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His Eminence Metropolitan Evangelos of New Jersey issues Encyclical for this year’s Holy and Great Lent



His Eminence Metropolitan Evangelos of New Jersey has released his Encyclical for this year’s Holy and Great Lent 2020. Read the full text below:

Holy and Great Lent 2020

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy
Esteemed Members of the Metropolitan Council, Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils,
Philoptochos Sisterhood, Faculty and Students of the Catechetical and Greek Afternoon Schools,
Directors and Participants of all Youth Organizations, and all devout Orthodox Christians of the
Communities of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey

"Wash me with my tears, O Savior, for I have been soiled by many sins.
Therefore I fall down before
You, I have sinned, have mercy on me, O God!" (Sunday Triodion Vesperal Hymn)

My Beloved in the Lord,

We stand at the very threshold of Holy and Great Lent; a time of reflection, repentance, prayer, and a return to God who constantly and mercifully embraces us even in our numerous faults. The period of Holy and Great Lent is not meant to emphasize self-deprivation, but it is meant to give us greater spiritual clarity so that we may come to better recognize ourselves. It can be very easy to think of this period as nothing more than a checklist of things to not do. Do
not eat meat, do not eat dairy products, and abstain from that which the canons of the Church tell us to during this period of Lent. To approach Great Lent in this manner, however, would be nothing short of mistaken and even pharisaical. Yes, the Church teaches us that we should not eat meat, dairy, fish, oil, and wine, during a majority of this fasting period, but we must ask ourselves, why does the Church prescribe this? The Church asks us to fast, but fasting is not just about food. It is not limited to what we eat or do not eat. It is about our thoughts, our words, our actions, our inner disposition, and our entire mindset.

By understanding fasting in this broader sense, the Church intends for us to be more reflective and prayerful during the Lenten period and to focus our attention on the greater themes of Great Lent – repentance and prayer. Being repentant is not easy. It requires us to admit that we are occasionally wrong which is difficult for anyone to admit since it requires humility. Furthermore, repentance requires that we seek forgiveness

from both those whom we have hurt and from God. We must be willing to ask both God and neighbor for forgiveness otherwise we are not really repenting. In addition to this, fasting gives us a renewed spirit of prayer which helps us to pray more during Holy and Great Lent. This type of prayer includes participating more in the Divine Services in your parish as well as increasing your personal prayer on an individual level.

This broader sense of fasting is never done in and of itself, but it is always done with something particular in mind. This is because there is no fast without a feast and likewise there is no feast without a fast. The Church is asking us to engage in this particular fast because we are preparing ourselves both as individuals and as members of a community for the greatest event of all – the Resurrection of our Lord, which in turn, is our resurrection as well. In order to
prepare ourselves properly for Pascha, we must endure to fast adequately. This means we have to ask forgiveness of our neighbors and when someone asks for our forgiveness, we must be willing to receive them with love. Simultaneously, our prayer life should increase so that we can develop a greater relationship with God who sheds His mercy freely upon us for our own mistakes. Furthermore, and for those who are physically able, we are called to prepare ourselves physically by abstaining from certain foods so that we can humble ourselves. Finally, we should more closely watch our words and our actions ensuring that what we say and what we do is in accordance with the Gospel of Christ.

My beloved in the Lord, everyone is at a different place spiritually. Some have been following the fasts and engaging in a spiritually uplifting life in the Church since their youth while others have done very few of these things. No matter where you are in your spiritual lives, I challenge you to do a little more and to seek God more fervently than before according to your spiritual maturity. As we hear the Apostle Paul say to the Corinthians regarding spiritual nourishment, *“I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it”* (1 Cor. 3:2). Let us strive to enrich our spiritual lives so that we may be ready to receive solid spiritual nourishment. Praying that God blesses each of you with a spiritually edifying Lenten Season so that we may experience Christ’s Resurrection on the third day, I remain

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

† E V A N G E L O S

Metropolitan of New Jersey