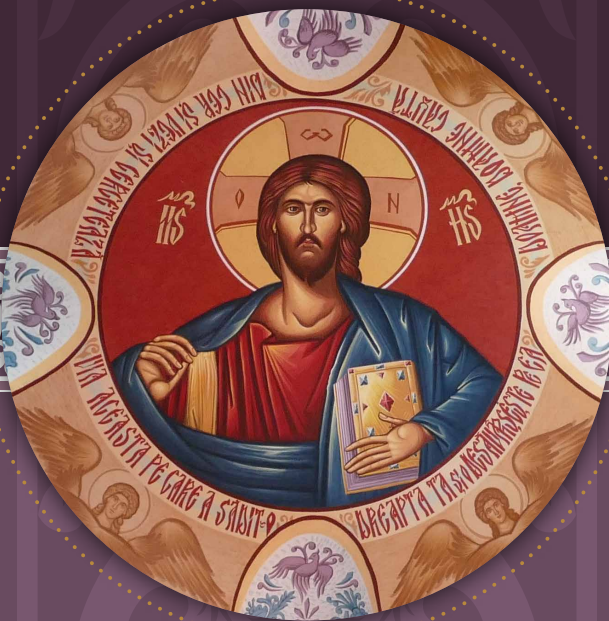


Reflections
FOR
**GREAT
LENT**



IOCC®

International Orthodox Christian Charities

INTRODUCTION

HIS EMINENCE
METROPOLITAN NICOLAE

The Romanian Orthodox Metropolia
of the Americas

*Liaison to IOCC
from the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops
of the United States*



Through Great and Holy Lent, the Church draws us into repentance and renewal. Through the fast, we attend to our spiritual well-being, seeking deeper communion with our good and loving God. But we also have practical work to do, and we do not seek Him in isolation. As St. Maximus teaches, we cannot love God if we do not love one another.

Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving refocus us on God's eternal love and its manifestation in this life. Christ asks each of us to care for those around us. "The work of love," St. Maximus writes, "is the deliberate doing of good to one's neighbor." Christ Himself sets the example: the Servant-King who empties Himself, humbles Himself, washing His disciples' feet.

This year's reflections come from clergy who have served on and advised IOCC Metropolitan Committees. These groups of volunteers across the US have, for three decades, lifted up IOCC's humanitarian work, offering their time and

*"The one who loves God
surely loves his neighbor
as well."*

—ST. MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR,
Four Hundred Texts on Love

resources to serve Christ by serving others. They find, as I hope we all do, that IOCC's mission is an expression of Christ's love for all humankind.

Once again, with great joy, I invite you on the journey to Pascha, toward our Lord's triumph over death. Let us pray that Christ will give us strength to imitate Him and to complete the work He calls us to do in His service!

SUNDAY of ORTHODOXY

FR. MICHAEL ARBANAS
Parish Priest

St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church
St. Louis, MO



*We venerate Your most pure image,
O Good One*

—FROM THE APOLYTIKION

On the first Sunday of Lent, we remember the restoration of icons to the churches in 843, after years of repression by iconoclast rulers and agitators. We process around the church with our icons, and we honor the many confessors who suffered humiliation, exile, torture, and even death because they defended the veneration of these images.

But what about this celebration makes it more than a historical commemoration? How is it unto our salvation? In other words, what does it say to us about how we should live?

We adorn our churches with icons, and we venerate these — show them honor — by kissing them. If we truly believe that every person is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), then how much more should we honor God's image in each person we meet, and even in those we'll never know personally?

We venerate the image of God in those around us through active love in all its forms — service, patience, generosity, encouragement, forgiveness, and many other ways. And IOCC gives us an opportunity to honor God's image in thousands of people around the world who are hungry, displaced, and desperately poor by serving their needs.

As we celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy, then, let us remember that the veneration of icons should not be a practice that sets Orthodox Christians apart, but one that pushes us to care about every human being, especially those in need.

SUNDAY of ST. GREGORY PALAMAS

FR. MALEK RIHANI
Founding Pastor

St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church
Palos Heights, IL



This great teacher, St. Gregory Palamas, whom we honor on this Second Sunday of Lent, was able, through his effective teaching and by his example, to show that the energies of God manifest themselves in the life of every Christian. They may not be easily explained, but they can be joyfully experienced.

When we submit our life to Christ and become co-workers with Him (1 Cor 3:9), the energies of God will flow naturally as we interact with our fellow humans.

Our IOCC family makes it possible for those in need to feel the energies of God in a very tangible way.

IOCC leadership makes it a point in their messaging to stress that their strong commitment to provide emergency relief for the most vulnerable is done in *the spirit of Christ's love*. This is not just any love; this is divine love, the agape that God defined for us to include charity, forgiveness,

accountability, discipline, sacrifice, and so much more.

As a spiritual advisor for the Chicago Metropolitan Committee of IOCC for the last 10 years, I see my role as ensuring that the spirit of Christ's love continues to be the fuel that drives our commitment to excel in planning and executing our events.

IOCC has taken the theological concept of the energies of God and planted it in the heart of our troubled world in the form of practical, effective solutions that are most pleasing to God.

"Divine grace is not created, but is the uncreated energies of God which are poured forth throughout creation."

—FROM THE
TEACHINGS OF
ST. GREGORY
PALAMAS

SUNDAY *of the* VENERATION *of the* HOLY CROSS

VERY REV. JOHN J. DRESKO
Retired Pastor

St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church
Las Vegas, NV



The midpoint of Great Lent sees the cross in our midst. St. Paul says that the word of the cross is “foolishness” to those who are perishing (1 Cor 1). The cross does not make sense to the world. Who would choose humiliation, agony, suffering and death as the way to salvation? Yet, there it is. We are confronted with it. The Church gives us the cross now to sharpen and change our focus from ourselves and our meager Lenten efforts to the destination.

Our Lenten journey is the struggle to see “through” the world in order to understand what is hidden and mysterious to those captured by the world. We fast, we pray, we give alms, and we forgive as our own crosses when the wisdom of the world tells us to fill, glorify, and hoard money for ourselves and stick it to the other guy when he deserves it. The Christian faith makes no sense unless we begin by uniting ourselves to Christ in baptism and taking up our cross. Even then, the demons constantly whisper: “Take care of yourself. God is not there. A cross is cruel and has no value.”

We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew.

—1 COR 2:7-8

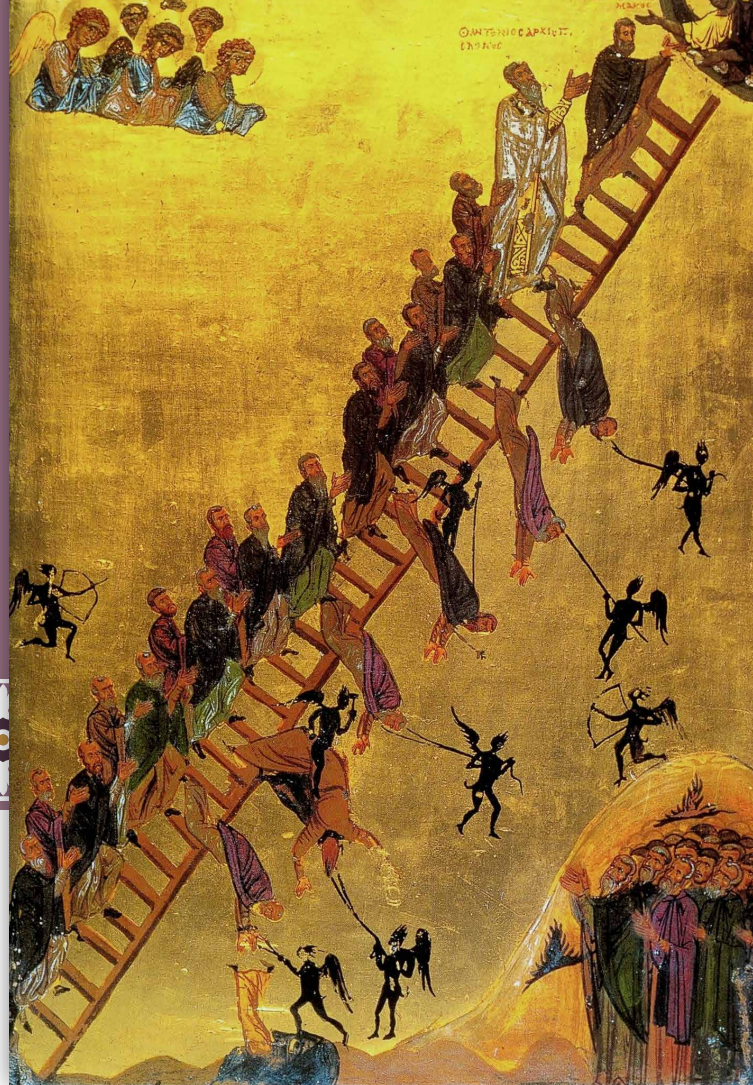
Those who are wise in the hidden mysteries of Christ will never be seen as wise in the eyes of the world. May we all be fools in taking up our crosses!

SUNDAY of ST. JOHN CLIMACUS

ARCHDEACON DAVID KHOREY

St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church
Grand Rapids, MI

*Prayer, fasting, almsgiving:
Our way of life now and always*



Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. This is the concise refrain we hear through Great Lent as we sharpen our effort to walk the “narrow path” of salvation. In prayer, we direct ourselves toward God. In fasting, we direct ourselves to the control of our own passions. In almsgiving, we direct ourselves toward our brothers and sisters who are in need. Each element describes a unique relationship, yet each is not full without the others; together, and in relation to each other, they form a whole, the Orthodox Christian way of life, renewed each Lenten springtime.

This essential, dynamic relationship between the three elements of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving is expressed in the Gospel reading on this Sunday of St. John Climacus. Our Lord casts out an unclean spirit from a boy whose distraught father brought him to Jesus, after the disciples were unable to heal him. This kind, Jesus instructs the disciples, “cannot be driven out by anything but

prayer and fasting” (Mk 9:29). One might ask, what of almsgiving? Truly, the importance of almsgiving is expressed not only in the disciples’ effort to help those who came to them in need, but in the very act of mercy that Christ Himself accomplishes that is itself the heart of this and every Gospel message.

In our churches, we can work with IOCC, including through its Metropolitan Committees, to serve Christ by serving those in need with “prayer and fasting,” now and throughout the year, as we walk the Way of Our Lord.

SUNDAY^{of} ST. MARY^{of} EGYPT

FR. LOUIS J. CHRISTOPULOS
Chancellor

Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Denver
Denver, CO



ST. MARY OF EGYPT

The Triodion period in the Orthodox Christian Church, which includes the four pre-Lenten Sundays, Great Lent, and Holy Week, provides for the faithful an excellent annual psychosomatic preparation for the Feast of Feasts: Pascha, our Lord's glorious and life-giving Resurrection. God becomes Man, taking on our FULL human nature in order to fully save us. It stands therefore to reason that for us to "psychically" or "soulfully" experience (for *psychi* means "soul" in Greek) the Resurrection, we must also physically or bodily prepare for it. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are key elements of this annual Lenten preparation. At their core is repentance, a change of heart or attitude, a reorientation of our life.

What better example of repentance could we have than St. Mary of Egypt (sixth century), who is commemorated on the fifth Sunday of Great Lent. A woman of ill-repute who, after spending 17 years as a harlot, at the Feast of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem was invisibly unable to enter the church. This barrier opened her heart to the reality of her sinful life, which in turn opened her to the

sweet love of our Lord through His Mother Mary. The Theotokos led her to the wilderness across the Jordan River where she spent the next 47 years in prayer and ascetic discipline. This extraordinary change, from one extreme to another, may be difficult for us to imagine. However, it provides hope that the love of God, with a willingness from us, can overcome all obstacles.

After serving on our local IOCC Metropolitan Committee for 25 years, I am so grateful for the loving, caring, compassionate, and dedicated work of IOCC. I refer to the organization with Godly pride in our pan-Orthodox reality internationally, nationally, and locally. I refer to the staff and volunteers with personal gratefulness at those levels as well. And finally, I refer to the thousands or tens of thousands that have been assisted or touched by the philanthropic and philoxenic love of IOCC, without whom we would be nothing. Hope that the love of God, with willingness from us, can overcome all obstacles.

PALM SUNDAY

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*Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes
in the name of the Lord!*

— JN 12:13

If Lent is a journey, then Holy Week is the final stretch before we reach our destination. Through the Church's beautiful services, we walk the path with our Lord and His disciples; we follow Christ to His passion and death and finally, joyfully, to His resurrection.

Cries of praise arise on Palm Sunday because the Lord has come, though we have not yet reached the cross. In Holy Week, Christ offers Himself with every step: He blesses bread and wine with His disciples, He struggles in prayer, He gives teachings of hope and comfort even as despair and confusion draw near. He endures loneliness, betrayal by His friends, and the darkness of death itself.

But the grave cannot hold the One who brought all things into being: "Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (Jn 1:5).



This week, as we keep the cross before us, let us also see in it the light and life that Christ grants us. Christ has emptied Himself so that we may join Him in life, in His Father's house. Let us rejoice together in His victory!

*"Come, take light from the light that
is never overtaken by night. Come,
glorify Christ, risen from the dead."*

—PROCLAMATION OF THE RESURRECTION



IOCC, in the spirit of Christ's love, offers emergency relief and development programs to those in need worldwide, without discrimination, and strengthens the capacity of the Orthodox Church to so respond.



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