



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA  
DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

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**Archpastoral Letter for the Great Fast 2018**

Protocol Number 01-001/2018  
Cheese-Fare Sunday – Sunday of Forgiveness

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

*Let us receive with joy, O faithful,  
the divinely inspired announcement of Lent.  
Like the Ninevites of old, like the harlots and publicans  
who heard John preaching repentance through abstinence,  
let us prepare for the Master's communion prepared in Zion.  
Let us wash ourselves with tears  
for its divine purification.  
Let us pray to behold the fulfillment of Pascha,  
the true Revelation.  
Let us prepare for adoring the Cross  
and Resurrection of Christ our God.  
Do not deprive us of our expectation, O Lover of Man!*

(The Apostikha for Tuesday Vespers of Cheese-Fare Week)

There are two ways that we can look at the Great Fast. The first is to see Lent as an arduous time of feeling forced to follow a number of formal, predominantly negative rules and regulations – abstention from certain foods, dancing, movies, etc. – dictated by Church authority. This preoccupation with “rules” is a common view that almost equates Lent with a period of punishment.

The second is to understand the time of the Great Fast as a sacred season handed down by the time-honored Tradition of our Faith to embrace a Lenten lifestyle that was joyfully embraced by the canonized Saints of every generation and our saintly grandparents and parents before us. For them it was a “way of living” – a state of mind, soul and spirit – which for seven weeks permeated their entire life. It was an opportunity to focus on coming closer to Christ our Savior, becoming more like Him, by imitating His ways of prayer and fasting and almsgiving.

Through the Gospel, the Church reminds us that the Lord was found in the synagogue every Sabbath and in the Temple every feast day ... seen to be in prayer before every great event in His ministry and in countless other moments when He went away from the crowds to re-establish communion with His Father. In encouraging all of us to be like the One in Whose image we were created, the Church affords us several opportunities to increase our prayer life in Lent: the divine services (the Canon of Saint Andrew, the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts, the Akathists, the services of Great and Holy Week, etc.), additions to our personal Prayer Rule (the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian, the canons of preparation for Confession and Communion), the weekday Scripture readings from Genesis, Proverbs and Isaiah (which were the lessons in the Faith for the catechumens of the early Church), and of course the Holy Mysteries of Confession and Communion, which are for the “forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.”

We know that Our Lord Himself fasted for forty days and forty nights, literally eating and drinking nothing. The Fathers of the Church and the collective conscience of the faithful have clearly affirmed the spiritual value – a value both penitential and purifying – of abstaining from certain foods (such as meat and dairy products, desserts and alcohol). It would be a serious mistake, however, to think that such abstinence is the only observance necessary in Lent. Bodily fasting must be accompanied by another fast: a stricter control over our thoughts, our words and our actions ... concentrating our attention on the Person of our Savior and what He requires of us. We are called upon to “give up” lustful thoughts and the judgment of others, words of criticism and gossip, the vices of pride and envy, greed and gluttony, and the evil deeds that derive therefrom – and to give up these sins not just for Lent, but for the rest of our lives. In so doing, if we try to focus our attention on Christ and His ways, we will notice that the radio and television, the theater and novels, Internet blogs and websites distract us from the Savior and make us insensitive to His presence and His example.

Finally, almsgiving is a form of Lenten observance that the Saints recommend most highly. We know that Our Lord helped everyone who came to Him – He gave them what He was able: He forgave the sinners; He healed the blind, the deaf, the crippled; He cleansed lepers and raised the dead; He gave love and personhood to the marginalized and outcast. We are called to give what we are able – especially from the time, talent and treasure we save by living more simply in Lent. Let us recall the words of the Lord in Isaiah 58: 5-8: “Is this not the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them ...”. And, of course, there is the all important ingredient of the Great Fast: forgiveness. Our Lord’s only condition for forgiveness is: “If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15).

Truly, the way for us to see Lent is as a journey of repentance – a return home, like the Prodigal Son, to the house and embrace of the God Who loves us more than we love ourselves. As he rediscovered his place in the household of his Father, so we must rediscover and recover what we were made to be through our baptismal death and resurrection. Lent is our pilgrimage to Pascha, to share in the Passion and Death of our Savior and in the Victory of His Resurrection. May we take this sacred season seriously, plan to participate in it as fully as possible, and maintain its true spirit:

*The time of Lent is a time of gladness!  
With radiant purity and pure love,  
Filled with resplendent prayer and all good deeds,  
Let us sing with joy ...*

Wishing you a blessed Lent, I offer my  
humble prayers, archpastoral blessing and sincere love,

*f Michael*

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