27/02/2020

Encyclical of Archbishop Elpidophoros for Holy and Great Lent 2020



March 2, 2020

The Beginning of the Holy and Great Lent
“You may freely eat of every tree of the garden”
(Genesis 2:16)

The Most Reverend Hierarchs, the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils of the Greek Orthodox Communities, the Distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools, the Philoptochos Sisterhoods, the Youth, the Hellenic Organizations, and the entire Greek Orthodox Family in America

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we commence our journey of the Great Lent that leads us inexorably to the Holy Passion of the Lord and the Pascha of unending joy. It is a time of determination and concentration, one in which we are encouraged to abstain from certain foods and drink, to practice more active charity and philanthropy, and to look within at the values and principles by which we live our lives.

Yesterday, on the last Sunday before the Fast, we commemorated the story of the "fall" of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Paradise. They were cast out because they ate of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," from which they had been forbidden by the commandment of God. Most of us know the story from our youth, but we often miss the verse before, that every other tree was theirs to enjoy. The denial of the one tree was not a punishment, but an opportunity. It was a calling for Adam and Eve to exceed themselves, and to give up something for the sake of love. Real love cannot be forced; it can only be offered freely. The seeming prohibition was in fact and invitation for them (and us!) to become truly free.

Therefore, as you fast for the next forty days, take time to offer whatever your strength allows in the freedom of love, always remembering every other "tree of the garden" with which you have been so richly blessed. Then, Lent will not be a season of deprivation, but one of abundance, an overflowing of the love, mercy, and forgiveness for which we journey to the Holy Resurrection of the Conqueror of death.

With paternal love in our Lord Jesus Christ,

† ELPIDOPHOROS



Archbishop of America
goarch.org