



## *Our Lenten Journey: Meditations and Challenges*

*Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos*

### **First Sunday of Lent: The Triumph of Orthodoxy – Returning to the True Image**

**Meditation:** On the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we celebrate the restoration of the holy icons, a visible reminder that God became man so that we might be restored to his image.

Icons are not just paintings; they are windows to heaven that reflect the divine reality. In the same way, our lives are to be a reflection of Christ to the world. But how often do the thoughts, words, and actions we bring about mean that His image is obscured within us? It is through fasting, prayer, repentance, and works of philanthropy that we clean off the dust of sin that clouds the beauty of God's likeness in us.

**Challenge:** This week, ask yourself: Do I live in such a way that others can see Christ in me? Did I live TODAY in a way that others can see Christ in me? **How can I make my tomorrow a better reflection of Christ?**

### **Second Sunday of Lent: Saint Gregory Palamas – The Light of Christ in the Darkness**

**Meditation:** Saint Gregory Palamas teaches us that God's uncreated light is not some far-off thing but something that can be tasted even here on earth by those who practice prayer and have a pure heart.

Just as Christ revealed His divine light at the Transfiguration on the mountain, He wishes to reveal His light in our hearts if we turn to Him. But the hubbub and other distractions tend to prevent us from perceiving His presence.

**Challenge:** Your goal is to take a few moments of silence and stillness each day, to put away the distractions and just let the light of Christ shine within you. **Do I take time each day to be still and listen for God's voice? Do I experience the warmth of His light?**

### **Third Sunday of Lent: The Veneration of the Cross – Strength amid Struggle**

**Meditation:** In the middle of Lent, the Church puts the Cross before us to remind us that we are not alone on this journey. Once a symbol of suffering and death, the Cross has become a sign of victory and salvation for us.

Christ's example of suffering teaches us that any suffering that befalls us can be turned into something positive by the grace of God. As we fast, fight against temptations, and attempt to become stronger spiritually, we ought to cling to the Cross as our strength.

**Challenge:** This week, when challenges arise, let us turn to Christ, knowing that He has already borne the greatest suffering for our sake. **Do I embrace my own struggles with faith, trusting that they will lead me closer to God?**

### **Fourth Sunday of Lent: Saint John Climacus – Ascending to God**

**Meditation:** Saint John Climacus compares the journey of spirituality to climbing a ladder, each step leading us nearer to God's presence and grace. He emphasizes the importance of dedicating ourselves to progress in our spiritual life through diligence and humility.

Just as a mountaineer needs discipline and concentration, we are also called to show discipline: pray, fast, and seek forgiveness. It's common to feel disheartened by recurring mistakes. Every little step we make towards God holds value in His sight and brings us closer to Him.

**Challenge:** This week prompts us to ponder the path we have taken and to consider what habits or distractions might hinder our progress toward holiness. **What steps can I take to ascend towards God and implement Christ's teachings in my life?**

## **Fifth Sunday of Lent: Saint Mary of Egypt – The Power of Repentance**

**Meditation:** Saint Mary of Egypt lived a life of deep sin before encountering God’s mercy. Her story serves as a reminder that no individual is beyond the embrace of God’s affection. Genuine repentance involves more than remorse for our transgressions; it necessitates a turning from them and yielding ourselves entirely to God.

The Lenten period offers us an opportunity to faithfully lay our vulnerabilities before Christ confident in His ability to bring about our transformation. Regardless of how distant we may feel from Him; HIS arms always remain open.

**Challenge:** This week, let us approach the Holy Sacrament of Repentance with sincerity. Through forgiveness, we receive the chance to renew ourselves! **What burdens my heart with sins? How can I allow God’s mercy to change me for the better?**

## **Sixth Sunday of Lent: Palm Sunday Approaches – Welcoming Christ into Our Hearts**

**Meditation:** As Great and Holy Lent draws to a close, we approach Christ’s arrival in Jerusalem with anticipation and celebration. The crowd enthusiastically greeted him, shouting “Hosanna.” Their enthusiasm sadly waned in just a few days as they shifted their focus away from Him. For many of them, it was a display of faith without depth and words without conviction.

Genuine faith is revealed not in moments of joy but especially when faced with challenges and adversity. Let’s take this time leading up to Holy Week to reflect on our beliefs and the sincerity of our hearts.

**Challenge:** Let us ask ourselves: **Do we genuinely embrace Christ in all aspects of our lives or when it suits us best?** This week is an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to living out our faith through our lives and not just through mere words.

## **Holy Week – Walking the Path to the Resurrection**

**Meditation:** Holy Week holds significance as it marks the sacred period of the year when we commemorate Christ’s journey through His suffering and death to His glorious and triumphant Resurrection. The path to Pascha is more than a reflection of events; it serves as an invitation for us to accompany Christ on this very path in our own daily lives.

We are encouraged to join the Theotokos and Saint John as they stood by the Cross in contemplation and to share tears of joy with the myrrh-bearing women when they encountered the empty tomb. Every minute of Holy Week echoes God's love for us all. A love that we should not take for granted but instead contemplate and pray upon as these days unfold before us. Throughout this week, may we embrace Christ's sacrifice with our hearts.

**Challenge:** Look forward to the intense joy that His Resurrection brings. **How can I delve further into the depth of the Holy Week's mystery?** Let Christ's triumph change my life for the better.

### **Holy Pascha: The Joy of the Resurrection – A New Beginning**

"Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!"

These words echo across the world on Pascha night, filling the darkness with the light of Christ's victory over death. Christ's triumph over death and light over darkness bring hope and love to our hearts and souls.

**Meditation:** Pascha is not only a celebration; it is an invitation to live as people of the Resurrection. Just as Christ emerged from the tomb, we, too, are called to rise from the tombs of sin, doubt, and fear, embracing the new life He offers. The period of Great Lent leading up to this occasion serves as our preparation. It does not signify the culmination of our journey. Pascha signifies a start—a reminder to spread Christ's light in the world and embrace His love with faith and renewed happiness.

**Challenge:** This Pascha, let us ask ourselves: **How can I live as a true witness of the Resurrection? How can I bring the light of Christ to those around me?**

I pray that the happiness brought by the Resurrected Christ resonates with us and shows us the way.

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

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