

CATECHETICAL HOMILY
FOR THE OPENING
OF HOLY AND GREAT LENT

+ B A R T H O L O M E W
BY GOD'S MERCY
ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE - NEW ROME
AND ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH
TO THE PLENITUDE OF THE CHURCH
MAY THE GRACE AND PEACE
OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST,
TOGETHER WITH OUR PRAYER, BLESSING AND FORGIVENESS BE WITH ALL

* * *

Most honorable brother Hierarchs and blessed children in the Lord,

Once again, with the will and grace of God the giver of all good things, we are entering Holy and Great Lent, the blessed period of fasting and repentance, of spiritual vigilance and journey with the Lord, as He comes to His voluntary passion, in order to reach the veneration of His splendid Resurrection and become worthy of our own passage from earthly things to "that which no eyes have seen and no ears have heard and no human heart has ascended" (1 Cor. 2.9).

In the early Church, Holy and Great Lent was a period of preparation of catechumens, whose baptism took place during the Divine Liturgy of the Paschal Feast. This connection with baptism is also preserved by the comprehension and experience of Great Lent as the period par excellence of repentance that is described as "a renewal of baptism," "a second baptism," "a contract with God for a second life," in other words a regeneration of the gifts of baptism and promise to God for the beginning of a new way of life. The services and hymns of this season associate the spiritual struggle of the faithful with the expectation of the Lord's Pascha, whereby the forty-day fast radiates the fragrance of the paschal joy.

Holy and Great Lent is an opportunity to become conscious of the depth and wealth of our faith as "a personal encounter with Christ." It is rightly emphasized that Christianity is "extremely personal," without this implying that it is "individualistic." The faithful "encounter, recognize, and love one and the same Christ," who, "alone and only, revealed the true and perfect human person" (Nicholas Cabasilas). He invites all people—and each person individually—to salvation, so that the response of each may always be "grounded in the common faith" and "at the same time be unique."

We recall the words of St. Paul that "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2.20). In this case, the words "in me," "me," and "for me" do not contradict the words "in us," "us," and "for us" with reference to our "common salvation."

Ever grateful for the heavenly gifts of his regeneration in Christ, the Apostle of freedom “makes what is shared his own,” as if the pre-eternal Word of God became incarnate, was crucified, and was resurrected “for him personally.”

Our experience of faith is “unique” and “profoundly personal” as a freedom given to us by Christ, as something that is at the same time “essentially ecclesiastical,” an experience “of common freedom.” This most genuine freedom in Christ is expressed as love and applied support to our concrete neighbor, as this is described in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.30–37) and in the passage about the Last Judgment (Mt. 25.31–46), but also as respect and concern for the world and the eucharistic approach to creation. Freedom in Christ has a personal and holistic nature, which is especially revealed during Holy and Great Lent in its understanding of asceticism and fasting. Christian freedom, as existential authenticity and fullness, does not involve a gloomy asceticism, a life without grace and joy, “as if Christ never came.” Moreover, fasting is not only “abstinence from food,” but “renunciation of sin,” a struggle against egotism, a loving departure from the self to the brother in need, “a heart that burns for the sake of all creation.” The holistic nature of spirituality is sustained by the experience of Great Lent as a journey toward Pascha and as a foretaste of “the glorious freedom of God’s children” (Rom. 8.21).

We pray that our Savior Jesus Christ may render all of us worthy of walking the way of Holy and Great Lent with ascesis, repentance, forgiveness, prayer, and godly freedom. And we conclude with the words of our spiritual father, the late Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon, during the Divine Liturgy of Cheesefare Sunday in 1970 at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens: “As we enter Holy Lent, what awaits us at the end is vision, miracle, and the experience of the Resurrection, the foremost experience of the Orthodox Church. Let us proceed toward this vision and experience but not without having received and offered forgiveness, not with a fast purely from meat and oil, not with a sense of hypocrisy, but with divine freedom, in spirit and truth, in the spirit of truth, in the truth of the spirit.”

Holy and Great Lent 2025
✠ BARTHOLOMEW of Constantinople
 Fervent supplicant for all before God

To be read in churches on Cheesefare Sunday, March 2, 2025, immediately after the Holy Gospel.

ΛΟΓΟΣ ΚΑΤΗΧΗΤΗΡΙΟΣ
ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΕΝΑΡΞΗ
ΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΓΑΛΗΣ ΤΕΣΣΑΡΑΚΟΣΤΗΣ

+ ΒΑΡΘΟΛΟΜΑΙΟΣ
ΕΛΕΩΤ ΘΕΟΥ
ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥΠΟΛΕΩΣ - ΝΕΑΣ ΡΩΜΗΣ
ΚΑΙ ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΚΟΣ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΗΣ
ΠΡΟΣ ΟΛΟ ΤΟ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ,
ΧΑΡΗ ΚΑΙ ΕΙΡΗΝΗ
ΑΠΟ ΤΟΝ ΣΩΤΗΡΑ ΚΑΙ ΚΥΡΙΟ ΜΑΣ ΙΗΣΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ,
ΑΠΟ ΕΜΑΣ ΔΕ ΕΥΧΗ, ΕΥΛΟΓΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΣΥΓΧΩΡΗΣΗ

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Τιμιώτατοι ἀδελφοὶ Τεράρχες καὶ τέκνα ἐν Κυρίῳ εὐλογημένα,

Μὲ τὴν εὐδοκία καὶ τὴ χάρη τοῦ ἀγαθοδότου Θεοῦ, εἰσερχόμαστε καὶ πάλι στὴν Ἀγία καὶ Μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστή, τὴν εὐλογημένη περίοδο νηστείας καὶ μετανοίας, πνευματικῆς ἐγρήγορσης καὶ συμπόρευσης μὲ τὸν Κύριο ποὺ ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸ ἐκούσιο πάθος, γιὰ νὰ φθάσουμε νὰ προσκυνήσουμε τὴν λαμπροφόρο Αὐτοῦ Ἀνάσταση καὶ νὰ ἀξιωθοῦμε μὲ αὐτὴ καὶ ἐμεῖς ἀπὸ τὰ ἐπίγεια νὰ «διαβοῦμε» σὲ ἐκεῖνα «ποὺ ὄφθαλμὸς δὲν εἶδε καὶ αὐτὶ δὲν ἀκουσε καὶ ἀνθρώπινο μυαλὸ δὲν φαντάστηκε ποτέ» (Α' Κορ. β', 9).

Στὴν ἀρχαίᾳ Εκκλησίᾳ, ἡ Ἀγία καὶ Μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστὴ ἦταν περίοδος προετοιμασίας τῶν κατηχουμένων γιὰ τὸ βάπτισμα, τὸ ὅποιον τελοῦνταν κατὰ τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία τῆς Ἀναστάσεως. Τὴν ἀναφορὰ πρὸς τὸ βάπτισμα διασώζει καὶ ἡ θεώρηση καὶ ἡ βίωση τῆς Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς ὡς κατ' ἔξοχὴν καιροῦ μετανοίας, ἡ ὅποια χαρακτηρίζεται ὡς «ἀνάκλησις βαπτίσματος» καὶ ὡς «δεύτερον βάπτισμα», ὡς «συνθήκη πρὸς Θεὸν δευτέρου βίου», ἀναβίωση δηλαδὴ τῶν δωρεῶν τοῦ βαπτίσματος καὶ ύπόσχεση πρὸς τὸν Θεό γιὰ ἔναρξη νέας πορείας ζωῆς. Οἱ ἀκολουθίες καὶ ἡ ὑμνολογία τῆς περιόδου συνδέουν αὐτὸν τὸν πνευματικὸ ἀγῶνα τῶν πιστῶν μὲ τὴν προσδοκία τοῦ Πάσχα τοῦ Κυρίου, διὰ τῆς ὅποιας ἡ τεσσαρακονθήμερη νηστεία ἀναδίδει εὐώδια πασχαλινῆς χαρᾶς.

Ἡ Ἀγία καὶ Μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστὴ εἶναι εὐκαιρία συνειδητοποιήσεως τοῦ βάθους καὶ τοῦ πλούτου τῆς πίστεώς μας ὡς «προσωπικῆς συναντήσεως μὲ τὸν Χριστό». Ὁρθὰ τονίζεται ὅτι ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς «εἶναι στὸ ἐπακρο προσωπικός», χωρὶς αὐτὸν νὰ σημαίνει ὅτι εἶναι «ἀτομοκεντρικός». Οἱ πιστοὶ «συναντοῦν, ἀναγνωρίζουν καὶ ἀγαποῦν τὸν ἔνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν Χριστό», ὁ ὅποιος «πρῶτος καὶ μόνος ἔδειξε τὸν ἀληθινὸν καὶ τέλειο ἀνθρωπο» (Νικόλαος Καβάσιλας). Ἐκεῖνος καλεῖ στὴ σωτηρία ὅλους μᾶς καὶ τὸν κάθε ἀνθρωπο προσωπικά, ὥστε ἡ ἀνταπόκριση τοῦ καθενός, πάντοτε «ριζωμένη στὴν κοινὴ πίστη», νὰ εἶναι «ταυτόχρονα μοναδική».

Θυμόμαστε τὸν ὑπέροχο λόγο τοῦ Παύλου: «Δὲν ζῶ πιὰ ἐγώ, ζεῖ μέσα μου ὁ Χριστός· αὐτὸν ποὺ τῶρα ζῶ στὴ σάρκα μου, τὸ ζῶ μὲ τὴν πίστη τοῦ νίοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ ὅποιος μὲ ἀγάπησε καὶ παρέδωσε τὸν ἔαυτό του γιὰ χάρη μου» (Γαλ. β', 20). Ἐδῶ τὸ «μέσα μου»

τὸ «μέ» καὶ τὸ «γιὰ χάρημου» δὲν λέγονται σὲ ἀντιθέση πρὸς τὸ «μέσα μας», τὸ «ἐμᾶς» καὶ τὸ «γιὰ χάρη μας» τῆς «κοινῆς σωτηρίας». Οἱ Ἀπόστολοι τῆς ἐλευθερίας, ἄκρως εὐγνώμων γιὰ τὰ οὐράνια ἀγαθὰ τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναγεννήσεως του, «αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶναι κοινό, τὸ κάνει δικό του», λέσι καὶ ὁ προαιώνιος Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔγινε ἀνθρωπος, σταυρώθηκε καὶ ἀναστήθηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκροὺς «προσωπικὰ γι’ αὐτόν».

«Μοναδικὴ» καὶ «βαθιὰ προσωπικὴ» εἶναι ἡ βίωση τῆς πίστεώς μας ὡς ἐλευθερίας ποὺ μᾶς χάρισε ὁ Χριστός, ἡ ὁποία εἶναι ἐν ταυτόχρονα καὶ «οὐσιαστικὰ ἐκκλησιαστική», ἐμπειρίᾳ «κοινῆς ἐλευθερίας». Αὕτη ἡ τόσο ἀληθινὴ ἐν Χριστῷ ἐλευθερία ἐκφράζεται ὡς ἀγάπη καὶ ὡς ἔμπρακτη συμπαράσταση πρὸς τὸν συγκεκριμένο πλησίον, ὅπως αὐτὴ περιγράφεται στὴν παραβολὴ τοῦ «Καλοῦ Σαμαρείτου» (Λουκ. ι', 30-37) καὶ στὴν περικοπὴ τῆς τελικῆς κρίσεως (Ματθ. κε', 31-46), ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς σεβασμὸς καὶ μέριμνα γιὰ τὴν κτίση καὶ ὡς εὐχαριστιακὴ χρήση της. Ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ἐλευθερία ἔχει προσωπικὸ καὶ ὄλιστικὸ χαρακτῆρα, ὁ ὅποιος ἀποκαλύπτεται ἰδιαιτέρως κατὰ τὴν Ἁγία καὶ Μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστὴ στὸν τρόπο τῆς κατανοήσεως τοῦ ἀσκητισμοῦ καὶ τῆς νηστείας. Δὲν γνωρίζει ἡ χριστιανικὴ ἐλευθερία, ὡς ὑπαρκτικὴ αὐθεντικότητα καὶ πληρότητα, σκυθρωπὸ ἀσκητισμό, ζωὴ χωρὶς χάρη καὶ χαρά, «σὰν νὰ μὴν ἥρθε ποτὲ ὁ Χριστός». Καὶ ἡ νηστεία δὲν εἶναι μόνο «ἀποχὴ ἀπὸ τρόφιμα», ἀλλ’ «ἀμαρτημάτων ἀναχώρηση», ἀγώνας κατὰ τῆς φιλαυτίας, ἀγαπητικὴ ἔξοδος ἀπὸ τὸν ἔαυτό μας πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφό μας ποὺ βρίσκεται στὴν ἀνάγκη, «καῦσις καρδίας ὑπὲρ πάσης τῆς κτίσεως». Ἡ ὄλιστικότητα τῆς πνευματικότητος τρέφεται ἀπὸ τὴν ἐμπειρίᾳ τῆς Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς ὡς πορείας πρὸς τὸ Πάσχα καὶ ὡς πρόγευσης τῆς «ἐλευθερίας τῆς δόξας τῶν τέκνων τοῦ Θεοῦ» (Ρωμ. η', 21).

Δεόμενοι στὸ Σωτῆρα μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, νὰ ἀξιώσει ὅλους μας νὰ διάγουμε μὲ ἀσκηση, μὲ μετάνοια, μὲ συγχωρητικότητα, μὲ προσευχὴ καὶ μὲ ἐνθεη ἐλευθερία τὸν δόλιχο τῆς Ἁγίας καὶ Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς, κατακλείουμε μὲ τοὺς λόγους τοῦ πνευματικοῦ μας πατέρα μακαριστοῦ Μητροπολίτου Χαλκηδόνος Μελίτωνα, κατὰ τὴ Θεία Λειτουργία τῆς Κυριακῆς τῆς Τυρινῆς τοῦ ἔτους 1970 στὸν Μητροπολιτικὸ Ναὸ Αθηνῶν: «Εἰσερχόμαστε στὴν Ἁγία Τεσσαρακοστὴ καὶ στὸ βάθος μᾶς ἀναμένει τὸ ὄραμα, τὸ θαῦμα καὶ τὸ βίωμα τῆς Αναστάσεως, τὸ κατ’ ἔξοχὴν βίωμα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας. Ἄς πορευθοῦμε πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ ὄραμα καὶ βίωμα, ὅχι ἀσυγχώρητοι, ὅχι χωρὶς νὰ συγχωροῦμε τοὺς ἄλλους, ὅχι μὲ ἀπλῆ νηστεία ἀπὸ κρέας καὶ λάδι, ὅχι μὲ ὑποκρισία, ἀλλὰ μὲ θεϊκὴ ἐλευθερία, μὲ πνεῦμα καὶ ἀλήθεια, μὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀλήθειας, μὲ τὴν ἀλήθεια τοῦ πνεύματος».

Ἄγια καὶ Μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστὴ 2025

† Ο Κωνσταντινούπολεως

διάπυρος πρὸς Θεὸ εὐχέτης ὅλων σας