



# + Nikon

Bishop of Boston, New England and the Albanian Archdiocese  
Orthodox Church in America

**Rt. Rev. Nikon (Liolin)**

**P.O. Box 149 Southbridge, MA 01550**

**508 -764 - 3222**

**Email: [bpnikon@aol.com](mailto:bpnikon@aol.com)**

## Lenten Message 2011

To the Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of New England and the Albanian Archdiocese,

If ever there was a winter to make us weary, this has been it. In all of this snow, ice, freezing rain, and sub-zero temperatures, even the most stout-hearted New Englanders begin to get a bit weary. Weary of the long dark nights. Weary of the bone chilling cold. Weary of the dangerous drudgery of commuting on slippery roads. But, weariness doesn't just come from winter. Taking care of our families. Working long hours. Trying to make ends meet in a difficult economy. We face countless challenges every day, that, over time, make our hearts weary and cold, like the barren winter landscape. And weary, cold hearts affect our relationships. Relationships between husbands and wives; parents and children; friends and neighbors, can be strained when we are suffering the oppressiveness of spiritual weariness.

As you may know His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah is on a Leave of Absence. The Holy Synod expressed their love and concern for him in Santa Fe, NM and our desire was that he should take a time of rest and return before Pascha more focused and refreshed. He is scheduled to Consecrate Bishop-Elect Matthias together with the members of the Holy Synod on Bright Saturday. The Synod affirmed our love for Metropolitan Jonah numerous times throughout our gathering. There was no talk whatsoever of removing him as the Metropolitan. He has labored caring for multiple dioceses and as our Metropolitan. He simply needed a break.

This need for spiritual rest and renewal is not unique to bishops, it is a necessity for all of us. The Church gives us the gift of Great Lent so that we can find spiritual renewal in Jesus Christ. For only Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ can warm our cold hearts, and relieve our spiritual weariness. We make this saving Lenten journey through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

During Lent, the Church offers us beautiful liturgical services, filled with the word of Scripture and composed hymns, which wash our souls like a gentle spring rain. The prayer of the Church is not an obligation to be fulfilled, it is an opportunity for refreshment. Yes, the liturgy is work, that is why it is called "liturgy," the work of the people. But it is not like the work that we are forced to do for forty or fifty hours a week. It is a life-giving work, a joyous work that brings us together as the Body of Christ, and renews our strength and vitality by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting is our opportunity to live more simply. It is not a time to live like Pharisees, attempting to maintain some sort of ritual purity laws. “Oh, look, today we can have oil and wine, but no meat, or dairy. So, let’s have lobster and scallops with that really nice margarine that tastes just like butter, and I’ll get a bottle of expensive wine, and we can have a vegan chocolate cake for dessert.” While such a dinner abides by the letter of the fasting rules, it is not fasting. Fasting is the conscious act of simplifying our worldly life to make room for Christ. To live simply, to eat simply, to put aside distractions and temptations of the flesh so that we can quiet our souls and listen to the still small voice of God, this is fasting.

But, fasting is not only about food. We can—and should—fast from TV, the Internet, from talk-radio, from all forms of media. That doesn’t mean we necessarily avoid all contact with media, but perhaps we intentionally watch and listen to less. Again, not because they are bad, but to give us more time, and greater freedom to meditate on Christ. However we keep the fast, it should be borne from our effort to joyfully embrace a life of greater simplicity, so that we can more perfectly follow Christ.

Almsgiving is an opportunity for us to reach out to others with the love of Christ in concrete material ways. If you have plenty of money, give some away to a worthy charity like the IOCC, FOCUS North America. or O-N-E Stewards (Diocese of New England) or the Student Trust Fund or Archdiocesan Projects (Albanian Archdiocese) If you don’t have much money, then invite someone to your house for dinner. Or, go through your wardrobe and donate the extra coat, and the extra pair of shoes to a homeless shelter. And almsgiving does not only apply to strangers. Our almsgiving can, and should begin at home, through the sacrificial giving of our time and attention to family members. Take time to play a game with the kids. Reach out to your spouse and ask how he or she is doing. Do household chores with a cheerful spirit, or do chores that someone else normally does. Almsgiving is not simply about giving money, it is about giving of ones self. Almsgiving is our opportunity to take concrete action in the name of Jesus Christ. It is our chance to live out our faith in a concrete, substantial way. Put more directly, it is our chance to stand at the right hand of God among the righteous who feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and ministered to those in prison. (Matt 25:35)

The Lenten season is now upon us, and with it comes a great opportunity to engage in a life-changing spiritual retreat of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Opening our hearts to Christ through prayer we welcome our Lord into our lives. Simplifying our lives through true fasting we make room in our hearts for the grace of the Holy Spirit. Reaching out to our brothers and sisters in concrete acts of mercy through almsgiving we spread the love of Christ in the world. The Church gives us Great Lent to be renewed, to escape the dreariness and weariness of life, and enter into the bright joy of life in Jesus Christ.

With Love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. N. Kon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'T' and 'N'.

Bishop of Boston, New England and the Albanian Archdiocese