

Catechetical Homily On the Commencement of Holy and Great Lent

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To the Plenitude of the Church

Grace and Peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
Together with our Prayer, Blessing, and Forgiveness

Beloved brothers and sisters, children in the Lord,

Tomorrow, we enter the period of Holy and Great Lent. In the Lenten vespers of Forgiveness chanted this evening, we shall hear the sacred hymnographer urging us to "begin the time of fasting with joy, submitting ourselves to spiritual struggle" in preparing to welcome the great Passion and joyful Resurrection of our divine-human Lord.

Therefore, what is demanded is a joyful disposition in order to embrace fervently the spiritual struggle of this period of contrition in purification and prayerfulness. Fasting, abstinence, frugality, restriction of personal desires, intense prayer, confession, and similar ascetic elements are essential to the period of Great Lent and should not be considered burdensome obligations or unbearable duties that result in despondency or dejection. When doctors recommend diet or exercise as necessary prerequisites for psychosomatic health and vigor, the first advice they offer by way of a mandatory condition of success is a pleasant mental disposition, which includes smiling and positive thinking. The same also applies to the spiritual period of fasting that opens before us. Great Lent should be regarded as an invaluable divine gift. It is a sacred time of divine grace, which seeks to detach us from things material, lowly and corrupt in order to attract us toward things superior, wholesome and spiritual. It is a unique opportunity to remove from the soul every passion, to rid the body of everything superfluous, harmful and mortal. Accordingly, then, it is a time of immense rejoicing and gladness. A genuine feast and exhilaration!

Nevertheless, my beloved children, the fasting expected of us by the Church, as well as the abstinence, frugality, restriction of personal desires and unnecessary pleasures or expenses, literally constitute a prescription for salvation. This is especially true this year, when our world has experienced a global economic crisis, filled with imminent danger of bankruptcy not only for individuals and companies, but also for entire nations throughout the planet, with destructive consequences in skyrocketing unemployment, the creation of entire hosts of people plagued by poverty, depression, social turmoil, increase in crime, and other such tragedies. Great Lent instructs us to journey daily with a little less,

without the arrogance of extravagance, waste and display. It encourages us to surrender all forms of greed and ignore the challenges of commercial advertising, which constantly promotes new and false necessities. It incites us to limit ourselves to what is absolutely essential and necessary in an attitude of dignified, deliberate simplicity. We are not to be a consuming or compulsive herd of thoughtless and heartless individuals, but a society of sensitive and caring persons, sharing with and supporting our “neighbor” that is in poverty or recession. Finally, Great Lent informs us about patience and tolerance in moments of smaller or larger deprivation, while simultaneously emphasizing the need to seek God’s assistance and mercy, placing our complete trust in His affectionate providence. That is how Christ envisions Great Lent. That is how the Saints lived Great Lent. That is how the Church Fathers undertook the struggle of Great Lent. That is how our faith has traditionally understood Great Lent. That is how the Church of Constantinople, in its wide experience and unceasing vigilance, has always projected and proclaimed Great Lent, and particularly in the current global circumstances.

In sharing these pastoral thoughts and words from the historical and holy Phanar, we extend to all of you our paternal prayer and spiritual blessing for a fruitful journey through the period of Great Lent.

Holy and Great Lent 2010

**+ Bartholomew,
Fervent supplicant before God**