

## On Repentance

*By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)*

The term "repentance" scares many people because self-reflection has become undesirable, if not irrelevant. Today's human beings do not want to see their own flaws and shortcomings. They prefer to be praised by everyone, honored in every circumstance. Hiding inside all people are illusions about themselves that they don't want to break. People convince themselves that pride provides psychological comfort, and in their stubbornness, they believe in their own goodness and that they don't make mistakes. They justify themselves by blaming others. Their attitude is, "They are the ones who are wrong," or at best, "I'm not the one who started it." They tell themselves, "I had to protect myself and put an end to their evil!" This is how people avoid self-criticism, allowing their flaws to grow deep within, escaping settings that speak about repentance or blocking their ears to such talk. Moreover, many wrongly believe that repentance means regret, sorrow, and sadness in their quest for joy and happiness. Why would they then accept something that spoils their happiness? Why would they demand more burdens for themselves? Repentance, in their minds, is associated with misconceptions influenced by distorted upbringings, plus erroneous teachings and spirituality that are particularly evident in medieval Western Christian literature, which has spread its culture everywhere. The Christian West knows a form of repentance that is distorted, exaggerated and rigid. Thus, repentance became a horrible punishment founded on penances, depression, fear, and submission of the flesh to suffering and contempt. In Orthodox theology, however, repentance signifies a new birth, a spiritual cleansing from within. It is a continuous self-correction, a perpetual awareness of not persisting in sin and error, a continuous rise from every fall, and a constant striving to what is better. It is a state of yearning not to be distanced from God, our beloved. We embark on the path of repentance when realizing we are lost, estranged from our fatherly home. This is clearly illustrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son. When the rebellious son lost all his wealth and fell into bad company, poverty and destitution, he came back to himself and remembered his father's house, longing for the dignity and honor he had with his father. The world with all its pleasures is captivating, promising a sought-after happiness that is in fact ephemeral, deceptive, and shallow. The joy of this world fades quickly in the face of any difficulty or distress. However, the hardness of the human heart – which stems from yearning for happiness that is ignorant of the joy of living with God – pushes us to sin again and seek a false consolation, instead of cultivating intimacy with God and the sweetness of His companionship. People, in general, tend to be more concerned with what is tangible and perceptible. However, God, the all-merciful, allows us to face numerous trials to realize our delusion, granting us the possibility to liberate ourselves from it so that we may know our true home, just as the Prodigal Son did. Unless one experiences the humiliation of being away from home and the absence of peace for which he longs because of his sin, he will not return to his Father's house. Additionally, he will not experience the joy and richness of repentance. The Apostle Paul defines Christian repentance as follows: "Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead" (Philippians 3:13). The Orthodox Church focuses, in its teaching about repentance, on the two aspects: forgetting and reaching forward. The Church moves us beyond sin and toward virtues. Perhaps the most beautiful description of repentance came from Saint John Climacus: "It is exchanging one love for another: exchanging the love of earthly things for the love of heavenly things." Therefore, we often notice that those who have known God after living far from Him have experienced deep repentance, a depth that those who are like the "elder son" inside the house in the gospel parable do not usually enjoy. But can we forget what lies behind if we do not understand it or know any better? Hence, self-reflection (coming back to ourselves) and self-examination are the first steps in our journey of repentance. When taking these steps become constant, they generate continuous spiritual alertness and heightened awareness, allowing us to sense the negative effects of our sins whether in word, deed or thought. At that moment, we rush to discard them, replacing them with their virtuous counterparts. This is how we ascend to true life. The life of repentance moves us up the ladder of divine ascent step by step, until we reach the fullness and abundance of life in Christ. Repentance is not an independent act with its own time frame, requirements and completion. No, it is a journey of life, or if you will, a lifestyle, sometimes requiring concentration on a specific aspect. However, it does not stop there, nor does it ever end. It is a life of wakeful, conscious, peaceful vigilance, aware of its reality, forever aspiring to transcend it. It is a life open to God, to people, to spiritual energies, and to deified humanity. It is a life not content with reality but continually elevates it. It is constantly ascending until it reaches the stature of Christ. The model for those who live a life of repentance is the following verse from the Apostle Paul: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

## PREPARING FOR GREAT LENT

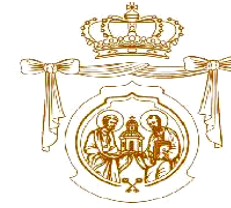
### Our Lenten Journey

### How Do We Forgive?

*by Abbott Tryphon*

**The decision to forgive another person a wrong done to us begins when we decide to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge. To forgive someone does not mean that we forget what they did to us, for this may be impossible. The memory of the hurt might always remain with you, but when you decide to forgive the person who wronged you, the grip of resentment is put aside. When we forgive someone it is even possible the find yourself filled with compassion and empathy for the person, for the act of forgiveness opens the heart to God's grace. When we forgive someone, we are not denying their responsibility for hurting or offending us, nor are we justifying their act. We can forgive them without approving or excusing their transgression against us. The act of forgiving another opens our heart to the peace that brings closure to hurt and pain, and opens us up to the love and peace that comes from living a life without resentment. If we find ourselves struggling to forgive, it is a good reminder to recall those hurtful things we've done to others, and remember when we've been forgiven. It is especially good to recall how God has forgiven us, and call upon Him to give us the grace needed to put aside our resentment, and truly forgive the other person. Being quick to forgive, and putting aside all thoughts of revenge will open our heart to a joyful and peaceful life. Finally, if we pray for those who've offended us, we open the door to all kinds of possibilities. When we ask God to help the person who's been unkind and hurtful, our own hearts receive healing, for when we've forgiven others, grace abounds. "Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate when people say unkind things about you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God wants you to do, and he will bless you for it." (1 Peter 3:9)**  
*The Very. Rev. Abbot Tryphon is Igumen of All-Merciful Saviour Monastery on Vashon Island, Washington*

His Eminence  
The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan SABA



Archbishop of New York  
and Metropolitan of  
All North America

**ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE  
OF NORTH AMERICA**

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**To be read from the pulpit and printed in the bulletin.**

Venerable Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, and Christ-loving Faithful of this Archdiocese,

May you have much joy on this glorious feast of Palm Sunday!

Today we see Christ riding triumphantly into the Holy City of Jerusalem and the crowds welcoming Him with praise and loving service, as they shout “Hosanna!” and lay down palm branches and even their own clothes as a carpet for His entrance. Let us likewise open our hearts to Him and welcome Him into our lives. Let us praise Him not just with hymns at church but also by confessing His goodness in our daily prayers and in our conversations with others. Let us lay down for Him a welcoming carpet of generous deeds toward our neighbors and faithful obedience toward Him. May we thus receive Him to rule in our hearts as our delivering King, and may we remain loyal to Him in word and deed—not betraying and abandoning Him, like the crowds in Jerusalem long ago.

As is our custom in this archdiocese, today we also remember our Father in Christ, His Beatitude Patriarch John X, and all our brothers and sisters of the Patriarchate of Antioch in its historic homeland of the Middle East. As we proclaim this ancient Faith in the New World, they are keeping it alive in the apostolic and historic places of its beginnings. Yet many of them continue to suffer from the aftermath of wars, disasters, and economic collapse. For this reason, we invite you to contribute today toward the patriarchate and its humanitarian work. Through your donations you can provide some comfort to our brothers and sisters in need, showing solidarity with them as one Body in Christ. Please give generously.

Wishing you all a deeply meaningful Holy Week and a glorious Pascha, I remain,

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. Saba". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✠ SABA

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America