

Special Lesson - Great Lent

Lesson 1. Preparing for Lent

Bible Study Preparation and Materials Needed:

Reading of the day: Matthew 6:1-21

Prepare Ahead: The Background section is material for the instructor and is not meant to be used word for word. The answers to the Bible Study discussion questions are provided for informational purposes and can be read aloud or shared verbally.

Optional video for discussion: [In Step with Christ #9 - Poon Paregentan](#) (duration 15:02)

* Instructor can choose to apply this as a part of the bible study discussion lesson or their own preparation purposes.

References:

www.vemkar.us

Orthodox Study Bible

Memory Verse:

“Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you openly.”

- Matthew 6:4

Bible Study Lesson

Open with prayer:

Իմաստութիւն Յօր՝ Յիսուս, տո՛ւր ինձ իմաստութիւն, զբարիս խորհել եւ խօսել եւ գործել առաջի Քո՝ յամենայն ժամ. ի չար խորհրդոց, ի բանից եւ ի գործոց փրկեա՛ զիս. եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Eemasdootyoon Hor Heesoos, door eents eemasdootyoon uzparees khorel yev khosel yev kordz arachi ko hamenayn jham. Ee char khorhrtos, ee paneets yev kordzots prgya zees yev voghormya ko araradzots eents pazmameghees. Amen.

Wisdom of the Father, O Jesus, grant to me the wisdom to think, speak, and do that which is good in Your sight. Save me from all evil and distracting thoughts, words, and deeds. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

For Students

Preparing for Lent (Matthew 6:1-21)

¹ Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ³ But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. ⁵ “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ⁶ But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. ⁷ And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. ⁹ In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

¹⁴ “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

¹⁶ “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. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Questions:

1. *What is the point of Lent?*
2. *Why do you think our Church Fathers decided this to be the reading for Poon Paregentan, the last day before Lent begins?*
3. *How are we supposed to give alms (donate to or help the poor)? Why would Christ tell people to do it that way?*
4. *What is the Armenian understanding of giving alms? What is the Armenian word and what does it really mean?*
5. *What is true prayer for God?*
6. *Why does Christ emphasize forgiveness, both in the Lord’s Prayer and after the prayer? Why is it so difficult to forgive?*
7. *Why is fasting needed and how should it be done?*
8. *Besides fasting from food, what else can you fast from?*
9. *How do we lay up treasures in heaven?*

For the Teacher

Background:

Today is **Poon Paregentan** and it is the last Sunday, which precedes the six-week period [40 days] of Great Lent. It falls seven weeks prior to the Resurrection [Easter Sunday] and is moveable within an interval of thirty-five days, along with the Feast of the Resurrection [Easter], from February 1 to March 7. The theme of this day recalls man's existence while living in perfect harmony with God in the Garden of Eden. The hymns and odes of the day recall the story of God creating mankind in His image and likeness, placing man in a bountiful garden paradise without sin and allowing man to share in His divinity.

Poon Paregentan ushers the faithful into the Lenten period of strict fasting, penance and reconciliation, with its ultimate destination of Easter, the Feast of the Glorious Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

This reading is part of the Sermon on the Mount. This "sermon" probably covered several days of preaching. In it, Jesus proclaimed His attitude toward the Law. Position, authority, and money are not important in His Kingdom – what matters is faithful obedience from the heart. In this particular passage, Jesus preaches about prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (helping the poor), the three main tools all Christians must use to combat evil in this world and especially during Lent. These three disciplines relate directly to God's righteousness.

These three acts of Christian virtue express continual conversion in turning away from sin in three ways:

1. Almsgiving: conversion in relation to others
2. Prayer: conversion in relation to God
3. Fasting: conversion in relation to oneself

Questions:

1. What is the point of Lent?

In the early Church, those who were converting to Christianity would spend the forty days before Holy Week preparing for their baptisms that would take place on Easter Eve. During these forty days, those learning about the faith, called catechumens, would attend church to explore this new faith and would also fast. This was a period of preparation for the spiritual war they were about to embark on. Today, since the adult baptisms are relatively few, Lent has become a time when Christians can renew their spiritual life and strengthen their spiritual weapons and tools for living in this world.

When soldiers go into battle, they take weapons to fight against the enemy, they usually take weapons like guns, armor, knives, and other things to fight. With these weapons, they are able to defeat the enemy that is trying to harm and kill them. These new Christians were also given weapons to fight against evil, Satan, and the attacks of demons.

Today, we too can strengthen and master these same weapons to wage war against the enemy in our lives.

2. Why do you think our Church Fathers decided this to be the reading for Poon Paregentan, the last day before Lent begins?

The main points of this reading are prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. As previously stated, these are tools and weapons we use to combat evil in our lives and in the world.

Prayer is how we communicate with God. Satan hates that we are able to speak with God and will do everything to prevent us from talking to God. He will try to distract us, make us tired, or trick us into thinking that it is not important or fruitful to pray, for prayer can chase away Satan.

Fasting is when we do not eat certain foods (meats and dairy products). However, fasting can also be when we take time away from certain things: shopping, TV, social media, games, etc. When we take time away from these things, we are confirming that these things do not control us, but we are in control. If we cannot say "no" to eating a hamburger or buying shoes or turning off social media, we become slaves to those things.

Almsgiving is donating to the poor and helping the needy. We do this because we are not alone in our faith, but we have brothers and sisters who need help and God has given us the responsibility to assist others, by showing love.

These three weapons: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are the tools we must practice during Lent, becoming stronger and better versed in using them against the evils of this world.

3. How are we supposed to give alms (donate to or help the poor)? Why would Christ tell people to do it that way?

Christ says that when we give alms and help the poor, we should not act like people who show off in order to gain fame and praise of others, but to keep it secret. The famous passage, “do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing” means that we should keep it discreet. Today many give in order to have their name mentioned or so that they become famous, but Jesus reminds us saying, “Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full” (Matthew 6:2). That is to say their reward is fame and praise of others, but they will not be rewarded in heaven.

4. What is the Armenian understanding of giving alms? What is the Armenian word and what does it really mean?

The Armenian word for almsgiving is *ողորմութիւն* (voghormootyoon), which means mercy. Christ encourages us to give mercy to others who are in need. Mercy (voghormootyoon) in Armenian does not mean what we think it means. When we hear the word “mercy” we think it means that God has the power to destroy us, but He decides not to. However, for the Armenians, mercy has a different meaning. The Armenian word is related to another Armenian word, *ողորլ* (voghorg) which means “flat or smooth”. So the Armenian idea and concept of mercy is to smooth the path before someone and to make their life easier. When we give alms or donate to the poor, we are trying to make their life easier so they can reach their destination: God. Likewise, when we pray to God and ask for mercy, we are asking God to smooth our journey and remove any obstacles in our way, so we can reach Him.

5. What is true prayer for God?

Christ does not condemn the use of many words per se, but teaches that words must express the desire for communion with God. Jesus gives us specific words to repeat, the Lord’s Prayer (vv. 9-13). It is not repetition itself that is condemned, but vain repetition. Many psalms, prayers, and hymns of the Church have been repeated for countless generations in the worship of God “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23).

True prayer is not telling God what He already knows and then telling Him what to do about it, nor is it appearing pious in front of others. True prayer is (1) humble (go into your room, v. 6), (2) personal (pray to your Father, v. 6), and (3) sincere (do not use vain repetitions, v. 7).

6. Why does Christ emphasize forgiveness, both in the Lord’s Prayer and after the prayer? Why is it so difficult to forgive?

Jesus insists on mutual forgiveness between people as a precondition of God’s forgiveness. Those who do not forgive are not forgiven — period. This teaching is repeated in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35), which concludes with the same teaching. To not forgive others is to willfully flee from the forgiveness of God for ourselves.

One of the main reasons why people do not forgive others is because of pride. People think that they are right and do not want to lower themselves to forgiving another because they think it means that they are admitting the other is right or condoning what they have done. This is not what forgiveness. Forgiveness is allowing the possibility to have a relationship with that person again and with God.

7. Why is fasting needed and how should it be done?

The purpose of fasting is not to “give up” things, nor to do something “sacrificial.” The purpose of fasting is to learn discipline, to gain control of those things that are indeed within our control but that we so often allow to control us. In our culture especially, food dominates the lives of many people. We collect cookbooks. We have an entire TV network devoted to food [the “Food Channel”]. We have eating disorders, diets galore, weight loss pills, liposuction treatments, stomach stapling—all sorts of things that proceed out of the fact that we often allow food, which in and of itself cannot possibly control us, to control us. We fast in order to gain control, to discipline ourselves, to gain control of those things that we have allowed to get out of control. Giving up candy—unless one is controlled by candy—is not fasting. It is giving up candy, or it is done with the idea that we fast in order to suffer. But we do not fast in order to suffer. We fast in order to get a grip on our lives and to regain control of those things that have gotten out of control. Further, there is the saying which should be repeated throughout Great Lent, “*while fasting from food, let us also fast from our passions.*”

8. Besides fasting from food, what else can you fast from?

One can fast from anything that has a control over you. This can be TV, social media, shopping, work, toxic relationships, or other things. When we are under the influence of other things or when we cannot say no to certain things, we become slaves to those objects and that is the worst type of slavery, because then we are slaves to inanimate objects.

9. How do we lay up treasures in heaven?

Storing treasures in heaven is not limited to tithing but is accomplished by all acts of obedience to God. There is a sense in which giving our money to God's work is like investing in heaven. But we should seek to please God not only in our giving but also in fulfilling God's purposes in all we do.

Jesus made it clear that having the wrong treasures leads to our hearts being in the wrong place. What we treasure the most controls us, whether we admit it or not. If possessions or money become too important to us, we must reestablish control or get rid of items. Jesus calls for a decision that allows us to live contentedly with whatever we have because we have chosen eternal values over temporary, earthly treasures.

Close with prayer:

Պահապան ամենայնի Քրիստոս, աջ Քո հովանի լիցի ի վերայ իմ, ի տուէ եւ ի գիշերի, ի նստիլ ի տան, ի գնալ ի ճանապարհ, ի ննջել եւ ի յառնել, զի մի երբեք սասանեցայց եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Bahaban amenayn Kreesdos, ach Ko hovanee leetsee ee vera eem; ee dveh yev ee keesheree, ee nsdeel ee dan, ee knal ee janabarh, ee nunchel yev ee harnel, zee mee yerpek sasanetsayts yev voghormya Ko araradzots yev eents pazmamyghees. Amen.

O Christ, guardian of all, let Your right hand guard and shelter me, by day and by night, at home and abroad, in sleeping and in waking, that I may never stumble. Have mercy upon Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

At Home

Please complete the assignment by next class.

Memory Verse:

"Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you openly." - Matthew 6:4