



ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA

Prot. no.: 073/2026

Great Lent 2026

Beloved in the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America,

By the grace of God, we welcome the season of holy Lent—this blessed time which the Church has appointed for us as an opportunity for renewal, repentance, and a sincere return to the depths of the heart, where we encounter our Lord in an atmosphere of stillness and clarity. This helps us to reorder our priorities and to realign our lives with our pursuit of the true life that is in Christ. It is a time to remember:

- That fasting, as we have received it from the living Tradition of the Church, is not an end in itself, nor is it merely abstaining from certain foods. Rather, it is a comprehensive spiritual journey whose aim is the liberation of the inner person and the reordering of our relationship with God, with ourselves, and with others.
- That we fast not to humiliate or punish the body, but so that the body may become obedient to the spirit. We fast because we ourselves are in need of fasting; through it, we grow spiritually and humanly, our inner depths are healed, and our hearts are enlarged to receive the grace of God. God does not need our fasting, but He rejoices in our return to Him with a humble heart.
- That we were created for the heavenly Kingdom, and fasting helps awaken this deep longing within us. It purifies our spiritual vision so that we may view our lives in the light of eternity. For this reason, the Church calls us to live Lent within its communal framework—not as an individual effort or a selective choice, but as an experience lived by the community of believers across the generations, and walked by the saints as a path toward true freedom.

“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11: 26)

- That our commitment to the Church's fasting guidelines is not merely formal, but a call to move from disciplining the table to refining the heart, and from external abstinence to inner purification. True fasting leads us into the depths of ourselves, where we confront our weakness, confess our sins, and open our hearts to the work of grace.
- That fasting is inseparably linked to prayer and works of mercy. There is no fasting without prayer, and no fasting without love. Through prayer we lift our hearts to God, and through mercy we translate our fasting into a living act of love, especially toward the poor and the needy. Therefore, the Church calls us to share with others what we save through fasting, transforming abstinence into giving, hunger into communion, and deprivation into love.
- That our contemporary world, with its excessive consumption and false sense of fullness, is in urgent need today of the spirit of fasting as a path to freedom, balance, and the restoration of human mastery over oneself. We are not of this world, even though we live in it, and fasting teaches us to use the goods of the world without becoming enslaved to them.

Fasting, my beloved, is the provision for the journey toward the glorious Pascha, where the mystery of redemption becomes a living reality within us, and the Resurrection of Christ is transformed into an inner resurrection that renews our lives. Let us live this holy season not as a negative act of deprivation, but as a positive journey toward God—filled with His presence, renewed in spirit, and growing in love.

I ask the Lord, on your behalf, to grant us all an acceptable fast, sincere repentance, and a humble heart, so that we may together attain the joy of the Resurrection.

Wishing you a blessed fast and a holy season, I remain,

Your Father in Christ,



+SABA

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

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