



THE GREAT LENT EPISTLE
OF THE PERMANENT CONFERENCE OF UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX
BISHOPS BEYOND THE BORDERS OF UKRAINE

*To the Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church
of the United States of America, our Eparchy of Western Europe,
of our Eparchy of Australia and New Zealand, and our Eparchy in South America*

Dearly beloved Spiritual Fathers, Sisters and Brothers of the FAITH,

CHRIST IS AMONGST US! IS AND ALWAYS SHALL BE!

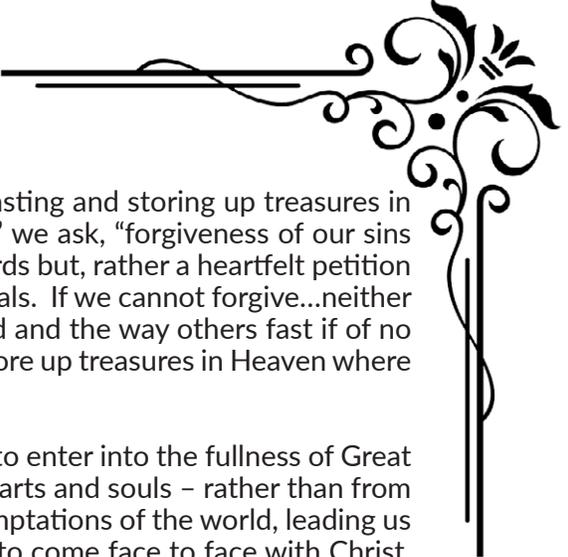
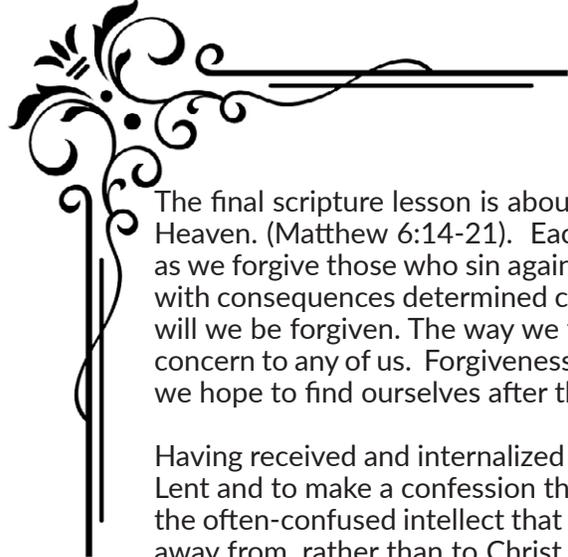
As we enter the blessed Great Lenten journey in preparation for the celebration of the FEAST of ALL FEASTS - PASCHA or the RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD - it behooves us to contemplate the necessary temporal and spiritual conditions for the successful completion of that journey and the fullness of Joy, Peace and Love of PASCHA. What are these preparations? Through the five weeks in anticipation before Great Lent we are provided with Scriptural lessons that manifest them clearly.

We begin with the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) who was a tax collector/thief, who had such a desire to be with Christ that he faced ridicule by people for climbing a sycamore tree to come face to face with our Lord, Who responded by speaking directly to Zacchaeus, indicating that He knew Zacchaeus and would stay at his home. Zacchaeus responded to criticism that our Lord would stay at the home of a sinner, declaring that he would make amends to all who he had cheated and give half his wealth to the poor. The Lord responded that "salvation has come to this home today...because the Son of Man has come to see and to save that, which was lost."

The lesson about the Publican (also a tax collector) and the Pharisee) (Luke 18:10-14) - a religious leader - depicts the Pharisee standing in the front of the Holy Altar proclaiming his "righteousness" and adherence to the Law and how great he was in comparison to the Publican. The Publican stood simply at the rear of the temple, head bowed low and beating his chest and beseeching: "God have mercy on me a sinner" and he alone, through his sincere humility returned to his home "justified".

Next, we heard the lesson about the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), who demanded what would be his inheritance from his father, received it and rapidly squandered it in a foreign land, finally ending up in the fields feeding swine. Finally, he "came to himself (схаменувся)" and returned to his father declaring: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."

The Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46) is the next lesson, presented by our Lord with a clarity that does not leave any room for us to misunderstand. The choices we make in relating to ALL our neighbors and ALL mankind will determine whether we will be judged to be lambs or goats. The way we respond to the two Great Commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it - You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)



The final scripture lesson is about forgiveness, the manner of our fasting and storing up treasures in Heaven. (Matthew 6:14-21). Each time we pray the “Lord’s Prayer” we ask, “forgiveness of our sins as we forgive those who sin against us”. These cannot be empty words but, rather a heartfelt petition with consequences determined completely by each of us as individuals. If we cannot forgive...neither will we be forgiven. The way we fast is between each of us and God and the way others fast if of no concern to any of us. Forgiveness and sincere fasting enable us to store up treasures in Heaven where we hope to find ourselves after the final judgment.

Having received and internalized all these lessons, we are prepared to enter into the fullness of Great Lent and to make a confession that arises from the depths of our hearts and souls – rather than from the often-confused intellect that can so easily succumb to all the temptations of the world, leading us away from, rather than to Christ. Throughout this Great Lent seek to come face to face with Christ, Who, you will discover, knows you intimately from the moment of your cleansing Baptism and the Seal of your Chrismation. Seek to make amends to those you have wronged; seeking forgiveness from those you have offended and offering forgiveness to those who have offended you; approach God with a humility that does not offer excuses or reasons for bad behavior and sinfulness; “come to yourself” in the recognition that you have squandered God’s gifts to you – your talents, your ability to love, your ability to share yourself and your treasures. Search for the ways that you can minister - to your neighbor, to the homeless, to the naked, to the thirsty, to the sick, to those imprisoned (physically, mentally or emotionally) and search for the ways you have failed to minister to all.

As we enter the Great Lenten Season, we, your hierarchs, successors to the Holy Apostles, humbly beseech your forgiveness for any way we may have hurt you, not been present to you, misled you or have been, in any way, responsible for spiritual confusion or even pain of any nature. We promise to strive for improvement in the future under the Grace and Guidance of the Holy Spirit. In turn, we express, from the depth of our hearts, minds and souls the same forgiveness to you on both the spiritual and temporal level. We love you all without reserve and assure you of our prayers for you daily, beseeching your prayers also for us.

Finally – as the one-year anniversary of the invasion approaches, we request that throughout this Great Lent and Paschal Seasons you dedicate your prayers, fasting and hope for the welfare of our brothers and sisters suffering through another genocide. This unjustifiable invasion of Ukraine is inspired by an all-consuming hatred in the minds and souls of those who would eradicate Ukraine and her ethnic distinction as a people. Pray fervently for an end to the suffering through deliberate targeting of civilians and non-military infrastructure. Further, pray fervently for the repose of the souls of all those who have perished during the aggressive insanity. May our Loving Lord hear our petitions and bring an end to this horror forever.

In our Lord’s All-Encompassing Joy, Peace and Love,

+ ANTONY

By the Grace of God, Metropolitan

+ JEREMIAH

By the Grace of God, Archbishop

+ DANIEL

By the Grace of God, Archbishop

GIVEN THIS 10TH DAY OF FEBRUARY 2023 - THE FEAST OF VENERABLE EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN AND VENERABLE EPHRIAM OF THE KYIVAN CAVES MONASTERY (PECHERSKA LAVRA) AT THE METROPOLIA CENTER OF THE UOC OF USA, SOUTH BOUND BROOK - SOMERSET, NJ

