



THE 2019

GREAT LENT EPISTLE

OF THE PERMANENT CONFERENCE OF UKRAINIAN
ORTHODOX BISHOPS BEYOND THE BORDERS OF UKRAINE

To the God-beloved Pastors, Monastics, and all Faithful Children of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the Diaspora and Ukraine,

Beloved in the Lord: **CHRIST IS AMONG US!**

The Holy and Sacred Season of Great Lent is upon us! Each year, the Church offers us the Lenten season as a time of repentance and renewal. As for us, Orthodox Christians, the contemplation on this beautiful season of the Church year is a cause for much of spiritual joy!

There is real confusion in today's world about the meaning of joy. Like happiness, joy is often seen as something that we can physically buy. We may be able to buy something that brings temporary pleasure: but we cannot buy joy. They must not be confused. Joy is a free gift from God.

This surreal and joyful season of Great Lent is an opportunity to be graced afresh by contemplating the presence of Christ in our lives. All our efforts to evangelize in our new millennium here in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in North America, Western Europe, Australia, South America and throughout Diaspora would be fruitless unless we ourselves have first contemplated on the presence of Christ in our relationship with the world around us. It is the presence of the One who has suffered, died and risen from the dead out of love for us. To be so loved by the God of love in the midst of all our sinfulness and human limitations, indeed, is a joyful experience. This is surely the starting point for the Lenten season and the key point in our reflection upon our path to salvation. It is all summarized in one word: conversion.

It resonates with a deep yearning and recognition within us. As we make our first prostrations, we are reminded of our own sinfulness. Throughout the next 40 days we are called to repent and believe the Good News: God loves us. He sent His Beloved Son to suffer and die for us. He has risen from the dead and shares his new life with us. This is the heart of the Gospel. Lent refocuses our attention on this message of salvation, this good news through our ability to recognize and consider our identity as children of God.

Searching for our identity is part of life. We identify our "self" as a family member, spouse, sibling, clergyman, carpenter, farmer, doctor, entertainer or clerk. We also identify ourselves as Orthodox Christians, or as members of a parish. Identity involves discovering who we are as persons and what our role is by answering these questions: who am I, and why am I here? Growth in the awareness of our Christian identity is a lifelong process that shifts as we change. It is rooted in our Baptism, where

we are transformed into our true identity as sons and daughters of the God. Holy Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians (“You should put away the old self of your former way of life . . . and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth” (Eph 4:22, 24), challenges us to put away our former life and put on a new self. In other words, he tells us to turn from sinful ways and take on our new life in Christ. In so doing, we become one with Christ, where we find our true identity. We accept this challenge during the Great Lent, as we journey with Christ through life’s difficulties to eternal life.

In the Church’s Tradition the season of Great and Holy Lent has always been accompanied by the Lenten efforts of prayer, fasting and acts of charity. We know that parishes will be providing many extra opportunities for prayer over the days of Lenten journey. We call upon you to greater attendance at liturgical services of the season. We hope that the participation in the Holy Mystery of Repentance over this time will be a real priority in your lives and in all parishes. We hope that the prayers of the Church will offer people an invitation to be touched, healed, forgiven, comforted and strengthened by our Lord. Also, at home we recommend a closer attention to times of prayer and fasting and moments of genuine devotion in family life.

Secondly, our journey through Lent and preparation to more fitting celebration of Pascha – the Resurrection of our Lord - includes “willing service to our neighbor”. All Christian true conversion starts in the heart but never stays there. True spiritual conversion always seeks out acts of charity to give practical help to our neighbor in need. This is a vital aspect of who we are as children of God.

We also encourage practical gestures of prayerful compassion to children. In this Lenten period, we must remember that our children are so often victims of human selfishness in today’s world and deserve special attention. During this Lent, perhaps we could find ways in our neighborhoods to share something of the importance of Christ Jesus to those who do not believe in Him. Such efforts can start so simply: with a kind word and gentle smile in His Name.

As we embark upon this Lenten journey, it is the time to renew ourselves as Orthodox Christians. Upon baptism we assumed the obligation of sharing the Good News of Christ with others, of defending the Holy Orthodox faith from persecution and of living a Christ-centered life of love for others. This six-week journey entails striving for humility and contrition before God in our repentance, seeking mutual forgiveness from others and contemplating our renewal in our prayers. Let us open our hearts to let in that, which is eternal, that which is Truth and not be blinded by the temporal world around us. Where there is light there is hope. Through His life and suffering for our salvation, we gain renewed hope in the light of Christ’s glorious victory over death and in eternal life.

May our All-Merciful and Almighty Lord assist us on our journey through this Great Fast with humility and reverence so that we may be worthy to greet the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

With Hierarchical Blessings,

† **YURIJ, Metropolitan**, *Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada*
† **ANTONY, Metropolitan**, *Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA and in the Diaspora*
† **JEREMIAH, Archbishop**, *Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Brazil and South America*
† **DANIEL, Archbishop**, *Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA and Western Europe*
† **ILARION, Bishop**, *Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada*
† **ANDRIY, Bishop**, *Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada*