



The Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA AND EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
The Most Rev. Mark, Archbishop of Philadelphia

March 6, 2023

Great Lent 2023

Dear Rev Frs. 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 Scripture, 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. Remember the hymnography of Lent, the demons do not eat either. Minimize time spent on the internet or watching television. Let us seek to be at peace with one another, forgiving and offering forgiveness. Read through Genesis, Isaiah, Psalms and Proverbs during this Holy season.

Let make use of 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, faint-heartedness, lust of 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 to judge our brother.

Sadly, some of our faithful 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 never engaged 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 the lengthy and determined effort. Many talk about what they are "giving up" for Lent, and do not consider what they have the opportunity to get rid of, i.e., a lot of bad habits that ultimately separate us from communion with the Lord. As we embrace the discipline of the Church we are giving up nothing, but gain 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 might experience the authentic freedom and joy Christ gracious bestows on those beloved of Him.

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

+MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania
Locum Tenens of the Albanian Archdiocese of the Orthodox Church in America



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"Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." Augustine