



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Holy and Great Lent 2018

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy

Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Esteemed Members of the Metropolitan Council, Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils, Philoptochos Sisterhood, Faculty and Students of the Catechetical and Greek Afternoon Schools, Directors and Participants of all Youth Organizations, and all devout Orthodox Christians of the Greek Orthodox Communities of our Holy Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved in the Lord,

As Holy and Great Lent commences with this Sunday's vespers, after the hymn "O Gladsome Light" we will witness the lights in the church going dark and the Royal Gates being shut, much like the darkness that exemplified the exile of Adam and Eve when the gates of Paradise were closed on them after they had disobeyed God. This period sees us wandering in darkness as we anticipate the light of the New Day, the day wherein the Light of Christ illumines the world at His resurrection. As we commence this journey to the Holy, Life-giving, and glorious Resurrection of our Lord, we must first acknowledge that in order to participate in any feast, let alone the Feast of Feasts, we must first participate in a fast since there is no fast without a feast and there is no feast without a fast. Indeed, Holy and Great Lent is a period wherein we are given the opportunity to reflect on our spiritual status and to make an increased effort to repent, thus turning ourselves once again towards God as we seek to partake in a resurrection like His. With the centuries-old fasting traditions that have been passed down to us by the Fathers and the saints of the Church, we can arrive at the resurrection of Christ with a purified mind, heart, and soul.

It must be emphasized, however, that the period of Great and Holy Lent should not merely be about that which we put into our mouths, but also that which comes forth from our mouths and that which dwells in our hearts. We may fast from meat and dairy for the entirety of the Lenten period just as the Church prescribes, but if it is not accompanied by humility, love, and patience, then it is for naught. We may take pride in our abstinence from oil and wine on the days which the Church advises us to abstain from these products, however, if we do this in arrogance while judging others for their shortcomings, then we labor not for Christ, but for our own egos. In truth, we may be able to follow all of the fasting regulations of the Church to the letter, but if we fail to follow the spirit of our Lord's example in caring and loving one another, especially our enemies, then we have accomplished nothing more than an elaborate diet.

This is not to say that fasting from food is not important. On the contrary, fasting allows us to reorient ourselves towards Christ by putting us in a spiritual mindset. Fasting also

highlights our free will insofar as we eat because we must in order to stay alive, but we fast because we choose to do so of our own volition. It is in this spirit of reorientation that we are invited by Christ to forge a stronger relationship with Him by praying more, doing greater acts of kindness, repenting for our sins, asking for forgiveness from those whom we have hurt, and attending more divine services in a communal manner.

My beloved children, it is my hope and prayer that we all remain focused on the spirit of our Lenten journey so that, when we hear the radiant hymn “Come receive the Light”, we may light our candle and, no longer being exiled from Paradise, step out of that darkness knowing that we have mentally and spiritually prepared ourselves to participate in the glorious resurrection of our Lord. Wishing you a blessed Lent, Καλή Τεσσαρακοστή, I remain

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Metropolitan Evangelos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The word "Metropolitan" is written in a smaller, more compact script, while "Evangelos" is written in a larger, more prominent script. The signature is centered horizontally and is overlaid on a grid of small, faint text that appears to be a watermark or a background pattern.

† E V A N G E L O S
Metropolitan of New Jersey