

ጸምስ ትፌውስ ቁስለ ነፍስ

“በጸም ወበጸሎት ይሠረይ
ኩሉ ኃጢአት”



Today many Orthodox Christians start what is known as ‘Lent’ or ጸም - the main fasting period. The Lent in many catholic and some orthodox denominations is 40 days based on the number of days that Christ fasted before his ministry or when Moses was up on the Sinai mountain in God’s presence. In EOTC the fasting days are 55 days.

Fasting has been part of the Jewish religious custom and even other religious (people of Nineveh) who were not part of ‘God’s family’. We also learn from early church fathers’ writing that the Jews would fast regularly on Tuesdays and Thursdays; before it got changed to Wednesdays and Fridays by the early church fathers. We also read in the New Testament Jesus teaching that one should fast and pray.

Historical examination demonstrates that the 40 days fasting period did not start until the 4th Century and they were connected to preparation for Baptism during Easter. Several pre Nicene church documents reveal that the length of the fasting period was not 40 days but varied from one or two days or forty hours [according to the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian]. Dionysius of Alexandria (mid 3rd Century) talks about a fast of up to six days. In some cases the fasting period would last up to three weeks.

Only following the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. did the length of Lent become fixed at forty days.

The great Orthodox Church Father Athanasius used to write a letter to the Christian believers every year to communicate the date of Easter and other important spiritual instructions; called Festal Letters. His first five letters written between 329 and 333 AD indicate that the fasting period is to be six days before the Easter celebration. It is only in his letter of 334 AD that he introduces the 40 days fast before the celebration of Easter.

Fasting for 40 days in Egypt was not always connected to the preparation for the celebration of Easter. It is documented that in Egypt, Christians would start the fasting period immediately after Jan 6 – the celebration of the Baptism of Jesus (ጥምቀት). Following the account in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus had gone straight into the wilderness and fasted for 40 days and 40 nights immediately after his baptism. It was only after the Council of Nicaea that the church in Egypt adopted Easter Baptism and transferred its fast, giving rise to Lent as we know it. **NEVERTHELESS, MORE THAN THE HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF WHEN AND HOW LENT ጸም STARTED, WHETHER IT IS FOR TWO DAYS, 6 DAYS, THREE WEEKS, 40 DAYS OR 55 DAYS... THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THIS RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE SHOULD BE THE INNER MOST SPIRITUAL COMMUNICATION THAT TAKES PLACE WITH GOD, THE ONE WHO IS OMNISCIENT, ልብ እና ኩላሊትን ለሚመረምር. FOR HE SAYS: “Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the**

house of Jacob their sins. Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?" Isaiah 58:1-5