

THE HOLY ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF BOSTON
His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

LENTEN ENCYCLICAL
of
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In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My beloved Orthodox Christians:

I remember something a friend said to me many years ago, while he was studying for the priesthood in a modernist "Orthodox" jurisdiction. His exact words to me were: "I was attracted to Christianity because it makes no demands on an individual." Since I myself belonged to the same jurisdiction as he at the time, I found myself agreeing wholeheartedly with what he said.

Imagine my shock when I began to study Orthodox Christianity a little more seriously at a later date. The Lord's Beatitudes alone, not to mention other scriptural passages, should have been enough to dispel any such foolish notions on my part. The writings and lives of the Saints, much to my dismay, only served to fortify what the Holy Scriptures had to say about this matter.

One would have thought that the symbol of our faith - the Cross - might have alerted my young friend and me to understand the true nature of our Orthodox Christian Faith. After all, the Cross, originally, was a means of executing people, not the symbol of victory and life it later became. It was certainly not the symbol of the easy-going, fun-filled religion my friend and I envisioned.

Perhaps my friend and I were looking at Christianity from the wrong end. Perhaps we were looking at the prize that would come - but only at the end of a long line of struggles. Perhaps we were looking at the crown, and had overlooked or ignored the many griefs and temptations and disappointments and tears that would be needed to obtain that crown.

We were very young and foolish. Would we have been able to understand what Saint Isaac the Syrian says in his *Ascetical Homilies*? The Saint writes:

Without entering into temptations, no man will ever gain the wisdom of the Spirit... If the soul does not taste Christ's sufferings consciously, she will never have communion with Him.

(Homily Five)

Little did my friend and I realize that Christ would be calling us to a life-long war - a war that knows no truce in this life. It was and is a war against ourselves. It was and is the worst kind of war - a civil war, a war pitting brother against brother, the carnal man against the spiritual man within us. Only the death of the one could bring victory and triumph to the other. It is a war in which the winner takes all - either in the form of eternal life or eternal condemnation.

