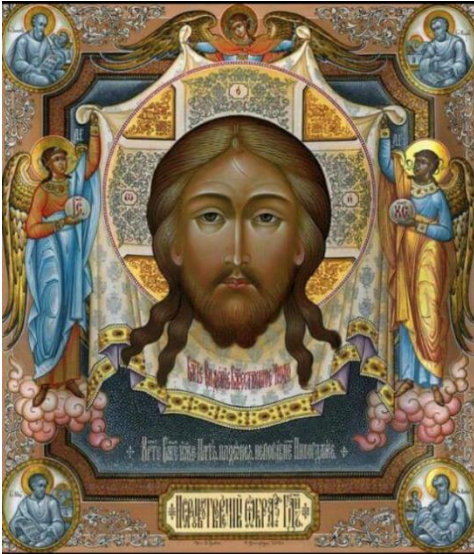


**Archpastoral Letter for the Beginning of Great
Lent 2021**

March 15/2, 2021



To the beloved clergy, religious, and faithful of the Russian True Orthodox Church, Archdiocese of North America & the Diaspora—mercy, peace, and love be yours in ever-greater measure.

Today we embark upon the road to self-awareness and growth that leads us to the joy of the Resurrection. This road, if we are honest with ourselves and before God, is not an easy one. It is one upon which we might find distractions, on which we may stop and look at ourselves and not like what we see, or on which we might get lost.

Fortunately for us, we are given a roadmap for our journey in a prayer that is ever present in our liturgical services during this holy season. It is one that is so common that we often take it for granted without reflecting on its depth, beauty, and meaning for our daily lives. This prayer is that of St. Ephrem.

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk.

Rather, give me the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou, unto ages of ages. Amen.

There is such a wealth to ponder in these three little lines that we could write volumes. Today, however, we will turn our attention to just the last verse.

It takes strength to be able to see ourselves as we truly are. For some, this might not be the most pleasant image. For others, there might just be a little tarnish that needs to be polished. Wherever we may fall on the spectrum, it is important for us to take that honest look and see if we are truly the person we want to be, and truly the person that God has called us to be. These forty days are given to us so that we can learn and grow and be better than we are today. There is no one among us who could not use a little improvement, and today is a good day to begin.

Once we've gotten the self-reflection part down, we come to the task that is, for some, even more daunting—not judging our brothers and sisters. Hopefully, reflecting upon our own sinfulness has made us painfully aware that there is no one without sin. Each of us falls along the path to salvation. It's easy for us to look at someone else's faults and judge, mostly because it takes the focus away from our own lives. The Christian, however, is called upon not to condemn the falls of their sisters or brothers, but to reach out a hand and help them back up when they stumble.

It is in seeing the image of God in ourselves and in others that we truly begin to walk the path that leads to the glorious Resurrection.

With the bestowal of our blessings and prayers for all of you, we remain

Sincerely in Christ,

+ALEXY

Metropolitan and First Hierarch of the Russian True Orthodox Church-MM
Archbishop of Minneapolis and Chicago

+HARALAMPOS

Archbishop of Dallas and Texas

+NICHOLAS

Bishop of Edenborn

Vicar for the Archdiocese of North America & the Diaspora