

March 2, 2014

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke's account of the parable of Prodigal Son, we hear the following words of the son to the father: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants." While all of us have received the spirit of sonship (Romans 8:15), like the Prodigal Son, we have squandered that gift and have rejected the pledge of future inheritance.

And yet today, we are given that opportunity to come before our Heavenly Father as repentant children, crying, "Abba, Father, turn not Thy face from Thy servant, for I am afflicted; hear me speedily, draw near unto my soul, and deliver it!" (Psalm 68/69:17-18). The present season of repentance allows us to assess what we are doing with our lives, discerning what has caused us to turn away from sonship and striving to regain the spirit of sonship through the acquisition of love.

Through the examples of Moses' forty days and nights without food or drink on Mount Sinai, and the forty days and forty nights that our Lord fasted in the desert, we are reminded of Saint Simeon of Thessalonica's words: "Fasting is the work of God." And it is this work that takes place in the arena of repentance -- Great Lent.

While our battle takes place within this world, we know from the words of the Apostle that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Corinthians 10:4). Rather, the weapon given to us by our Lord is His commandment to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). This commandment is the basis on which we will be judged by the Son of Man at His awesome second coming. When we saw the least one hungry, did we love him? When we saw the least one imprisoned, did we love him? When we saw the least one homeless and a stranger, did we love him? If we do any of these tasks, if we give of all that we possess but do not do it in response to Christ's commandment, we have gained nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3).

We are given this time of the Great Fast to grow closer to God and His Holy Church. But, before we can even begin to take steps toward a closer relationship with our Lord and Savior, we must learn to love, for "whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:8).

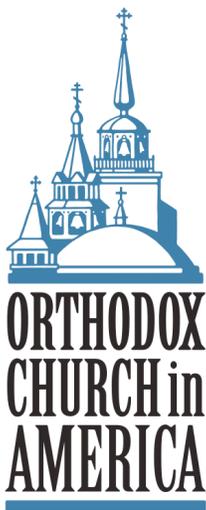
Brothers and sisters: I too have sinned before heaven and before you, and thus I beg your forgiveness for my failings, and I ask for your prayers as I assure you of mine.

As we enter together into the season of Great Lent, let us "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light, that having sailed across the great sea of the Fast, we may reach the third-day Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of our souls" (Apostikha at Vespers, Sunday of Forgiveness).

With love in Christ,



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