



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Reflections of His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey for the journey of the Great Lent.

My Beloved brother Clergy and blessed Faithful children in the Lord,

With sacred compunction and spiritual joy, we enter once again the Holy and Great Lent, this “arena of ascetic struggle,” as it is beautifully described by His All-Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who reminds us that this season is not a burden, but a gift—“a spiritual spring,” a period illumined by the light of the Resurrection.

The Apostle Paul exhorts us: “Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Great Lent is precisely this sacred time: a journey of repentance, humility, fasting, and prayer, with our eyes fixed upon the life-giving Cross of the Lord. As we advance toward Holy Pascha, we do not walk in darkness, but in hope, for the Cross leads always to the empty Tomb and to the joy that “no one will take from you” (John 16:22).

His All-Holiness has wisely emphasized that asceticism is not foreign to the life of the Church, nor a denial of joy, but “another word for Christian existence.” True asceticism is ecclesial, not individualistic. It is not self-justification, but self-offering; not self-destruction, but the transformation of the heart. As the tradition of the Gerontikon teaches: “We have been instructed not to destroy the body, but to destroy the passions.” In this spirit, our fasting becomes a means of freedom—freedom from egoism, from attachment, from the illusion that life consists in possessions (cf. Luke 12:15).

Great Lent is never a solitary path. It is the common struggle of the Body of Christ. Repentance, forgiveness, almsgiving, and prayer are inseparably woven together. Our Lord reminds us: “When you fast... when you pray... when you give alms” (Matthew 6:1–18). These are not isolated acts, but expressions of one unified life in Christ.

In an age marked by confusion and fragmentation, the Church offers the healing experience of communion. Great Lent calls us to rediscover the Eucharistic heart of our existence. Every ascetical effort finds its fulfillment in the Divine Liturgy, in thanksgiving and doxology, in the foretaste of the Kingdom. The Resurrection of Christ is “the hope within us” (1 Peter 3:15) and the radiant horizon toward which we journey.

We are not alone in this sacred struggle. The benevolence of the Triune God sustains us; the intercessions of the All-Holy Theotokos protect us; and the prayers of the saints accompany us. As we recall the historic gratitude of the faithful who chanted the Akathist Hymn in thanksgiving to the Mother of God, so too we entrust our cities, our parishes, and our families to her maternal care.

My beloved clergy, we have the commitment to lead the people of God with patience, discernment, and love. Be living examples of repentance and hope, guiding the faithful not merely by word, but by the witness of your life.

Let’s embrace this season not with gloom, but with expectation. Lent is a “second baptism,” a renewal of grace, a return to the Father who awaits us with open arms (cf. Luke 15:20).

May the Lord grant us all a blessed and fruitful Fast, marked by prayer, adorned with forgiveness, and crowned with love so that sanctified in Him and “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), we may arrive together at the radiant joy of His Holy and Saving Resurrection. Amen.