

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

**ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA**

Great Lent 2019

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. Isaiah 1:18

Beloved in Christ:

Greetings to you in the Name of Our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

We begin again the time of the Great Fast, our Lenten journey that will culminate in our commemoration of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Our Lord. Our companions along the way will be fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, which will prepare our minds and hearts, our souls and bodies to participate in this most holy and grace-filled time of our ecclesiastical year.

I would like to point out two very instructive passages that the Holy Church offers us as we begin this journey: the reading from St. Matthew during the Liturgy of Forgiveness Sunday and the reading from Isaiah during the Sixth Hour of Clean Monday. In the gospel passage, Our Lord warns that our sins are not forgiven unless we forgive others. We can fast, pray, give alms, and do prostrations, but these will be for naught if we do not forgive ourselves, our brothers and sisters. The Lord also teaches that our spiritual practices are to be done humbly, without vainglory.

The Lord makes a similar point through His prophet, Isaiah, but with even stronger language. The Lord tells His people that their services, prayers, and sacrifices are not pleasing to Him – “When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen” – because they do the rituals without following His commandments and without repentance. As we increase our liturgical worship and our attendance at services during Lent, we must give our hearts to the Lord, not empty ritual, lest our chanting and serving be an offense to Him, and the Lord hide His eyes from us.

We learn from these passages what the Lord wants from us during the Great Fast. In the gospel passage, He instructs: “Anoint your head and wash your face.” In other words, our fasting should not be seen by others because we go about looking sad. Our fasting, when coupled with forgiving and being forgiven, should be shown in our *joy*.

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

358 Mountain Road, P.O. Box 5238, Englewood, NJ 07631-5238
(201) 871-1355 T Archdiocese@antiochian.org (201) 871-7954 F

Let us journey joyfully. The Lord instructs in the prophecy that our fasting, services, and prayers need to be accompanied by washing ourselves clean and doing acts of charity: “Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.”

Beloved in Christ: Let us embrace this time of the Great Fast with joy. Let us forgive with ease, pray with fervor, chant with eagerness, fast with rigor, and give alms generously. In this manner, our sins will turn from scarlet to white as snow and from crimson to wool, and we shall be made worthy to enter into that joyous feast of Pascha night, where the table is rich-laden and the calf is fatted.

Praying that our Lenten journey is well-pleasing to God, I remain,

Your Father in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Metropolitan Joseph". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

+JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

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

358 Mountain Road, P.O. Box 5238, Englewood, NJ 07631-5238
(201) 871-1355 T Archdiocese@antiochian.org (201) 871-7954 F