



REFLECTIONS  
FOR

# GREAT LENT



**IOCC**<sup>®</sup>

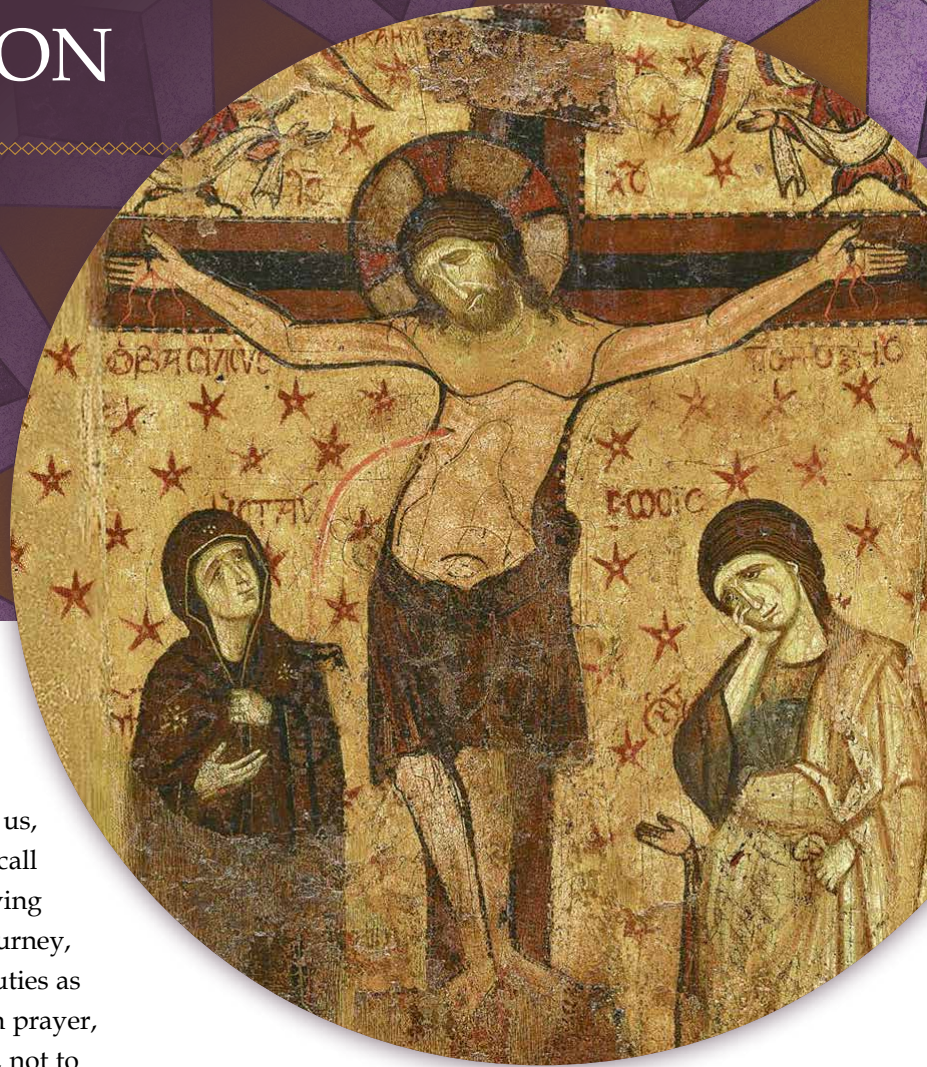
*International Orthodox Christian Charities*

# INTRODUCTION

## HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN NICOLAE

*The Romanian Orthodox Metropolia  
of the Americas*

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



Once more, Great and Holy Lent is upon us, brothers and sisters, and with it comes a call to repentance before our all-good and loving Creator. As we embark on this solemn journey, we are likewise called to reflect on our duties as Christians. We humble ourselves through prayer, through fasting, and through almsgiving, not to punish ourselves but to prepare our souls to bask in the mysterious light of Christ's Resurrection.

The reflections in this booklet have been thoughtfully authored by Orthodox clergy from around the country. Each reflection seeks to delve into these Lenten subjects, providing us with an insight for each Sunday of the Great Fast. It is my hope that these reflections will help guide and inspire you on your own Paschal journey.

So let us commence! I offer you my blessings as we move through this holy season, reminding ourselves daily, again and again, of Our Lord's great sacrifice on the Cross, and our supremely high calling—to pick up our own cross and follow Him. So let us endure, remain steadfast in hope, and give thanks to Him for all things!

# SUNDAY of ORTHODOXY

V. REV. FR. PAUL WESCHE

St. Herman's Orthodox Church  
Minneapolis, MN



*“Orthodoxy is what Christ taught, the apostles preached, and the Fathers kept.”*

— St. Athanasius the Great

The Triumph of Orthodoxy commemorates the restoration of icons as essential to Orthodox Christian biblical worship. They proclaim Christ as God incarnate in whom and by whom all things were made, who is Himself the Icon of the invisible God (*Colossians 1:15f.*). He is the Icon in whom Man was made as male and female (*Genesis 1:26-27*). Because our “primary substance” is our having been made “in the Icon” that is Christ [Origen of Alexandria], our primary substance is “personal communion” that lives and has its being in the Holy Trinity.

The Triumph of Orthodoxy, then, proclaims the restoration of personal communion with God in the triumph of the Icon, Jesus Christ, over the devil and death. Eden has been opened again and we may enter to become gardeners of immortal plants, communicants of the divine nature (*2 Peter 1:4*).

But Eden is the “icon” of our heart, as St. Kallistos Angelikoudes reminds us. The Triumph of Orthodoxy therefore proclaims the destination of our Lenten journey: “Christ in you, the Hope of Glory.” In the Light of Christ who illumines all, we take up the cross of the Fast to follow Christ from the Jordan into the wilderness of our own soul, and into the tomb of Lazarus, our own heart. Like Lazarus, we are called by Christ to “come forth” and to follow Him into His New Tomb and into the Garden of His Resurrection, the Pasture of eternal life in the Personal Communion of the Holy Trinity.

# SUNDAY of ST. GREGORY PALAMAS

REV. DR. FR.  
RICHARD ANDREWS

Sts. Peter & Paul Greek Orthodox Church  
Glenview, IL



Saint Gregory Palamas (+1396) was a champion of Hesychasm, the silent prayer, the Prayer of the Heart, the Jesus Prayer. The heart of his defense is that true practitioners of prayer could see the Uncreated Light of God. Our incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, told His disciples, "I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the Light of Life" (*John 8:12*). Jesus also told them, "You are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before people, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (*Matthew 5:14-16*).

The Jesus Prayer is as follows: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." The power of the prayer is witnessed by countless ascetic saints throughout the centuries. Jesus says: "But if your eye is dark, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (*Matthew 6:23*).

*"The light of Christ illumines all."*

— St. Gregory Palamas

Every follower of Christ is called to true prayer and intimate communion with Him. The depth of that intimacy depends on our ability to be a lens through which that Light shines towards other people, especially those in need. IOCC helps us become a lens of light for those who walk in darkness when disaster strikes. The Prophet Isaiah sums it up: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined" (*Isaiah 9:2*).

# SUNDAY of the VENERATION of the HOLY CROSS

REV. FR. ANASTASIOS BOURANTAS

St. George Greek Orthodox Cathedral  
Philadelphia, PA



*In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*—when we hear those words, our first inclination as Orthodox Christians is to cross ourselves. The cross is the “sign” that we understand and accept that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was indeed crucified. The symbol of the cross—originally meant to identify severe punishment for criminals—became a symbol of hope and life after our Lord’s Resurrection. When we wear our cross, when we cross ourselves and honor the Cross on the Third Sunday of Lent, we proclaim our faith as Orthodox Christians.

The cross also teaches us that throughout life, there are many challenges that we face. Within those challenges, we can persevere and learn from that which has become difficult to bear; we can realize that through the storms of life, we have the example of Christ, He that endured the crucifixion, the scourging, the crown of thorns, and the piercing. He showed us that we can overcome all things if we have faith. As Jesus had faith in God the Father, we too must have faith that our crucified and risen Lord will accompany us on our journey of life.

In this midpoint of Great Lent, let us remain strong in our faith, by participating in the liturgical life of our blessed Orthodox Church, continuing our fasting, and most of all, let us be mindful of our sisters and brothers all over the world, who struggle and carry their cross for our Lord. May we have a blessed Resurrection!

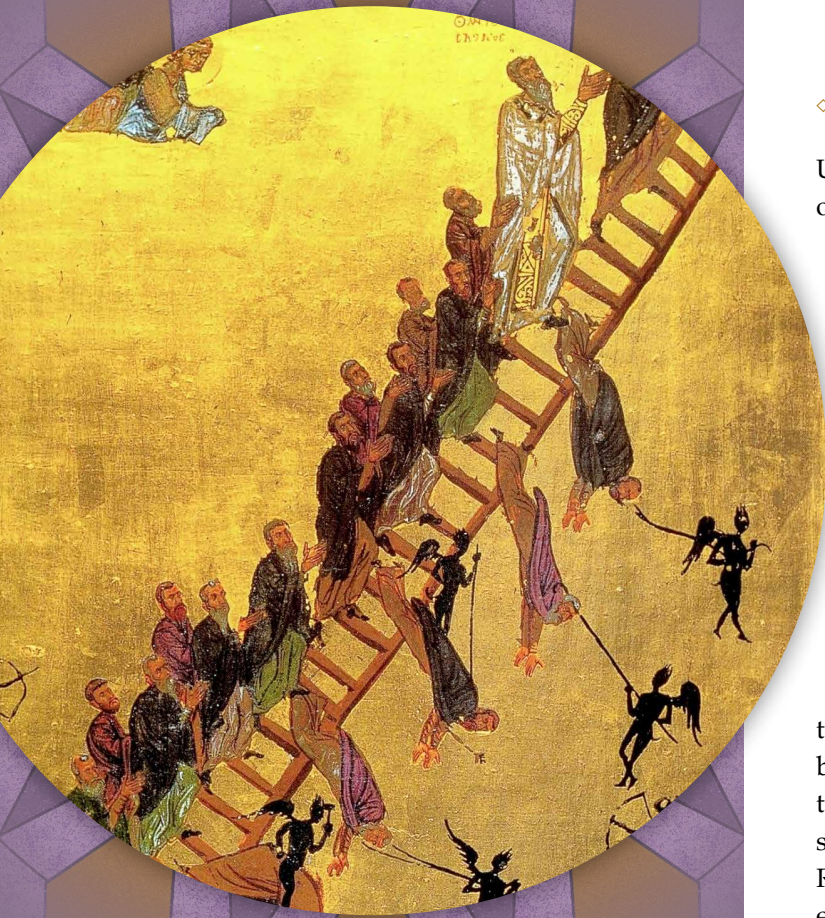
*“For the Cross is the salvation of the Church; the Cross is the boast of those who hope in it; the Cross is reconciliation of enemies to God and conversion of sinners to Christ.”*

— St. John Chrysostom

# SUNDAY of ST. JOHN CLIMACUS

V. REV. FR. AARON WARWICK

St. Mary Orthodox Church  
Wichita, KS



On the 4th Sunday of Lent, we commemorate Saint John Climacus, author of “The Ladder of Divine Ascent.” St. John’s book outlines 30 “rungs” we must climb on the spiritual ladder. On this Sunday, churches offer for veneration the icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent, which shows people at all stages of the ladder being pulled off by demons.

*“Humility is the only virtue that no devil can imitate. If pride made demons out of angels, there is no doubt that humility could make angels out of demons.”*

— St. John Climacus

Unfortunately, in our spiritual ascent, it is not only the demons who pull us off this ladder, too often we are pushing and pulling each other off! We can engage in such “demonic” behavior in multiple ways. Perhaps we fast from food, but as St. John Chrysostom said, we still “eat our brother” by gossiping about him. At other times, we find ourselves condemning others, viewing their sins as worse than our own. Or, perhaps, we steal from those in need — St. Basil said that if we have one coat on our back and one in our closet, we are stealing from the poor.

This Lenten season, we have an opportunity to help others stay on the Ladder. We do this by showing them the same mercy we want God to show us, whether that’s looking after their spiritual needs or material necessities. May the Resurrected Lord give us the strength to encourage others to stay on the Ladder during this holy season!

# SUNDAY of ST. MARY of EGYPT

REV. FR. MALEK RIHANI

St. Mary Orthodox Church  
Palos Heights, IL



One of the best ways we Orthodox express our love for one another is with the words “Many Years.” We do this to wish each other as much time as possible to repent and to return to the graces of God on our journey to partake of His divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). The fifth Sunday of Great Lent, and the story of St. Mary of Egypt, gives us another reminder of the importance of seeking repentance.

Like many of the great saints and prophets before her, Mary lived the worst possible life on earth. As a young person, she was set on destroying herself, and sought every opportunity to destroy the lives of others. But when she traveled to Palestine and tried to enter the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, she felt an invisible force deny her. She that was a sinner and a destroyer of life was unable to enter and worship the Creator of life. In her role as a most loving mother, the Blessed Theotokos guided Mary of Egypt to a new life of continuous repentance, until Mary received her reward of eternal life.

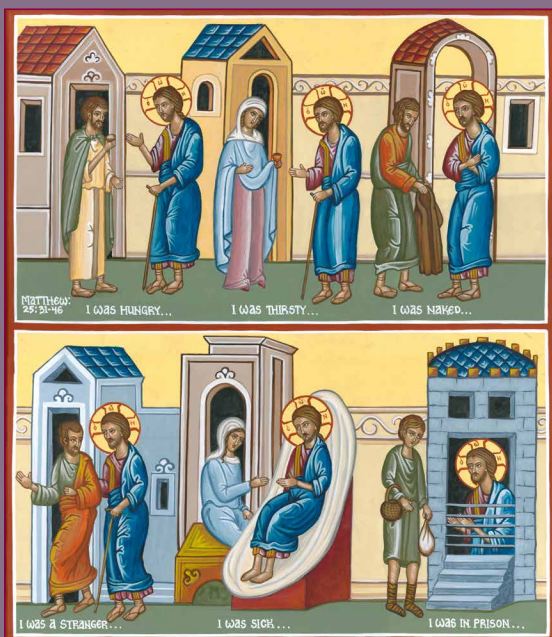
As a child, I grew up in Jordan, about 60 miles from Jerusalem. I lived across the street from a refugee camp, and saw first-hand the deplorable conditions that refugees endure. IOCC is there on the ground assisting Jordan with the influx of refugees – results of ongoing conflicts in the region. I will always be grateful for the presence of IOCC, feeding the hungry and healing the sick. Let us strive to imitate St. Mary of Egypt and her continuous repentance, until divine peace is restored in the land of peace.

*Having been a sinful woman, / you  
became a Bride of Christ through  
repentance. / Having attained the angelic  
life, / you defeated demons by the weapon  
of the Cross; / therefore, O most glorious  
Mary you are a Bride of the Kingdom.*

— Kontakion: Tone 3







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