



ΙΕΡΑ ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗ ΘΥΑΤΕΙΡΩΝ & Μ. ΒΡΕΤΑΝΙΑΣ
ARCHDIOCESE OF THYATEIRA & GREAT BRITAIN

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Encyclical of His Eminence the Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain, to the Christ-bearing Flock of this Biblical Province of the Ecumenical Throne, upon our entry into Holy & Great Lent 2016.

Dearly Beloved in the Lord

By the grace and blessing of our God worshipped in Trinity, we have been made worthy once again to continue our Orthodox Tradition and devotions with all reverence and faith, throughout these Holy Days that lie ahead. Daily we praise Him in body and in soul with our works, in keeping with the Divine Psalmist's exhortation, "let everything that has breath sing praise unto the Lord". We have arrived at the solemn period of Holy and Great Lent, an eventful period overflowing with grand and salutary lessons expressed in divine worship and prayer, the contemplation of God's Word and the calling to remembrance of the life of the Church Militant, which travels together with and struggles alongside the saints, who made this earth like unto heaven, and who by means of their bloody self-sacrifice, contributed to the holy victory of God's Kingdom throughout the inhabited earth.

Holy and Great Lent is a season teeming with soaring demonstrations of God's love for man, lessons derived from the history of Mankind, which Our Lord Jesus Christ sanctified, recapitulated and regenerated, giving new breath and new life, as taught us by the Divine Apostle Paul: *"because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—for it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 2:4-6). The Hymnographer of our Church urges us to "humble ourselves before God, and with fasting cry aloud like the Publican, 'God be merciful to us sinners' " (Triodion Hymn).

The fundamentally existential lessons of these Holy Days are prayer, repentance, humility, apology, forgiveness, charity, almsgiving, love for God and mankind, fasting, and the practice of virtue and good works, together with faith in God and our confidence in His Divine Will and love for mankind, which "God in many times and various ways" has shown us. Let us flee from selfishness, pride and vanity, according to the Hymnographer's counsel: "we see the exalted honour that comes through humility, and the grievous fall that comes through pride; let us then emulate the good works of the Publican, and hate the evil of the Pharisee", and further

on he reminds us that the God-Man Christ "who humbled Himself even to the form of a servant, showed that humility is the best path to exaltation".

Such Holy Days as these, beckon us to re-examine the deeds of our life, that we may cease wasting our good things on trivialities, and begin using our health, our learning and our finances for good and holy purposes. Let us not "squander our life in indolence", because each of us will give account for his deeds, in accordance with the unerring mouth of the Lord.

This devotional period brings to our attention figurative examples of repentance displayed by the Publican, the Prodigal Son, and Saint Mary of Egypt, which have enduring relevance and instructiveness for all persons wishing to restore within themselves, "the image of God" in which He has made us. There exists no virtuous and righteous life, other than man's return to God, a way of life which he both finds and reveals in love and co-operation with his fellow man. It is in this spirit of sacrifice and self-offering to others, that we imitate the Merciful God who is indeed a Friend of Man. The God-Man Christ was crucified to raise us up to Heaven and transform us into Members of His Body and partakers of His Heavenly Kingdom. Therefore brothers and fathers, let us fast in body and in spirit, repenting of our faults and forgiving each other. Let us take refuge in our Church where we can pray and partake of the Immaculate Sacraments unto remission of sins and life everlasting, that we may celebrate the Saving Passion and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. For it is Him we praise with joy and gladness, because He "emptied Himself by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a Cross"(Phil.2:7-8), for the salvation and redemption of mankind. To him belong the glory, the infinite mercy, and the Kingdom, unto the ages of ages. Amen.

London, Great Lent 2016

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain Gregorios". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Archbishop of Thyateira
& Great Britain Gregorios

Note: To be read from the Pulpit in place of a Sermon, on Sunday 13 or 20 of March 2016.