

nourishment of our souls through increased prayer time contemplating the holiness of God. For we, also, are called to become holy. We were created to be heaven bound and not earth bound. Our Lord reminds us that we live in the world, but are not of the world. Our Lord's prayer to the Father is clear when He says that He does not pray for the world, but for those who are being saved for His eternal Kingdom, our real and permanent home.

During this holy period we should increase our good works in helping others and to imitate Christ Who came not to be served, but to serve. If we want to find our true calling in life, it is exactly this: to serve others. The feeling of fulfillment is phenomenal when we serve others. We should also attend retreats that take place, thereby giving ourselves more time for spiritual nourishment.

All this preparation, as mentioned before, has one goal, and that is to meet our Lord, the Bridegroom of the Church, as He calls Himself regarding His Second Coming. The Parable of the Ten Virgins is a most-appropriate icon on which to reflect. Five virgins were wise and five were foolish. All were awaiting the Bridegroom, but only five were ready to receive Him.

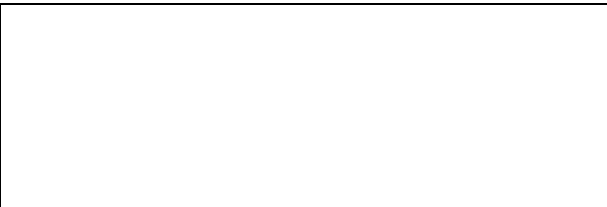
Let us therefore enter into this refreshing period of renewal in our spiritual lives, as we prepare ourselves to experience the world-changing

events in the life of our Lord which herald the coming of our permanent home in the heavenly realms with our Lord Jesus Christ. May this period of the Great Fast be most edifying and sanctifying for all of God's people.

+ Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver February 2004

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As we enter into the holiest period of the year in preparation for the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we ask ourselves, "Why should we follow the discipline of fasting, which in essence is abstinence?" What is the purpose of it? Obviously the purpose is that we may be ready to meet our Lord and to receive His promise of eternal life in His Kingdom.

We realize, according to Holy Scripture, that we were created to live forever; and that we will live eternally after the return of Christ to the earth, with our resurrected bodies reunited with our souls. The Lord therefore asks us to make our decision as to where we wish to live eternally. We have only two directions of which to choose. There is no other.

Mankind could not save itself on its own. Since man fell from his original pristine state to the imperfect state and consequently all of his descendants after him, he has tried time and again to reach his original condition. Every pagan religion in the world taught of man's eternal existence and ways in which one could live eternally. We can mention only the Egyptian culture which established the most elaborate way one

could reach to the stars and to eternal life. All failed because the imperfect can never by its own efforts attain perfection.

We know the story. God in the Person of Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, out of His great love for us, came into the world in order to guide us toward Him. He tells us that His Kingdom has been prepared for us even before the world began. He entered into our human nature as one of us for the sole purpose of teaching us how we can reach perfection. He did this without interfering with our free will. For had He tampered with our free will, we would no longer be in His image. This is what distinguishes us from all other creatures of this world. We have been created in His image so that we may attain to His likeness, using our hearts and our minds to guide us. He created us to live with Him and to enjoy the works which He has created for us.

Great Lent is the most appropriate time on the church calendar to begin the process of meeting the Lord, especially during the holy and inspirational services of Holy Week and more so at His glorious Resurrection. Everything in life has a time of preparation, especially man. Since we are in the process of becoming — no one is, only God is — the Church affords us the time-tested discipline of preparation for the most glorious and spectacular occurrence to have taken place in the cosmos: our Lord's defeat

of the power of death and His Resurrection.

This preparation is the message of renewal. In His public ministry our Lord's message was "Repent!" In the original language of the Gospels the exhortation of the Lord was and is: "Change your mind; change your ways; change your direction in life." This concept of change simply said is to renew, to start over again through the right preparation.

The Church teaches us that even though we are born with an imperfect nature, we are intrinsically good. Even though through our fallen nature we have the inclination to sin, meaning to go contrary to the divine will, we can still reach sainthood which is the calling of all who accept Christ as Lord, God, and Savior. In other words, even though Christ came into the world to lead us back to Him, we have the freedom to choose whether we wish to follow Him or not. We know that He humbled Himself out of His great love for us and our eternal condition because we were led astray by the evil one who deceived our progenitors in the beginning. It was Satan who has been responsible for the horrors and catastrophes in the world and who wants us to break away from God, as he did in the angelic period of God's creation. The saying is true, "Misery loves company."

We, who have chosen God, prefer to live with Him. God adopts us as His children, while Satan keeps us in

slavery at all times. The decision is easy. The effort takes work. The beautiful thing about this, though, is that the Lord, His holy Mother, the Theotokos, and the saints who have gone before us help us to succeed.

How do we proceed in our preparation? We must prioritize our value system. God must always come first; everything and everyone else follow in their proper place. One of the basic steps in our preparation is to give more attention to our souls. We, unfortunately, do not give to our souls even equal time in our lives with our bodies. During the Lenten period we must converse with God, the ever-blessed Holy Trinity, on a daily basis and several times a day in private prayer. We should attend the special services that take place during the Great Fast along with the usual services and sacraments. Even making the sign of the Cross upon ourselves is a prayer.



Together with prayer, we must become selective in our diet and follow the teachings of the Church becoming vegetarians for several weeks. Physiologically this is good for the body. Theologically we remind ourselves of the Lord's words that man does not live by bread alone. In other words, we give more time to the