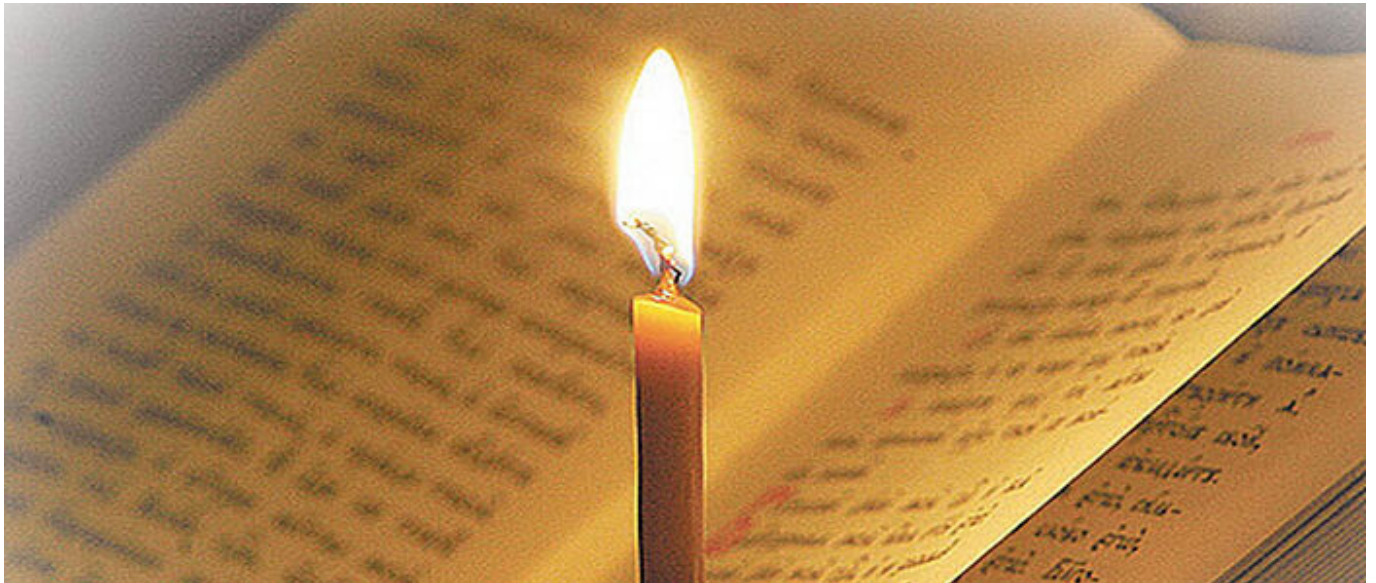


LENT IS A TIME TO STRENGTHEN OUR FIDELITY IN CHRIST—METROPOLITAN SAWA OF WARSAW



“For Orthodox Christians in our complex, difficult times, full of spiritual disappointments, temptations and limitations of all kinds, Lent is of great spiritual importance,” His Beatitude Metropolitan Sawa of Poland begins his Lenten epistle.

Lent is a time for increased prayer and the struggle for purification, which give us renewed strength to struggle with the temptations of our times. We fast to elevate the soul above the body, to bring about repentance, and to see the world around us through the eyes of a spiritually-cleansed person, the Polish primate writes.

Never before has man been so entrenched in the material world; never before has man been “so weak and spiritually empty,” Met. Sawa states. There are many reasons for this, one of the main ones being the “catastrophic exchange of values,” where modern man serves the lust of the flesh instead of the spirit. Thus, love has cooled and man has become a “toy in the hands of his passions and all kinds of evil powers.”

Satan now works out in the open, His Beatitude warns.

As Orthodox Christians, we can resist this evil only by our faith in Christ. And for this to be effective, we must be faithful to Christ in absolutely everything—whether big or small. And Lent is a time when our fidelity to Christ is strengthened, through humility and repentance.

“Fasting purifies the human spirit, restores spiritual strength over the weaknesses of the flesh. The human spirit was created by the Creator, not to serve the flesh and the outside world, but to inherit the eternal Kingdom,” the Metropolitan exhorts. And in the Divine services, we sing of “joyful” repentance. “We should mourn our sins and rejoice in God’s mercy.”

“A cleansed conscience sees much good. When a soul loves Christ, it is forgiven much,” Met. Sawa teaches. Further: “When we unite with Christ through repentance, Christ will be with us and no evil powers can harm us.”

This is the path for the modern Orthodox man to fight evil, for as St. Isaac the Syrian and St. Anthony the Great teach, the greatest thing we can do is confess our sins, which is greater than angelic visions, His Beatitude writes.

“Repentance is a ladder the leads man to Heaven,” he adds. And the main condition for repentance is mutual forgiveness, to which the Church calls us on the upcoming Forgiveness Sunday.

“Brothers and sisters! In accordance with our Orthodox practice, on the eve of Lent, I am asking all of you, for myself and the entire clergy, to forgive our sins: We have sinned in word, deed, thought and feelings. Forgive us sinners,” the Polish primate movingly asks of his flock.

May we peacefully and profitably pass through the days of Great Lent in order to truly honor Christ’s Resurrection, His Beatitude entreats in conclusion.

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