

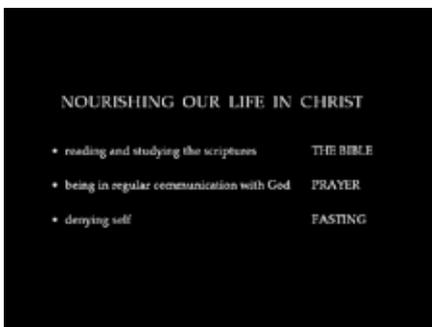


The Bible, Prayer and Fasting

By Father Raphael Armour

In our last session we talked about the Holy Mysteries. But they are not the only ways in which God comes to us.

Today, we will discuss some of the means by which we discover God's will for us, for it isn't much use to have the strength and desire to follow Christ if you don't know which way he is going! But we must see our life as a whole and what we discuss this time is not an alternative to what we discussed during our last session.

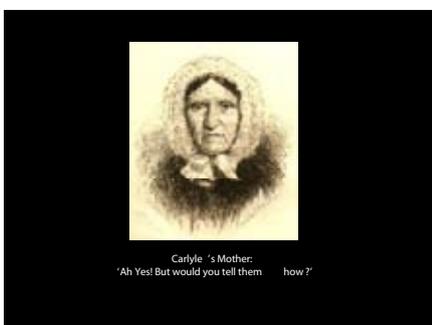


Visual Aid 1: Nourishing Life in Christ

Some of the tried and tested ways of nourishing our Life in Christ are:

- reading and studying the scriptures – **the Bible**
- being in regular communication with God – **Prayer**
- denying our self – **Fasting**.

There is a story about the 19th century philosopher Thomas Carlyle. One Sunday he returned home from church complaining to his mother about the sermon which he had sat through.



Visual Aid 2: Carlyle's Mother

'If I were to preach a sermon,' he said to his mother, 'I would say: "Good people, you know what Jesus has told us. Well, go and do it!"' 'Ah, yes, Thomas', his mother replied, 'But would you tell them *how*?'

Perhaps that's how we feel about our topic today: yes, we should fast; yes, we should pray; yes, we should read the Bible. But *how?*

Let's look at each of these matters in turn. In the time available, this cannot be an exhaustive discussion but the intention is to provide you with some guidelines, which may help.

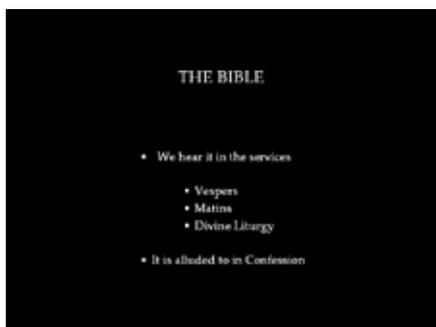
The Bible



Visual Aid 3: Contents of the Bible

Some people may not know our 'jargon'. We use terms like Old Testament (meaning the books written before the time of Jesus – in effect the Jewish scriptures) and New Testament (meaning the four accounts of the Gospel, the Book of Acts, the Epistles of St Paul and other Apostles and the Book of Revelation). So I hope you will at least understand this bit of our jargon, if it's not already familiar to you.

I suspect that not everyone realizes just how much scripture forms part of our Orthodox Services.



Visual Aid 4: The Bible in Services

During Vespers and Matins the Psalter (The Book of Psalms) is read through in its entirety each week – and twice each week during Lent. Three readings – usually from the Old Testament – occur during Vespers on great feasts of the church. Hymns from the New Testament – the Song of Zechariah (*'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel'*), the Song of the Mother of God (*'My soul doth magnify the Lord'*), the Song of Simeon (*'Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace'*) – are read at Matins and Vespers, one of the Resurrection Gospels is read each Sunday at Matins, the Lord's Prayer is read at least once at every service, and the whole New Testament, with the exception of the Book of Revelation, is read at the Liturgy, day by day, during the course of the year.

On top of this, our services are shot through with extracts from scripture or allusions to scriptural passages. It has been calculated that the Divine Liturgy alone contains 98 quotations from the Old and 114 from the New Testament.

Have you stood through the Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete during Lent? Do you

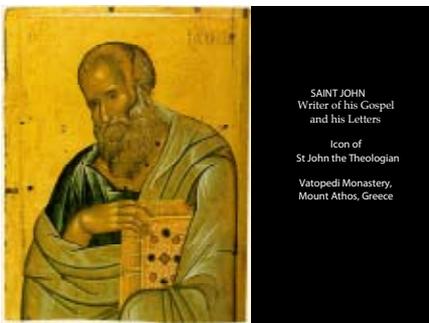
understand it? Well, it's one huge reflection on people and incidents in the Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments.

In the same way, when you come to Confession, the priest may well read prayers which refer to David, Manasseh, Peter, the prostitute weeping at Christ's feet, the publican and the Prodigal Son. If the priest comes to bless your house, the prayer refers to Zacchaeus (you may remember that he was a tax collector and a rather short man, who climbed a sycamore tree so that he could see Jesus as he passed by). So the Bible is not, in fact, something which ought to be unfamiliar to Orthodox people. We simply don't realize that it has always been there and plays an important part in our life in the Church.

Orthodox Christians are very good at kissing the Gospel book and carrying it in processions but my experience in speaking with people is that not many of us spend much time reading it.

'This is all very well', you may say, 'but we are a bit uncertain about reading the Bible at home.' Some people think it is something only Protestants do, some may think it's difficult to understand. Well yes, Protestants do read the Bible – which probably accounts for why they are more familiar with it than are most Orthodox – and yes, parts of the Bible can be difficult to understand. But neither of those things is an excuse for our not reading it.

'But why do I need to read the Bible', you may ask, 'if so much of it is read in the services?' Well, it's not always the easiest thing to absorb what we hear without reading it too. And by reading the scriptures we can grow to understand and appreciate more of God's love and the wonderful things he has done for us. It is one of the ways in which God can speak to us.



Visual Aid 5: Icon of St John the Theologian

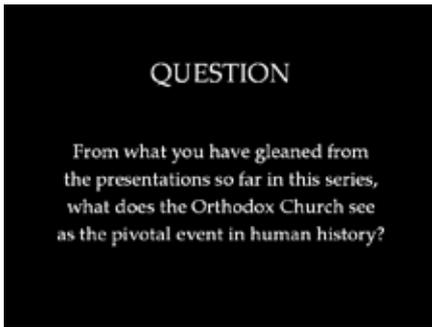
The Gospel, the *good news*, tells us of Jesus Christ – his teachings, his life, his death and his resurrection.

The letters or epistles teach us about:

- doctrine – what we believe and why we believe it
- history – what people reported who had had a firsthand encounter with Jesus in his lifetime
- behaviour – how we are to live the life in Christ
- encouragement – to encourage the young Christian Churches in their faith and life – and
- correction – to steer local churches back from errors of belief and behaviour which sometimes crept into local churches and to keep them 'on target'.

And all of this applies to us too.

Before moving on, I want to ask a question:



Visual Aid 6: The Question

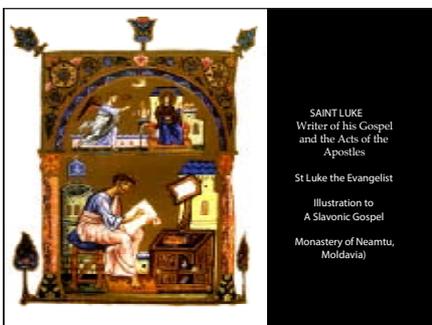
From what you have gleaned from the presentations so far, what does the Orthodox Church see to be the pivotal event in human history?

[Invite responses which hopefully will lead to ...]

Answer: The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If this is true, if it is indeed what we have termed the ‘pivotal event’, then everything has to be looked at in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The evangelists writing trying to make sense of the death and resurrection of Christ and the writers of the Epistles, letters to the early Churches and to individual people, are trying to explain the reality of Jesus Christ and our life in Him, in the light of the resurrection. But by the same token, the understanding – the Tradition of the Orthodox Church – is that everything before the coming of Jesus Christ points to him. So, when we read the books of the Bible written before this ‘event’ (what for convenience we call the Old Testament) – and we see this in the Gospel narratives themselves – we read them in the ‘shadow’ of the Cross. This is, perhaps, one area where we diverge strongly from other Christians. They will read the Old Testament for its historical content, or moral instruction; but while the Orthodox do not necessarily discount these approaches, we are more concerned with discovering pointers to Jesus Christ.

But why should we even bother about the Old Testament, you may ask, if it was written before the birth of Jesus Christ? Isn’t it just for Jewish people?’ Well, bear in mind what I said about reading the Old Testament as pointing towards the Lord Jesus Christ.



Visual Aid 7: Icon of St Luke, Gospel writer, Author of Acts

We can in fact see this approach in St Luke’s account of the evening following the Lord’s resurrection. In St Luke Chapter 24, verses 13 to 35, we read about two of Jesus’ disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. ‘While they were talking and discussing together,

Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him' (Luke 24:15-16). As they walk, the two disciples speak about how Jesus has been betrayed and crucified – how their hopes have been dashed – but that some of their friends had been to the tomb and found it empty. Then St Luke records this: 'And He [that is, Jesus] said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself' (Luke 24: 25-27).

So Jesus himself taught them from the Old Testament. But it was not a 'fundamentalist' approach: '*he interpreted to them in all the scriptures*' the things about himself. He interprets the Hebrew scriptures in the light of his own death and resurrection.

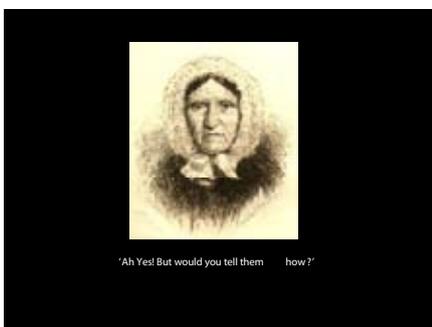
St Paul also writes:

'I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.' (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

Now St Paul was an educated Jewish man, a Pharisee, and he knew the Hebrew scriptures. In this passage we see him interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the life we share in Jesus Christ.

Many Orthodox people are nervous about reading the Bible because they think they may misunderstand things and be branded as heretics. If you are regular in attendance at the services – especially at Vespers and Matins, as well as at the Liturgy, on Sundays and Feast days, you will hear hymns which, in large measure, are commentaries on scripture. They give us an excellent way in which we can understand the Bible. Stand in church regularly and listen!

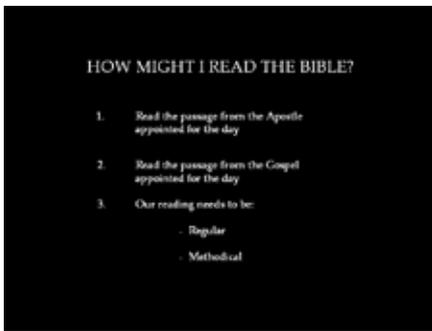
But it still begs the question. You may say, 'How do I go about reading the Bible? It's pretty complicated, after all'. Yes, parts of it can seem difficult to understand, but . . .



Visual Aid 8: Carlyle's Mother

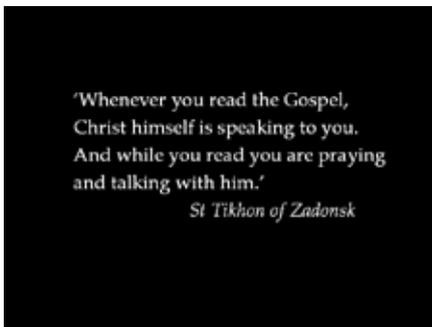
Where would I start?

If you were to start to learn to play the piano you might choose to begin with something simpler than Beethoven's late Sonatas. And that is how we need to start with the Bible.



Visual Aid 9: How might I read The Bible?

Each day a passage from one of the Apostles and from the Gospel are appointed to be read, during the Liturgy. That is something which shows us that the Orthodox Church sees that reading the scriptures should be both regular and methodical. Perhaps we can start by reading those passages at home. We can read the passages slowly and thoughtfully, allowing the words to ‘sink in’ to our minds and hearts.



Visual Aid 10: Passage from St Tikhon

‘Whenever you read the Gospel’, wrote St Tikhon of Zadonsk, ‘Christ himself is speaking to you. And while you read, you are praying and talking with him.’¹ We also stay ‘in tune’ with the life of the whole Church in this way as, day by day, the scriptures are read both in the church and in our homes. In this way our home-life becomes bound more closely to the life of the Church. We can read the passage on our own or together as a family.

[We can find out these passages in various lectionaries and calendars which are published; there is one by the Fellowship of St John the Baptist, using the New Calendar and one by the Diocese of Sourozh, using the Old Calendar. There are even Orthodox Lectionaries on the internet!]

And there are commentaries on the various books of the Bible by the Fathers of the Church and by other Orthodox scholars, to help us in our understanding. Metropolitan Kallistos has said:

‘We do not read the Bible as isolated individuals, interpreting it solely by the light of our private understanding, or in terms of current theories about source, form or redaction criticism. We read it as members of the Church, in communion with others throughout the ages. The final criterion for our interpretation of Scripture is the mind of the Church. And this means keeping constantly in view how the meaning of Scripture is explained and applied in Holy Tradition: that is to say, how the Bible is understood by the Fathers, and the saints, and how it is used in liturgical worship.’²

By ‘being in communion with others throughout the ages’, as Bishop Kallistos puts it, we try to live our life with the same understanding as those who have gone before:



Visual Aid 11: How to live with understanding of the Bible

- hearing God speaking to us
- being challenged by the words of Christ and the teachings of the apostles
- striving to bring our lives into conformity with the will of God
- learning how we are to conduct ourselves
- nourishing our life in Christ

and these things happen both at home and when we come together in the Church because our life is one.

Prayer

Let's move on to today's second topic.

An early Christian writer, Evagrius of Pontus described prayer as 'the converse of the mind with God'. And St Isaac the Syrian wrote: 'Just as nothing resembles God, so there is no ministry or work which resembles converse with God in stillness.'

Those two quotations both use the word 'converse', 'conversation', which in turn expresses an important component of prayer: intimacy.

The Russian theologian, Vasilii Rozanov (1856-1919) wrote: 'There is no Life without prayer. Without prayer there is only madness and horror.'

The soul of Orthodoxy consists in the gift of prayer.'³

Jesus, himself, in his teaching said '*When* you pray ...' It is not an optional extra! When the disciples came to Jesus and said: 'Lord, teach us to pray', he gave them that most famous of all prayers, what we call 'The Lord's Prayer' or the 'Our Father' which shows us important basics about prayer:

- **Our Father in heaven**

Prayer is a relationship with God who is a person – the Father, who is the Lover of Mankind. In fact, if you think of how we usually use the word 'lover' it is a word with incredibly intimate connotations!

- **May your name be hallowed**

We pray that God's Name be held Holy, by us and by other people. So it follows that He is holy too. And because we are His children through baptism in Christ, to some degree we share that holiness.

- **Your kingdom come**

We yearn to share ever more closely in God's life. It's the cry of the good thief crucified next to Jesus: 'Remember me, [Lord], when you come into your kingdom' (Luke: 23:42). We are also praying for everything in heaven and earth to be brought more fully under God's rule.

- **Your will be done on earth as in heaven**

We pray that God's will may be done – that heaven might come down to earth.

- **Give us today our daily bread**

We ask God to supply the things we need for our material life – not necessarily the things we want to have. We may need a car – but it doesn't have to be a BMW! Remember what Jesus said: 'Seek first his [God's] kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well' (Matthew 6:33). But the Greek has a further meaning that the English doesn't fully capture: we ask for 'the bread of the Day', not just everyday food but the food of God's eternal day, which is Himself.

- **And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors** ⁴

We don't ask God to forgive us just because we forgive others but in the same measure as we forgive them. There are some hard sayings of Jesus and three are directly on this point. 'For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses' (Matthew 6: 14-15; see also Mark 11:25 and an equally strong statement in Matthew 18:35).

- **And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one**

We stand in need of God's guidance and deliverance every moment of our life.

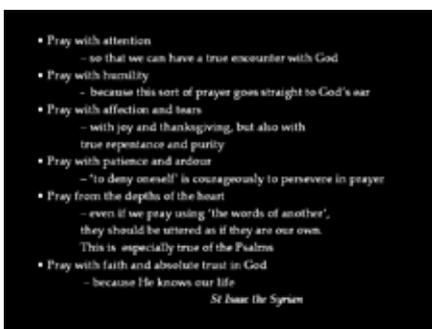
But how to pray?



*Visual Aid 12:
Carlyle's Mother*

So, we are back to Thomas Carlyle's mother: 'Would you tell them how?'

St Isaac the Syrian, whom we mentioned a few minutes ago, is a good guide, and teaches us many useful things.



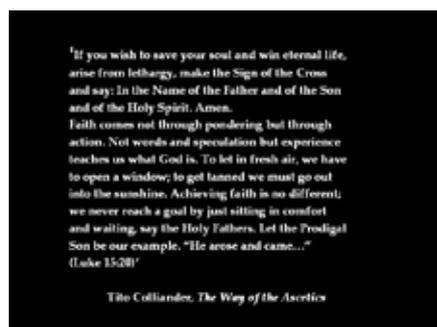
*Visual Aid 13:
Advice of St Isaac the Syrian*

He says we should:

- Pray with attention – so that we can have a true encounter with God
- Pray with humility – because this sort of prayer goes straight to God's ear

- Pray with affection and tears – with joy and thanksgiving, but also with true repentance and purity.
- Pray with patience and ardour – ‘to deny oneself’ is courageously to persevere in prayer.
- Pray from the depths of the heart – even if we pray using ‘the words of another’ they should be uttered as if they are our own. St. Isaac says this is especially true of the Psalms.
- Pray with faith and absolute trust in God – because He knows our life.

There is a wonderful little book by a Scandinavian writer, Tito Colliander, called *The Way of the Ascetics*, which begins in this way:



Visual Aid 14: *from The Way of the Ascetics*

‘If you wish to save your soul and win eternal life, arise from lethargy, make the Sign of the Cross and say: In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Faith comes not through pondering but through action. Not words and speculation but experience teaches us what God is. To let in fresh air, we have to open a window; to get tanned we must go out into the sunshine. Achieving faith is no different; we never reach a goal by just sitting in comfort and waiting, say the Holy Fathers. Let the Prodigal Son be our example. “He arose and came ...” (Luke 15:20).’⁵

The tried and tested way of prayer is to use a book and simply read the prayers slowly and with focus. But we must not try to run before we can walk. Echoing the fathers – and indeed the notes to be found in most books of prayers – Metropolitan Anthony Bloom taught us that it is better to pray a few prayers with real focus and devotion than to simply rush through 20 pages of prayers. There are no prizes for the first one to finish, or establish a new ‘best time’! St Paul writes about our needing to be like athletes training for a race. In the same way that we should not expect to be able to run the London Marathon if the most we do is walk to the local shop, or play the late Beethoven Sonatas when we cannot even manage ‘Twinkle, twinkle, little star’ – so if we are not used to praying, we should not expect it to come easily to us. The London Marathon, the late Beethoven Sonatas and prayer have this in common: they all require training and discipline. How we live our life has a real impact on our ‘performance’.

The Jesus Prayer

One form of prayer – what is known as ‘the prayer of the heart’, or ‘the Jesus Prayer’ – developed over many centuries.



Visual Aid 15: The Jesus Prayer

It is one of the simplest forms of prayer: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me’ or some say, ‘have mercy on me a sinner’. It is a prayer of great simplicity but of great depth also. This prayer sums up our entire faith.

- **Lord Jesus Christ** - the ‘total’ Christ – human and divine – the Christ who became a human for us and to whom we pray.

Lord – everything belongs to Him and has been created through him.

Jesus – the Name which the angel told Joseph must be given to the child Mary was carrying: ‘You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins’ (Matthew 1:21). The name Jesus means ‘one who saves’.

Christ – the anointed one, the Messiah, anointed by and with the Holy Spirit, appointed by God to lead his people.

- **Son of God** – he is the Son, sharing all the divinity of God the Father. So now we see that this prayer is absolutely rooted in the Holy Trinity.
- **Have mercy on me** – we recognize our dependence upon Jesus Christ, for mercy, not in a legal sense as a judge shows mercy in a court of law, but mercy in the sense of love, springing from relationship.

Silence

Ultimately, all words, whether from books or from ourselves are inadequate. As we become used to bringing ourselves into the presence of God, we shall find that silence is as authentic a response as words. Where, like two close friends, it is enough to be together without the need for words.

So, perhaps in answer to Mrs Carlyle I would offer this advice – and it is only advice, not a definitive statement, because there is no one, single, ‘right way’ for everybody:



Visual Aid 16: Advice on Prayer

- Stand in front of your icons. Be as calm as you are able. Make the sign of the Cross and say: ‘In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’

- Use a book of prayers and read some of the morning and evening prayers each day. Some of the prayers may already be familiar to you from the services.
- Take your time. Let the prayers sink into you so that, over time, they become part of you.
- Read the passages of scripture appointed for the day with your prayers – perhaps the Gospel in the morning and the reading from the Apostle in the evening – again, read them slowly, perhaps two or three times and let the passage sink in.
- With your daily prayers, also read one or two psalms (or a portion of a long psalm each day). Start at Psalm 1, read each of them in turn and when you reach Psalm 150 start again at Psalm 1.
- Remember before God your family, your bishop, the priest of your parish, the members of the councils of your parish and diocese, your friends, those with whom you work, those who have asked you to pray for them, and for your relatives and friends who have died.
- Pray for your enemies. That may be difficult but it is something Christ told us to do.
- Pray for yourself.
- Give thanks to God for His blessings and, in the evening, think about the day and acknowledge your sins.
- Say the Jesus Prayer (perhaps 25 times).
- Stand in silence.

When it comes to your preparation for Holy Communion, you might want to read some of the preparation prayers with your daily prayers over three or four days before coming to the chalice, rather than all together on Saturday evening or Sunday morning. And in the same way, perhaps you will read the Prayers of Thanksgiving for Communion with your prayers over two or three days after receiving the Holy Gifts.

This is advice – and it may not work for you. Each of us is different. That, in part, is why every one of us needs a spiritual father – or dare I say mother? – someone who will care for us, with whom we can be ruthlessly honest about our life, who will encourage us on our journey on the Way and keep us on the right path if we seem to be moving off balance – in our prayer and in our understanding of scripture, as well as in other areas of our life.

If you are starting to pray for the first time, you may become distracted and find it difficult to focus. Bishop Kallistos quotes an Indian writer who describes our thoughts as being like monkeys jumping from branch to branch in the trees. You are not especially sinful, so do not be discouraged – that's the way it is.

Sometimes, I am asked to speak to groups of non-Orthodox Christians and I usually talk about arriving in church: you come in, you make the sign of the Cross, you venerate the icons and you stand quietly trying to focus your mind and what pious thought comes into your head? 'Did I turn the gas off'? It is wonderful to see the looks of relief on peoples' faces when they know that others have the same experience!

So there are distractions and temptations to keep us from prayer but it does not mean we do nothing. We need to resist them; to struggle with our life. That is the way of the saints – and St Paul tells us that we are all called to be saints.



Visual Aid 17: Donatello's Mary Magdalene

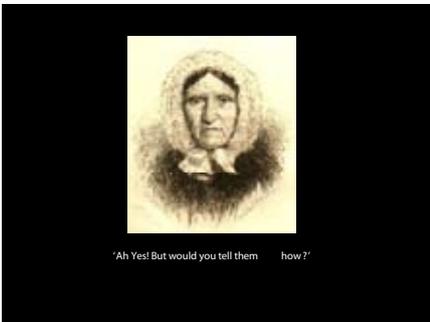
Fasting

Just as Jesus said to his disciples 'when you pray' (not 'if you pray'), so he also said 'when you fast' (not 'if you fast'). So, neither prayer nor fasting is an optional extra!

Many religions practice fasting. The Moslems, for example, have the period of Ramadan when they eat nothing during the hours of daylight. It is rather odd, however, that in the Western Churches fasting has been all but abandoned over the last 150 years. In Britain, at one time, Parliament used to proclaim National Days of Fasting during wars or periods of plague or failure of crops. Everyone fasted and prayed in church for a whole day. Today, we have the National Lottery ...

Our life in the Orthodox Church is punctuated by fasts. Most Wednesdays and Fridays are fasting days as are the 40 days before Christmas and 50 days before Easter – days when the service books say we should eat only a vegan diet – no meat, no dairy products, no fish, or wine, or olive oil, (except on certain days).

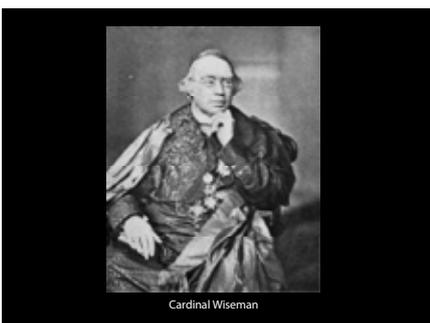
If Thomas Carlyle's mother (remember her from earlier?)



Visual Aid 18: Carlyle's Mother

wants to know how to fast, she need only read the passages in various books. But that will teach her only about externals. We must not, however, become totally absorbed by the externals of fasting: Lent is not the same as going on a diet!

Nor is it simply following rules. In his book *Eminent Victorians* Lytton Strachey wrote of Cardinal Wiseman:



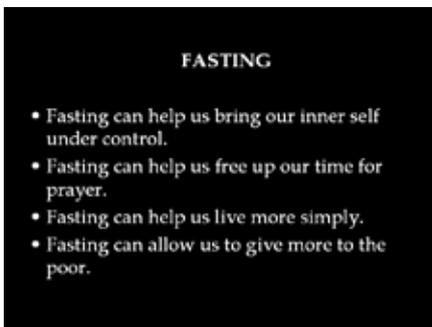
Visual Aid 19: Cardinal Wiseman

‘He loved a good table. Some of Newman’s disciples were astonished and grieved that he sat down to four courses of fish during Lent. “I am sorry to say,’ remarked one of them afterwards, “that there is a lobster-salad side to the Cardinal”’.



Visual Aid 20: Cardinal Wiseman with Lobster Salad

Perhaps we need to ask ‘why’, rather than ‘how’. Here are some answers which in turn may generate some more questions:



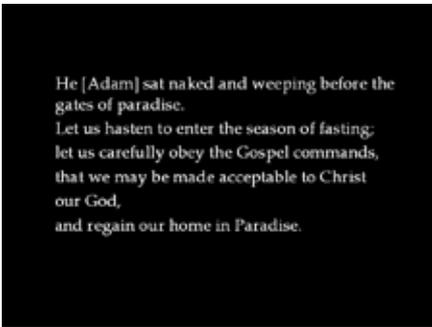
Visual Aid 21: Answers on Fasting

- Fasting can help us bring our self under control. Am I living the way I should every day? Am I fasting from food but devouring my brothers and sisters instead?
- Fasting can help us free up our time for prayer and for others rather than spending it in the kitchen. Do I use my time in the wisest and most profitable way?
- Fasting helps us live more simply. Do I need as many things as I have or feel the need to buy? What impact do my spending habits have on the environment? Do I have a ‘lobster-salad’ side?
- Fasting allows us to give more to the poor because the Fathers are clear that money we save from eating more simply does not go into our pocket. It is to be given away. Do I give money regularly, realistically and sacrificially to God’s work?

We should not limit our fasting to food. I remember Father Alexander Schmemmann saying that when he was a child, the first thing his mother did when the family returned from Forgiveness Sunday Vespers was to lock the piano – and leave it locked until Easter. Fr John Jillions, my predecessor in Cambridge, much to the horror of his children, locks the television set away for the whole of Lent. Do I need so much diversion? Does television become something which distracts me from prayer and comes between me and my family and friends?

None of the things we have mentioned – food, things on sale in shops, money, pianos, television sets, even lobster-salad – is bad. But everything – our time and our resources – needs to be used responsibly and to the glory of God.

So our fasting is not negative; it is a door through which we can enter, even a few steps, further into the Kingdom. On Forgiveness Sunday – the last day before Lent begins when we commemorate the expulsion of Adam from Paradise – we sing these words at Vespers:



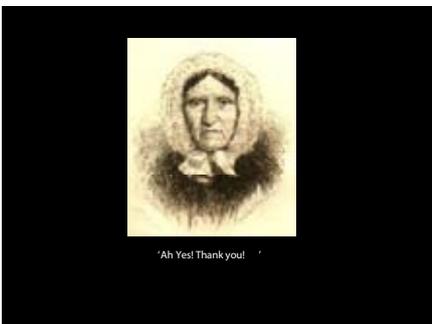
Visual Aid 22: Vespers text on Adam

*He [Adam] sat naked and weeping before the gates of paradise.
Let us hasten to enter the season of fasting;
let us carefully obey the Gospel commands,
that we may be made acceptable to Christ our God,
and regain our home in Paradise.*

Perhaps that's it in a nutshell: we fast to be obedient to the Gospel, to be acceptable to Christ and to regain our home. It doesn't have to wait until Great Lent. Every day prescribed as a fasting day can be for us a 'Lent-in-miniature'.

We spoke earlier about the need for a spiritual father to help us in achieving balance in relation to prayer and the understanding of scripture. This holds equally true of fasting. Either we may be tempted not to fast at all or to go completely 'over the top' or even to adopt the lobster-salad approach. We need balance. Fasting for an eighth century monk in Constantinople may not be appropriate for a manual labourer, or for someone working in a stressful atmosphere in an office or hospital in twenty-first century London, and certainly not for someone who is ill.

Earlier, we thought of St. Paul's words 'we are all called to be saints' (Romans 1:7). Our sanctification will not come to us wrapped in cellophane. St Paul also tells us to 'work out our [your own] salvation with fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:12); not trying to save ourselves by good deeds, but working out in our daily life what God has 'worked into us' by His Grace and Love. It is our calling – it is 'Living the Faith'. Perhaps even Mrs Carlyle would understand.



Visual Aid 23: Carlyle's Mother: 'Thank You'.

Raphael Armour

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1 Cited in Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, revised edition, (St Vladimir's Seminary Press: Crestwood, New York, 2002), p. 111.

- 2 Ibid., p. 110.
- 3 Ibid., p. 105.
- 4 Of the two somewhat different versions of the Lord's Prayer found in the gospels (which are both likely to be translations into Greek from Aramaic) that in Matthew 6:9-13 is most commonly used in liturgical worship. The Revised Standard Version translates it with the words 'debts' and 'debtors'. Luke 11:2-4 is less metaphorical, asking God to 'forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us' (RSV). Older versions preferred 'trespasses' and 'trespass', and some modern translations render the petition 'forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us'.
- 5 Tito Colliander, *The Way of the Ascetics*, trans. Katherine Ferré (St Vladimir's Seminary Press: Crestwood, New York, 1985) p. 1.