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Great Lent is an Eastern Orthodox holiday which always begins on a Monday between February 15 and March 21. The beginning date, Clean Monday, is set at seven weeks before Pascha, (known as Easter in western cultures), in the Orthodox church. Great Lent is so named to differentiate it from the Advent fasting period which is known as Little Lent.

Great Lent is a period of self-denial and is observed with strict abstinence from meat, dairy products, wine, and olive oil. Orthodox Christians also make a sacrifice during this period such as giving up a favorite food or other pleasure.

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The season of **Great Lent** is the time of preparation for the feast of the Resurrection of Christ. It is the living symbol of man's entire life which is to be fulfilled in his own resurrection from the dead with Christ. It is a time of renewed devotion: of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It is a time of repentance, a real renewal of our minds, hearts and deeds in conformity with Christ and his teachings. It is the time, most of all, of our return to the great commandments of loving God and our neighbors.

In the Orthodox Church, Great Lent is not a season of morbidity and gloominess. On the contrary, it is a time of joyfulness and purification. We are called to "anoint our faces" and to "cleanse our bodies as we cleanse our souls." The very first hymns of the very first service of Great Lent set the proper tone of the season:

*Let us begin the lenten time with delight ... let us fast from passions as we fast from food, taking pleasure in the good words of the Spirit, that we may be granted to see the holy passion of Christ our God and his holy Pascha, spiritually rejoicing.*

*Thy grace has arisen upon us, O Lord, the illumination of our souls has shown forth; behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the time of repentance (Vesper Hymns).*

It is our repentance that God desires, not our remorse. We sorrow for our sins, but we do so in the joy of God's mercy. We mortify our flesh, but we do so in the joy of our resurrection into life everlasting. We make ready for the resurrection during Great Lent, both Christ's Resurrection and our own.

*This information was compiled by published information on the websites; with the latter coming courtesy of the Orthodox Church in America. Please consult your parish priest for more information or clarification.*