



His Eminence, the Most Reverend

+ **MARK**

Archbishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania
Orthodox Church in America

February 22, 2026
Beginning of Great Lent

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

Christ is in our midst! He is and ever shall be!

As we prepare to enter this holy season, I sincerely ask each and every one of you to forgive me. For the times when I fell short as your archpastor, when I spoke when I should have remained silent, or remained silent when I should have spoken, and for any way in which I have hurt you, knowingly or unknowingly, please forgive me. The Church once again places before us the call to repentance, forgiveness, and renewed love for God and our neighbor. This most holy season invites us not only to examine our own hearts, but also to deepen our commitment to one another as members of the Body of Christ, bound together in prayer, sacrifice, and, above all, love.

In this light, the words of Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of Sourozh speak with sobering clarity. He says, *“To forgive does not mean to forget; to forgive means, with compassion and pain in the soul, to say: when the Last Judgment comes, I will stand up and say: Do not judge him, Lord.”* Forgiveness, as the Church teaches us, is neither just a sentimental moment nor ignoring the wrong that was done. It is a costly act of love that requires humility, patience, and a willingness to bear the burdens of others. It is precisely this kind of love that Great Lent seeks to cultivate within us.

In the readings from Genesis proclaimed at the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, we are reminded that humanity was created in the image and likeness of God, called into communion with Him and with one another through a bond of eternal love. Through sin, death entered the world, defacing what God had made good and fracturing our communion with our Creator. Yet, beloved, in the most supreme and awesome expression of divine love, the only begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, took upon Himself our flesh and blood for our salvation. By His voluntary Passion and glorious Resurrection, He has granted us victory over death and opened for us the path to the Pascha incorruptible. Great Lent is the sacred journey of repentance and preparation by which we are led toward that life-giving Feast. Even in the light of the Resurrection, we stay in constant need of repentance, for we too often fall short and “miss the mark” of what is asked of us. To heal our fallen image, the Church grants us this season of fasting, not only from food, but from all that separates us from God and alienates us from our brothers and sisters in Christ. We do not fast just in order to suffer, but to be liberated, so that we may once again learn how to commune rightly with our Lord and with one another.

During the Great Fast, the virtues of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are set before us as concrete expressions of repentance and love. Almsgiving, in particular, calls us to look beyond ourselves and to respond to the needs of others with generosity and compassion. Through acts of mercy, we take part in the life of the Church and become laborers in her mission, offering tangible support to those who proclaim the Gospel.

In this spirit, I ask that you remember in your prayers, and support according to the kindness of your hearts, our diocesan seminarians, Subdeacon Jacob Kurtz, Reader Alexander Koropsak, and Nicholas Sheridan, as they continue their formation for service in Christ's Holy Church. Their studies require their full attention, making outside employment impossible. Neither seminary provides assistance for rent, utilities, groceries, or books. Your support, whether through a monthly gift or a one time offering made directly to a seminarian or sent to the Diocesan Chancery with a notation, provides meaningful help and eases these burdens.

Those wishing to send support directly may do so at the following addresses:

Sdcn. Jacob and Mariana Kurtz
Children: Luka, Noah, and Magdalena
St. Tikhon's Theological Seminary
P.O. Box 130
South Canaan, PA 18459

Rdr. Alexander Koropsak
St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary
575 Scarsdale Rd
Yonkers, NY 10707

Nicholas and Abigail Sheridan
St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary
575 Scarsdale Rd
Yonkers, NY 10707

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I humbly ask you to remember me in your prayers, as I remember you in mine, as we journey toward the Feast of Feasts, Great and Holy Pascha.

Your unworthy father in Christ,

+ Mark

+MARK, Archbishop of Philadelphia and the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania