



*Reflections for*

# GREAT LENT



**IOCC**<sup>®</sup>

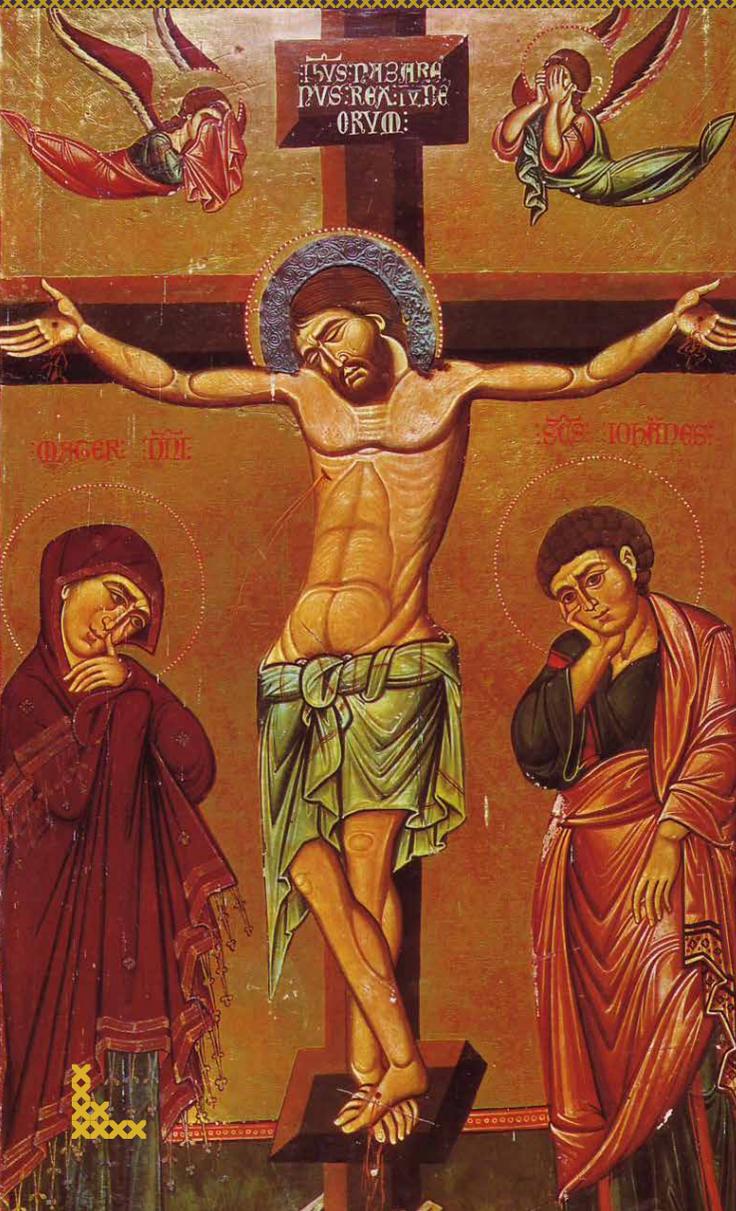
*International Orthodox Christian Charities*

# 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 again, we begin our journey through Great Lent, offering ourselves in repentance to our all-good and all-loving Creator. The Fast is a chance to turn inward, and the Church, in her wisdom, provides us with the tools and instruction we need to draw nearer to Christ as we prepare for the glorious night of His Resurrection.

If we take these disciplines to heart, if we give greater attention to our fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, we not only personally experience the warmth of His consolation, but we acquire the ability to see His Light reflected in those around us. For as we struggle toward Christ, we struggle toward our fellow man. And when we stumble, as we often do, we rise again, knowing we have in the heavens “a great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) as our support.

In the following pages, you will find reflections from priests across the country designed to inspire and encourage you on your Lenten journey. For each Sunday of the Fast, these Fathers offer spiritual insight and commentary from the wealth of their own experience.

It is my great joy to begin this voyage alongside you, and I offer my blessings as we make our way toward that great Paschal mystery. May this be for you a season of peace, holiness, and repentance. And may we all come together in unison to shout on that tremendous night—Christ is Risen!

# SUNDAY of ORTHODOXY

REV. FR. THOMAS MUELLER

Saints Cyril and Methodius Church  
Milwaukee, WI

Ἡ Ἀναθήλωσις τῶν ἁγίων εἰκόνων



Sunday of Orthodoxy commemorates the end of Iconoclasm, when emperors banned and destroyed icons during the 8th and 9th centuries. On this day, icons were restored to the Church. Behind the iconoclasts' assault on icons lay an attempt to diminish faith in the Mystery of the Incarnation—the Word of God made human in the flesh. This Mystery is at the very heart of the Gospel and of our salvation. It finds expression in the writings of the Sts. Irenaeus and Athanasius: God became human so that humanity might become divine.

The iconoclasts were influenced by other religions, which deny that God can ever be seen or pictured. They see God's condescending to become human in Christ as a scandalous blasphemy: how could God appear as an infant in a manger or an outcast condemned to crucifixion and laid dead in a tomb? How could God consort with Samaritans, publicans, lepers, and sinners? But this is the depth of God's love—that He takes up our life with all its wounds to raise it up and deify it from within. To question the Incarnation

is to try to limit the One-Who-Is love itself. This questioning attempts to leave the "least" of his brethren—the poor and despised, diseased and disabled, refugees and aliens, public sinners—outside of His loving redemption. Today, supposed Christians presume to disdain and abuse such people, creating a new iconoclasm that would reject God's choice to identify Himself with these "least" ones (Matt. 25:31-46). Today, we celebrate our boldly Incarnational Faith; how can we fail to be generous and loving to His living icons among us?

*We venerate Thy most pure image, O Good One; and ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ our God. Of Thy good will Thou wast pleased to ascend the cross in the flesh and deliver Thy creatures from bondage to the Enemy. Therefore with thankfulness we cry aloud to Thee: "Thou hast filled all with joy, O our Savior, // for Thou didst come to save the world."*

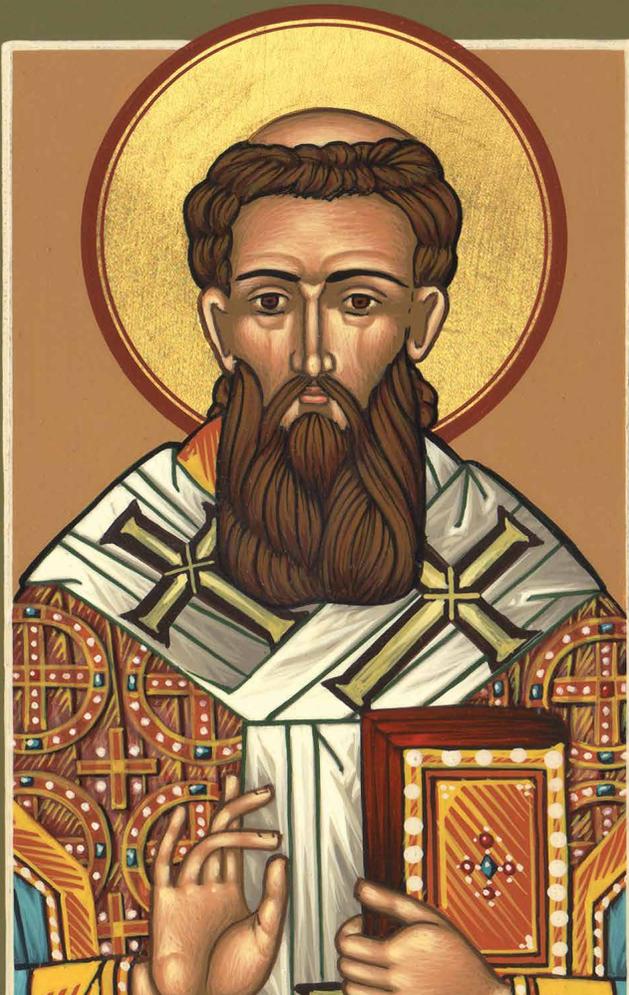
Troparion for the Sunday of Orthodoxy

# SUNDAY of ST. GREGORY PALAMAS



REV. FR. MARK SIETSEMA

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church  
Lansing, MI



What is the language of heaven?

Ancient scribes said Hebrew. Some today might say Latin, language of the Eternal City; others might say Greek, language of the Gospels. On the Second Sunday of Great Lent, we commemorate a person who knew the real answer.

Saint Gregory Palamas taught that silence is the language of God's Kingdom. He and his monks practiced the Prayer of the Heart, a mindful repetition of the words "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner." Spoken at first with the lips, these words over time enter the heart and become a second heartbeat that continues even in silence.

As the monks quieted their minds and bodies through fasting and prayer, they began to perceive the light of God's glory, a divine energy that pervades Creation. Beholding this uncreated Light, they became true theologians, knowing God – not so much intellectually as experientially and personally. They were like the disciples on Mount Tabor, witnessing Christ's Transfiguration.

"Listen to my Beloved Son," said the voice of the Father to those disciples. In silence and in worship, know God and heed His will. Talk less, heed more.

True theology is not expressed in a multitude of words, but in quiet and prayerful obedience to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Through IOCC, we can all speak the love language of kind deeds with a silent voice that goes out "into all the earth" (Psalm 19:4). God bless our Lenten journey with quietude and light!



*"The light of the Lord's transfiguration does not come into being or cease to be, nor is it circumscribed or perceptible to the senses, even though for a short time on the narrow mountain top it was seen by human eyes."*

Homily on the Holy Transfiguration



# SUNDAY of the HOLY CROSS



V. REV. DR. FR. PHILIP LEMASTERS

Saint Luke Orthodox Church  
Abilene, TX



Today we venerate the precious and lifegiving Cross upon which Christ offered Himself for the salvation of the world purely out of love for those enslaved to the fear of death, which He conquered through His glorious resurrection on the third day. Through His crucifixion, the New Adam entered fully into the misery and wretchedness of the first Adam to the point of death, to liberate us from slavery to its corrupting power and make us participants in eternal life. The Cross is truly the Tree of Life through which we return to the blessedness of Paradise. It is “a weapon of peace and a trophy invincible” that the powers of this world cannot defeat.

To share in the Savior’s victory through the Cross, we must take up our own crosses by putting faithfulness to Him before anything else, including indulging inclinations and desires that hold us back from offering ourselves fully. Even as common bread and wine are fulfilled as

our Lord’s Body and Blood when offered in the Divine Liturgy, we too are transformed when we unite ourselves to the High Priestly offering of the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world through His Cross. We must not adore the Cross only in religious services, but daily as we take up our crosses to love God with every ounce of our being and our neighbors as ourselves.



*The Lord said:  
“If anyone wishes to come  
after me, let him deny  
himself and take up his cross  
and follow me.”*

— Mark 8:34



# SUNDAY of ST. JOHN CLIMACUS



REV. FR. THEODORE DORRANCE

Saint Catherine Church  
Greenwood Village, CO



Saint John Climacus is honored by our holy Church as a great ascetic and author of The Ladder of Divine Ascent. For nineteen years at Sinai, John progressed under obedience to his spiritual father until his elder's death. He then became a solitary hermit, spending forty years laboring in prayer, fasting, and repentance. Reports of his holiness spread far and wide, and visitors from all walks of life came to him for guidance.

Knowing of the wisdom and spiritual gifts of Saint John, the abbot of Raithu asked him to compose a guide to the monastic life. Deeming himself unworthy of this task, only out of obedience did he fulfill the request. Inspired by Jacob's ladder in the Old Testament (Gen. 28:12), he called his work The Ladder, for the book is "a fixed ladder leading from earthly things to the Holy of Holies." The thirty steps of spiritual perfection correspond to the Lord's age at the beginning of His ministry.

The fourth step, On Obedience, is both enlightening and timely. Within this fourth chapter, we find the story of Saint Acacius, who through obedience was sanctified and even taught his abusive elder from the grave. Many today think that obedience is giving up one's will and losing one's freedom. Christian obedience, however, is the proper exercise of our freedom, freely offered to God and to our neighbor. As St. John Climacus teaches us, this type of obedience – true obedience – is an act of love.

*Let us honor John, the pride  
of ascetics, angel on earth,  
man of God in heaven,  
adornment of the world*

— Great Vespers of the Feast

# SUNDAY of ST MARY of EGYPT



V. REV. FR. IGNATIUS VALENTINE

Saint Nicholas Orthodox Church  
Cedarburg, WI



In the story of our Venerable Mother Mary of Egypt, we are reminded of the necessity of fortifying ourselves with God’s abundant grace through partaking of the Eucharist. After her initial repentance and baptism, she received the Eucharist before fleeing to the wilderness. It would be 47 years of fierce struggle with her passions before she would meet the priestmonk Zosima. At her urgent request, he returned the next year with the Eucharist.

When they met at the appointed place, God allowed St. Mary to walk on the water of the Jordan to where Zosima waited. The old priestmonk trembled with fear at this awesome sight. Trying to bow down to her in reverence, he forgot that he was carrying the precious Gifts. St. Mary had to rebuke him and remind him of the necessity of guarding the sanctity of the Lord’s Body and Blood. After communing, she retreated to the desert once again and immediately gave her soul up to God.

Because of her unique situation, St. Mary only communed twice during the 48 years that she followed Christ—but it never left her mind. She craved this grace that God offered. She understood that it provided her armor against the assaults of the Evil One. St. Mary gives us an example to follow, to be diligent to commune, so that we may be empowered for the lifelong struggle of repentance.



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

— Apolytikion of Saint Mary of Egypt

# PALM SUNDAY



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As we embark on the journey of Holy Week—a journey within a journey—we begin by hearing the jubilant shouts of “Hosanna!” as Our Lord makes His entrance into Jerusalem. And as we come to the end, on the night of Holy Pascha, our voices join in the triumphant cry—“Christ is Risen!” We often think of Holy Week as a week of darkness, a time of intense fasting and prayer, but it is worth remembering that it begins and ends with great joy and celebration.

Between these moments, we take part in all the critical moments leading to the Lord’s Passion. His offering the Eucharist to His disciples at the Last Supper, His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, His betrayal at the hands of Judas, His inquisition and torture, and finally His glorious ascent of the Cross. But this ascent is also a descent, a descent through all the fallen depths of mankind. Misunderstanding leads to abandonment, abandonment leads to betrayal, betrayal gives way to hatred, and hatred to viciousness and a brutal death.

But Christ has the last word. Through every trial, He demonstrates the perfect love and perfect grace of the God-man. In His suffering, He blesses, and “By His wounds, we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

So let us take heart! The Lord, Christ our God, is always with us, in joy and in sorrow. I offer my blessings to you and your loved ones during this Paschal season, trusting it will be one of great peace. “Christ is Risen!”





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