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**THROUGH THE DESERT
TO THE RESURRECTION:
SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS
ON GREAT LENT**

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Ukrainian scholars invite Christians to learn more about the spiritual and religious history of the Ukrainian people and to reflect on the fate of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in the 21st century.

In their spiritual conversations on Great Lent, the authors have attempted to help a person meet God and to understand the existing issues of the Orthodox faith of today in the context of the spiritual walk to the light of Christ's Resurrection, the Holy Easter.

The book is addressed to anyone who is not indifferent to the issues of human spirituality, to anyone who seeks to understand more deeply the essence of the Christian faith and the essential aspects of the mission of the Orthodox Church in the modern world.

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The spiritual path of knowing God – a spiritual conversation on Great Lent

Reflecting on the importance of Great Lent for the spiritual life of an Orthodox Christian, we recall that Great Lent is a period of spiritual and theological enrichment of humans. It is a shame to witness that, for many contemporaries, fasting is just a constant thought of the fasting table (boiled potatoes, oil, sauerkraut, beets, and other culinary delights). Besides, false ascetic ideas are also added: as if fasting is not the right time to be happy, enjoy every day of life, visit and interact with each other; as if God were expecting us in the fasting period to be continually sad, disappointed, immersed in our own darkness of despair, temptation and sorrow. It is certain that only the enemy of the human race – Satan – will be pleased with such a delusion of «spirituality» and the wilderness of «holiness» of life since he has succeeded in distorting the words of Holy Scriptures and Christians no longer remember the Gospel Narratives: «When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting» (Matt. 6:16).

On the contrary, in times of political crisis, economic upheaval, and spiritual catastrophe, the modern man has never before been hungry for the living word of the Living God. Therefore, during fasting, it is important not only to fast physically but also to delve deeper into the Word of God, thinking over the theological treasury of the Orthodox Church and religious philosophy. Many parishioners who are unable to adhere strictly to fasting for health reasons, should place more emphasis on spiritual growth: looking at theological truths in life, reading theological and



philosophical literature. Thus, within forty days of fasting, they have a wonderful opportunity to gain a certain spiritual benefit by reading more books of theological direction. It is during fasting the time for turning a person to the world of spiritual meal – literature, because literature is a world of spiritual meanings of being, values, motivation, interests, heavenly music of inspiration and creativity.


Let's recall that Great Lent is, above all, the spiritual path of knowing God. And this is an enrichment of one's own inner experience of spiritual being, a search for oneself, a creative philosophical and intellectual ascent upwards to the knowledge of God. During fasting, it is important to refresh your soul, body and mind, make sense of your own life, identify specific goals, and formulate a strategy for movement and direction. This is what the theological thought of the Orthodox Church teaches us. It must always be remembered that the theology of the Church is not the dead material of the seminar summaries of future clergymen, the academic reflections of theologians. It is, above all, the eternal topical word of the Creator of the Universe addressed to every Christian and humanity in general.

It is known that the spiritual life of the person is the way to salvation, it is a constant endless effort for a true, complete, holistic being with God, without any metaphysical speculation, ideological or political distortions, womanish prejudices, all departures from the Truth. And herein lies the particular importance of the period of Great Lent, when every Sunday we bethink the events of the lives of saints, celebrate important dates of church history, and approach the true knowledge of God, thanking our Heavenly Father for spiritual joy, earthly happiness, and trials on the path of salvation, renewal and recovery of sight.



That is during Great Lent when one can feel the spring spirit of renewal, the joy of fellowship of the living God. The spiritual life of a Christian – confession, Holy Communion, temple and home prayer, thanksgiving to God, constant reflection on the Word of God, reflection on the being and challenges of the modern world – is a dynamic path of spiritual, moral, intellectual, theological growth. Thus, in the life of the Church, there are enormous potential intentions for the deployment of a full, holistic human being. It must be remembered that in certain periods of human history, the church thought, the social teaching of the Church can become a new impetus for the social and spiritual dynamics of the development of society and modern civilization. Our society seeks a living, modern, clear word about religious faith, the search of God and spiritual existence, which, unfortunately, is in great deficit in modern church preaching. Undoubtedly, one cannot speak to a modern man about the history of the Church, theology, spiritual ideals, Christian values in the language of theological books of the 18th – 19th centuries. It must be understood that the dynamics of the spiritual life of every Christian today are complex, contradictory, multifaceted and diverse.

In our opinion, if in the history of the Ecumenical Council we contemplate the dynamic phenomena of the development of theology, worship, philosophical reflection and general parish existence, then in the 21st century the bright pages of the development of the greatness of the Church and the power of the grace of the Holy Spirit should be opened. It should be emphasized that the Church's internal resources are inexhaustible. This is what the Holy Fathers, eminent theologians, religious thinkers and philosophers write about. Hence the special responsibility of each Christian for the possibility of transfer of his



faith to young people and the next generations. After all, Orthodox Christians must be witnesses of the wisdom of God, love, care, mercy, forgiveness not in heaven, not on the walls of ancient temples and cathedrals but in the real-life of society. And not to be the militant ignorants of the dark «Middle Ages», the radical fanatics of ritual and superstitions.

It is understandable that the generations that live on the planet are changing, their mentality, worldview, and therefore the Church must take this into account, referring to contemporaries. The Church is a living theanthropic organism that is constantly evolving in history and culture. Therefore, during Great Lent, let's read the Gospel, the message of the Holy Apostles, read the theological books, think about the lives of the holy ascetics of the Church of Christ, and think creatively about the philosophical and historical literature devoted to the religious path of humanity – the way of the temple of faith, hope, love, to finding eternal salvation. Holy Scripture calls us: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good” (Thess. 5: 16–21).