

Lent Pastoral Letter by John X Patriarch of Antioch and All the East



By the mercy of God Almighty
John X
Patriarch of Antioch and All the East
to
My brothers, Pastors of the Holy Church of Antioch
My sons and daughters, all over this Apostolic See
Beloved spiritual Brethren and Children,

At the beginning of Forty-Day Lent, we bow the knees of the soul before the Benevolent Creator. We shed tears of repentance, asking for His saints' intercession and the succor of the Virgin Mary. We say in unison these words: "Lord, O Lord open unto us the door of Thy Mercy."

This is what the Minister of the Divine Sacrament says just before every Liturgy. This is what we constantly need to say at the doorstep of the season of repentance that paves the way to Resurrection. The mercy which God prefers over sacrifice is the core essence of Lent and Fasting. Great Lent is the path of mercy that leads us to the Cross of Glory and from there to the threshold of the Empty Tomb.

"Lord, O Lord open unto us the door of Thy Mercy."

We say it today in united voices with many people. We ask through it the divine mercy, not the human one. We ask through it divine mercy that is poured out on us as much as we have mercy on one another, according to the amount of our love. We ask for a generous mercy that God shall bestow on us as much as we depend on him. We ask for mercy from a God Who has knocked on all doors for the sake of our salvation and awaits us to knock on the door of His mercy. Then He shall pour it out on us and with it He shall wash our hearts, souls and our beings. We ask for mercy in the season of divine mercy, in the season of Great Lent, where souls shine with the flowers of the earth touched by the breeze of the divine mercy, which removes all distress and sorrow.

“Lord, O Lord open unto us the door of Thy Mercy.”

We say with the tongue of all humankind, with the tongue of the hungry and the homeless, the poor and needy, and this weary East ravaged by wars that yearns for the peace of Jesus. We say it with the tongue of Truth that was slaughtered under the feet of falsehood. We say it in the name of the human person in this East, particularly its Christians. We say it as a leitmotiv of those who are always crucified, so that no one finds themselves in distress under any cross.

We say it today that we have lost brothers and beloved ones to the current pandemic. We say it, having in our heart all those who left us to meet the face of Christ, going from this ephemeral world to another endless one. We have in mind especially our beloved ones who perished and left us on earth as a result of this pandemic. We say it and think of those unknown soldiers, the medical and service staff, who are the first line of defense. We say it, asking Christ our God to lift the present pandemic from his world.

The present season reminds us of the scent of Christian history in this Middle East. It reminds us of an oriental Christianity that was thrown under the cross of the Lord of Glory for two thousand years. It shares His distress. Its pain derives from His shadow. Her preaching comes from the good news of His gospel. Its authenticity comes from His Apostles. Her patience is His. Her wreath is His. Her genuine testimony comes from the kindness of his Apostles and from the fragrance of His martyrs. Her bells ring with His gospel and its chrism is the blood of its heart, which she poured out over the generations, expressing genuine faith scented with the fragrance of Christ and the sweetness of living with Him.

We enter this fasting season, while the wound of the Church of Antioch is still open. This wound is the kidnapping of the Bishops of Aleppo, John Ibrahim and Paul Yazigi, since April 2013, amid a general silencing of this file and condemned international muteness. We raise our prayers for them and for every kidnapped person.

As we address to you our apostolic blessing from the throne of the Apostles Peter

and Paul, we ask you forgiveness, my brothers and beloved ones, in these blessed days, and we ask the Almighty Lord to open for us always the door of His divine mercy. We join our prayers to yours, saying: "O Lord, O Lord, open the door of Thy mercy for us. Let Thy mercy on us be like our reliance upon you. For Thou art blessed forever, Amen."

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