

PASTORAL MESSAGE

Great Lent, 2011

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. [Mark 8:34-35]

Waking to the sound of silence and longing for a quiet heart, I am ready to rise and journey to my treasured site of solace and retreat. Today I must seek something beyond this world, something that will help lighten the burdens I carry in life—this life of shadows and tears.

Through God's grace, I arrive at the blessed House of Worship. The door unlocked, it is drawing me in as if to say: *Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. [Mathew 11: 28-29]*

Entering this abode of grace, I join others who are reaching to God, seeking oneness with Him. I urge my mind to leave its cares at the door and bowing down to the Creator of all things, I lay my life down before Him.

The scent of incense, the rustling of the priest's robes, the coming of dawn announcing itself upon the faces of the icons—this is my Home. From where I now stand, I witness the sweet uncovering of beauty as it, too, enlightens the icons surrounding me.

The lighted candles give a glimmer of hope, as the ancient chant reaches in to touch my soul. Bathed in the fullness of the light of Christ, I once again discover the race that God has put before me. I am running toward Him—away from the world that imprisons me—and into the arms of Christ, Who has saved me.

Oh, how I long for a life of quietude, yet the cares of the world are persistent. They try to pull me away from my resolve, even here in this Holy Place. Hush, now, mind and heart. Let it all go—for this moment belongs to God. Deeper and deeper into prayer—my heart and mind seem to unite as they resound the words of the cantor. And I only must listen and be still.

Presently, my eyes turn to meet Christ upon the cross, suspended in the icon near the candles that have been lit for those who have passed. The bite of sorrow enters my being, as I remember the words of the Canon for Holy Thursday: *Today He who hung the earth upon the waters is hung upon the Cross. He who is King of the angels is arrayed in a crown of thorns. He who wraps the heavens in clouds is wrapped in a purple robe of mockery. He who in Jordan set Adam free receives blows upon His face. The Bridegroom of the Church is transfixed with nails. The Son of the virgin is pierced with a spear. We venerate The Passion, O Christ. Show us also Thy glorious Resurrection. [The Lenten Triodion, Holy Thursday at the sixth reading of the 12 Gospels]*

Yes, His Resurrection has saved me, but His instructions have warned me. I must decrease in order that He will increase within me. Tenderly, He leads me, yet He instructs that I must take up my cross and follow him.

And what is this cross? It is that gift that God gave to each of us as He Himself crucified the sins of the flesh—so that all mankind could be united with Him in oneness of heart, soul, body, mind, and purpose.

May God bless us all as we endeavor to meet Him on the Bright and Glorious Day of the Resurrection.