



Holy Protection Of Mary

BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PHOENIX

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Office of the Bishop

PASTORAL LETTER FOR THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT FAST

From the Most Reverend Artur Bubnevych
February 13, 2026

To the Reverend Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the God-loving Eparchy of Phoenix

Christ is among us! He is and always shall be!

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

With the Sunday of Forgiveness the Church places us at the threshold of the Great Fast, opens before us the bright road to the Holy Pascha and gives us the keys to unlock Lent. We begin the journey with the mighty Rite of Forgiveness embracing each other with mercy. We have already taken some steps towards the Fast by saying farewell to meat and cheese. Now, the Church asks us to bow before one another and say the most healing words on earth: "Forgive me, a sinner." This is our first prostration of the Fast.

The Gospel proclaimed on Cheesefare Sunday speaks directly to the heart: "If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Mt 6:14). Saint Paul then awakens us from sleep and calls us to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 13:11-14). This order is life-giving: mercy awakes us from sleep; forgiveness changes our life. Metanoia is born and grows from the soil of grace already given.

When we celebrate the Rite of Forgiveness after the Divine Liturgy, we confess something deeper than individual failures. We acknowledge that our lives are bound together, that sin wounds communion, and that healing begins face to face. In that humble bow we discover who we truly are - members of one Body longing to be restored. *Metanoia*, a repentant change of heart, begins when I see my brother and sister as the very place where Christ waits for me.

Fasting, then, is the language of a forgiven heart. Without forgiveness fasting is only a diet; without fasting forgiveness is only a feeling. United, they become the journey to Resurrection.



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The Prayer of St Ephrem, our missionary motto on a journey to Pascha, reveals the deepest connection between forgiveness and metanoia. I cannot change while I am busy condemning others. The first fast is the fast from judgment. When we lay down the burden of accusing one another, the heart becomes wide enough for grace. Then bodily fasting, prayer, and almsgiving take on their true meaning: they teach us to hunger for the Kingdom, to simplify our lives, and to share what we have received.

Let us ask the Lord that our repentance acquires a missionary face and becomes a light for those who have lost hope. During this Holy Season I invite every parish, every family, and every soul to:

1. Practice forgiveness. Every community is called to be a small hospital of forgiveness.
2. Participate in the Presanctified Liturgy, approach the Mystery of Confession, pray the prayer of St. Ephrem daily with prostrations.
3. Practice corporal and spiritual work of mercy, support the ministries of your parish.
4. To “go forth in Peace”: the world is hungry for mercy.

My dear brothers and sisters, we are privileged to walk together toward Pascha and we are gifted with the keys to open the door: mercy received and mercy given. If we forgive quickly, fast joyfully, and serve generously, our parishes will become icons of the Resurrection.

As your bishop, I bow before you and ask: forgive me, a sinner! I assure you of my prayers for each family and community of our Eparchy. May the Most Holy Theotokos cover us with her mantle, and may this Holy Fast lead us with bright sorrow to the radiant joy of the empty tomb.

With love in Jesus Christ,

+ *Artur Bubnevych*

✙ Artur Bubnevych

Bishop of the Eparchy of Phoenix