

You have downloaded a document from



The Central and Eastern European Online Library

The joined archive of hundreds of Central-, East- and South-East-European publishers, research institutes, and various content providers

Source: Analele Științifice ale Universității »Alexandru Ioan Cuza« din Iași. Teologie Ortodoxă
Scientific Annals of the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi - Orthodox Theology

Location: Romania

Author(s): Nicolae Preda

Title: Partaking of Fish – Uniformity and Diversity within Worship Ordinances
Partaking of Fish – Uniformity and Diversity within Worship Ordinances

Issue: 1/2018

Citation style: Nicolae Preda. "Partaking of Fish – Uniformity and Diversity within Worship Ordinances". Analele Științifice ale Universității »Alexandru Ioan Cuza« din Iași. Teologie Ortodoxă 1:117-126.
<https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=740036>

Partaking of Fish – Uniformity and Diversity within Worship Ordinances

Nicolae PREDA

*Diac. Lecturer. PhD.
Faculty of Orthodox Theology,
University of Bucharest, ROMANIA*

Abstract:

The partaking of fish on Wednesdays and Fridays, during Pentecost, is a liturgical issue of high relevance, because it concerns many faithful of our Church, especially because this liturgical specification was generalized and introduced in most church calendars. Unfortunately, there has not been extensive research on the specification “partaking of fish”, which we encounter in the church calendar, although the way it was understood was different.

Keywords: *Pentecostarion, Resurrection, Pentecost, feast day, partaking of fish, Typikon*

I. The Feast of the Lord’s Resurrection - Prototype of Church Ordinances

The brilliant thought of the Holy Fathers can be perceived even in the way in which they were able to establish the order of the fasting, laying at its foundation the very feast that brings with it the eating of all “earthly goodies” (*cf.* “Rules for the Meal” in *Ceaslov* 2001: 133), namely the Resurrection of the Lord. Here is, for example, the exhortations of St. John Chrysostom († 407) from the “Paschal Homily” to “the holy and bright day of the glorious and saving Resurrection of Christ our God”:

If anyone is devout and a lover of God, let them enjoy this beautiful and radiant festival (...) If anyone has wearied themselves in fasting, let them now receive recompense. Enter all of you, therefore, into the joy of our Lord, and, whether first or last, receive your reward (...) O rich and poor, one with another, dance for joy! O you ascetics and you negligent, celebrate the day! You that have fasted and you that have disregarded the fast, rejoice today! The table is rich-laden: feast royally, all of you! Let all partake of the feast of faith. Let all receive the riches of goodness. Let no one lament their poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed... (*Penticostar* 1999: 24-25).

If we carefully observe the structure of the Great Lent (the 40-day period before Easter) and the structure of the Pentecostal period (the time between Easter and Pentecost), we find that the two liturgical ordinances are regulated according to the overwhelming importance of the great feast of the Resurrection. Those related to the Great Lent have special preparation for the proper welcome of the Lord's Resurrection, while those of the Pentecostal period reveal the immense joy that encompasses the entire creation with the Resurrection [For 40 days, some say even to Pentecost, a "single feast" is celebrated, "all days have the same power as Sunday" and, in general, the fasting is completely suppressed] (Hieromonk Makarios of Simonopetra, trans. Ică jr. 2003²: 267). The harshness ["The 40-day fasting, which, unlike the other annual fastings, is called the first fasting or the great fasting, is harsher than the other fastings; and then the fasting from the Holy Week is harsher than the 40-day fasting"] (Mitrofanovici 1909: 172) of the Great Lent [A complete "image" of the way of fasting during the Lent, but also of the dispensations, according to the Church ordinances, Rules and Typikon, which are based on ancient Christian customs and canons, is found at Badea Cireșanu: "*In the holy and the great forty-day period, in the first day, that is Monday, after the Cheesefare Sunday, it is not right to eat; also on Tuesday. And on Wednesday after the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, we eat bread, seeds, drink water and mead. Those who can not keep this fast, will eat bread and drink water Tuesday after Vespers. On Saturdays and Sundays we can eat oil and wine. In the rest of the weeks, we eat nothing till 5 o'clock in the evening, eating dry food, avoiding **crayfish**, except on Saturdays and Sundays. We do not eat fish within the forty days but on the Annunciation Day and Palm Sunday; Fish eggs are eaten on March 9 (40 Martyrs) and on Saturday of Lazarus. The sick, the children, the elders, and the helpless, are dispensed by this restraint, but they also fast at least with the spirit*"] (Cireșeanu 1912, vol. III : 396-397), on the one hand, as well as "the consolation" from the Pentecost period (the less harsher way of fasting and the partaking of fish on Wednesdays and Fridays) ["The current use is to suspend altogether the fasting in the Bright Week and partly during the 40 days after Easter"] (Hieromonk Makarios of Simonopetra, trans. Ică jr. 2003²: 494, note 20), on the other, find their reason, without a doubt, in our Savior's statement:

And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but yours eat and drink? And he said unto them, Can you make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days (Luke 5, 33-35).

Therefore, we can say that the reason why the Holy Fathers designated this “partaking of fish” on Wednesday and Friday, during Pentecost, that is, until the Ascension of the Lord, and then to Pentecost and Sunday of All Saints, is precisely the Savior’s answer to the scribes and Pharisees (*cf.* Luke 5, 33-35). Moreover, the forty days until Ascension are the last in which the Savior, *the Bridegroom of the Church*, is with the Apostles on earth (*cf.* Acts 1, 3).

II. Unity in Diversity

The fact that all the sons of the Church are called to enjoy the Resurrection (both those who have labored (fasted) and who have worked harder or less), as St. John Chrysostom recalls (See “Cuvântul de învățătură”, *cf.* *Penticostar* 1999: 24-25), supports us in arguing that the various tendencies, according to which “partaking of fish” on the Wednesdays and Fridays of Pentecost (indicated by ecclesiastical ordinances) refers only to those who labored and fasted throughout the Great Lent, are by no means supported. We must remember that our Church has always established its ordinances with righteous consideration and *oikonomia* (dispensation) to awaken in the conscience of the faithful the great care and love of God for man. However, we must not ignore the zeal of those Church believers who, for various reasons or perhaps in the desire to keep the “old rule”, choose to fast even in these days of dispensation. The attitude of the latter, as well as that of the faithful who, according to the instructions of the church calendar, eat fish on the Wednesdays and Fridays of Pentecost, are perfectly perfected by the Apostle Paul, who thus shows us the true significance of fasting:

But meat commends us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their

weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend (1 Corinthians 8, 8-13) (The Apostle on the 35th Sunday after the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Meatfare Sunday).

What is important to note in this context is that the freedom of believers to choose one of the two ways of fasting must be, as a matter of course, the fruit of the love of one's neighbor, as the Holy Apostle Paul tells us:

But put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. Him that is weak in the faith receive you, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believes that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eats herbs. Let not him that eats despise him that eats not; and let not him which eats not judge him that eats: for God has received him. Who are you that judge another man's servant? to his own master he stands or falls. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand... (Romans 13, 14; 14, 1-4) (The Apostle on the Cheesefare Sunday).

III. The Order of Fasting in the Vision of the Church

The order of the fast in the Orthodox Church is based primarily on the guidance of the Holy Fathers, who sought to harmonize the principles of the Christian faith with those of the spiritual experience. This ordinance was also laid down in the church calendar for two reasons: in order to highlight its capital importance, but also from the desire to make the faithful of the Church partakers of its knowledge. The liturgical specifications related to the days when we can eat fish are undoubtedly related to the rules of the fast and the way the Holy Fathers understood the fast, that is, the fact that it represents a unity, a whole, which does not lose its integrity through these dispensations. In other words, the fasting is not fragmentary. Moreover, we would like to mention that, in their view, fish is considered to be fasting food under these circumstances. The current structures of fasting cannot be thought, unfortunately, in a different way, in the sense that we cannot say that we fast until a certain date, then we take a break from the fasting, and after a day we start fasting again. The full vision over fasting, including the references related to "partaking of fish", has its foundation, in our opinion, in the fact that

the canonical decisions regarding fasting are not dogmatic, that is, they should not be regarded as absolutely unchangeable and eternal rules, but they are part of the

moral-disciplinary church norms, which were formulated by the church authority according to the needs, circumstances and evolution of the religious-moral life of the faithful and which can therefore be cancelled, modified or attenuated by the same authority, if necessary (Branîște 1993²: 261-262).

IV. Church Ordinances in the Calendar

The church calendar, as a liturgical principle, which determines the limits of the liturgical life of the faithful (monks and laity alike), contains a number of typikonary specifications and ecclesiastical ordinances, which are aimed at the uniformization of the liturgical ordinances mentioned in various typikons, church or service books. The initiative of uniformizing our Church's liturgical ordinances and practices is gratifying, and it comes to meet the needs of believers eager to know the Church rules, since they are no longer at hand, and can not easily read the Typikon ["TIPIC or TIPICON (Gr. τυπικόν, τό – tipicon, from the Greek τύπος, ό - tipos = form, manner, formula, norm; slv. tipiku) – that is rules, fixed and stable verbal forms and formulas, consecrated by the Church, according to which public divine worship is done"] (Branîște and Branîște 2001: 510) and the various cult books or church precepts.

We would like to recall that the uniformity of the worship implies, on the one hand, maintaining the uniformity of the Typikon and, on the other hand, the observance of the "traditional" orders, principles that the Holy Fathers always kept in mind in order not to create confusion among believers. Also, the Church has always sought to inform the faithful by various means and methods, as often as it has changed and generalized liturgical practices and church ordinances. Concerning the uniformity of the typikonary specifications related to the days when it is "partaking of fish", we want to specify that it was made in the church calendar in different forms: both by directly mentioning it into brackets (partaking of fish) or using a fish as a graphic sign [The exact meaning of this particular symbol will be shown in some calendars in a legend].

We must remember that guidance, regarding the partaking of fish during the Pentecost period do not appear in old church calendars, because the faithful of our Church were well informed, having access to the typikons and church books that included these tipikonary rules.

V. Contemporaneity and Uniformity

Unfortunately, there has not been extensive research on the specification “partaking of fish”, which we encounter in the church calendar, although the way it was understood was different. We assert this thinking, firstly, of all of the mentions recorded in the calendars of the various dioceses, in the sense that some of them specify certain days when people can eat fish, others do not. What is important, however, to emphasize is that the understanding of this liturgical statement is essential and that its uniformity is necessary, for which since recently, almost all church calendars contain accurate guidelines regarding the “partaking of fish” during the church year. In fact, the Church has thought and prepared by appropriate measures, not so much the introduction of these specifications, but especially the generalization of those ordinances, which the monasteries, but also many of the priests of myrrh, connoisseurs of the Church rules, have always preserved, such as for example, the “partakings of fish” on the Wednesdays and Fridays of Pentecost, according to Saint Sava’s Great Typikon [See “Chapter 35: For the Partaking throughout the Year”] (*Typicon* 2002: 46).

VI. The So-called Principle of “Oikonomia” in the Practice of the Church

On the “partaking of fish”, as recorded in the so-called “Church Ordinances” we should say, also, that they are part of those ordinances which are based, first of all, on the principle of the oikonomia (dispensation), which the Church applies in “certain” circumstances. However, certain typikonary specifications have not been applied and understood equally in all monasteries, thus leaving the abbots the opportunity to decide on them. Regarding “the partaking of fish”, on the Wednesdays and Fridays of Pentecost, Saint Sava’s *Great Typikon*, *The Great Horologion*, *The Pentecostarion*, as well as other church books, unanimously recall that for the monks, “the partaking of fish” is done every Monday of this period, in **on the Wednesday of the Mid-feast of Pentecost and on the Leavetaking of Pascha** (Wednesday before Ascension). All these partakings (dispensations) are based on the principle of “oikonomia” and they were plainly shown by the Fathers of the Church; it's about what the books of worship call “the comfort of the

brethren”. Based on the so-called principle of “oikonomia”, but also on another principle (“as the greatest one wants”) [Clarifications on the application of this liturgical “principle” we find at fr. prof. PhD Nicolae D. Necula (How to apply the principle “as the greatest one wants”?)] (Necula 1996: 20-23), the abbot of the monasteries could partake themselves on fish on Wednesdays and Fridays of Pentecost and for the monks. Moreover, this is expressed plainly also in Saint Sava’s Great Typikon: “... And some partake also in the other Wednesdays and Fridays of Pentecost” (*Tipicon* 2002: 46). The term “some”, in our opinion, would include, first, those who could decide on these “partakings of fish”, that is to say the monks of the monasteries.

VII. Saint Sava’s Great Typikon

Saint Sava’s Great Typikon, printed in Iași in 1816, in Romanian, but in Cyrillic letters (re-edited in Suceava in 2002) is the most important ecclesiastical book that mentions “the partaking of fish” during the Pentecost period [We would like to point out that the Great Typikon also contains a chapter that mentions all of the “partaking of fish” during the year, called “In which day the monks partake and dispense the fasting for the whole all year round”] (*cf. Tipicon* 2002: 672-674). Hence, these liturgical instructions will be taken over by other church books:

And in the Wednesdays and Fridays during all Pentecost we partake the monks to oil and wine, and the laymen to fish. Except the Wednesday of the Mid-feast of Pentecost and on the Leavetaking of Pascha, because in those two days we partake of fish and wine, and some partake also in the other Wednesdays and Fridays of Pentecost (*Tipicon* 2002: 46).

“The partaking of fish”, in general, would therefore be based on the “principle” mentioned in Saint Sava’s Great Typikon, shown above, namely: “when the monks partake of wine and oil, laymen partake of fish”.

VIII. The Great Horologion

After Saint Sava's Great Typikon, the Great Horologion is the book of worship that best illustrates the rules of "the partaking of fish" during the Pentecost:

So, arriving the brilliant day of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, is permitted all food, until Thomas Sunday, That is, the monks eat cheese, eggs and fish, and the laymen also meat. Then, from Monday after Thomas Sunday, until the Pentecost Sunday, on Monday is eaten fish, and Wednesdays and Fridays oil, and the laymen also fish. And on the Wednesday of the Mid-feast of Pentecost and on the Leavetaking of Pascha we all eat fish. And from the Pentecost Sunday, until All Saints' Sunday, we eat always cheese, eggs and fish, and the laymen also meat (*Ceaslovul cel Mare* 2003: 772).

IX. Other Sources

Among the ecclesiastical books, which contain mentions of "the partaking of fish" during the Pentecost, there is also the worship book used by the choir during this period called *Penticostarion*. Unfortunately, it does not specify very precisely the order of these dispositions. So on Wednesday, on the fourth week after Easter, on the Mid-feast of Pentecost, it is mentioned: "at the table, the brethren are comforted" (*Penticostar* 1999: 165). As it can be seen, this clarification does not recall whether or not it is "partaking of fish". Also on Wednesday, on the sixth week after Easter, on the Leavetaking [*LEAVETAKING* or *OTDANIA* (slv.) – is called the end, dispensation or end of the holiday (or of a Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church); Starting in the fourth century, the Church has established the custom of great feasts and even of saints to be celebrated in a more special way..."] (Braniște and Braniște 2001: 325) of Pascha, we find the only clear note on "partaking of fish", during Pentecost: "In monasteries, at the table, the brethren are comforted with fish" (*Penticostar* 1999: 243).

Another church book that reminds of "the partaking of fish" during Pentecost is *The Guide of the Good Christian*: „**2. Partakings of fish** (...) As well as on Wednesdays and Fridays between Thomas Sunday and All Saints' Sunday" (Ghenoiu 1997: 56). The words in this *Guide* seem to be, in our opinion, actually, a takeover of the rules provided by Saint Sava's Great Typikon.

X. “Spiritual Comfort” or the Measure of Perfection in Eastern Spirituality

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that a fundamental feature of the Eastern spirituality, which comes to strengthen the practice of our Church as far as both the partaking of fasting and the “comforting of the brethren” are concerned, is represented by the fact that the Desert Fathers who lived alone and had a very harsh life, interrupted their fasting when someone came to them, to show them the love with which they were obliged to receive them. All these ordinances will be for the common monasteries (Cenobitic monasticism), which will appear later, a model, since this usage mirrored the manner of the Savior’s party with the Apostles after the Resurrection. In other words, the Desert Fathers could not fast when the brethren came to visit for them (cf. *Matthew 10, 40*), given that neither the sons of the wedding have fasted as long as the Bridegroom was with them (cf. *Luke 5, 34-35*).

Conclusion

The clarifications indicated in the various “Church Ordinances”, as well as the other indications regarding the partaking of fish from the Church calendar, have always had the purpose of uniformizing liturgical ordinances.

In the Church calendar, the standardization of the norms concerning the days of partaking of fish was made in various forms: either literally putting the word in brackets (partaking of fish), or marking the sign of the fish near each date.

It is also worth mentioning that, in the Wednesdays and Fridays when eating fish is allowed, in the period of the Pentecost (according to Saint Sava’s Great Rules), the Church thought and prepared by appropriate measures, in our opinion, not so much the introduction of these specifications, but rather the generalization of those ordinances that monasteries, and most of parish priests, connoisseurs of church rites, have always preserved.

In conclusion, the “partaking of fish”, recorded in the so-called “Church Rules”, is part of those ordinances that are based on the principle of the *oikonomia* (dispensation), which the Church applies in “certain” circumstances.

References:

- Braniște, Fr. Prof. PhD. E. 1993². *Liturgica Generală cu noțiuni de Artă bisericească, Arhitectură și pictură creștină (General Liturgy with Notions of Church Art, Architecture and Christian Painting)*. Bucharest: Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church.
- Braniște, Fr. Prof. PhD. E. and Braniște, Prof. Ecaterina. 2001. *Dicționar enciclopedic de cunoștințe religioase (Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Religious Knowledge)*. Caransebeș: Diocesan Publishing.
- *Ceaslov (Horologion)*. 2001. Bucharest: Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church.
- *Ceaslovul cel Mare (The Great Horologion)*. 2003. Alexandria: Publishing House of the Orthodox Church.
- Cireșanu, Badea. 1912. *Tezaurul Liturgic al Sfintei Biserici Creștine Ortodoxe de Răsărit (The Liturgical Treasure of the Holy Orthodox Eastern Christian Church)*, volume III with 62 pictures. Bucharest: "Gutenberg" Publishing, Joseph Göbl S-sori.
- Ghenoiu, Archimandrite Gherontie. 1997. *Îndrumătorul bunului creștin (The Guide of the Good Christian)*. Monastery Saint Nicholas-Sitaru.
- Hieromonk Makarios of Simonopetra. 2003. *Triodul explicat. Mistagogia timpului liturgic (The Lenten Triodion Explained. Mystagogy of the Liturgical Time)*. Translated by deac. Ioan I. Ică jr. Sibiu: Deisis Publishing.
- Mitrofanovici, V. 1909. *Prelegeri academice despre Liturgica Bisericii Dreptcredincioase Răsăritene (Academic Lectures on the Liturgy of the Faithful Eastern Church)*. Cernăuți: Bucovina Printing Company.
- Necula, Fr. Prof. PhD, Nicolae D. 1996. *Tradiție și înnoire în slujirea liturgică (Tradition and Renewal in Liturgical Service)*. Galați: Publishing House of the Lower Danube Bishopric.
- *PENTICOSTAR adică Sfintele slujbe de la Duminica Paștilor până la Duminica Tuturor Sfinților (PENTICOSTARION that is the Holy Services from the Easter Sunday to All Saints' Sunday)*. 1999. Bucharest: Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church.
- *Tipicon întru slava Sfintei, Celei de o ființă, Făcătoarei de viață și Nedespărțitei Treime, a Tatălui și a Fiului și a Sfântului Duh (Typikon for the Glory of the Holy, the One, the Life-Giving and the Infinite Trinity, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit)*. 2002. Suceava: "Bucovina Istorică" Publishing.