



March 2, 2025
Protocol 03/001

To the clergy, monastics, and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America, beloved children in the Lord,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

We read in the life of St. Euthymius the Great that, in the time of the great Palestinian monastic fathers, many of the monks had a practice of retreating into the desert, not just for the forty days of Lent, but for the entire period between Theophany and Palm Sunday. This practice is referenced in the hymns of the Triodion. At Matins on Friday of the Sixth Week—the last of day of Lent—the final troparion of the second canon proclaims: “All who dwell in deserts, in mountains and in caves, draw near and assemble with us, to meet the King and Master with palms in your hands; for he comes to save our souls.”

Such a practice is unthinkable in our time, even for most monastics. Still, this practice holds an important lesson for all Orthodox Christians as we prepare for Great Lent. Namely, that ascetic effort should not be divorced from silence, *hesychia*, a withdrawal from the tumult of the world.

In fact, the cultivation of silence has a special value in this age of constant noise. Social media platforms capitalize, quite literally, upon our endless “engagement” with one another. Advertising is ubiquitous, invading every nook of our life, sometimes in truly insidious forms. Thanks to smart phones, a barrage of “entertainment”—podcasts, TikTok videos, YouTube Shorts, Spotify playlists, mobile games—is constantly at our fingertips. News outlets try to persuade us to read or watch or listen to the world’s happenings on a 24-hours-a-day basis. Streaming services like Netflix and live-streaming services like Twitch provide us with a nearly endless river of “content.” And the prevailing ideology tells us that self-expressions and making ourselves “heard” are among life’s highest values.

However, if we constantly fill our eyes and minds with soul-numbing entertainment, what room do we leave for the encounter with God? If we constantly fill our ears with the sound of our own voice and opinions and expression, how shall we hear the eternal Word of the Father?

Therefore, I call upon each of us, all the clergy, monastics, and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America, to make a Lenten commitment to cultivate silence in our life in some concrete way. I offer

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here but a few examples, asking each of us to consider adapting the practice of silence to the realities of our own daily life. We might:

- fast from posting on social media, or perhaps fast from using social media entirely, even passively;
- limit our time on the computer by turning it off at dinnertime and not turning it on again till after breakfast the next day;
- make rules around cellphone usage—no entertainment apps, no podcasts or videos.
- give up all streaming services for the entirety of Lent, or even give up movies, television, and videos altogether for the holy Forty Days.

Regardless of our other efforts, all of us would benefit from resolving to spend 10 minutes or half an hour in complete silence each day, both for the period of the Fast and beyond. In this regard, I recall the 8th and 9th maxims of Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko: “Practice silence, inner and outer. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.” It would behoove all of us to practice such deliberate silence in addition to the time we spend in prayer each day.

This practice of silence will take effort, and we may find that we fall short of our goals. But, as with every ascetic effort, we recognize that we are passionate sinners, weak and erring, and in need of God’s strengthening grace. Despite our failures, we know that Christ receives and rewards authentic struggle. As St. John of the Ladder says, to fall is human, but to remain fallen is proper only to the demons. If we come up short, we repent and try again, and if we keep trying, by God’s grace, we will notice a change in ourselves.

To wit, when we cultivate silence, we weaken our passionate ties to the world. We challenge our tendency to idolize our own words and actions. We become more vigilant, noticing the movements in our mind and soul, helping us to see our own sinfulness and our need for Christ. Perhaps most importantly, when we are still and silent, we allow God to act and to speak.

“Be still, and know I am God,” says the holy Scripture (Ps. 45:10); the Word of God came to the holy prophet Elijah in the silence after the storm, as a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:12). When Christ quieted the winds and waves, saying “Silence, be still,” then the disciples recognized his power (Mk. 4:39). If we, too, wish to encounter his power and his Person, we must practice stillness, allowing him to calm the waves of passion and worldliness that trouble our heart and soul.

The Russian term for a monastic novice is *poslushnik*: the one who obeys, or, more fundamentally, the one who listens. Though we may not be able to retreat into the desert like the great monastic fathers of old, at least we can imitate the novice’s way of life by cultivating a small measure of silence and attention in our lives. In addition to our usual and necessary Lenten efforts in fasting, prayer, almsgiving, this Lent, let us all become novices in spirit, through silence learning to listen to God and to obey his word, in which lies our salvation and his great mercy.

Wishing all of you a soul-saving Forty Days, with my primatial blessing and prayers, I remain,
Yours in Christ,

+Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada

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