



ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗ ΜΑΡΩΝΙΤΩΝ ΚΥΠΡΟΥ

MARONITE ARCHEPARCHY OF CYPRUS

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Pastoral Orientation for the season of Lent 2024 Together Towards the Promised Land

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

At the beginning of this Lenten season, I am pleased to address you, my beloved, through this Pastoral message, whose reflections, I hope, will accompany us throughout this holy season, so that we may cross over with the Church to the other shore of our lives. Open to the inspirations of the Spirit, enlightened by the example of the Divine Master and his sublime teachings, we will have the joy of reaching our New Promised Land.

Lent: A Time of Grace and Hope

Lent is the season of grace in which the desert can become once more – in the words of the prophet Hosea – the place of our first love (cf. Hos 2:16-17). God shapes his people, he enables us to leave our slavery behind and experience a Passover from death to life. Like a bridegroom, the Lord draws us once more to himself, whispering words of love to our hearts. (Pope Francis, Lenten message 2024).

Lent: A Time of Solidarity

Solidarity is the most beautiful gift that fraternal love offers us. It opens our eyes to the suffering of our most fragile brothers and sisters, and invites us to reach out to them. Let us never forget the words of Christ: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father... for I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:34-35). In welcoming others in their distress, we welcome Christ himself. And what greater reward than to know that we have touched the heart of God?

I think of refugees, displaced persons, victims of wars and natural disasters, as well as those subjected to what is called economic emigration. And what about families evicted from their homes or those who cannot find a place to live, the large number of elderly people whose pensions do not allow them to afford a decent home at a fair price?



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It is in the heart of divine love that the Christian finds the strength to help his neighbor, sharing with him his material and spiritual riches. This tender solicitude is not simply a gesture of charity towards the poor; it reveals itself to be a true source of spiritual fulfillment for the one who gives. Indeed, by offering his help, he gradually detaches himself from earthly goods, rising to a higher plane of consciousness.

This blessed Lenten season is a privileged time for us to detach ourselves from material riches and turn to God, the only source of true happiness, and to orient our existence towards Him. For, as the Apostle Paul reminds us, our true home is not of this world: "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3:20).

Lent: A Time of Conversion and Return to God

Lent is a time of conversion, a journey of repentance, abstinence, prayer and listening to the Word of life, which makes us discover the mercy of God who awaits us with love like the father who, on seeing his prodigal son return, welcomed him with open arms; he threw himself around his neck and kissed him and prepared a great feast of joy. Let us not fall into the trap of procrastination. The call of God is urgent for our salvation and our true happiness. It is not enough to return in words, intentions, wishes and promises. True return comes only through action. (His Eminence Cardinal Mar Béchara Boutros El Raii, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, message for Lent).

It is a time to return to ourselves, to be silent and listen to the Word of God, and to let Christ dwell in us to do his will and let ourselves be guided by the Spirit.

Lent: A Time of communitarian Decisions

The Church's synodal form, which in these years we are rediscovering and cultivating, suggests that Lent is also *a time of communitarian decisions*, of decisions, small and large, that are countercurrent. Decisions capable of altering the daily lives of individuals and entire neighbourhoods, such as the ways we acquire goods, care for creation, and strive to include those who go unseen or are looked down upon. I invite every Christian community to do just this: to offer its members moments set aside to rethink their lifestyles, times to examine their presence in society and the contribution they make to its betterment. (Pope Francis, Lenten message 2024).





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Lent: A time of sharing and self-giving

Lent, with its trials and privations, is not a mortification, but a true exodus that reaches its culmination in the gift of self, with love and in complete freedom, to the Father. Thus, as disciples of Christ, we are called to go out of ourselves, to leave our selfishness and attachments to turn towards our brothers and sisters and discover the joy of sharing and giving. "But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." (2Co 6, 5-7).

Lent: A time of prayer for peace

Likewise, let us pray together for peace in the world, for the peace and reunification of Cyprus and the restoration of the Maronite villages, Asomatos, Ayia Marina Skyllouras and the Monastery of the Prophet Elijah, symbols of a vibrant community and a precious heritage.

May our prayers rise to heaven as a song of hope and supplication.

Lent: Towards the Light of the Resurrection

Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us ascend fearlessly with Christ to Jerusalem (cf. Lk 18:31), and accept his call to repentance in order to cling more deeply to God, the Holy and Merciful.

May this Lent be for us an opportunity for a true spiritual renewal, may it incite us to listen the Lord's call to open our hearts to all those who suffer. Let us take the time to discern his will and let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit to accomplish his will, and to walk towards the light of the Resurrection of Christ, bearers of hope and peace for the world.



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