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PASTORAL LETTER OF THE
UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC HIERARCHY OF THE U.S.A.
FOR THE GREAT FAST, 2025

May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the holy Spirit. —Rom. 15:13

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

As we enter the Great Fast, we begin to walk along a path of deeper union with God, through the grace of repentance and the renewal of our spiritual identity. By its very design, this holy season serves as a magnifying glass or a litmus test for our lives. It invites us to pause amid the whirlwind of life and to quiet our hearts, reflecting on what it means to be disciples of Christ, what it means to live in hope.

In this Holy Year, as we are called to be pilgrims of hope, we must often face trials and confusion. Members of our Church, our refugees, our forced migrants and victims of war, soldiers on a brutal front, residents of cities under bombardment: all of us are citizens of the 21st century, in which turbulence, ideological confrontations, and economic inequality prevail. Besides these challenges, each of us has personal struggles, in family and school, work and health, faith and doubt, life and death. It is precisely in these trials that Jesus calls us to walk forward with hope—and not merely hope for ourselves, but hope for our brothers and sisters as well, indeed, hope for the entire world.

Hope is not the same as optimism. It is not a feeling or a declaration that everything will turn out as well as we would like it to. *The virtue of hope is “an unshakeable confidence in the Savior. It characterizes the believer who awaits the fullness of Christ’s coming; hope is the virtue of the ‘sojourner,’ the one who, being a partaker of divine life, grows in it, that is, becomes divinized” (Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church: Christ—Our Pascha, nn. 841–842).*

What, then, is our hope? What is full hope? What is ultimate hope? Is it not the life in Christ, life in the Kingdom of God? We who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). He guides us with His word, nurtures us with the Holy Eucharist, calls us His friends, His brothers and sisters (John 15:15). We are sons and daughters of the heavenly Father, part of the Body of Christ: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12).

Dear brother, dear sister, you belong to Jesus! Christ has taken on our life, our humanity, and we have put Him on as our clothing! He feeds us with His most holy Body and Blood. Our hope is not measured by wealth, power, pleasure, or comfort, but instead is founded on the promises of Christ. It arises in our friendship with the Son of God, through which our true identity in the house of the Father is made manifest.

How shall we live this hope? How can we begin anew? In the Gospel, we hear the Lord's call: *"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"* (Matt. 3:2). The Great Fast is a time to reclaim our true identity, a time to rediscover hope. All the practices of this salutary season have one fundamental goal: to help us to encounter the Lord, to know Him, to receive His gifts and blessings, and to trust Him in all circumstances of life.

When we pray, may our eyes meet the eyes of Jesus. When we fast, may we become detached from those things of the world that distract us from seeing those eyes clearly. Let us put aside, at least for a while, the screens of our phones and computers so that we may hear God's Word. This Word is addressed to each of us personally in our pain and our sorrows, in our doubts and confusion. Through repentance and confession of our sins, let us create a place in our hearts and souls for the Holy Spirit, who fills our lives and relationships with light and peace.

Our hope must motivate us to give hope to others as well, to share the gift of faith, of Holy Baptism, of trust in Jesus. How? We do this through our sacrifices—our time, talents, and treasure. So, beloved in Christ, let us give freely, let us give generously. Let us give so that it hurts at least a little: we must give more than mere crumbs from our table! May our giving become a true sacrifice of love. And best of all, let us do at least one good deed each day without letting anyone know about it: you, your good deed, and the Lord—an intimate secret.

Today, as Ukraine suffers from the prolonged, oppressive war waged by Russia—a war that destroys, divides, and seeks to erase our identity—many of our brothers and sisters endure the pain of loss, displacement, and suffering. Cities are reduced to ruins, families are torn apart, and countless lives are lost. Yet, even in this darkness, we hold fast our hope that evil will not have the final word. May our hope in the risen Christ be a firm anchor (Heb. 6:19). In Christ, we are already victorious, for *"nothing and no one can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (cf. Rom. 8:39).

May prayer, fasting, and almsgiving help us receive the gift of hope that God is bestowing upon us. With this hope, let us make our confident pilgrimage toward the Resurrection.

Christ is risen! Indeed, He is risen!

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Great Fast 2025