



Orthodox Church in America
DIOCESE OF THE MIDWEST

Wednesday, 18 February 2026
Saint Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome
№. 16

ARCHPASTORAL MESSAGE OF THE MOST REVEREND DANIEL
ARCHBISHOP OF CHICAGO AND THE MIDWEST
AT THE BEGINNING OF GREAT LENT

To the Clergy, Monastics, Faithful and Friends of the Diocese of the Midwest

Beloved in the Lord,

I greet all of you with love as we enter into the grace-filled season of Great Lent. As the Doors of Repentance are opened to us, I ask your forgiveness for any way in which I have sinned against you as your Bishop and Archpastor, as your Father in Christ, and as your brother in the Lord.

Every year, at the beginning of Great Lent, the Church encourages and reminds us of the traditional practices we have at our disposal in order to continue growing in holiness and to focus most especially on our preparation for the great celebration of the Lord's three-day Paschal mystery which we commemorate in Holy Week and on Holy Pascha. In the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Saint Matthew, we are told of how we should behave in our practices of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer:

“When you give alms, sound no trumpet before you. When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

“When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

“If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

“When you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret...”

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven... for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

As we hear in these words, it is the Lord Himself who counsels us on how we are to proceed in the season of repentance and renewal that lies ahead of us. Almsgiving. Prayer. Fasting. Focus, or refocusing on the things of

heaven and not on the things of this world. These are the keys that open for us the doors of repentance, the doors that lead us into the Kingdom of Heaven.

In our Orthodox Christian tradition, we look to the weeks ahead of us as a holy, sacred time. Indeed, we look to Great Lent as a time during which we embark upon a journey. Great Lent takes us on a journey during which we are guided by the Church, supported by one another in maintaining our focus and our purpose through the very practices of which the Lord Jesus speaks. We understand this journey not merely as a time of dietary restrictions, fasting, more prayer, reaching out to those in need, and re-setting our priorities. This is a season in which we cleanse our hearts, minds and souls. We deepen our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ through prayer. We focus on the needs of others before our own needs in order to serve Christ by serving our neighbors. And we work to establish the right relationship between the “things” of this world and the treasures that await us in the Kingdom that is to come.

During these forty days, the Church invites all of us to:

Fast with humility - not as an expectation or inconvenience, but as a way to free the soul from passions.

Pray with sincerity - always seeking God’s mercy and guidance in every moment.

Give generously - remembering that love for others is inseparable from love for God.

Repent wholeheartedly - turning away from sin and the concerns of the world and placing our eyes on the things that really matter and so be embraced by the Father; and,

Refocus intently on the things that matter most.

As we gather in our churches throughout the Diocese of the Midwest, I encourage you to participate in the Lenten Divine Services and join in prayer with our Orthodox sisters and brothers within the diocese and throughout the world; as we fast together and pray together and repent of our sins, as we minister together with all those who are in need. Let us do so, always being of one mind and heart, professing our faith in the One Who has saved us.

Please be assured that I share with you in all the spiritual challenges of the weeks that lies before us. Let us pray for one another that our efforts will benefit not only ourselves, but indeed, will bring blessings to the entire local Church, our diocesan family.

May this Great Lent, be for all of us a season of peace, forgiveness, healing, and spiritual renewal so that with full hearts we may all greet with joy the bright and radiant feast of Pascha.

Be assured of my prayers and blessings for you, your families, and all your loved ones.

With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daniel". The signature is stylized with a large, flowing 'D' and a cursive 'aniel'.

DANIEL

Archbishop of Chicago and the Midwest