

## His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America issues Christmas Fast Encyclical



### Encyclical on the Christmas Fast

Ἄγαπήσεις Κύριον τὸν Θεόν σου ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου. Αὕτη ἐστὶ πρώτη καὶ μεγάλη ἐντολή. Δευτέρα δὲ ὄμοία αὐτῇ· ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν. (κατά Ματθαίον 22:37-39)

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-39)

To 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 Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As we enter more deeply into the Christmas Fast, we understand that this will be a holiday season unlike no other, I want to commend to all of you the words of the Lord written above. Our chief and principal responsibility as Christians is to our God and to the image of God that we find in other people. And this duty is love.

With the continuing pandemic, we are facing even harder times that will demand sacrifice for the sake of our own health and for the sake of others' health as well. I encourage each of us to consider the sacrifice of the Lord Himself, how He humbled himself to be born in the cave of Bethlehem. You may hear voices, even from Christians, that clamor for so-called "rights and privileges" and spurn the simple covering of our faces during this pandemic, as if this covering were somehow dishonoring our Creator.

But please consider how the Lord of Glory covered himself with our naked flesh in His Incarnation, and how He humbled himself – even to the death on the Cross – for our sake and our salvation. Can we not cover our faces to save our neighbors? Is this really too much to ask? This is how you honor God, by honoring His creation! And can we not distance ourselves for a time from those we love for their well-being? The meaning of Christmas begins with the Son of God distancing Himself from Heaven itself – an incalculable space – so that we could be united to the Father.

My Beloved Christians, we are facing a critical moment in the health of our Country, but just as much, a critical moment in the health of our souls. How will the world know we are Christians? "If you have love for one another," was the answer of the Lord (John 13:35). Let us set aside our egoistic pretensions and even the opinions that bolster our pride and vanity, and humbly, graciously, and giving the glory to God Almighty, show our love for one another by protecting the living image of God that is each and every human being.

With paternal love in our Lord Jesus Christ,

†ELPIDOPHOROS  
Archbishop of America

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