

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

Diocese of Oakland, Charleston,
and the Mid-Atlantic

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

The Nativity Fast as Necessary Preparation for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – 2019

Chris is born! Glorify Him!

Dear Beloved in Christ,

As we prepare to celebrate the Lord Christ's assumption of our human nature in order to redeem it, we rejoice in His divine condescension and His munificent love. We are also reminded that both body and soul are involved in the work of our salvation. This is why there is a fasting period prior to any great feast. Fasting is part of the regimen of noetic healing prescribed by the holy fathers along with vigils and prayer. In order to receive the full spiritual benefit of any feast, one must take full advantage of this healing therapy of fasting, vigils and prayer.

Let me offer an extended quote from Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos that is useful for our understanding on these important therapies. He writes, "Fasting aims at the exercise of both soul and body so that they move together in the course to deification. There is both a bodily fast and a spiritual fast. Bodily fast refers to the quality and quantity of food, as determined by the Church. It is scientifically proven that some meals are heavier and others are lighter for the organism. Sometimes it is essential to fast very strictly because in this way man's nous is detached from material goods and turns to God. Furthermore, obedience to fasts determined by the Church helps man to submerge his will to the universal will and experience of the Church. Combined with spiritual fasting, bodily fasting introduces man to the atmosphere of cleansing, that is, the struggle to cleanse the heart from the passions of self-indulgence, avarice, boastfulness, and selfishness.

Vigils are an effort to subordinate the body to the soul, in the sense that it does not exceed its functions and its mission. The Church does not share the dualistic view of Hellenistic philosophy, according to which there exist two separate entities, a soul and a body. Vigils, along with all other physical exercises, aim precisely at the unity of soul and body. In any case, a lot of people stay awake for various reasons today. So it is worth doing this vigil for God, to stay awake for the glory of God. Of course, in the world, vigil is not the all-night prayer of the monks in the Monasteries, but an exercise against excessive sleep and excessive physical comfort that breed countless evils to man's organism. Vigil is also closely related to the balance of the psychosomatic organism of man and to watchfulness, which is essential in spiritual life.

Prayer is tied to fasting and vigils. Fasting and vigils without prayer are useless. Indeed, if the Holy Spirit does not come, all physical exercises are futile. Prayer is either worshipping, with the entire community, or intelligent, made by man's reason, or noetic-of-the-heart, when the nous, in the Holy Spirit, enters man's heart. Then the nous and the heart unite in the power and energy of the Holy Spirit, and this is called illumination of the nous.

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

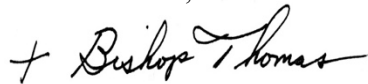
4407 Kanawha Ave. SE, Charleston, WV 25304-1734
(724) 787-9832 Phone
bpthomasjoseph@gmail.com

In Church hymns, fasting, vigils, and prayer are called celestial gifts. They assist man in his journey to deification and sanctification. They lead the psychosomatic organism to balance. In Adam there was such a balance before the Fall. The nous was inspired by the Grace of God; it nurtured the body and then radiated the Grace to all creation. After the Fall, however, the nous was darkened. The body is fed from the creation rather than from the nous, and bodily passions show up. The soul is fed from the body, and this creates psychological passions. With fasting, vigils, and prayer these contrary-to-nature functions are corrected. This is why cleansing, illumination, and deification are expressed through these gifts.”

This therapeutic system, developed by the holy fathers who had achieved theosis, provides us with what we need to work out our own salvation.

In this way, the feast of the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior is not a mere historical remembrance but the nativity of our Lord and Savior within our own heart. This is the purpose of the fast and the feast. May the Lord Christ bless you and your families during this joyous feast of the Incarnation!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bishop Thomas". The signature is written in dark ink and is preceded by a small cross symbol.

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)

Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

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