

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

To the Clergy and Faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church who abide in the United States of America, Canada, Western Europe, Australia/New Zealand, South America and Ukraine as we inaugurate the Great Lenten Season in preparation for the Great and Holy Feast of Feasts – the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

GLORY BE TO OUR LORD!

“Turn not away Thy Face from Thy child, for I am afflicted. Hear me speedily. Draw near unto my soul and deliver it.” (Prokiemon of Vespers on the Eve of Great Lent)

With this Prokiemon Great Lent is inaugurated and the Church, like a good mother, places her faithful on the journey of repentance. The Baptist John preached a “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mk.1:4) and “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2), as he “prepared the way of the Lord, making straight His paths.” (Matt. 3:3). Throughout the history of the Church, the invitation to repentance was extended not only to her faithful, but to the entire world and all mankind.

By Baptism and Chrismation – we have been sanctified – we have been made holy – we have been made citizens of the Kingdom proclaimed by Christ and life is no longer “ours”, but we are adopted by Christ our King, Lord and Master – and we surrender our self-centeredness by a total commitment of “our” lives to God. Our Lord, in His call to the Kingdom, described in vivid detail the ethical demands of that Kingdom, which were so unearthly, that the disciples cried out: “Who then can be saved?”

Great Lent – the season of repentance – takes us AWAY from death and destruction and leads us TO life. Repentance – turning FROM life in the “flesh” TO life in the “Spirit”. The world in which we live is in turmoil. It is a world, which disregards the teaching of Jesus Christ. Our mother Church realizes that we are material and so often we are shackled to this world and all things physical – things that “moths eat – rust corrupts – thieves break in and steal” (Matt. 6:19) – things that are all left behind as we enter the next world.

Repentance calls us to become spiritual – to become those persons created in the image of God and at the same time to image God. Repentance – the time for cleanliness, for renewal, for the desire to return to the Love of God the Father – the desire to restore our true image as the children of God – the desire to cry in the depth of our soul: “In my repentance, open for me the doors, O Giver of Life” – the desire in the words of St. Paul: “to cast OFF the deeds of darkness and put ON the armor of Light” (Romans 13:12) with faith, love and hope of salvation. It is the desire to fulfill the mandate of Christ: “Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt. 5:48)

“Open to us – open to us the doors, O Giver of Life!” The Risen Lord responds, “Come, come, the doors are open – the Kingdom of Heaven has come! Enter by the way of prayer and fasting” – and He shall embrace each of us, just as the prodigal son was embraced by his father. (Luke 15:21)

Let us persevere in faith as did our ancestors of the great Ukrainian nation and many other nations throughout the history of mankind, having been suppressed and forbidden by godless regimes to freely express their faith in the God of Love, the God who promised them the same salvation He promises us. Their faith prevailed and has enabled the citizens of those nations to experience today that, which most of us have who have been blessed with the “good life”, have taken for granted each day – the right to choose

Christ – the “...better part, which will not be taken away...” – as did Mary, the sister of Lazarus. (Luke 10:42)

As your spiritual fathers, we shall pray fervently during this Great Lenten season, dearly beloved, that each of your lives will turn AWAY from all in the flesh that stunts your spiritual growth and, in truth, disables you. We shall pray that your own personal repentance and your journey – through prayer and fasting – will instead focus your lives on the straight and narrow path, which leads TO the spiritual – TO salvation. It is a journey we make together and therefore, we humbly ask for your fervent prayers for us, as well.

In response to our community prayer, our Lord will surely not turn His Face away from us – even though we are afflicted. This is His promise to us. He will hear us and draw near unto our souls and deliver them. Let us persevere in faith as “...His own People, the Royal Priesthood, a holy nation”. (Liturgy of St. Basil)

In our Lord's abundant Love,

+Constantine

Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA and the Diaspora

+John

Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+Antony

Archbishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA

+Ioan

Archbishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the Diaspora

+Yurij

Archbishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+Jeremiah

Archbishop of the South American Eparchy of the UOC

+Ilarion

Bishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+Andriy

Bishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+Daniel

Bishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA