

March 2/February 18, 2020



**To the beloved clergy, monastics and faithful of the Russian True Orthodox Church, Metropolia of Moscow—mercy, peace, and love be yours.**

As I read through the Scriptures, one story that always brings me great sadness is that of Judas. Here was a man who walked and talked and shared his life with Jesus every day. He witnessed the miracles and wonders that occurred everywhere with his own eyes. He was able to hear the words of the New Law right from the mouth of the Master. He experienced His love and mercy firsthand. And yet, he never quite grasped the depth of His love and forgiveness for those who reach out to Him. Instead, the weight of his betrayal made him believe that he was beyond redemption. It made him feel alone and ashamed. And so, he hanged himself.

Just imagine how different his story might have been if he had allowed the teaching of the Lord take root in his heart. If he had only realized that this same Jesus, who forgave sinners on a daily basis, and who welcomed all back into the loving embrace of the Father, could do the same for him we might celebrate his life as a story of joy instead of tragedy. Sadly, however, we do not.

We no longer live in the days when we can physically walk and talk and sit at the feet of the Lord and learn. We do, however, live in a time when it is just as easy to feel alone, ashamed, and beyond redemption. Today, possibly more than at any time I can remember, it seems that people carry around weights that are far too heavy for them to manage alone. Sometimes they are able to reach out for help and be relieved, but other times they succumb beneath this weight.

As we begin Great Lent today, there are two areas of our lives to which I think we should be attentive. The first, is that we look at ourselves and ask if we have allowed ourselves to be weighted down during the past year (or many years). Are we walking around with the weight of the world upon our shoulders? Have sins, anxieties, fears, troubles or pains taken hold of us to the point that we think there is no way out? If the answer is yes, then I say to you, don't be afraid to reach out for help. Reach out to the Lord for forgiveness, strength, compassion, and reach out to others. No one can, or should, maneuver the twists and turns of life alone. With the Lord, we are never alone, and He has placed others along our path with arms waiting to reach out and lift up. Whatever our need, He is there, together with all those he has blessed us with along the road of life. Please never be ashamed or afraid to reach out.

The second area that we need to look at is how we have placed unnecessary weight or burden on others. Have our words caused others pain or shame? Have our actions lifted others up or knocked them down? Has our lack of care or empathy caused another to feel unloved or unworthy? Have we made people feel ridiculed or worthless or unworthy because they don't look or act or think like us? We bear a responsibility for our actions and no amount of fasting or abstinence or church attendance takes away our responsibility to live a life worthy of the name Christian, not just in name, but in action. As the great teacher and Father of the Church, St. John Chrysostom reminds us, it's not what goes in us that makes us unclean, but rather what comes out of us.

As we enter this most sacred period today, let us bring to the Lord all that weighs us down and ask for His help in gently lifting it off our shoulders and let us reach out to one another with love and compassion at all times. Together, we can be victorious in this journey that leads us to everlasting joy.

With the bestowal of my archiepiscopal blessing upon you, I remain

Sincerely in Christ,

+ALEXY

First Hierarch of the Russian True Orthodox Church--  
Moscow Metropolia

Metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia  
Archbishop of North America & the Diaspora