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Ukrainian Catholic Church

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PASTORAL EPISTLE OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC HIERARCHY IN THE UNITED STATES
FOR THE BEGINNING OF SAINT PHILIP'S FAST 2025

He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.
—Ps. 147:3

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

With the beginning of St. Philip's Fast, or *Pylypivka*, on November 15th, we are invited to contemplate the profound mystery of the Nativity of our Lord, the Incarnation. The pre-eternal God, who holds the universe in His hand, humbles Himself to become truly human: a vulnerable, defenseless child. The four Evangelists chose vibrant images and words that reveal the brokenness of the world into which Christ was born: the oppression of Roman occupiers, political machinations that lead to the slaughter of the Innocents, forced migration, and the lack of shelter even for a pregnant mother.

God enters into this world of suffering to bring healing and salvation. Born in a stable, soon to become a refugee, Christ identifies with every wound, every scourge, every form of human brokenness. The miracle of the Incarnation is, among other things, God's solidarity with man, God coming to meet our humanity in the midst of all its pain and vulnerability, God becoming man in order that man may become God.

Living through the fourth winter of a barbaric aggression, Ukrainians, members of our Church, bear witness to the profound woundedness of humanity, indeed, they're experiencing it firsthand. The horrors of destruction, loss, and displacement leave scars on the land, on the bodies of soldiers and civilians, and on the hearts of tens of millions of innocents. Those of us who live far from immediate suffering carry our own burdens. We feel the weight of separation, fatigue, and quiet loneliness. We bear hidden grief and carry profound wounds. Into the midst of these wounds, Christ is born, and He brings with Him the promise that even in our anguish, hope can take root and healing can begin anew.

This year, Mother Church invites us to dwell in hope. The Jubilee Year of Hope, Pope Francis's last gift to a world shaken by division, anxiety, and conflict, calls us to trust in God's promises amid personal and global turbulence and uncertainty. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, "Hope does not disappoint" (Rom. 5:5). Hope is not an abstract idea, it is incarnated: in Christ it takes on flesh. It is made visible to us at Christmas: God Himself enters our fragile world, bringing light, renewal, and the promise of restoration.

These mysteries are subtle and tender, often going unnoticed amid the hustle of Advent preparations. To help us focus, the Church gives us the Fast of St. Philip, which invites us to step aside and reclaim the gift of silence. We are encouraged to fast not only from food but, importantly in our day, from the chatter of social media, those 'likes' and 'shares' that steal our inner peace, the pull of consumerism, and the endless distractions that fragment our attention. By intentionally creating time and space for stillness, we open ourselves to the quiet presence of God.

We are called to return to the practices that attune our hearts to God's closeness: personal prayer, attention to the Word of God, participation in the liturgical life of the Church, and silent contemplation. When the noise of the world fades, we begin to hear the gentle voice of God, who enters the world to make all things new (cf. Rev. 21:5).

Brothers and sisters, may this year's Philip's Fast lead you on a journey inward, a gentle pilgrimage into the quiet of your heart. May it be a time to rediscover the profound peace of God's presence, a season for healing what is broken, and for mending the fractures in our lives and our relationships.

Walking with you in *Pylypivka*, holding you in prayer, and sending our sincere blessings, we remain,

Yours in Christ,

† **Borys Gudziak**

Archbishop of Philadelphia for Ukrainians

Metropolitan of Ukrainian Catholics in the United States

† **Paul Chomnycky, OSBM**

Bishop of Stamford

† **Benedict Aleksiychuk**

Bishop of St. Nicholas in Chicago

† **Bohdan Danylo**

Bishop of St. Josaphat in Parma