

THE HOLY ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF BOSTON

His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

LENTEN ENCYCLICAL

Of

His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

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

My beloved Orthodox Christians:

It was the summer of 1963, and our small and newly-founded brotherhood had travelled to Athens, Greece, with the intention of visiting our spiritual fathers on the Holy Mountain, Athos. We wanted to purchase some items for our new monastery back in Boston, and so we went to Metropolis Square in Athens where all the shops that sell ecclesiastical items are clustered.

At one point, while all four or five of us were walking toward one shop, we approached a street vendor who was selling roasted chestnuts. With a loud voice, he was shouting, "Chestnuts! Fresh chestnuts! Hot chestnuts!"

As we were about to pass him by on the sidewalk, he suddenly cried out: "Chestnuts! **FASTING** chestnuts!"

We stopped in our tracks. We looked at each other with a smile, and asked, "Did he really say *fasting* chestnuts? Well, in that case, perhaps we should buy some!"

Clever Greek merchant. He saw a group of monks approaching; he sized us up as potential customers and made a quick sale.

I don't know if there is any such thing as *non*-fasting chestnuts, but it was obvious that our street vendor, perhaps unwittingly, was following the counsel of the saints: "He who wishes to be saved, contrives means."

Equally inventive in getting ahead — this time, in the spiritual realm — was St. John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople. As we learn from his life, the Saint used to sleep prostrate on his knees, and just to make sure that he wouldn't oversleep, he would place a beeswax candle nearby and then press a heavy iron nail into the side of the candle. When he was about to rest, he lit the candle, and as he took his brief nap, the candle burned down slowly until it reached the nail. When the heat of the flame had warmed and loosened the wax, the nail fell with a loud

clatter onto a metal pot the Saint had placed directly below the candle, thereby awakening him. Thus, in all likelihood, the Saint was the inventor of the alarm clock.

The lesson that we learn from these two — the street vendor and the Ecumenical Patriarch — is the same, my beloved. Unless we use our wits, we will not be able to get ahead, either in this life or in the next. We will not be able to get anywhere by dozing and by being lazy. In order to progress, either materially or spiritually, one must apply intelligence and diligence.

In our times, God has provided most of us with an abundance of food — and, if we are willing to use our wits — He has even given us an *abundance* of fasting foods. Today, we have foods available that our ancestors could not imagine in their dreams. Canned foods, frozen foods, fresh foods from all parts of the earth, available at every season of the year, ersatz "meat" and "dairy" products made from vegetables. By using our wits, all of us, young and old, will find that there are many means available to us to help us observe the holy fasts of the Church, as strictly as each one is willing and able. This, in turn, is but a training tool for us to instruct our body in the art of true fasting: the fasting of our senses.

Truly, he who wishes to be saved, contrives means.

With God's help, we intend, in the next issue of *The True Vine*, to publish a series of articles dedicated to fasting. One of the central features of this issue will be a study by St. Nectarius of Pentapolis. Another article will be the Life of a young martyr, who preferred to surrender his life rather than break the sacred fast observed by the Church.

By following faithfully in the footsteps of our many wise and resourceful saints, my beloved, we too shall be counted worthy to attain to the Holy Resurrection, in Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Your fervent suppliant unto God,

✠Ephraim, Metropolitan

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