

THE GREAT LENT EPISTLE

OF THE PERMANENT CONFERENCE OF UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX
BISHOPS BEYOND THE BORDERS OF UKRAINE



His All-Holiness, Patriarch of Constantinople, BARTHOLOMEW has profoundly expressed in his message to the world for Holy and Great Lent 2022: “Experientially and theologically it is impossible for us to comprehend the spirit of Holy and Great Lent if we do not perceive it as a journey toward Pascha. The entire period of fasting preserves the ‘paschal perception’ of life. Gloomy asceticism is a perversion of the Christian experience; it is the ignorance of the imminent grace and future Kingdom; it is life ‘as if Christ never came,’ without expectation of the ‘resurrection of the dead’ and of ‘life in the age to come.’”

For too many of us, Great Lent has, indeed, become just that “gloomy asceticism”, which prohibits so many from comprehending PASCHA as the culmination of all our life. If we fast “because we’re supposed to” or “because that’s what Babusya did” accepting a burdensome tradition, without a paschal expectation in life, then it truly is a perversion of the Christian experience. Can we possibly allow ourselves to live our life as though Christ never came, never offered Himself up for our salvation, never rose from the dead and that there is no hope for an age to come? This truly would be gloom followed by death and nothing more.

Great Lent must be perceived as a positive opportunity to fit our life into the framework of the reality of Pascha. It must be a time of serious contemplation about the ways we fail to reflect the Light and the Power of the Resurrection through our own being life around us. We must determine not only the need to reposition ourselves in order reflect fully, but to take the necessary steps to do so. This is a challenge and when we begin to experience the great benefits resulting from our acceptance of that challenge, the gloom we may be experiencing suddenly begins to fade away.

Among the first of such steps is a need for a real increase in our prayer and fasting efforts. Here there is no better way to begin than the prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian, which, if we pray it at some point each day and during the Liturgical Services of Great Lent, contemplating each word we say when the prayer is complete, will open the way to real personal spiritual depth during the Lenten season:

*O Lord and Master of my life, take away from me the spirit
of laziness, lust for power, idle talk and despair.
Give me rather, the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love.
Yes, Lord and King, grant that I may see my own sins and judge not my brother,
for blessed are You, unto the ages of ages.
Amen.*



We pray for you all each day and have, most importantly throughout the pandemic that has so horridly affected so many of our lives. We will continue to do so during this Great Lent and all our lives. We presently have, as you all know, a further obligation in our prayers and fasting – the invasion of our beloved Ukraine by the Russian Federation. It is nearly impossible to believe that after 30 years of independence recognized by all nations of the world, we return in our prayers to utilizing the words “our long-suffering Ukraine” in beseeching God’s intercession to bring the carnage to an end. Please, please, dearly beloved, offer additional prayer and fasting for the safety, protection and healing of our brothers and sisters under attack and those who have been forced to flee from the aggression.

In addition, we will pray in gratitude for the world-wide reaction in support of the Ukrainian people and the nation. We are not speaking of an expression of “thoughts and prayers”. Rather, the world is reaching out diligently in offering physical, financial and most of all medical support to Ukraine, beyond all expectation. European nations are welcoming refugees from all over Ukraine without any restrictions and providing for their every need. This is the will of God, and we thank all who have stepped forth.

As we have prayed fervently for weeks now in all our parishes, we beseech our Heavenly Father to send forth his legions of angels, commanded by the Patron of the City of Kyiv, Archangel Michael, to crush the aggression of those who would destroy Ukraine and her people.

May the Grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Love of God the Father and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

In our Lord’s All-Encompassing Love,

+ ANTONY

By the Grace of God, Metropolitan

+ JEREMIAH

By the Grace of God, Archbishop

+ DANIEL

By the Grace of God, Archbishop

