



73rd Year

March 2, 2025

Pamphlet #9 (3744)

THE SUNDAY EPISTLE (Romans 13:11-14:4) **Awakening for the day of salvation**

Brethren, salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions. One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for God is able to make him stand.

THE ARENA OF VIRTUES

As we stand at the threshold of Holy and Great Lent, my brethren, we heard the Apostle Paul calling the Christians, in view of the coming of the day of Christ, to put aside the works of sin and to take up the weapons of light. Given that the day and hour of the Second Coming of the Lord is unknown, for each of us, the

moment of our meeting with Him is that of our biological death. The Apostle to the Nations calls us, in view of this certain prospect, to abandon the sinful way of life and to choose the path of virtue.

Great Lent

This is also the message that our Church sends, just before we enter the “arena of virtues.” Great Lent is a journey with internal characteristics, where we are called to know ourselves in order to meet our God who resurrected from the dead, having passed through the furnace of Passion and the Cross. In this journey, which represents the course of the whole life of the Christian, we must abandon our passions, fight against our weaknesses, and confront our evil self. We will achieve these by using the spiritual abilities provided by our Church, about which the Apostle Paul speaks today. These are the virtues.

The spiritual exercises

The virtues – spiritual exercises, in which we are called to strive during the period that opens up before us – are fasting, prayer, humility, almsgiving, love, and above all, repentance. All these spiritual elements make up the canvas of our spiritual struggle and help in our spiritual completion and final union with God. However, virtues presented as human achievements, alienated from the grace of God, lead to the opposite of the pursued results. This happens because they can exalt our egotism, making us believe in our supposed spiritual self-sufficiency. Whoever is led to this conclusion destroys what he has built within himself.

For the struggle of virtue to have results, it must be stripped of external characteristics that seek human approval and be confined to the internal field of our existence. Abba Isaiah specifically says: “He who boasts and strives for virtue and does not take care to conceal it, so that people do not perceive this good work of his, is like a house whose door and windows have

been removed and, as a result, any reptile that wishes easily enters it."

The internal dimension of virtues is also declared by St. Isaac the Syrian: "Virtue is not the display of many and various acts performed through the body, but that which is contained by a most wise heart which is supported by hope in God. This heart is connected, by the right intention, to the works done according to God's will."

Acquisition of the Holy Spirit

Many of our Christian brothers and sisters often fall into the temptation of displaying the external forms of their piety, that is, their virtues, especially during periods like Great Lent. They have the illusion that the attainment of virtues by itself can ensure the salvation of the soul and union with God. They never understood that virtues are tools given by God, which become active and useful when used as fruits of Divine illumination, inspiration, and grace, given to humble hearts that have learned to work secretly.

Therefore, let us always keep in mind what Saint Seraphim of Sarov said: "Virtues are not the purpose of life; rather, the acquisition of the Holy Spirit." When the Holy Spirit envelops our existence, then the virtues will be the natural consequence, God's reward in our spiritual struggle. Amen!

Archimandrite E. Oik.

March 2, 2025: Cheesefare Sunday

Commemoration of the expulsion of the first-created Adam from Paradise; Hesychius the Martyr, Theodotus of Cyrene Cyprus († 326), Euthalia the Virgin Martyr († 252). The Priest Nicholas Planas († 1932).
Tomorrow begins Holy and Great Lent.

3rd Tone – Eothinon: 3 – Epistle: Romans 13:11-14:4
– Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21

NEXT SUNDAY: March 9, 1st Sunday of Lent (Sunday of Orthodoxy)
Epistle: Hebrews 12:1-10 – Gospel: John 1:44-52

Relevant Publications at the Beginning of Great Lent

(From the Apostolic Ministry, in Greek)

ΣΥΣΣΩΜΟΙ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ (ALL THE MEMBERS OF CHRIST: or about striving in the Eucharist) by Metropolitan Agathangelos of Phanariou. A eucharistic treatise that comes to respond to the challenges of our time and to the discussions that arise and touch on the very nature of the God-founded mystery of the Divine Eucharist. The second part contains the "Discourse of Edification and Salvation" by Saint John Chrysostom.

ΣΤΟ ΚΑΤΩΦΛΙ ΤΗΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΗΣ ΤΕΣΣΑΡΑΚΟΣΤΗΣ (AT THE THRESHOLD OF GREAT LENT – liturgical and compunctionate texts) by Metropolitan Symeon Koutsas of Nea Smyrni. An excellent aid for the holy period of Great Lent, which constitutes the heart of the ecclesiastical year. Twelve texts referring to spiritual preparation, temperance, Christian asceticism, the person of God, and the prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian.

Η ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΥ (THE DIVINE LITURGY OF SAINT BASIL) the original text with a modern Greek translation by the theologian Evangelos G. Karakovounis.

Η ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΟΗΓΙΑΣΜΕΝΩΝ ΔΩΡΩΝ (THE DIVINE LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS) the original text with a modern Greek translation by the theologian Evangelos G. Karakovounis. The faithful delve meaningfully into the exquisite and mystagogic prayers of the sacred texts.

Η ΝΗΣΤΕΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ (THE FASTING OF THE CHURCH: why, when, and how we fast) by the Metropolitan Symeon Koutsas of Nea Smyrni. An excellent publication for a fuller understanding of the true meaning and paramount importance of fasting for spiritual life and to know when and how we should fast.

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