



## **METROPOLITAN ARCHEPARCHY OF PHILADELPHIA**

**Ukrainian Catholic Church**  
810 North Franklin Street  
Philadelphia, PA, 19123-2005  
Tel (215) 627-0143  
Fax (215) 627-0377  
[ukrmet@ukrcap.org](mailto:ukrmet@ukrcap.org)

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### **GREAT LENT PASTORAL OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC HIERARCHY OF THE U.S.A. TO OUR CLERGY, HIEROMONKS AND BROTHERS, RELIGIOUS SISTERS, SEMINARIANS, AND BELOVED FAITHFUL**

#### **Glory to Jesus Christ!**

#### **Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

A year ago, at the beginning of Great Lent the world was hit by an unprecedented pandemic. Unprecedented not so much in ferocity or scope but in global consciousness: we became aware that we are in this together. In a stroke, the world was humbled. Our sense of control, modern technological hubris, and the frivolous pursuit of pleasure had to take a back seat to the reality and mystery of life and death. In our Metropolia we experienced considerable losses. Three weeks into the lockdown, during Holy Week, Metropolitan-emeritus Stephen Sulyk succumbed to COVID. As the year progressed, the virus took from us priests, religious and many parishioners—our grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters, children, relatives and friends. We have been humbled. We are subdued. Some of us still remain confused, lonely, and depressed. However, St. Paul encourages us, telling us to “not grieve as others do who have no hope.” (1 Th 4:13).

Indeed, many of us were able to recognize authentic blessings, we experienced a renewed awareness of family, a peace that comes with authentic humility, a peace that comes with a wakefulness to God’s presence and guidance in the face of hardship. This past year we have seen some of the best of humanity: heroic acts of authentic solidarity, examples of inspiring mutual service, medical care in dangerous circumstances, chaplaincy work in hospitals, the service of first responders. We adapted in order to make sure that community worship could be safe for the faithful and clergy. We found news ways to teach and educate, to visit the sick and housebound, to provide food and donations in kind for the poor, to support those with crisis pregnancies, and more. There is much to make us ponder and wonder, be thankful for and give praise.

In a certain sense, last year’s Lent had an old-time quality. It is said that in pre-modern centuries in Ukraine and other Christian countries there was a “social hush” during Great Lent. Everything quieted down. Individuals and families focused inward, judging themselves in the light of the Gospel, rather than judging others. Towns and villages as communities, and nations as cultures entered together into a spirit of penance: a recognition of and remorse for transgressions, violence and greed, deceit and betrayal, individual and social sin. Indeed, last year we had a Great Lent without parties and galivanting. We stayed home. And while we were unable to receive each other into our homes, we were able to welcome the Lord into our lives, and remind ourselves that each and every household is called to be a domestic church, a place of growth in faith, prayer and caring for others.

In the end, our home is much more than a physical place. It is a spiritual and moral reality. Our home is with the Lord, who invites us to “come and see” and be with Him (see Jn 1:35-39). It is where we work and serve, where we become a blessing to others, where we are free to be ourselves, have a sense of being where we belong, are not full of ourselves. We are at home when we fulfill our calling, follow God’s will. We are at home when we are pure in thought, action and word, long-suffering, kind, and gentle, as God is with us.

This Great Lent let us build on the lessons learned this past year. Our journey home is well on its way. This precious, yet fragile gift of life we share, is one of pilgrimage, of repentance, of living up to the faith that God has in each one of us, in deep humility. Let us be guided by the ancient Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem:

*O Lord and Master of my life, drive from me the spirit of indifference, despair, lust for power, and idle chatter.*

*Instead, bestow on me, Your servant, the spirit of integrity, humility, patience, and love.*

*Yes, O Lord and King, let me see my own sins, and not judge my brothers and sisters, for You are blessed, now and forever and ever. Amen.*

St. Ephraim’s prayer encapsulates the striving of the season, one that leads us to the triumph of Pascha, the victory of the Savior over our shame, fear, and death itself. Let it be our personal and community prayer as we fall down before the Lord of mercy, confident of His love and hospitality. On our Lenten journey let us remember how the disciples followed Jesus. For them home was not a place, but a Person—the same One who calls out to us today: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17).

We will be praying with you and for you!

**Christ is in our midst! He is and always will be!**

**+Borys** Gudziak, (Author)

Archbishop of Philadelphia

Metropolitan of Ukrainian Catholics in the United States

**+Paul** Chomnycky, OSBM

Eparch of Stamford

**+Benedict** Aleksiychuk

Eparch of St. Nicholas in Chicago

**+Bohdan** J. Danylo

Eparch of St. Josaphat in Parma

**+Andriy** Rabiy

Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia

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