



CATECHETICAL ADDRESS ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF HOLY AND GREAT LENT 2008

Protocol Number 293

+ B A R T H O L O M E W

BY THE MERCY OF GOD ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE
NEW ROME AND ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH
TO THE PLENITUDE OF THE CHURCH
GRACE AND PEACE FROM OUR SAVIOR AND
LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND FROM US BENEDICTION
BLESSING AND FORGIVENESS

During this period of Holy and Great Lent, our Church calls us to repentance. Doubtless, as contemporary man hears this invitation to repentance, he does not feel comfortable, because he has accustomed himself to a certain way of life, and does not wish to question his own rectitude. Calling one's own rectitude into question produces feelings of insecurity, because the ideological structure within which you have sure and certain refuge is clearly risked.

However, a deeper examination of the issue compels us to accept that people's convictions do not conform to objective reality, on the basis of reasonable judgment. Rather, they create a justification that is pleasing to self, namely: excuses in sins (Psalm 140:4). When a person justifies his or her actions and self-vindicates on the basis of erroneous values, significant harm happens, because inevitably, the moment come when the truth emerges, and we find ourselves without excuse. Moreover, there may be no more time to adjust our convictions: that is, to repent of our sinful deeds and erroneous, through which we have tried to justify our behavior.

Now as Christians, we are used to both hearing about and practicing repentance, and we do not feel a conflict with our Church's call to repentance. However, there is a need for us to make a deliberate and conscious effort to realize that a complete repentance has two objectives.

The first objective is threefold: a renunciation of our sins, a decision to cease and desist from sinful deeds and habits, and a decision to make amends for the consequences of our sins. For example, the publican Zaccheus, who sincerely repented during his encounter with Christ, demonstrated his repentance in a practical way by repaying fourfold the very people from whom he had unjustly seized wealth.

The second objective of repentance is that we should change our mentality. We should replace our understandings with other higher and loftier ones; or in the words of the Psalmist: to ascend in our hearts (Psalm 83:6). This second objective needs to be pursued especially by those who are unconvinced by their consciousness about specific sins. For example, our understanding of love surely falls short of perfection; likewise our understanding of humility. For when we compare our own spiritual state to the perfection of God, a perfection we are called to imitate, surely we will see our shortcomings and realize the endless road we must traverse in order to find ourselves in the path of those who are like unto God.

As we examine the quality of our inner peace, we ascertain that we fall short of the peace of Christ which surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7). Pondering the level to which we trust our lives to God's Providence, we sadly realize that we are often seized by anxiety and uncertainty about the future, as if we were either of little faith or even without faith. In general, upon examination of the purity of our conscience, we realize that we fall short of understanding correctly the many feelings we harbor within ourselves that are detrimental to our purity, often mistaking them as healthy. Thus, a new and more complete enlightenment of our conscience is needed through the teachings of the Fathers and of the Gospel, so that we will be in a better position to think critically about ourselves and our shortcomings, in line with the judgment of God. Since no one can claim to judge himself perfectly, by the same token no one can claim that he has no need of a renewed mind, a more enlightened mind, a transformation of mind, a correction of mind and mentality, i.e. a need of repentance.

The call of our Orthodox Church to repentance is not merely a call to self-reproach. Self-reproach can be useful, as are deep contrition and tears of repentance; but they are not of themselves sufficient. We need to experience the joy emanating from the forgiveness granted to us by God, the sense of deliverance from the burdens of the bondage of sin, and the sense of God's love for us. Our repentance does not deprive us from the joy of life, making us indignant at the hearing of the sermon calling to repentance.

Repentance means cleansing and enlightenment of our minds, more ardent love for Christ and His creation, freedom and joy through the newness of life into which we continually enter through our constant repentance.

The one who constantly repents, ever progresses, ever rejoices through new ascents, finds constant satisfaction in deeper understandings of all things. Through the transformation of mentality and understanding, the one who repents better understands the whole world, becomes wiser, more judicious, more discreet, nobler and a true friend of Christ. Therefore, the preaching of repentance should be favorably received by wise persons who are able to appreciate any improvement that comes from the renewal of the human person through repentance.

Therefore, brothers and sisters and beloved children in the Lord, let us accept the invitation of our Church to repentance as we have set forth above. Let us who have fallen short through sin cleanse ourselves from sin through confession. Let us constantly examine our own presuppositions, so our judgments and thoughts may be godly and pure, just and true.

Finally, we paternally pray that all of you may enjoy the every assistance and help of the Lord on your road to repentance and throughout your renewed life in Christ.

Holy and Great Lent 2008
BARTHOLOMEW of Constantinople
The fervent intercessor for you all before God

