



*Office of the Bishop*

March 28, 2026

Beloved family in Christ Jesus, our Lord,

I greet you at the conclusion of the season of Great Lent, a time of assessing our spiritual lives and claiming with conviction whose side we are on. Are we serving the powers of the world with its penchant for avarice, anger, and pride, or are we committing to the way of gentleness, humility, nonviolence, and love espoused by our Lord and Teacher, Jesus Christ? Upon our celebration today of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, we will behold, in our Holy Week services, what that triumph means and what it costs.

#### **Following Christ during Holy Week**

The service of Matins on Holy and Great Monday is known as the "Bridegroom Service," and where it is served, it is typically done on the evening of Palm Sunday, as well as on Great and Holy Monday and Tuesday. The icon of Christ known as "The Bridegroom" used in this service is of Jesus, his hands bound, wearing his robe of mockery, his crown of thorns, and his scepter of reed. His body is covered in bloody wounds from his scourging at the hands of Roman soldiers. This icon illustrates the state of perfect abasement in which he takes up his cross and voluntarily sets out upon his final journey to Calvary and the salvation of the world.

This service, recalling the parable of the wedding feast in the Gospel of Matthew, includes this hymn:

I see your bridal chamber adorned, O my Savior,  
But I have no garment that I may enter therein.  
O Giver of Light, make radiant  
the garment of my soul and save me.

We who wish to enter upon the liturgy of our redemption, and then to celebrate Christ's resurrection—and ours—must take realistic stock of our own sinfulness and spiritual poverty as our necessary preparation to enter into the mystery of Christ's extreme humility, of his suffering, death, and resurrection. We do not examine ourselves to count up our achievements, but to see how our idea of success compares with his.

### The Peace of Jesus

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is clear that his way is not the world's way. Indeed, we see written on his icon in many of our churches, "I am the way and the truth and the life." The passage continues, "No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father" (John 14:6-7 NABre). Further on in John's Gospel, we read: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid" (John 14:27).

In these crucial passages, Jesus says quite plainly that to follow his way is to enter into the truth that leads to life. To say that no one comes to the Father except through him is to declare that Jesus' way, *and no other*, is what leads to the source and ultimate meaning of our existence. It is the only way to the unique peace that Christ offers.

To know the Father of all is to know our own origin and our destiny, and to know Jesus is to know the will of the Father for all times, for all peoples, and for all circumstances. Jesus' entire mission and message is to do the Father's will. For Christians to follow Jesus is for us to do what we see him doing, like the students of a sage or rabbi would do. Thus, we come to know and to obey the divine will by studying both Christ's teaching and his deeds so that we may align our lives with his. We do this by earnest study of the scriptures, particularly the Gospels, where the story of Jesus is to be found.

In the Gospels we come to understand that our enemies are not God's enemies. Our enemies are God's children, infinitely and unconditionally loved for all eternity. This is the understanding behind Jesus' unique commandment in the Gospels. In a sentence that scripture scholars largely agree is in his own words, Jesus commands: "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). To see the enemy as one who is loved by God as much as oneself is to make it possible for us to comprehend and to obey this commandment.

Christ is here quite categorical: his peace is not the world's peace, a hollow caricature of what he is offering his disciples. The world's peace is completely consistent with hatred, with violence, with oppression, and with the deceptions and falsehoods used by the powerful in the achievement of their own selfish aims. Rather than accepting the peace offered by Christ, we settle for the world's "peace," for the offering of an empty mannequin, troubled and afraid as our hearts often are by life in a fallen world under the reign of sin and death. It is here that kingdoms, empires, and states enter in to offer the palliative of "government." And here we see clearly that states do not love their enemies. For the state, the enemy is to be destroyed for the sake of the state's own survival.

Please do not misunderstand—this is not a criticism of government as such. After all, St. Paul reminds Timothy to urge "that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity" (1 Timothy 2:1-2) a sentiment we find almost word for word in the Divine Liturgy. When questioned about paying taxes to Caesar, Jesus answers, "[R]epay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God" (Matthew 22:21). And if, after paying God all that is due God, we have anything left over, we are free to pay that to Caesar.

### Jesus or Genghis?

But we must understand that to follow Jesus is to recognize that the state, that sociopolitical structure from which so much power and authority derive in our world today, claims to promise two things it ultimately cannot deliver: peace and survival. The peace of the state is illusory, guided only by its own self-interest, and its promise of survival is always provisional and, at best, temporary. As followers of Christ, we know that the only true survival is our hope of eternal life safeguarded and guaranteed by the resurrection. And yet, in the mind of the powerful, only violence can bring about “peace and survival.”

We can thank Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel for making this quite clear in a recent statement. Paraphrasing historian Will Durant, he [said](#), “History proves that, unfortunately and unhappily, Jesus Christ has no advantage over Genghis Khan. Because if you are strong enough, ruthless enough, powerful enough, evil will overcome good.”

Durant and Netanyahu understand that the means needed for evil to overcome good are the means of Genghis Khan, i.e., what we are now relying upon to accomplish our national objectives: military strength, moral ruthlessness, and worldly power. These are not the means of Jesus. But the means of Jesus are what is needed for good to overcome evil. They are the *only* means capable of accomplishing this. Where we have desired victory for the sake of survival, Jesus has given us instead the victory of the resurrection, by which our real survival is guaranteed for all eternity.

The Divine Liturgy itself becomes a mirror of our unity in the bond of Christ’s peace, a unity that ought to render government effectively unnecessary and irrelevant for Christians. The kingdoms of this world are not needed when the Kingdom of God has broken into history, when those whose only law is love overcome the realm of Caesar. Our liturgy begins, “Blessed *is* the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Note the verb here: “is,” not “will be” or “would be.” However, if we do not see the Kingdom of God at hand, we will turn to the kingdoms that we do see. Whether or not we can see that the Kingdom of God is at hand is largely a matter of what we choose to look at.

After this blessing, and after our “Amen,” the deacon’s first words are “In *peace* let us pray to the Lord,” and we respond for the first of many times, “Lord, have mercy.” It is peace, the fruit of God’s mercy, that is the condition for us to pray as the Body of Christ. The next petition of the deacon tells us precisely where this peace comes from: “For the peace from above...Lord, have mercy,” and the next tells us for whom our prayer for peace is intended, and for what purpose: “For the peace of the whole world, for the wellbeing of all the churches of God, and for the unity of all...Lord, have mercy.”

On the Third Sunday of Great Lent, we celebrated the Veneration of the Holy Cross. There, in the midst of our Lenten fast, the Cross was brought forward for us to venerate as a sign of strength and hope, just as Moses set up the bronze serpents for the Israelites, in their in their wilderness wandering, to gaze upon and receive healing. It marked a turning point in the Lenten season: from that Sunday on, we turned our attention from our

weakness and sinfulness and began to meditate more intently on the Passion, what Christ accomplished for us and for our salvation in his moment of utter self-emptying. The Cross exposes our vanity and the futility of our designs. It reveals to us that it is not about what *we* think, about our philosophies and theories and statecraft, but about *Christ's sacrifice as the only guarantee of peace and survival.*

### An Unjust War

In the opening week of our Lenten journey, the United States launched an attack on the people of Iran with no presumption of legality, no explanation to the American people, and no regard for the tenets of international law that, though fundamentally flawed, inasmuch as they fall short of the law of love Christ sets forth in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), nevertheless provide a framework for cooperation between nations. The crusade-like mentality behind the attack has removed any pretense that its organizers care about human rights or protecting the lives of civilians. There has not even been any attempt to consider, much less apply, the principles and conditions of just war theory to the killing. The unmasking of the government's true intentions is apocalyptic in the Greek sense of *apokalypsis*—a revelation or disclosure. Its intentions are to a large extent inspired by a cramped and dark religious sense that goes by the name of “Christian,” but ultimately is the betrayal of Judas carried into our own age.

To promote this unjust war, leaders initiated a propaganda campaign that spliced images of real-life bombings with scenes from video games and movies, turning horrific violence into a spectacle and dehumanizing victims made in the image and likeness of God. Among these victims were [100 children killed](#) in missile strikes on a school in southern Iran. Our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, has [condemned](#) these atrocities, as have other of my brother bishops. Tragically, however, and at great cost to its moral authority and the strength of its gospel witness, debates within the church about applying “just war theory” to this latest US intervention have led some to believe that we can reason through this irrational act. But to be clear: even if one accepts this theory of justified killing, if this war fails to meet the criteria of a “just war,” there is no Catholic “unjust war theory” to permit one's participation in the violence of this war. Killing in an unjust war is murder, and it is forbidden to the Christian.

We should be clear that the just war theory has been *abused* more than it has been *used*. It is trotted out to try and assuage our consciences and supersede the radical demands of the gospel, as if we knew better than Christ how to interpret His message. “We can no longer think of war as a solution,” Pope Francis wrote in his encyclical [Fratelli Tutti](#), then [sounded](#) a note of caution: “[I]t is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a just war” (§258). Less than two years later, speaking with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill after the Russian invasion of Ukraine—an act of aggression that, in its extra-legality, has [parallels](#) to US actions in Iran—Francis [lamented](#) that “Wars are always unjust” and reaffirmed that “The Church must not use the language of politics, but the language of Jesus.”

It is this “language of Jesus” toward which we must turn now in these final days of Great Lent. This means having the courage to speak the truth, even when it comes at

great personal cost and sets us against the prevailing logic of the world. Let me reiterate the words I wrote in my Lenten pastoral letter twenty-three years ago at the time of another morally corrupt invasion, [that of Iraq](#), which are as applicable today as they were in 2003:

We must call murder by its right name: murder. God and conscience requires nothing less if the face of the earth is to be renewed and if the salvation offered by Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ is to reach all people, including us. We have no choice before the face of God but to speak unambiguously to the moral situation with which we are confronted and to live according to the Will of Him who gazes at us from the Cross (*Catechism* 1785).

### Conscience Before Cooperation

Ultimately, brothers and sisters, it is to your consciences that I am appealing. I have not written this letter for the public at large, but for you, the faithful of the Romanian Catholic Church in the United States and Canada. I write in my capacity as your bishop and pastor in my ardent desire for your salvation and eternal life. I do not write to condemn this war in Iran, or any of the previous or future wars of this or any other administration. Pope Leo and other leaders of our Church have already done so many, many times, more clearly and effectively than I can. Nor do I write as if to legislate or threaten canonical punishment—by no means! Still, I must declare for your sake that this war is unjust, killing in it is murder, and any willing participation in it is complicity in murder.

It is quite clear to me that appealing to the conscience of the state is futile. The state is not listening, and it never will. It is our conscience and our willingness to follow it courageously regardless of consequence that make the difference. Moreover, it is by virtue of our conscience, formed by the teaching of the Church and the command of Christ, that *I urge you to resist participation in this war in any way you can.*

Let us take this to heart as the truth, and confess with our Blessed Martyr Cardinal Iuliu Hossu, who lived his motto, “Our faith is our life,” up to his death in prison. Thus may we enter upon this week of our Lord’s passion, following him who is our Way, our Truth, and our Life, to the Father who has loved each of us out of non-existence into existence, not only for now, but always, and forever and ever.

Wishing you strength, courage, and every blessing and peace in this season of our victory, I remain,

Your brother in Christ-God,



✠john michael  
a sinner,  
bishop

