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Office of the Metropolitan

**2009 Lenten Pastoral Letter**  
**of the Ukrainian Catholic Hierarchy in the U.S.A.**

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory." (Colossians 3:1-4).

Dearly beloved in Christ!

A distinctive characteristic of our spirituality is that it is mystical. We are all called to mysticism. We all are called to contemplate Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father where He continuously offers Himself up to the Father. His death on the Cross is an eternal act. In Baptism we were united with Christ, and if we abide in Him we too share in His offering to the Father. But this is not some kind of magical act that transforms us. Rather, it is the beginning of a life-long process in which the Spirit of God gently leads us.

Saint Augustine teaches us: "You have created us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." Our journey to the Father is not a magical life in acquiring redemption. It must be won by sharing Jesus' path of the Cross, His struggle. Whosoever wishes to share His glorified life must be crucified with Him. The old, sinful man must gradually die away. The first step along this path, the all-pervading keynote, the starting-point and, at the same time, the deepest foundation is a feeling of unqualified contrition. "Where shall I begin repentance for my wicked life?" These words of the *Canon of Repentance* of Saint Andrew of Crete are characteristic of this spiritual state. "Wallowing in the depths of sin, I cry unto the unfathomable depths of Thy mercy. Give me tears, O Christ, to wash away the stains of my heart. Open to me the gates of repentance, O Giver of Life." And so it goes on, ever increasing in force through the songs of the Church (particularly during Lent), the liturgical prayers, the lives and teaching of her great Saints.

It is imperative that we be docile and open to the Spirit of God. Saint Paul speaks of his mystical experience. "I know someone in Christ who, fourteen years ago (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows), was caught up to the third heaven. And I know that this person (whether in the body or out of the body I do not

know, God knows) was caught up into Paradise and heard ineffable things, which no one may utter." (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

How difficult it is for many to realize that we are destined for eternal glory in Christ. The Lenten season gives us so many opportunities to focus on Jesus Christ. Many find it difficult to do so because of all the anxious cares of life. Saint Paul briefly outlines for us a program for Lent: "Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of God is coming (upon the disobedient). By these you too once conducted yourselves, when you lived in that way. But now you must put them all away: anger, fury, malice, slander, and obscene language out of your mouths. Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator." (Colossians 3:5-10). "So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma. Immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among you, as is fitting among holy ones, no obscenity or silly or suggestive talk, which is out of place, but instead, thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure or greedy person, that is, an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the disobedient. So do not be associated with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth. Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them, for it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says: 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.' Watch carefully then how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord." (Ephesians 5:1-17). "The light of Christ illumines all" (the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts).

Christian mysticism has its roots in the joyful message of the incarnate and risen Christ. The joy of the resurrection is the key-note of the Eastern Churches whole outlook upon the world. "Let rejoicing fill the heavens; let gladness fill the earth" (Third Resurrectional Tone – Psalm 96:11). "Now all things are filled with light: the heavens, the earth and the abyss. Let all creation celebrate the resurrection of Christ! (Paschal Canon, Ode 3).

+Stefan

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