



**EPARCHY OF NEWTON**  
MELKITE GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

## GREAT LENT 2020

Dear Clergy and Faithful,

A blessed Great Fast!

The season of Great Lent, also called the Great Fast, developed over the centuries. Historically, it was the last forty day of catechesis, or religious instruction, for the catechumens--those studying to be incorporated into the Body of Christ through Baptism at the celebration of the Lord's Resurrection on Pascha. During this time of instruction, they learned how a Christian was to live his/her life. The focus was on the necessity of prayer, fasting, and good works.

As it developed and grew, the Church recognized that we fail many times in properly living our Christian life. So, as the catechumens were hearing what Christian life was all about, the existing Christians were asked to refocus and renew their own lives to be more in conformity with Christ.

Contrary to common thinking that Lent was gloomy or morbid, in reality it is a joyful time, a time of purification. Our liturgical prayers remind us: "Let us enter the season of the radiant Fast with joy...let us purify our spirit and cleanse our flesh...let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments of Christ our God, with the brightness of love and the splendor of prayer, with the purity of holiness and the strength of good courage. Clothed in a garment of light, let us hasten to the holy third-day Resurrection that shines upon the world with the glory of eternal life" (*Orthros, 1<sup>st</sup> Monday*).

The Great Fast of forty days is a tithe, or one-tenth, of the year in which we make a return to the Lord by the good practice of our faith. In a sense, it is our annual retreat to recall our sins, and through repentance "turn toward God and drawing near to Him" (*Ode 9, Othros, 1<sup>st</sup> Monday*).

Let us take hold of this opportunity by our focus on the tripod of Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Prayer is a dialogue with God--asking, thanking, and praising, a dialogue of silence in the quiet of our hearts. We lift up our mind and heart to God, walking consciously in His presence; entering into communion with God who enables us to do His will.

We fast from specific foods, but also "true fasting is to put off all evil, to control the tongue, to forbear from anger, to abstain from lust, slander, falsehood, and perjury" (*Vespers, 1<sup>st</sup> Monday*). And the money we save by our fasting, along with our good-will offerings, we give to those in need through The Shepherd's Care, our eparchial charity program.

Almsgiving or good works reminds us that others are important--all of us are made in the image and likeness of God. So we go out of ourselves more to focus on our brothers and sisters in need. Possibly choose a shut-in or someone in a hospital or nursing home who has no one around--visit and share Christ's love. And let us not forget that everyone around us needs kind words, prayers, and support.

Besides your private prayer life, join your parish community in prayer at the Presanctified Liturgy and at Great Compline. The Akathist Hymn is also served in our parishes on Fridays honoring the Mother of God, as we prepare also for the Feast of the Annunciation on March 25, falling most of the time during Great Lent.

Don't let this season speed by without notice, get involved. Reenergize your Christian living; retreat to your baptismal promise to make Christ your King and God. See others with love and care. Open your Bibles, and read God's word. Add more personal prayer to your day, and observe your personal rule of fasting.

I greet you all as we, together, journey towards Holy Week and the glorious Resurrection of Christ; and I pray for you and yours: be a radiant Christian!

May your observance of the Great Fast be abundantly blessed.

Yours in Christ God,

✠ Most Reverend Nicholas J. Samra  
Bishop of Newton