned in the Holy Scriptures and are to be found in the teachings of the fathers of the Church. These various ways have been accepted and are valid in the Church. The motive for outlining these fasting practices is so that no confusion will create quarrels amongst the faithful regarding fasting. The faithful should not only focus on the outward aspect of fasting but, even more so on the inner aspect, which has spiritual benefits and nourishment, and we can see this stated very clearly in the Holy Gospel: "*Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 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: 16-18.



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St Ephraim again states, “When we seek the Truth, let us labour in fasting, by it let us make it to the Kingdom. The blind people, on the day of their fasting, hasten to pride and without uncertainty, fasting in their mouth and an idol in their heart, prayer in their mouth and sorcery in their minds, their stomachs empty of bread but full of lies, they wash their hands daily, but the hidden blood hidden with them shouts out.”

The Ways of Fasting

1. Abstaining from food and drink from sunrise until sunset;
2. Abstaining from food and drink from sunrise until noon;
3. Vegan nourishments throughout the entirety of the fasting day.

The Synod reiterates that all these methods of fasting are acceptable before the Lord. There must be no expression of disapprobation between the clergy and the faithful regarding the methods of fasting, but rather we must focus on the true purpose of fasting. The purpose of fasting is to strengthen the spirit, to resist bodily desires, to examine the soul, to turn our hearts to God in prayer, and to overcome trials with the fullness of faith. Fasting is spiritually entering into the wilderness with Christ. Today’s world is imposing that we live outside the faith and forget that there is another life—that of the spirit—which requires our utmost attention. Christ was led to the desert, and He revealed to us the importance of fasting. He showed us how we can be victorious over Satan and bodily desires by means of this spiritual weapon.

Therefore, let us take advantage of fasting as an armament that will assist us with preparing ourselves year after year to withstand the influences damaging our relationship with God and our fellow man. As stated by St Ephraim, “*The Lord of the victorious gifted us His armament and He ascended to heaven to be an overseer.*” Let us be true children of God, born from the baptismal waters and of the Holy Spirit. Let us enter into this spiritual struggle in the hope of renewal and awaiting the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, so that we may have life in Him eternally.