

## **GREAT LENT 2026**

A message from his Grace Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos, Spiritual Advisor,  
National Ladies Philoptochos Society.

To the Esteemed Members of the National Ladies Philoptochos Society,

I greet you with love and spiritual joy in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as we once again enter the sacred and beautiful season of Great Lent.

Just as Jesus retreated to a solitary place for prayer and communion with the Father, as depicted in Mark 1:35, this holy period welcomes us into deeper prayer, sincere repentance, renewed commitment, and a more intimate relationship with Christ.

As your Spiritual Advisor, it is my privilege to share with you a series of weekly reflections centered on the Akathist Hymn and the person of the Theotokos, the Mother of God. During the Fridays of Great Lent, the Church places before us this magnificent hymn of praise, gratitude, and hope. A hymn that continually calls us to “Rejoice,” even in the midst of fasting and spiritual struggle. To infuse this joy into your everyday life, consider adopting a small, repeatable act that aligns with the hymn's call. Whether it is lighting a candle each morning, pausing at noon to whisper, 'Rejoice,' or another simple practice, let this become a habit of joy that carries the spirit of Friday's hymn through the entire week.

In these reflections, we linger over the Mother of God's quiet and courageous “yes.” Her steady trust when the path ahead was unclear. Her joyful obedience and her strength at the foot of the Cross. We witness that her hope did not fade in sorrow, but blossomed fully in the light and joy of the Resurrection. Her life, in a blessed way, guides us and strengthens us in our own walk of faith.

You, as women devoted to philanthropy and Christian witness, live out that same offering every day. Like our Panagia, much of what you do happens quietly, through humble acts of kindness, with hearts filled with generosity, through faithful care and genuine Christian love for those who are hurting. Often unseen, your ministry carries Christ into homes, hospital rooms, communities, and hearts. Whether it is changing the sheets for a patient in need of comfort, writing a quiet check to support a struggling family, or offering a warm meal to those who are hungry, these moments are sacred. They reflect your unwavering faith and dedication, bringing light and hope to the mundane tasks of everyday life.

It is my sincere prayer that these humble meditations encourage you, steady you, and fill you again with confidence in God's loving providence. May this Great Lent journey with the Mother of God, our beloved Panagia and the Mother of all humanity, deepen your faith and renew your joy, so that you may continue your sacred work of philanthropy with strength, tenderness, and love. To help integrate this journey into your daily life, consider adopting a simple prayer or reflection for each day: "Dear God, as I walk with you today, guide me in your love, inspire my actions, and renew my spirit." This brief moment of connection can provide an anchor throughout your Lenten journey.

May the Most Holy Theotokos guide and protect you, and might the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ illumine your path throughout this blessed season.

With prayers and blessings,

+ Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos,  
Spiritual Advisor, National Ladies Philoptochos Society