



Holy Ghost Orthodox Church

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GREAT LENT—WELCOME BISHOP DANIEL

ON THE MEND: Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Metropolitan Theodosius [OCA], Archbishop Jovan, Bishop Robert, Father John Harvey, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Dragan Filipović, Father Paul Stoll, Father Igor Soroka, Father Joseph Kopchak, Father Elias Warnke, Father Nestor Kowal, Father George Yatsko, Father Paul Bigelow, Father Emilian Balan, Father John Nakonachny, Father Steve Repa, Protopresbyter William Diakiw, Protodeacon Joseph Hotrovich, Father Adam Yonitch, Pani-Dobrodijka Sonia Diakiw, Father Paisius McGrath, Joshua Agosto and his family, Eva Malesnick, Stella Peanoske, Joe Nezolyk, Nick Behun, Grace Holupka, Virginia Bryan, Joseph Sliwinsky, Linda Mechtly, Mary Mochnick, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Sam Wadrose, Isabella Olivia Lindgren, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Erin, Michael Miller, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Liz Stumpf, Theodore Nixon, Michelle Corba Kapeluck, Linda Hippert & family, Margaret Vladimir, Luke Emmerling, John Sheliga, George Rocknage, Robert McKivitz, Liz Obradovich, Halyna Zelinska [Bishop Daniel's mother], Charlotte, Andrew Mark Olynyk, Deborah Finley, Claire Senita, Eleanor Kelly, Bryan, Nancy Barylak, Patrick Keenan, Khrystyna Chorniy, Anthony Cormier, Nathan Forbeck, Sarah Doyle, Samuel Peters, Jean Stutchell, Esther Holupka, Wanda Mefford, David Vallor, Henry Faraly, Betty O'Masta, Julie Eiler, Dorothy Lednovich, Bob C., Allie—young girl with leukemia, Heather Kramer, Jane Wartinbee, Matthew—21-year-old with cancer, Nicholas Orlando, Mary Ann Kuznik, Michael Woloschak, Michael

Pryhodzenko, Sonia Luciw, Theresa Ditto, Mary Ann Musial, Mary Pelino, Yvonne Christy, Myron & Barbara Spak, Pete Niederberger, Julia Duda, Lisa Pandle, Kris & Julie Hanczar, John Kennedy, Loretta, Nancy, Carol, & Michael Sheliga, Gaelle Kelly, Irma McDivitt, Robin Young, Mckayla, Rachel, Carl & Margaret Reed, Lydia Wilson, Robert Pointon, Walter Cecelia, John Persico, Jeff Miller, Mary Kernick, Glenn Miller, Jean Marie, Donna & Walter McCrackin, Bonnie & Eugene Blair [Pani Gina's parents], Mel & Charlotte Malik, David Hoenshell, Barbara Macino, Shelley Hill, Mikaela Kapeluck, Linda Cawley, Gerald Cogley, Helen Bozo, Corey Guich, Robert Vangrin, Susan "Billie" Mason, Pauline Witkowsky, Sera White, Donald Griffey, Deborah Smith, Nancy & Eric Dunik, Julian Strozh [child with cerebral palsy], Dr. Kirsten Ream, Patricia Corey, Michelle, Katie Swarm, Richard Dunst, Michelle, Patrick, Linda Morris, Howard Simpson, Chris, Pastor Ed Bowen, David Hiles, Karen Johnson, Jennifer, Jerry Quinn, Cher Mount, Frank & Janet Horrell, Jim Wandling, Gail, Sirena Sharp, Ron Paulovich, Fred DeNorscia, Sandi Anderson, Donald Uebing, Sabrina, Shirley, Denny Mader, Ella Campbell, Tom Hyatt, Bill Janiro, Jean Symanko-Andy's sister, William Lemonakis, Barbara McDougall, Alma Wyke, Lindsay Romanczak & family, Virginia Catherine Pynch, Susan Lucas, Neil Carter & family, James Paluh, Mickie Weikel, Evelyn Krempasky, Tammy Strunk, Loida Esbry, Darlene Chicka Deskins, Drew, Alice & Keith Philipa, Kateryna Kocelko, Nancy Heinbaugh, Mira Filipovic, Lynn, Jacqueline, Irma Opacic, Sharon, Zan Cheng, Jeff Jones, Kristy, Elaine Ellenberger, Donna Cacioppo [Evelyn's niece], Brandon, Anna Tranchine, Demetra, Blase Urban, Catherine Hogel & children, Jennifer & Dylan, Ron Schwartz, Lydia Wilson, Flora Tomlin, Stella Rossi, Howell Swarm, Jane Bielewicz Allred, Manny "Lazarus" Lopez, Glenn & Lucas Burlack, Katie Elizabeth, Mileva, & Michael, Deirdré Straughan, Terri Paluh, Lori & Steve Lucier, Evelyn Felouzis, Kyranna Cherpas, Pastor Bruce Nordeen, Millie Koss Good, Mary Haraczy, Heather Ried, Carla Perry, Linda Elliot, Dennis McDaniel, Mike Mangan, Luke Tinsley, Brent, Tricia, Katherine Gorman, Pamela Jaquette, Michael Pawlyshyn, and Jackie Crimbchin. ARNOLD: Stefania Lucci, Steve Sakal, and Homer Paul Kline. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

Please remember in your prayers—our dear 'Little Father' Emilian, who returned to Romania to undergo surgery for back pain. This particular procedure is not offered here in the United States. He asked for our

prayers and expressed his thanks for the love and fellowship he has shared with the Holy Ghost Parish Family. He said he looks forward to returning to us pain-free at some time in the future...may God watch over him and heal him...Fr. Bob

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS: All Christians and the others in the Middle East who are suffering during this time of great tragedy and unrest. May God watch over and keep them safe! Lord have mercy!

Please remember ALL American service men and women in your prayers. May God watch over them and all American service men and women—and bring them all home safely!

REMEMBER—PRAYERS ARE ALWAYS FREE!

Communion Fasting: nothing to eat or drink after midnight, EXCEPT in cases where your doctor tells you to eat or drink something for medical reasons: medication, diabetes, etc. If you have a question, please ask Father Bob.

AT ANY TIME—if there is an emergency, if you have questions, or if you just need to talk, please CALL FATHER BOB at [412] 279-5640.

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

**SUNDAY, MARCH 20 HIERARCHICAL DIVINE LITURGY OF SAINT BASIL THE GREAT 10:30 AM
FIRST SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOXY; THE HOLY
MARTYRS OF CHERSON: BASIL, EPHRAIM, CAPITO, EUGENE, AETHERIUS,
ELPIDUS, & AGATHODORUS; SAINT PAUL THE SIMPLE OF EGYPT-DISCIPLE OF
SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT; SAINT PAUL THE CONFESSOR-BISHOP OF
PRUSIAS IN BITHYNIA; SAINT EMILIAN OF ROME
SPECIAL PARISH MEETING AFTER DIVINE LITURGY**

Tone 1

Hebrews 11:24-26,32-12:2

John 1:43-51

VESPERS OF THE TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOXY—ST. NICHOLAS GO CATHEDRAL—4 PM

**SUNDAY, MARCH 27 DIVINE LITURGY OF SAINT BASIL THE GREAT 10:30 AM
SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS-ARCHBISHOP OF
THESSILONICA; SYNAXIS OF ALL VENERABLE FATHERS OF PERCHEVSKY
LAVRA; SAINT BENEDICT OF NURSIA-ABBOT; SAINT EUSCHEMON-BISHOP OF**

LAMPSACUS; SAINT ROSTISLAV-MICHAEL-PRINCE OF KIEV; SAINT THEOGNOSTUS-METROPOLITAN OF KIEV AND ALL RUS

Tone 2

Hebrews 7:26-8:2; Galatians 5:22-6:2

John 10:9-16; Luke 6:17-23

SUNDAY, APRIL 03 DIVINE LITURGY OF SAINT BASIL THE GREAT 10:30 AM
THIRD SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT; ADORATION OF THE MOST HOLY CROSS;
VENERABLE JAMES THE CONFESSOR-BISHOP OF THE STUDIUM; SAINT CYRIL-
BISHOP OF CATANIA; SAINT THOMAS-BISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Tone 3

Hebrews 4:14-5:6

Mark 8:34-9:1

Litany in Blessed Memory of Frank & Ollie Pendlyshok, John Cherepko, Rose Lopushanksy, Mary Haluszczak, Vladimir Hanczar, Michael Brittan, Deacon Dennis Lapushansky, & Lynne Giglione—Fr. Bob

BULLETIN INSERT FOR 20 MARCH 2016

FIRST SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOXY; THE HOLY MARTYRS OF CHERSON: BASIL, EPHRAIM, CAPITO, EUGENE, AETHERIUS, ELPIDUS, & AGATHODORUS; SAINT PAUL THE SIMPLE OF EGYPT-DISCIPLE OF SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT; SAINT PAUL THE CONFESSOR-BISHOP OF PRUSIAS IN BITHYNIA; SAINT EMILIAN OF ROME

*****SPECIAL PARISH MEETING AFTER DIVINE LITURGY*****

TROPARION—TONE 2

We venerate Thy most pure image, O Good One,
And ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ our God.
Of Thy good will Thou wast pleased to ascend the cross in the flesh
And deliver Thy creatures from bondage to the enemy.
Therefore, with thankfulness we cry aloud to Thee:
Thou hast filled all with joy, O our Savior,
For thou didst come to save the world

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever,
and unto ages of ages. Amen.

KONTAKION—TONE 8

No one could describe the Word of the Father
But when He took flesh from you, O Theotokos,
He accepted to be described

And restored the fallen image to its former state
By uniting it to divine beauty.
We confess and proclaim our salvation in word and images

PROKEIMENON—TONE 4

READER: Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our Fathers and praised and glorified is Thy name forever!

PEOPLE: Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our Fathers and praised and glorified is Thy name forever!

READER: For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us!

PEOPLE: Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our Fathers and praised and glorified is Thy name forever!

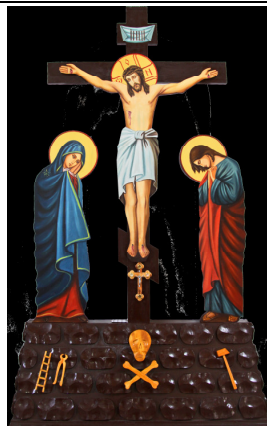
READER: Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our Fathers

PEOPLE: And praised and glorified is Thy name forever!

ALLELUIA VERSES

Moses and Aaron are among His priests; Samuel also was among those who called on His name.

They cried to the Lord, and He answered them.



PERMANENT CONFERENCE OF UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX BISHOPS BEYOND THE BORDERS OF UKRAINE IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 2016

To the Christ-loving and faithful spiritual children of the Holy Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

May the grace of Christ, Who endured the passion for us, abound in your lives!

We have experienced the wondrous and sanctifying events of the season of “God with us”. Through eyes of faith, made clear by our liturgical life, we have stood at the cave and received the Light of Lights emanation from it. We have journeyed with the Wise Men and offered the best of ourselves to the New Born King. We have stood at the Jordan and heard with John, “This is my beloved Son, upon Whom My favor rests”. We have proclaimed with Simeon, “my eyes have seen Your salvation ...”. We have rejoiced and proclaimed the Glory of God the Father and the Gift of His Only-Begotten Son in word and deed.

Now we embark upon another spiritual journey – Great Lent 2016 – a journey, which leads us to the most sacred days of the Orthodox Christian year – the days of Holy and Great Week and Feast of Feasts, the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Once again, via the words of Christ, which echo

throughout our rich liturgical life, we are reminded of the holiness to which we have been invited and His affirmation of that holiness in His words and deeds as recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In words ascribed to a prominent spiritual father of the early church, Venerable Ephraim the Syrian, we are reminded of our holy nobility. We beseech divine assistance in overcoming laziness in any guise, in exercising courage and being stalwart in the face of the trials and tribulations, in avoiding the lust for power, all of which destroy self and others. We beseech that divine assistance also in ridding ourselves of useless and harmful speech, which contributes neither to our edification nor to the improvement of our fellow man.

We who have been called by Christ to shepherd and oversee this segment of His Holy Vineyard – that of the Holy Ukrainian Orthodox Church – make this Lenten journey with you, our beloved spiritual children.

For us all this is a time of purification, a time of personal renewal and time of divesting ourselves of those accouterments, which prevent the Light of Christ from penetration our lives and transforming us. It is a time of faithfulness to Christ our Lord, Who like the Father, continues to manifest His fidelity to us stubborn prodigals who stray from him – sometimes because of human weakness, often purposefully. With you we beseech the One, Whom we acknowledge as the Lord and Master of our lives, to grant us the spirit of humility, meekness, patience and love so that Lent 2016 might signal growth in personal integrity and holiness. It is by these that we, who are conscious of our own sins, might assist in the spiritual edification of our brothers and sisters in the Faith.

With you and our brethren in Ukraine and throughout the world we enter this Lenten Season 2016 as humble pilgrims, willing to change, to divest ourselves of the old and to receive with joy and thanksgiving the many good gifts of God – Graces – Mysteries, through fasting, through increased prayer and repentance. These Graces make it possible to open ourselves up to Christ who offered Himself for us, our fellow man and the life of the world.

Repentance, is much more than abstinence. Our Holy Church calls us to repentance in our life, and calls us to fulfill God's commandment – calls upon each of us to make a self-recognition of our conscience, the offenses made to others and the forgiveness to those that have sinned against us. The Church calls upon us to bring our repentance within the light of God's truth, thereby, receiving the remission of our sins. Is that not why, that in all humility and sincerity of heart we beg of our Lord, "Oh giver of life open the doors of repentance for me."

Our repentance will make us think less of self and more of being concerned and care for the needs of all God's children. Entering the season of Great Lent – the road of the Great Fast will take each of us to the greatest joy of the Lord's Resurrection – the joy of life conquering death, - the night that is more brilliant than the sun and banishes all darkness.

We request your prayers during these days of self-scrutiny, these days of spiritual growth and we assure you of our own prayers in your behalf. May Christ, the Lord and Master of our lives, grant us those gifts, which are necessary for our salvation and may we be the wise servants, who accept them with humility and thanksgiving.

We, by the Grace of God, your Hierarchs pray that your experience of the Great Lenten Season truly will be holy and that with gratitude to All-mighty God you arrive at the resurrection of Jesus Christ and His empty tomb. Growing in grace with you and with you anticipating the glorious day of Christ's Resurrection, we remain,

Your servants in our Lord Jesus Christ,

• **YURIJ**, Metropolitan

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

• **ANTONY**, Metropolitan

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Diaspora

• **IOAN**, Archbishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Diaspora

• **JEREMIAH**, Archbishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Eparchy of Brazil and South America

• **ILARION**, Bishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

• **ANDRIY**, Bishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

• **DANIEL**, Bishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA

Date: March 12, 2016 Prot. No. 284

CATECHETICAL HOMILY ON THE OCCASION OF HOLY AND GREAT LENT

† B A R T H O L O M E W

BY THE MERCY OF GOD ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE, NEW-ROME, AND
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH, TO THE PLENITUDE OF THE CHURCH,
GRACE AND PEACE FROM OUR SAVIOR CHRIST,
TOGETHER WITH OUR PRAYER, BLESSING AND FORGIVENESS

Beloved and blessed brethren and children in the Lord,

Yet again this year, through the God-inspired words, the holy Psalmist ushers the Orthodox faithful into the “mystery” of Holy and Great Lent, pointing out the benevolence of the Lord and the workings thereof as he cries out, *the Lord works mercy and righteousness for all the oppressed* (Psalm 102,6). For the Lord *satisfies our desire with good things so that our youth is renewed like that of the eagle* (c.f. .5).

As we all know, each person, created in the image and the likeness of God, constitutes a temple of the Lord. All the more, those of us who have been baptized in Christ, anointed with Holy Chrism, and grafted onto the olive tree of the Orthodox Church, are temples of the Holy Spirit Who resides in us. This is the case even as we distance ourselves from the Lord by committing sin—voluntary or involuntary—for *if we are faithless, He remains faithful* (2 Tim 2:13).

Unfortunately, the stain of sin hinders the Grace of the Holy Spirit to work in us. For this reason, our Holy Orthodox Church established the forthcoming period of fasting during Holy and Great Lent to allow us to cleanse ourselves through repentance, and thereby becoming worthy to receive the life-giving Passion and the glorious Resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ. The poet of the Great Canon, Saint Andreas of Crete, urges: *Come, my wretched soul, and confess your sins in the flesh to the Creator of all. From this moment forsake your former foolishness and offer to God tears of repentance* (Great Canon, Monday Ode 1).

The Church, always concerned about our salvation and spiritual perfection, initiates her members into this period of repentance, urging them all to struggle

against the materialistic and covetous way of life, which, as a “heavy yoke,” grounds the soul and drags it upon the earth, hindering its ability to spread its wings toward heaven and the kingdom of God.

In this way, through repentance and purifying tears, we are clothed again with our original beauty and our God-spun shroud that we lost after the fall, covering ourselves, instead, with the coat of shame similar to the fig leaves worn by Adam.

The fast and abstinence from food, *idle talk*, and *deceitful thought* represent the start of the correct, restrained, and temperate use of material goods, with the common good as its goal. In this way, we eliminate the negative impact that irrational use of goods may have upon society and the natural environment. This, therefore, allows for the prevailing of the *philanthropic fast*, which should not render *judgment over the oppressed*, but offer mercy, grace and comfort for them and for us on our journey toward the *likeness of God* (St. Basil Great).

In this way, a temperate use of goods sanctifies both matter and our lives since perishable matter is not the goal per se of sanctification, but rather, its means. Therefore, according to the evangelical periscope, the fast should constitute a motive for restraint, with a final goal to *abound in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit* (Rom. 15:13), according to the word of the Great Apostle of the Nations Paul. This holds true even for today’s poor “Lazarus” and for those seeking refuge.

Furthermore, the true spirit of the fast and of abstinence should not be forgotten, since this is what renders them acceptable to the Lord, as James the Apostles teaches: *religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world* (James 1, 27). For we shall not obtain grace—offered to us in abundance through the fast and through abstinence—simply by refusing and abstaining from food. The Prophet Isaiah wonders: *Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists; is this the kind of fast I have chosen?* (Isaiah 58: 4). The Lord declares, through the Prophet, *I have not chosen such a fast, but one that asks you to share your food with the hungry, that encourages you to invite the homeless into your home, and to clothe the naked when you see them* (Isaiah 58, 5-7).

Especially in our times, the financial and refugee crises, as well as the multitude of hardships that plague the world today offer to us Orthodox Christians the possibility to cultivate the authentic spirit of the fast, linking abstinence from food with acts of charity and solidarity toward our brethren most in need—those who suffer, the poor, the homeless, the refugees, those who have no *place to rest their head* (Math. 8: 20), and those who are forced by the harsh conditions of war, challenges, and grief to abandon their paternal homes and to travel amid countless risks, dangers, and sorrows.

When our fast is accompanied by an increase in philanthropy and love toward the least of our brethren in the Lord, regardless of their race, religion, language and

origin, then the fast shall ascend to the throne of God as a fragrant incense, and angels shall stand by us while we fast, in the same way they ministered to the Lord in the desert.

We offer our heartfelt fraternal and paternal prayers to all, that the imminent phase the Holy Fast will prove fruitful and sanctifying, replete of grace and holiness, and that God will render us worthy and without tribulation to enter into the eternal and life-giving Chalice—the life-bearing Side of the Lord—*from which sprang as the fountain of deliverance and wisdom* (Great Canon, Wednesday, Ode 4)

May the Divine Grace and the abundant Mercy of the Lord be with you all, bretheren and children, so that you may receive, through the evangelical ethos, the Gift of the Feast of feasts and the Celebration of celebrations—the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom all glory, dominion, honor, and thanksgiving now and to the endless ages. Amen.

Holy and Great Lent, 2016

+ Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople

Your fervent supplicant to God

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News Release

Contact: PRESS OFFICE Stavros Papagermanos pressoffice@goarch.org

Protocol 36/16, March 14, 2016

Holy and Great Lent

It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more...Philippians 1:9
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 Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we begin our solemn journey through this holy time of Great Lent, we are guided by the beautiful services and traditions of our Orthodox faith to dedicate ourselves to prayer and fasting, to gather more frequently in worship, to contemplate the direction of our lives in repentance, and to strengthen our faith in the hope of the light and life to come.

The spiritual impact of this sacred time of year is tremendous if we dedicate our full being—heart, body, soul and mind—to God. This transformation in our lives and the witness of life and faith we offer others through Great Lent is affirmed in the opening of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians. In giving thanks to God for

the Christians in Philippi and their *partnership in the Gospel*, Paul writes, *It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with all knowledge and discernment* (Phil. 1:9). From their faith in and experience of the love of God and their love for one another, they were growing in spiritual wisdom.

When we come before God in repentance, we too experience His great love for us. His abundant and saving grace is revealed and acknowledged throughout this season of Lent as we are guided to the complete and ultimate act of love in the Passion of our Lord. As we receive His love and our lives are renewed in it, we are blessed with a deeper knowledge of truth and His will. Blessed by His grace and presence, we gain a higher level of discernment to see what is pure and holy.

This is affirmed by the Apostle Paul as he continues his letter: *So that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ* (Phil. 1:10). In these words we can see how Great Lent is a preparation to receive the Risen Lord; but we also see how this sacred time should influence our lives in our preparation for eternity. Through repentance and the forgiveness of God we are able to see the way to salvation. Through grace and faith we become a new person in Christ, knowing and seeking the abundant blessings that He offers to us.

The Apostle Paul refers to these blessings as *the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ* (Phil. 1:11). During Great Lent and through our prayer, worship and fasting we experience these blessings, and we see the great spiritual fruit that comes. We see how this journey is the journey of our entire life, culminating in the blessings of eternal life and communion with God. We see the blessings through our witness and ministry to others during this holy season, as we prayerfully anticipate the light and joy of Pascha.

As we look to the days and weeks ahead, I prayerfully ask that you commit your time to the spiritual opportunities offered in Great Lent. Be faithful in prayer and worship. Keep the fast. Offer your time and resources to help those in need. Above all, seek the grace of God that your love may abound for Him and each other, and from the abundant blessings and spiritual fruit we receive, we will offer thanksgiving, glory, and praise to Him!

With paternal love in Christ,

†DEMETRIOS, Archbishop of America

We are Coming to Confession not to Be Judged and Condemned

Source: Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh Archive

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I have been asked to give a couple of sermons on Confession. This is my second sermon on the subject.

When we come to Confession we come to meet a friend face to face. We are not coming to be judged and condemned. We do not come in terror of what will happen. We come to the One who, being God, beyond suffering, beyond death, has chosen, for the

love of us, to become Man, to take upon Himself all our human destiny and to give His life for us. His life, His death are to us evidence that we are so loved of God that we can come up to Him whether we are good or bad with hope that He will receive us with open arms; that if anyone is to cry over our unworthiness and our sins it is Him, for compassion, for pity, for love — with a readiness, as He said in a vision to one of the saints, that if there was only one sinner in the world He would again become Man and again die for him, because He cannot endure the thought of anyone perishing.

This is the God, the Christ, to Whom we come when we come to Confession — to the One who is open to us with all His life and death; One who waits for us to come to be healed, to be consoled, to be supported — not to be condemned, not to be judged.

And then, what is the role of the priest? In the prayer which is read before Confession we are told, 'I am but a witness'. What does it mean? A witness to what? To the fact that you have come? That would not be enough. But if you think of what witnesses are: there are accidental, occasional witnesses. You are present in the street when an accident takes place. You are asked: what did happen? You are neither in favour of the ones or the others. You are just telling what your eyes have seen. It's for others to judge and to know.

There are other forms of witness. At times a friend of ours is brought to judgement. And we come to defend him, to testify for him, to save him. That's another kind of witness.

And then there is the witness which the Holy Gospel mentions speaking of St. John the Baptist: as the friend of the Bridegroom, the one who comes to the wedding, invited both by the bride and the bridegroom, because he is the nearest, the closest, to them both. And he is there to share their joy, the miracle of their encounter, the miracle of a blessing that will come upon them and out of two make one, unite them so that they are inseparable for ever in the mystery of eternal love, of divine love shared with them.

This is the position of the priest. He is called by Christ to be before the person, the sinner, a witness to the fact that he the sinner is loved, that Christ is there, that He has no other desire or intention but the salvation and the joy eternal of the one who has come today. And he comes also in the name of the sinner saying: Christ, my God, our Lord, this person has sinned, yes, but look, he trusts in You, he believes in You, we all love him with the same love as You possess. We are prepared to give our lives for him to be reconciled and find peace and joy and be at one with You, our Lord, our God, our Saviour, our Lover.

When you come to Confession next time, think of these things. Think of the way you come: not with fear of punishment or of rejection but with open heart to pour out everything evil or doubtful there is in this heart. And Christ will receive you. Your confession may be to Him a new crucifixion but He accepts it. He doesn't reject it.

He does not reject you. Come, open your heart, speak in all truth to Him, knowing that you are loved beyond judgement, to the point of sacrifice and death: His death, and your life — life in time and life eternal. Amen.

We welcome today His Grace, Bishop Daniel, on a special visit. Thank you, Vladyka Daniel, for taking time out of your extremely busy schedule to come and give us your guidance and love. Our future is unknown, but we are truly happy to have a shepherd who loves us and is willing to give us your ideas and love to help us along the journey. Please remember us in your prayers as each of us remember you in ours! M'nohaya Lita, Vladyka! Eis Polla, Eti Despota! May God grant you Many Years in His Service! With our love and prayers, the Parish Council and Parish Family of Holy Ghost Orthodox Church, Slickville, Pennsylvania, Priest Robert, Pani Regina, Reader Alexander, and Matthew Popichak.