

## ARCHPASTORAL LETTER FOR THE GREAT FAST 2014

Dearly Beloved Members of our Diocesan Family:

*Christ is in our midst! – He is and ever shall be!*

As we begin the Lenten journey of the Great Fast this year, I am mindful of a question often asked of us by non-Orthodox -- “Why do you fast in Lent?” -- and a question often asked by our own fellow Orthodox Christians -- “Why do we have to fast during Great Lent?”

The answers to both questions, of course, can be found in the pages of the Holy Scripture within the deposit of Holy Tradition.

Just as the children of Israel ate the “bread of affliction” (Deuteronomy 16:3) in preparation for the Passover, so we Christians prepare ourselves for the celebration of Holy Pascha by observing the fast of Great Lent. The Bible records that Moses fasted on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28), and Elijah fasted on Mount Horeb (I Kings 19:8-12). But most importantly, Our Lord fasted in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights (Matthew 4:1-2), and we imitate His example.

Christ Himself instructs us, “When the Bridegroom is taken away, My disciples will fast” (Matthew 9:15). And, He presumes that His followers will fast when He teaches, in His Sermon on the Mount, “When you fast ...” not ‘if’ you fast. He goes on to say, “Anoint your head and wash your face so that you do not appear to be fasting before men ... for your Father Who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matthew 6:16-18).

As early as the first century, the Church set aside certain days on which she prescribed fasting to be observed. In the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (ca. 60 A.D.), we read: “He (Christ) commanded us to fast on Wednesday and Friday.” And, as the Saints explain, we fast “on Wednesday because on this day Our Lord was betrayed; and on Friday because on this day He suffered death for our salvation.” Early on, the 40-day Fast of Lent was likewise observed in imitation of Our Lord’s time of prayer and fasting in the wilderness.

The primary aim of fasting is to make us conscious of our dependence on God. We voluntarily experience *physical hunger* in order to become aware of our true *spiritual hunger*. Another reason we fast is to subdue our passions and self-will. The Saints tell us that there is no way we can control our urges for pleasure, money or power, if we cannot control our stomach. Fasting is the first step toward self-control, as our self-will is cut off by being obedient to the Church and her rules.

