



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA  
DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

33 Hewitt Avenue - Bronxville, NY 10708  
Office (914) 779-6580 Fax (914) 779-6581  
[www.nynjoca.org](http://www.nynjoca.org)

## Archpastoral Letter for the Great Fast 2017

Prot. No. 01-001/2017  
Sunday, February 26, 2017

Dearly Beloved Members of our Diocesan Family:  
Christ is in our midst! – He is and ever shall be!

Once again, the Church beckons us to begin the sacred season of Great Lent, providing us with the spirit with which we are to enter into it from the Vespers of Forgiveness Sunday: *“Let us enter the Fast with joy, O faithful ...”*

Lent is our journey with the Lord to Holy Pascha ... and the Church has been preparing us for it the past few weeks with a change in orientation in liturgical time. Just a number of weeks ago, we were celebrating events that reveal *Who Christ is* – the Nativity, on which we proclaim Christ as the Son of God ... and Theophany, on which we proclaim Christ as One of the Holy Trinity. Now, however, we move to commemorate events that reveal *Why Christ came* – the Cross, the Tomb and the Resurrection on the third day. The Holy Church is moving us together, as a community of believers, beyond the Gospel message of the Incarnation to the Gospel message of Deliverance.

Even now, in the distance we see a procession. But this procession is not led by the Shepherds and the Magi, or by the Forerunner and his Disciples. Rather, this procession is one in which praises are mixed with curses; in which Our Lord’s blessing on us is mixed with His Blood upon Himself. From afar, for every shout we hear of “Hosanna,” there is a cry of “Crucify Him!” not far behind. Yes, Great Lent is on the horizon, and we learn from Zacchaeus our first example of how to rightly enter this season: in deep awareness of our own true need, but in clear anticipation of the only One Who can meet it: “The Son of Man (Who) has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

What did Zacchaeus the publican see when he climbed that sycamore tree so long ago? He saw *personal* salvation, because salvation is a Person. St. Nikolai Velimirovich tells us, “Christ is the salvation that comes, and Zacchaeus is the house to which He comes.” The 20<sup>th</sup> century Saint, who was the Rector of St. Tikhon’s Seminary and reposed in that hallowed place, continues: “Each of us is a house in which sin dwells when Christ is far off, and to which salvation comes as Christ draws near. Whether Christ is able or not to draw near my house and yours, depends on us.” The spring of Lent is a season for spring cleaning of our homes, and a season for “spiritual spring cleaning” of our hearts. Over the next seven weeks, we will struggle

for sure, as Zacchaeus did, for a clear vision of our Salvation, Who Himself will be “lifted high” upon the Cross to achieve our deliverance from sin and death and the devil. But will we make that vision personally our own?

Our preparation for the Lenten journey also includes the Church’s example of the Publican, not the Pharisee, on how we should pray, and how we should *not* pray, to God. For the Great Fast is the time of prayer par excellence. Then comes the lesson of the Prodigal Son, when the Church depicts for us how merciful the Lord is when His fallen away child returns to Him in repentance – accepting him with love, without berating him, without reproaching him for what he had done, but with love and forgiveness only. And then, the Church prepares us with the account of the Last Judgment beforehand, so that while we are able, we might run from the left side to the right side of the Righteous Judge ... by using our freedom to serve the Lord and to help those persons He presents to us on our path, who are made in the image and likeness of God and who are in need – “the least of His brethren.” And finally, the Gospel tells us that we will indeed be truly forgiven our sins by the Lord, but only so long “as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Indeed the journey of Lent is meant for us to run – to meet the All Compassionate Lord on the path to salvation that He has forged for us – out of love. Not out of forced obligation, or repetition of tradition – but in genuine love for the Savior. Our Lenten labors – to improve our daily prayer life, our faithful reading of the Holy Scripture, our fervent participation in the divine services, our frequent reception of the Sacraments of Confession and Communion, our more strenuous fasting discipline, our generous sharing of time, talents and treasure in thanksgiving to God for His blessings, and our showing of genuine love for our neighbor in tangible ways – must be done out of love for Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ ... seeking to imitate Him in thought, word and deed, and in doing so becoming more and more like Him ... Who loves us more than we love ourselves.

If this is the work that we pledge to do and accomplish during Great Lent this year, then indeed we will inherit what God has prepared for us from the foundation of the world – life with Him forever in the Heavenly Kingdom – and the taste of it this Pascha, celebrating our Salvation with a “joy that no one can ever take away from us” (John16:22).

My beloved in the Lord, I wish all of you the blessings of a Holy Lent, as you love the Lord and serve His Church, drawing ever closer to Him and becoming more and more like Him, and I remain with humble prayers and sincere love for you,

Devotedly yours in our Savior Jesus Christ,

*+ Michael*

**+ MICHAEL**

Archbishop of New York and the  
Diocese of New York and New Jersey