



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
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ARCHPASTORAL LETTER FOR THE GREAT FAST 2025

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Sunday, March 2, 2025

Beloved Members of our Diocesan Family:
Christ is in our midst! – He is and ever shall be!

***“You shall be holy,
for I the Lord your God am holy.”***
(Leviticus 19:2; I Peter 1:16)

The purpose of our spiritual lives, according to the teaching of our holy Orthodox Church, is *theosis* or deification. That means that we are, as the Scripture teaches, to be like God – holy, to become Christ-like, to imitate the Saints before us who have achieved that goal and give us their example to follow. It is a life-long process in response to Christ’s gift to us of salvation – His victory over sin and death and the devil – given so that we could grow in *theosis*, have eternal life, and live with Him forever in His heavenly kingdom.

One might ask, how do I know if I am growing in *theosis*? Actually, the Fast of Great Lent is the perfect time for us to evaluate how we are doing in achieving the goal of our spiritual life – how we are progressing in *theosis* – in becoming more like Christ our Savior.

Perhaps asking ourselves the following questions can help us in our evaluation:

- 1) Since Great Lent last year, have I been praying to God more regularly, more attentively, more sincerely? In the Gospel of Luke, we see Our Lord in prayer to His Father before each major event in His life.
- 2) Over the past year, have I read the Scriptures more frequently and more devoutly, trying to learn their meaning and live God’s commandments? The Bible is a “love letter to us” from the King of Heaven; Lent is the perfect opportunity to read it!
- 3) Since last year’s Fast, have I been attending the divine services more faithfully? In the Gospels, we find Christ praying publicly, in the synagogue every sabbath, and in the temple on every feast day.

4) Over the past year, have I received the Holy Mysteries (the Sacraments) on a regular basis? Our Lord gave His life on the Cross for the remission of our sins; we receive that forgiveness through Confession and Communion.

5) During the fasting seasons, have I abstained from meat and dairy foods, alcohol, and forms of entertainment, as prescribed by the Church. Our Savior ate and drank nothing for 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness.

6) Have I been sharing more of my time, my talents, and my financial resources for Christ and the extension of His kingdom here on earth, through the work of the Church? He tells us, "To whom much has been given, much is expected."

7) Over the past year, have I been more loving, more kind, more forgiving to my family, my co-workers, my fellow parishioners, and "the least of the brethren" who need help? The Scripture tells us to see in everyone the "image of God."

Each of us has to answer these questions for ourselves. Only I can truly say if I have come closer to Christ by the things I have done, by the things I am doing. Hopefully, all our answers are "yes."

But if they are not, there is good news. We can begin anew, this very sacred season, to improve our prayer life, our reading of Scripture, our participation in divine services, our reception of Confession and Communion, our fasting discipline, our sharing of time, talent, and treasure in thanksgiving to God, and our showing our love for our neighbor in tangible ways.

By doing these things, we will in fact be imitating our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, and in doing so, we will be growing in *theosis*, becoming more and more like Him ... the One Who loves us more than we love ourselves. May we indeed commend ourselves and all our life to Him this Lent and every day ... in gratitude for all that He has done, and for all that He continues to do, for us.

With my humble prayers, my archpastoral blessing, and my sincere love,

+ Archbishop Michael

Archbishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey