



DIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA AND EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

The Most Rev. Mark, Archbishop of Philadelphia • Orthodox Church in America

Great Lent 2025

Dear Reverend Fathers, Matushki and Faithful,

Christ is in our midst!

Great Lent is here, and the Lord gives us wonderful opportunities to redirect our lives and hearts to Him. Hopefully, we will take full advantage of this time to renew our relationship with the Lord through repentance, confession, increased prayer, reading of the Holy Scriptures, fasting, and almsgiving. As Fr. Alexander Schmemmann comments in his book on Great Lent, “Let us abstain from frivolous conversation and various forms of entertainment.” The fast is not simply from certain foods but from feeding the passions and sin. In the Gospel of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), we understand that when the Lord returns in glory, His judgment will not simply be based upon the absence of sin but on the development of virtue. Essentially, are we loving and compassionate, and is this evident in concrete ways through our actions? Remember the hymnography of Lent: the demons do not eat either. Let us seek to minimize time spent on the internet or watching television. Let us strive to be at peace with one another, forgiving and offering forgiveness. Read through Genesis, Isaiah, Psalms, and Proverbs during this holy season.

Let us use this time to rid our lives of the distractions that clutter our minds. As we ponder the prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian, let us abstain from “the spirit of sloth, despair (faint-heartedness), lust for power, and idle talk” and open our hearts to chastity, humility, patience, and love. May the Lord help us to see our own sins and not judge our brother. Do we believe change is possible for ourselves and others? Are we willing to utilize the tools the Church, in her wisdom, gives us to do so?

Sadly, some of our clergy and faithful have never embraced the Lenten school of repentance and its discipline. We will try everything the world offers to seek mental and physical health but never embrace the tried and proven gift of Great Lent. If you have never engaged in the Lenten prescription above, try it this year. By the time we reach Holy Week, things we once considered unchangeable in our lives suddenly begin to be addressed or resolved through a lengthy and determined effort. Many talk about what they are “giving up” for Lent but do not consider what they have the opportunity to get rid of—namely, bad habits that ultimately separate us from communion with the Lord.

St. Mark the Ascetic remarks, “We beg and plead with God to deliver us from our sins, yet we continue to love and nurture their causes.” As we embrace the discipline of the Church, we are giving up nothing but gaining true and authentic freedom and the gift of eternal life. Doing things our own way is what landed us in this mess. Let us seek to embrace the discipline of the Church so that we might experience the authentic freedom and joy Christ graciously bestows upon those beloved of Him.

Asking for your holy prayers, I remain your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

+MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania