



GREAT LENT

The Journey to Pascha

Reflections for the Lenten Season

INTERNATIONAL
ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
CHARITIES

JOURNEY TO PASCHA

**His Eminence
Metropolitan Nicolae**

Romanian Orthodox Metropolia
of the Americas

*Liaison to IOCC from the Assembly
of Canonical Orthodox Bishops
of the United States of America*

It is once again my joy to invite you on the journey toward Pascha, our Church's greatest feast and our Lord's greatest victory, the triumph over death.

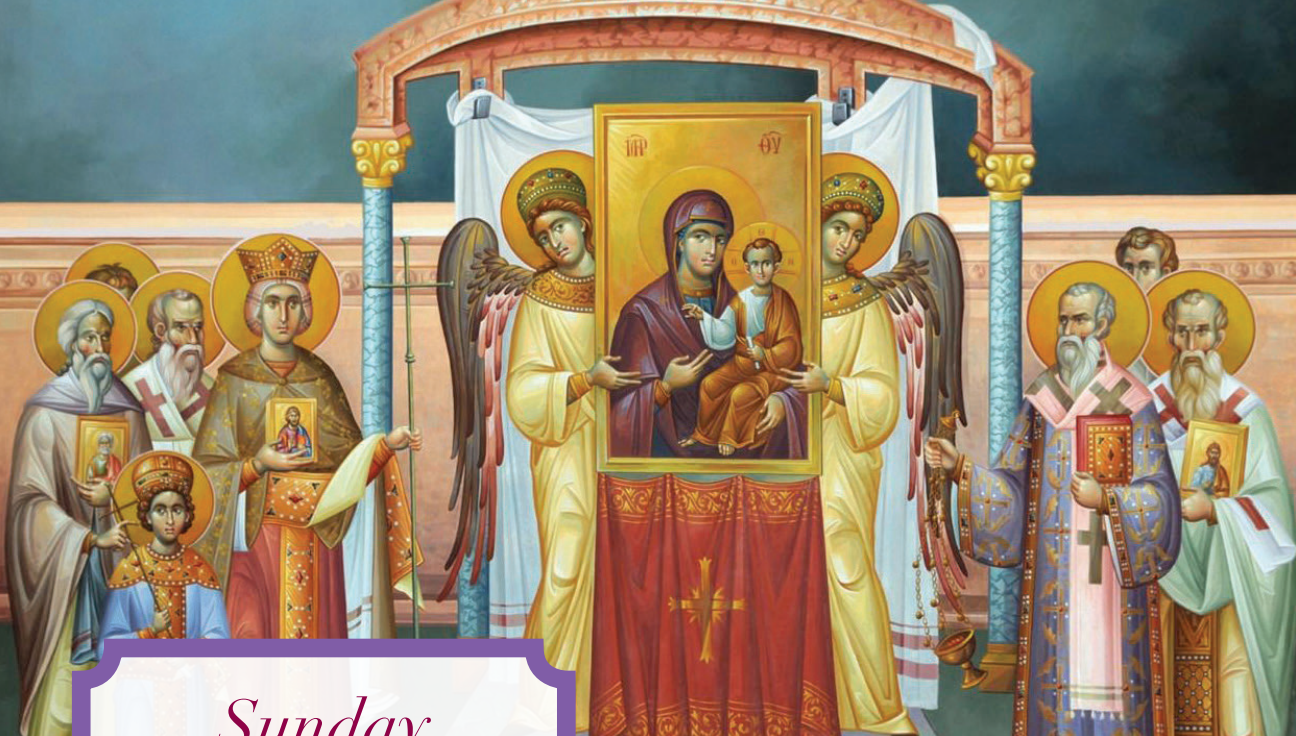
Great Lent in many ways parallels, briefly, our human life. Both are paths that we follow prayerfully, reflectively, seeking always to grow more like the One who has made us and called us to Him. We will surely stumble, yet we repent and return, hoping in God's mercy, which is manifest most powerfully in the Cross of Christ and the power of His Resurrection.

On this journey, the Church guides us with the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving: simple, perhaps, but never easy. In these pages, IOCC humbly offers encouragement for the Lenten journey, in hopes that your soul may be refreshed along the way.

During Great Lent and throughout our days, may each of us serve Christ, who loves us and gave Himself for us! May each of us serve Christ by serving others, as He asks, offering to His service all that He has given us!

Reflections graciously contributed by clergy in IOCC's headquarters region of Baltimore and Washington, DC.





Sunday of Orthodoxy

Rev. Fr. Damaskinos Issa

St. Mary
Antiochian Orthodox Church
Hunt Valley, MD

In the Sunday of Orthodoxy Gospel, Philip tells Nathaniel: “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law” – Jesus Christ. “Come and see.” This proclamation relates the reading to the feast of exalting the icons.

Icons serve a twofold goal: first, we tell the world through icons that “we have found Jesus Christ.” At the same time, we invite the world to come and see God Himself, whom the prophets desired, who

in the fullness of time took on our nature, became incarnate, and gave us the ability to say, “Come and see.”

Orthodoxy is a holy deposit: Orthodox persons have no favor in themselves to own it; our merit is to deliver Orthodoxy to the world through orthopraxis. Jesus Christ will stay in the books if we do not evangelize Him in our deeds, words, and missions. In the same way we put icons in our churches and homes, we are to put our orthopraxis wherever we go, making Christ visible to all through our work of mercy.

If orthopraxis is an icon, IOCC is an incarnation of orthopraxis. Through the acts of mercy and love that IOCC provides to those in need, the face of Christ is manifested to others. IOCC through its work with the beloved brethren of Jesus Christ is the apostle Philip saying to the world, “Come and see” how sweet is the Lord.

St. Gregory Palamas

V. Rev. Fr. Theodore Boback Jr.

St. Andrew Orthodox Church
Baltimore, MD

The second Sunday of Great Lent, which commemorates St. Gregory Palamas, is also referred to as the second triumph of Orthodoxy because of Gregory's defense of the faith and his understanding of prayer. Prayer is conversation with God, nourishment for the soul. Our private prayer life at home and our corporate prayer life in Church intensify during Lent.

This Sunday's Gospel tells of four men who cared for their friend and lowered him through a roof to see Christ. Our Lord, seeing their faith, responds, "Your sins are forgiven." Their effort is an example: we too are given strength by God to help those in need.

Combined with fasting, prayer, and forgiveness is our almsgiving, offered to those in need through our Church and its organizations. IOCC fosters within society the words of our Lord to love God and neighbor – taking care of the least of the brethren, bringing light where there is darkness. During various disasters in our nation and elsewhere, for over 27 years, IOCC has provided the requisite aid for many in times of need.



"Prayer changes from entreaty to thanksgiving, and meditation on the divine truths of faith fills the heart with ... hope."

– St. Gregory Palamas, Philokalia, vol. 4

On our Lenten journey, let us love God, serve Him with our time, talents, and resources, and give thanks and glory to Him in all things. He is the conqueror and the victor. Let us rejoice in His holy Pascha!

Veneration of the Cross

Rev. Fr. Dimitrios J. Antokas

Greek Orthodox Church of St. George
Bethesda, MD



One of the most difficult things to face is rejection. This third Sunday of the Great Fast, we venerate the cosmic sign of rejection—the Cross of the Lord Jesus, the throne of the Crucified God. It is a reminder that when Christ calls us, He bids us come and die!

Jesus knew rejection throughout His life—no room at the inn, badgering from Pharisees, betrayal by a friend, and the aloneness of crucifixion. The Cross is not only about rejection; it is a sign of God's ultimate vulnerability. Christ aligned Himself with the marginalized, the sinners, and the destitute. The Lord's preaching cost Him. What does it cost us?

In reaching out to the broken and wounded, IOCC makes the point that doing the Christian Gospel is not about being comfortable, it is about being faithful; it is not about standing with those in worldly power, it is about giving real power to those who need it to survive.

Let us examine our lives closely. Are we in solidarity with Christ's broken brothers and sisters? Do we see the Cross as the symbol of God standing with us in our suffering? Remember that God is not more powerful than He is in this incredible moment of humiliation. Can the same be said of us?



St. John of the Ladder

Rev. Fr. Louis J. Noplos

St. Demetrios
Greek Orthodox Church
Baltimore, MD

The great ascetic St. John of the Ladder offers an example of both the spiritual struggle and the spiritual humility we must engage in on the way toward salvation. His best-known work, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, depicts the effort needed on that path.

St. John saw clearly, by God's grace, that the Christian life is a journey; we take steps to mute the distractions of this world in order to cling more closely to God alone. This happens with steps, never in a sudden accomplishment. Fasting, prayer, and almsgiving are lifelong disciplines. They also help keep us from pride; like St. John, we too must pursue humility before Almighty God.

During Great Lent we are asked to course-correct, coming back to the true path: the Church reminds us to direct our attention away from the things that weigh us down, placing our focus deliberately, once again, on the goal of serving our merciful and holy God.

*You offer the teachings of your God-given book,
O wise John ... it is a ladder from the earth
unto Heaven that confers glory on the souls that
ascend it and honor you faithfully.*

— *Kontakion of the Saint*



St. Mary of Egypt

Rev. Fr. Vasilije Vranic

St. Luke Serbian Orthodox Church
Washington, DC

A Russian folktale speaks about a cobbler who received a message from God that He would visit him on Christmas Day. The cobbler diligently prepared for the divine visit, but that entire day, only several people in need came by his house. The day passed by, and God did not come. When the cobbler complained that he had been deceived, God replied to him that He indeed had visited the man several times – in the form of all those people in need.

We Christians very often pass by people in need thinking that they would spend the money we give them in unacceptable manner. Yet we forget that every person, no matter how undeserving of our attention and our charity, is an opportunity to serve God. Christ said that whenever we serve our neighbor, we serve God: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40).

Through you, the divine likeness was securely preserved, O Mother Mary, for you did carry the cross and follow Christ.

– *Apolytikion of the Saint*

The fifth Sunday of Lent is a pertinent moment to remember that God provides us with opportunities to serve Him by serving others, no matter who or what they are. Was not St. Mary of Egypt in the first part of her life a sinful person undeserving of one’s attention? Yet through her repentance and subsequent dedication of her life to God, did she not become one of the greatest saints of the Christian Church?



Palm Sunday

**His Eminence
Metropolitan Nicolae**

Romanian Orthodox Metropolia
of the Americas

*Liaison to IOCC from the Assembly
of Canonical Orthodox Bishops
of the United States of America*

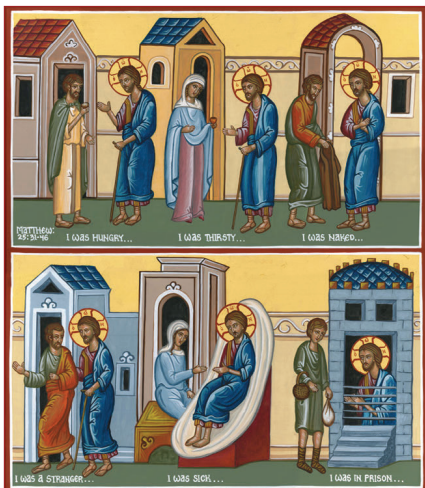
The final Sunday before Resurrection marks Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem: we have nearly reached the end of the Lenten journey.

We enter Holy Week as our Lord entered the holy city; we see the Cross before us, a somber yet hopeful sign. As we follow Christ's final days in the Holy Week services, we move ever closer both to His death and to His Resurrection. Because Christ gives so generously of Himself—on the Cross and in the Eucharist—we dare to offer ourselves to His service.

As we continue our journey during Holy Week and beyond, may we imitate first the One who emptied Himself! May we find assurance in His victory over death, placing in him the hope of our salvation!

*Come, all the faithful,
let us worship the holy Resurrection
of Christ; for behold, through the Cross,
joy has come into all the world.*

— Prayer after the Sunday Matins Gospel



*IOCC, in the spirit of Christ's love,
offers emergency relief and development
programs to those in need worldwide,
without discrimination,
and strengthens the capacity of the
Orthodox Church to so respond.*



IOCC[®]

International Orthodox Christian Charities

P.O. Box 17398 | Baltimore, MD 21297-0429 USA

Toll Free 877.803.4622

iocc.org

ICONS COURTESY OF:

Orthodox Church in America | *oca.org*

Estate of Mr. Diamantis John Cassis

Fr. Matthew Garrett | *holy-icons.com*

UncutMountainSupply.com



ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL
ORTHODOX BISHOPS
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA