

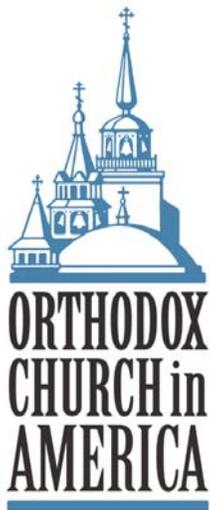
Metropolitan Tikhon, Primate

March 15, 2013

To the Very Reverend Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In his first Epistle, the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian writes: "This, then, is the message which we have heard of Him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). There is no darkness at all in Christ, Who is "Light of Light, True God of True God;" and there is no darkness in His Bride, the Holy Church, for in her "the light of Christ illumines all."



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We are entering the sacred season of Great Lent which, externally, might be perceived as a season of darkness and gloom, reflected in the somber color of the vestments, the physical exertion of fasting and prostrations and the labor of long services. But in reality, though externally dark, this season places us on the path that brings us to the eternal light of the Resurrection and the glory of the Kingdom.

The season of repentance introduces us to the reality of that glory, through our participation in God's divine grace, which is both freely given to us and experienced through our own efforts, small as they may be and daunting as the struggles may seem. This is why Saint Silouan can say, "Glory be to the Lord that He gave us repentance. Through repentance we shall, every one of us, be saved. Only those who refuse to repent will not find salvation, and therein I see their despair, and shed abundant tears of pity for them."

We can only find true peace and lasting joy when we are led out of the despair of our passions and into the light of Christ by His Grace and through our labors of repentance, fasting and prayer. As we enter upon the struggles of the Fast, let us be encouraged as we listen attentively to the sacred hymns of the Church: "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. So, clothed in raiment of light, let us hasten to the Holy Resurrection on the third day, that shines upon the world with the glory of eternal life" (Sessional hymn, Matins on Monday of the First Week).

I humbly ask for your forgiveness and pray that the Lord will bless each of us with a profitable and peaceful Lenten journey.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



+TIKHON
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada