



THE GREAT LENT EPISTLE

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

Beloved in the Lord: clergy, brothers and sisters in the Lord!

Once again, we are entering into the Sacred Season of the Holy and Great Lent.

In the First Gospel, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ calls Matthew with a simple expression “*Follow me.*” Upon hearing the call, the tax collector “*got up and followed him.*” The Greek translation of “got up” is *anastas*, the word used also to describe the Resurrection (*anastasis*) of our Lord from the dead. Choosing to follow Him is also a kind of resurrection from the dead, since it involves the rising up from a “lower” path of life to a “higher” one, from a preoccupation with the temporal world to an ultimate immersion in the Divinity of God.

The call of Christ Jesus addresses the mind, but it is meant to move through the mind into the body, and through the body into the whole of one’s life, into action and decision. “Follow me” has the sense of “walk as I walk, think as I think and choose as I choose.” Discipleship – being a follower – requires an entire reworking of the self, according to the example set by our Savior.

Follow me... Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel!

The Lenten season is an invitation to a sincere review of our life in the Light of the Gospel. Any illusion of self-sufficiency we may have held should have been dispelled by these past 12 months in which we have faced a global medical crisis, economic hardship, social unrest, and partisan divisiveness. Perhaps, when we emerge on the far side of COVID-19 pandemic, we would have learned to be a bit more humble — that, despite all our vast technology, we are not the masters of our destinies as we sometimes tend to believe.

The events of the past year have caused much suffering for many people and suffering does not usually exalt us. It can and does embitter us, and we can be and are tempted to self-pity, becoming completely self-centered. A faithful observance of the Holy and Great Lent can help us grow in humility - which is not “thinking less of ourselves” (as some erroneously believe) but rather, “thinking of ourselves less”. Great Lent, therefore, is a summons to reach out to others in their need so that we, having experienced mercy from God, might learn how to be ourselves merciful.

And, certainly, this past year has been very disruptive of our lives. We yearn for “normality” -whatever the “new” normal might be. And so, while we face the future with humility, we must also embrace the present with a strong dose of patience. Patience is the spiritual vaccine we all need during these days of

pandemic, economic stress, social unrest, and political divisiveness and, therefore, a great virtue for us to work on this Great and Holy Lent of 2021. St. Peter says: *"Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. For the eye of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.'*" (1 Peter 3:8-12)

If you are patient, you do not answer that angry email with an angrier one. You wait and perhaps you will not say or write something you cannot take back. Patience helps you de-escalate tense situations. Patience gives birth to humility and brings us closer to holiness. Holy and Great Lent calls us to recommit ourselves to the search for holiness, which is what "life in Christ" means for all Orthodox Christians.

Through prayer, repentance, fasting and simple daily kindness, we lead ourselves and our loved ones to a renewed faith in the power of God's Love for us, a Love that is stronger than sin, death, and the devil. Through repentance in the Holy Mystery of Confession, we seek to overcome the influence of sin which has wounded our capacity to live in fellowship with others and union with God. In the Fourth Prayer – of St. Simeon the Translator – before receiving the Holy Eucharist – Communion, we pray: *"The multitude of Your Loving-Kindness is immeasurable and the mercy of Your Goodness and Forbearance beyond description and there is no sin, which overcomes Your Love for all mankind."* Thus, we see that there is great hope always that we can be victorious over sin – turning away from sin and toward a Loving God, always ready to embrace us in His LOVE.

Let us all journey through this Sacred Season with a sense of repentance, with a renewed desire to love, to serve, to be present for one other; so that we can all proclaim to the world around us – **WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF LOVE! WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF THE GOSPEL! WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF PASCHA!**

Blessed Lenten Journey to all!

With Archpastoral blessings,

+ YURIJ – Metropolitan
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+ ANTONY – Metropolitan
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, South America and Diaspora

+ JEREMIAH – Archbishop
Ukrainian Orthodox Eparchy of South America

+ DANIEL – Archbishop
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA and Diaspora

+ ILARION – Bishop
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+ ANDRIY – Bishop
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada