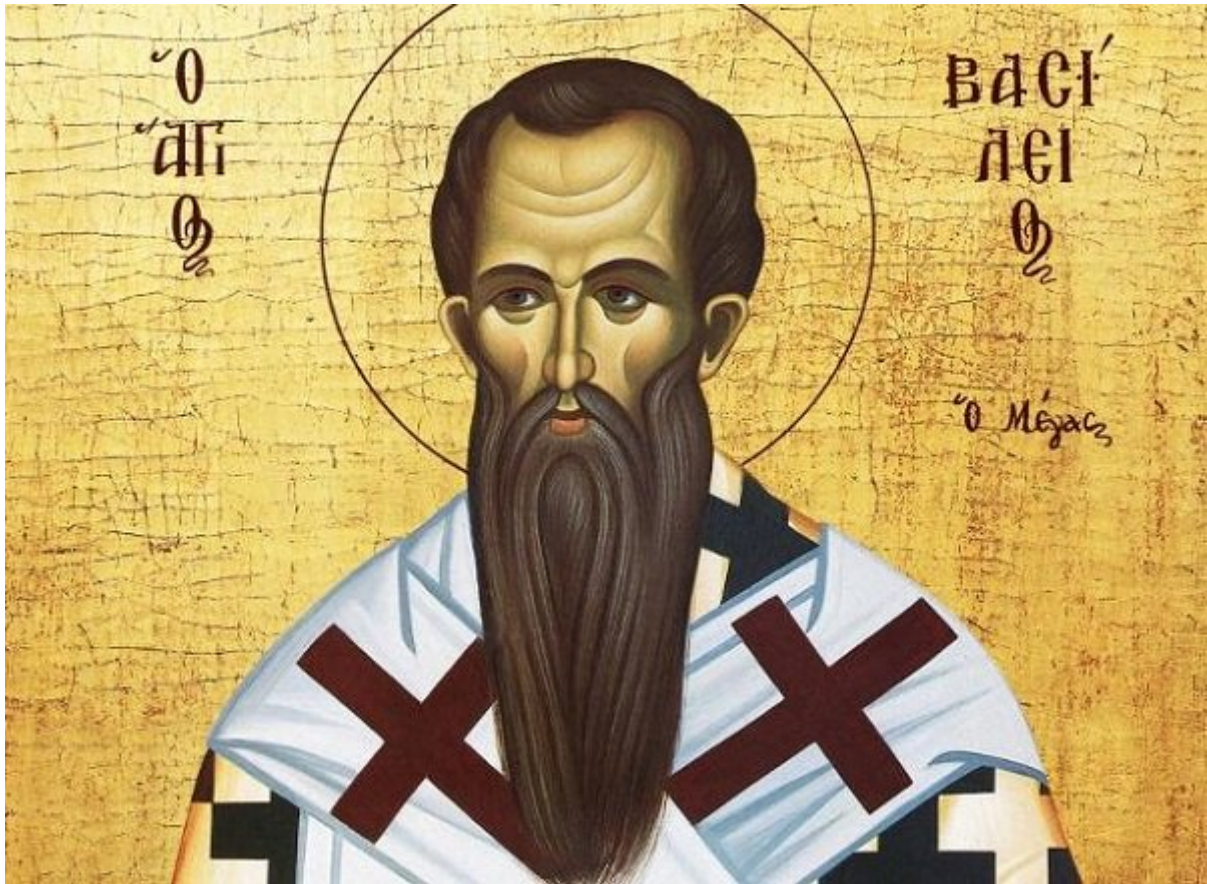


1st Discourse on Fasting (Saint Basil the Great)

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Fasting is a prophetic command

*'Sound the trumpet on the day of the new moon, in the glorious day of your feast'.
(Ps. 80, 3).*



This is a prophetic ordinance. For us, the readings (Is. 58, 4-6) resound louder than the trumpet and any other musical organ, announcing the awaited feast of feasts [‘If you fast for quarrels and strife, and strike the humble with your fists, why do you fast to me as you do today, so that your voice may be heard when you cry aloud? I have not chosen this fasting and such a day to afflict the soul of the humble. Nor should you bend your neck as a ring, or place sackcloth and ashes beneath you, because you shall not call this an acceptable fast. I have not chosen such as fast, says the Lord, but loose all the bonds of injustice, undo the knots of hard bargains, set the wounded free, and break every unfair agreement’]. We’ve learned the grace of the fast from Isaiah, who rejected the Jewish mode of fasting and showed us the true way. And the Lord says: ‘Do not look dismal, but put oil on your head and wash your face’ (Matth. 6, 16-17). Let us, then, behave as we’ve been taught, let’s not be seen frowning in the days to come, but let’s look at them with a smiling face, and behave as the saints would. No-body who’s faint-hearted is crowned and nobody who’s miserable wins a trophy. Don’t frown if people are taking care of you. It’s unseemly not to rejoice over the health of the soul and, instead, to be sad over the change of food and to make it look as though we enjoy the pleasures of the flesh rather than the care of our soul. Because satiety restricts pleasure to the belly, whereas fasting increases the benefit to the soul. Be glad that the doctor’s given you medication that destroys sin. Just as, in the intestines of young children, worms disappear with certain active remedies, so sin, which lies in

the depths of the soul, is killed by fasting which enters the soul, provided this fasting is worthy of the name.