

## Reflection for Great and Holy Lent 2021 by His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco



Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

In a few short days, we will begin Great Lent and our journey to the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. With Clean Monday, we will begin the Great Fast, as Lent is often called, and turn our focus to our spiritual and religious lives. In its hymnology, the Church contrasts the perceived darkness of Great Lent with words of joy. A hymn of Clean Monday states, ***“Let us joyfully begin the all-hallowed season of abstinence; and let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments of Christ our God, with the brightness of love and the splendor of prayer, with the purity of holiness and the strength of good courage....”***

An overarching theme of Great Lent is called bright-sadness – χαρμολύπη. The atmosphere of the weekday services is penitential, especially as we repeat the prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian day after day, or hear the refrain “I have sinned...” in the Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete. This reminder of the distance we experience between God and our self is meant to chasten us and bring us to a state of repentance- μετάνοια – of changing our mind, our heart, and our actions.

We prepare to begin Great Lent after one of the most challenging years in anyone’s memory. Over 500,000 people in the United States have lost their lives to the Coronavirus. There has been economic devastation. There have been natural disasters. Our churches were not spared from the ripple-effects of the pandemic. Thankfully, in these last few weeks, there has been progress in the re-opening of our society and our churches.

The Psalmist says, “***I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’***” (Psalm 122:1) I am sure that you are eager to return to church and will be glad when you open its doors and enter. We have been away for too long. Even if the number of participants is reduced, we can look forward to spending time in our Father’s house once again, to pray and worship in person, and to participate in the divine services of our Faith.

Great Lent also provides us with the opportunity to place God back in the center of our lives. Set aside your usual routines and concerns and instead prepare, through fasting and repentance, in anticipation of the joyful celebration of the Lord’s Holy Resurrection.

Beloved in the Lord, the journey now begins. Let us “***walk by faith, not by sight***” (II Corinthians 5:7) toward the Cross of Christ. Let us not be distracted by worldly pursuits. And as Saint Paul writes to the Hebrews, “***...let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.***”

My beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, I know this past year has been difficult, but you have never been alone. As you take these first steps on your journey through Great Lent, may you be renewed in your faith and strengthened in your life in Christ. God bless you!

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