

Great Lent Epistle in the year of our Lord 2016 Permanent Conference of Ukrainian Orthodox Bishops Beyond the Borders of Ukraine



To the Christ-loving and faithful spiritual children of the Holy Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

May the grace of Christ, Who endured the passion for us, abound in your lives!

We have experienced the wondrous and sanctifying events of the season of “God is with us.” Through the eyes of faith, made clear by our liturgical life, we have stood at the cave and received the Light of Lights emanation from it. We have journeyed with the Wise Men and offered the best of ourselves to the New Born King. We have stood at the Jordan and heard with John, “*This is my beloved Son, upon Whom My favour rests.*” We have proclaimed with Symeon, “*my eyes have seen Your salvation...*” We have rejoiced and proclaimed the Glory of God the Father and the Gift of His Only-Begotten Son in word and deed.

Now we embark upon another spiritual journey – **Great Lent 2016** – a journey, which leads us to the most sacred days of the Orthodox Christian year – the days of Holy and Great Week and the feast of feasts, the Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Once again, via the words of Christ, which echo throughout our rich liturgical life, we are reminded of the holiness to which we have been invited and His affirmation of that holiness in His words and deeds as recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In words ascribed to a prominent spiritual father of the early church, Venerable Ephraim the Syrian, we are reminded of our holy nobility. We beseech divine assistance in overcoming laziness in any guise, in exercising courage and being stalwart in the face of the trials and tribulations, in avoiding the lust for power, all of which destroy self and others. We beseech that divine assistance also in ridding ourselves of useless and harmful speech, which contributes neither to our edification nor to the improvement of our fellow man.

We, who have been called by Christ to shepherd and oversee this segment of His Holy Vineyard – that of the Holy Ukrainian Orthodox Church – make this Lenten journey with you, our beloved spiritual children. For us, all this is a time of purification, a time of personal renewal and time of divesting ourselves of those accoutrements, which prevent the Light of Christ from penetrating our lives and transforming us. It is a time of faithfulness to Christ our Lord, Who like the Father, continues to manifest His fidelity to us stubborn prodigals who stray from him – sometimes because of human weakness, often purposefully. With you we beseech the One, Whom we acknowledge as the Lord and Master of our lives, to grant us the spirit of humility, meekness, patience and love so that **Great Lent 2016** might signal growth in personal integrity and holiness. It is by these that we, who are conscious of our own sins, might assist in the spiritual edification of our brothers and sisters in the Faith.

With you and our brethren in Ukraine and throughout the world, we enter this Lenten Season 2016 as humble pilgrims, willing to change, to divest ourselves of the old and to receive with joy and thanksgiving the many good gifts of God – Graces – Mysteries, through fasting, through increased prayer and repentance. These Graces make it possible to open ourselves up to Christ who offered Himself for us, our fellow man and the life of the world.

Repentance, is much more than abstinence. Our Holy Church calls us to repentance in our life, and calls us to fulfill God's commandment – calling upon each of us to make a self-examination of our conscience, the offenses made to others and forgiveness to those who have sinned against us. The Church calls upon us to bring our repentance within the light of God's truth, thereby, receiving the remission of our sins. Is that not why, that in all humility and sincerity of heart, we beg of our Lord, "*O, Giver-of-life, open the doors of repentance for me.*" Our repentance will make us think less about the self and more about being concerned and caring for the needs of all God's children. Entering the season of Great Lent – the road of the Great Fast will take each of us to the greatest joy of the Lord's Resurrection – the joy of life conquering death, – the night that is more brilliant than the sun and banishes all darkness.

We request your prayers during these days of self-scrutiny, these days of spiritual growth and we assure you of our own prayers on your behalf. May Christ, the Lord and Master of our lives, grant us those gifts, which are necessary for our salvation and may we be the wise servants, who accept them with humility and thanksgiving.

We, by the Grace of God, your Hierarchs, pray that your experience of the Great Lenten Season truly will be holy and that you arrive at the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and His empty tomb with gratitude to the All-Mighty God.

Growing in grace with you and with you anticipating the glorious day of Christ's Resurrection, we remain, Your servants in our Lord Jesus Christ,

† **YURIJ,**

Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

† **ANTONY,**

*Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA
Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the Diaspora*

† **IOAN,**

Archbishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the Diaspora

† **JEREMIAH,**

Archbishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Eparchy of Brazil and South America

† **ILARION,**

Bishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

† **ANDRIY,**

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