

**PASTORAL LETTER OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV (SHEVCHUK)
TO THE FAITHFUL OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH
FOR GREAT LENT 2012**

«Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!»

Mt. 4:17

Dear in Christ!

With these words of our Divine Savior, the Church of Christ is calling today each and every one of us to commence a blessed time of the Great Fast. The name “Great” of this fast is not accidental: it is caused by those God’s gifts and fruits for our spiritual life, which we can attain during this time, provided we spend it worthily. The greatness of this time is likewise determined by the depth of a spiritual change of our person and our life, which will be the result of the meeting with the merciful and loving Heavenly Father.

Hence, how do we live out this period worthily, so as to transform and enrich our lives? First of all, dear in Christ, we need to remember that fasting does not only mean limiting ourselves in food and entertainment. Fasting is primarily to keep away from sin, from evil habits and passions. It is also a rejection of indifference, evil thoughts and selfishness. Lent is an invitation, addressed to each of us, wounded by sins, encumbered with infirmities and depleted with the daily chores, to surrender ourselves to the Lord’s embrace.

The Fathers and spiritual teachers of the Church, urging Christians to live out the fast worthily, called it a time of spiritual awakening and renewal of man; they compared it with the spiritual spring, during which the divine life awakens in our souls: “...When winter ends and we start coming closer to the spring warmth, a seafarer takes his boat again out into the sea, a soldier cleans his weapons and trains his horse for a fight, a peasant sharpens his tools, a traveler, having felt a surge of strength, girds and embarks on a journey... And so let us also, at this time of the coming of the spiritual spring, similarly fix our spiritual weapons as soldiers, let us sharpen our tools as farmers, and, like the true leaders, let us take into our hands the boat of our spirit so as to be prepared to endure the heaps of the waves of senseless passions and, as the pilgrims heading towards our heavenly homeland, let us begin the fulfillment of our spiritual journey” (St. John Chrysostom, *Word to the Antiochian People*, 3).

Lent is a special time of repentance and penance. Just as in nature, a normal sign of an early spring is the awakening of all creatures to a new life, similarly the human soul, through repentance and penance, comes to life and, having been warmed by the warmth of God’s mercy and love, is freed from the dead stiffness and produces sprouts of a new life in the Holy Spirit. Whoever honestly admits his sins in the Holy Sacrament of Penance, feels the good-giving action of the warmth of God’s life-giving love. And just as spring wins over winter, so the power of the Lord’s forgiveness wins over fear, weakness and disbelief in us, proving that the Divine love is stronger than our sin and that there is no evil force, which would be able to resist the saving mercy of the Heavenly Father. That is why Prophet David, in repenting burst, sings to the Lord: “May Your compassion come to me that I may live, for Your law is my delight” (*Ps. 119:77*). Revived through

repentance and penance and united with the Lord in the Holy Communion, a believer blossoms with God's beauty of the righteous life and becomes the bearer of hope for his environs as well as for the entire society. For just as sin has a devastating impact not only on a sinner himself, but on all of his environs as well, conversion and repentance bring healing to our relationship with God, our neighbor and all of the creation.

Lent is a time of intensive prayer. Giving up during this period on entertainment, we concomitantly need to pay more attention to the communication with God: through participation in Lenten liturgical services in the church as well as through longer and more intense prayer in family circle and solitude. We cannot devoid of our attention a practice that has recently been introduced in our Church – the reading of God's Word. Every day the faithful, whether alone or with the family or gathered in prayer groups in parishes, reflect upon and pray with some excerpts from the Sacred Scripture. In this way, the Word of God becomes for us a spiritual nourishment as well as recalls for us that "man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (*Mt. 4:4*). I fervently entrust to continue and spread this pious practice. And for those who have not started doing this yet, may Lent become an opportunity to begin to get to know the Word of God as well as to live it out ever more.

Charitable deeds are likewise a necessary condition of Lenten spiritual journey. The Lord, through the words of the Prophet Isaiah, directs to all of us a special call, showing the meaning of an authentic fast: "Is this not the fast that choose? ... Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" (*Is. 58:6-7*). Just as in nature, the emergence of fresh green shoots in spring exposes the life of a plant, so the Christian almsgiving is a sign of the spiritual awakening of man, his openness to God and neighbor as well as a compelling witness of the living faith, "working through love" (*Gal. 5:6*). All Christians are called to do the almsgiving, regardless of wealth or financial capability. St. Pope Leo the Great teaches that "nothing can get into the way of our charity, with which we fulfill a vocation of the love of God and neighbor... Not only the rich and wealthy can perform the charity works vis-à-vis their neighbor, but also those that are poor and with the limited fortunes... Almsgiving transforms inequality in terms of the earthly goods into equality in obtaining the heavenly gifts" (*Word on the occasion of Lent, 6, 1-2*).

Dear in Christ! The time of Lent opens for us the way to Heaven. Let's embark on it in the spirit of repentance, prayer and almsgiving. Let us walk it together, growing in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Let me remind you about the obligation to partake in this blessed time in the Holy Sacraments of Confession and Communion. May Lent grant us with the renewal of the spiritual life, the awakening of the Christian zeal and love of God and neighbor in our parish communities and monastery ambits! I implore our Father, "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (*1 Tm. 2:4*), to lovingly bring all of you closer to His merciful paternal heart and, having forgiven your sins, make you, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the partakers of the glory of the resurrection of His Divine Son.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

† SVIATOSLAV

*Given in Kyiv,
at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,
on Cheesefare Saturday, 25th February 2012 A. D.*