

The Great Lent Schedule

The Great Lent begins on a Monday, exactly 48 days before Easter Sunday. As everyone knows, Easter Sunday is a moveable feast of the Church, which does not follow a fixed date. Therefore, the Great Lent too does not have a fixed date of commencement.

As per the Syriac tradition, since the day begins in the evening, observation of lent should begin with the Lenten prayers of vespers (*ramsho* in Syriac) on the previous day (in this case, Sunday evening). The Great Lent lasts all of 48 days, including the Passion Week, and concludes with the Holy Qurbana on Easter Sunday on the 49th day.

The day before the commencement of the Great Lent, which is a Sunday, is called Pethrutha. This is a festival observed by almost all Syrian Christians of Kerala, including the Syrian Catholics. Though Payne Smith in his dictionary has defined the word Pethrutha to mean mushroom, the traditional understanding in Malabar is that it refers to mounds of food.

The miracle at the wedding of Cana, remembered on the same day, provides a fitting context for the Pethrutha celebrations.

The Great Lent combines both fasting (Malayalam: *upavaasam*) and dietary restrictions (Malayalam: *nombu*). Dietary restrictions, as understood here, refers to avoiding fish, meat, wine, eggs, and dairy products. According to the Hudoyo Canon (Chapter 5:1), fasting during the Great Lent is up to the ninth hour (approximately 3 p.m.) on week days, and till noon (12 p.m.) on Saturdays and Sundays. Nursing mothers, the sick, and the infirm have been exempted from these requirements. When in doubt, always check with your priest.

Starts with Shubhkono

The beginning of the Great Lent is signaled by the Shubhkono service, held on the very first day (Monday). This is a service of preparation and forgiveness and is marked by forty prostrations and the kiss of peace. Each Sunday of the Great Lent is arranged to reflect on one of the miracles performed by Our Lord. On successive Sundays, the healing of the leper, the paralytic, the Cananite woman, the cripple woman, and the blind man are remembered and reflected upon. Passion Week begins on Palm Sunday. Passover falls on Thursday of the Passion Week, and Good Friday follows the next day.

Holy Qurbana during the Great Lent is restricted to Saturdays and Sundays with the exception of mid-lent Wednesday, the annunciation to St Mary, 40th Day of Lent, and Passover. Services without Holy Qurbana during the Great Lent are Shubhkono and Vaade Dalmeeno (the Monday of Passion Week). Both are conducted by the celebrant from the chancel table. It should be noted that Holy Qurbana will be celebrated on March 25 (the annunciation to St Mary) even if that day happens to be Good Friday (like in 2016). The annunciation to St Mary is a fixed feast, and is always celebrated on March 25.

Other days of note during the Great Lent are Catholicate Day (celebrated on the 36th day of the Great Lent, which is a Sunday), Saturday of Lazarus (the day before Palm Sunday) and Saturday of Good Tidings (day after Good Friday).

Prayers and Prostrations

Canonical prayers are said thrice a day (vespers, noon and matins) during the Great Lent. Great Lent prayers are marked by prostrations. This is done by kneeling down, touching the ground with the forehead, then standing up and making the sign of the cross.

Noon prayers during the week days of the Great Lent are marked by forty prostrations. This is done in four sets of 10 prostrations. The first set is done to the accompanying chant of 'Kurielaison'. The second set is done to the accompanying chant of 'Lord have mercy upon us'. The third set is done to the accompanying chant of 'Lord be kind and have mercy upon us'. And the fourth and final set is done to the accompanying chant of 'Lord accept our entreaties, and have mercy upon us'.

The 40 prostrations for the noon prayers are not required for Mid-Lent Wednesday and 40th day Friday. The 40 prostrations for noon prayers are not done during the Passion Week of the Great Lent as well. Also, the Hail Mary prayer is not recited and the *quqlions* are not chanted during the Passion Week. There **will be no** Kiss of Peace (Malayalam: *kaikasthoori*), benedictions (Malayalam: *samadhanam*) during the Holy Qurbana, or kissing of the celebrant's hand (Malayalam: *kaimuthu*) during Passion Week. Neither are the flapping fans (Malayalam/Syriac: *marhawsa*) used or the bells rung during Passion Week.

The Kiss of Peace and kissing of the celebrant's hand are, however, restored on the Saturday of Good Tidings.

Prostrations in general during prayers are not done on Sundays of the Great Lent, and after the Holy Qurbana on Mid-Lent Wednesday and Maundy Thursday (Passover). On

other days (like Saturdays) during the Great Lent, those who have partaken the Holy Sacraments should not do prostrations until vespers on that day. We hope the above summary is helpful for all during the Great Lent.

References:

Sabha Encyclopaedia

Shushroosha Samvidhana Sahayi

Hudoyo Canon