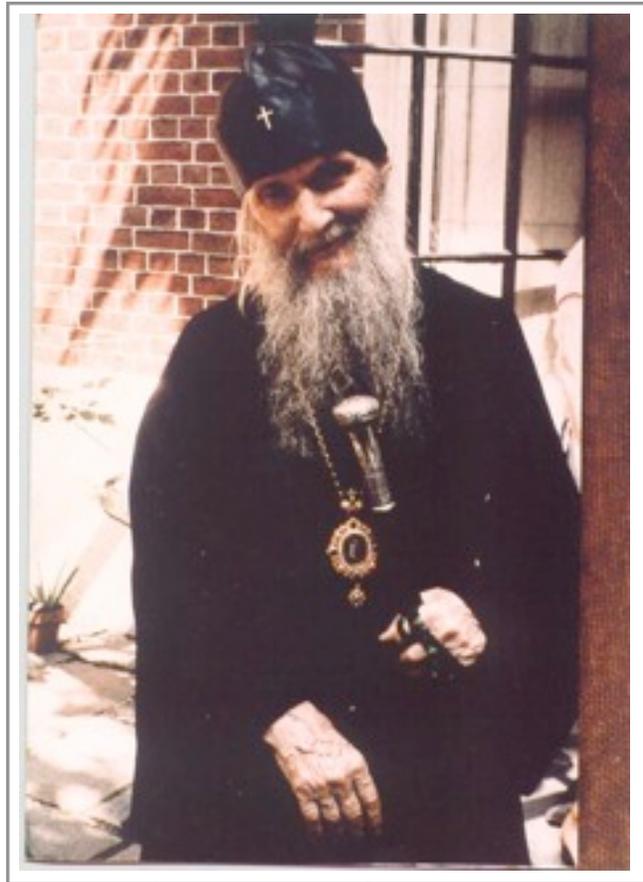


# Excerpt from Homily on Prayer, Feast and Fasts

*by Saint Philaret of New York*

We have many fasts: four lengthy ones, the Great Fast (Great Lent), the Apostles' Fast, the Dormition Fast and the Nativity Fast; and a number of shorter ones.

What an amazing and un-Christian relationship so many people now have to these fasts. The fasts are violated by people without a qualm of conscience, as if the matter was about some nonsense which had no significance. The Church, on the other hand, takes a very serious view of the matter, and excludes from Holy Communion those who refuse to keep the fasts without cause. Indeed, Saint Seraphim of Sarov very pointedly said, "One who does not observe the fasts is not a Christian, no matter what he considers or calls himself ... and you should not pay attention to him, no matter what he says."



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*(continued on p 2)*

Fasting is absolutely indispensable for man. From the external aspect, it is a struggle of filial obedience to God, Who has given us the rules of fasting through His Holy Spirit. From the inner aspect, fasting is a struggle of restraint and self-limitation. In this lies the great value and sense of fasting, since a strict observance of fasts tempers one's will and perfects the character of one who is firm in his religious convictions and actions. Let us not forget that Christ Himself fasted, and foretold that His apostles would also fast.

We hear people claiming that fasting is harmful to the health. But strict fasting is not required of people who are ill, and they fast only according to their strength. Most important, one should remember that it is only those people who do not fast who speak about the "harm to health" of fasting. But those who do observe fasting will never say this, for they know from personal experience that not only is fasting not harmful, but it is positively beneficial to bodily health.

Fasting is not merely a restraining from food. During the days of the fasts, the Church sings, "While fasting bodily, let us also fast spiritually..." True fasting includes deeds of Christian mercy. It is an alienation of the evil-one, a restraint of the tongue, a laying aside of anger, a cutting off of vices and an exposure of falsehood... Thus, for a Christian, fasting is a time of restraint and self-education in all respects, and a real Christian fast gives believers a great moral satisfaction. The great teacher of Christian asceticism Bishop Theophan the Recluse says of fasting:

"Fasting appears gloomy until one steps into its arena. But begin and you will see what light it brings after darkness, what freedom from bonds, what release after a burdensome life..."