



Skete of the Most Holy Theotokos
and Ever-Virgin Mary,
Queen of All
The healer of cancer

445 Longshot Lane · Rochelle, Virginia · 22738
queenofall@earthlink.net · tel. 239-229-3871
www.queenofallskete.org

Lent/Pascha 2024

To my dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Each morning I open my window and by God's grace, I see the bluebird that sits every day on a tree limb outside my cell, *hear* his song, and *smell* the aroma of hyacinths. It is by God's grace that we breathe and welcome each day, and during Lent, as life becomes quieter and more focused, we become more keenly aware of life's blessings.

Many years ago, while staying in the monastery at Zalongo, Greece, one morning I stood on the balcony outside the cells and was struck by the view of the mountainside, with the Ionian Sea in the distance. A senior nun asked what I was doing and I said, "The panorama is very beautiful." She smiled and said "Yes, the view is beautiful, but we are not here for the view." And thus, Lent causes me to recall this moment, thank the bird for his song, and return to studying St. Gregory Palamas' *The 150 Chapters*.

When day turns to night, I enjoy the prayers by candlelight. This enables a greater focus on the prayer book and holy icons. Periodically, I will study an icon by candlelight, and every time some new detail emerges that I have not noticed before.

Alas, I could ramble on, but my purpose of writing is to ask for your holy prayers and to let you know that you remain in prayer at the Skete. May this Lent bring you closer to God, closer to your parish community, and closer to your family. In my recent speech about *Reality*, I realized how important these relationships are to keep us from straying from the Lord. When we veer course, our minds are influenced by secular society and we become malleable to its whims. This is just the type of weakness that the Antichrist is seeking in us, to tear us away from total trust in God. You may notice that every Lent, the media produces stories designed to place doubt in the hearts of believers. We need to be aware of the wiles of the enemy and to stay focused on the meaning of "faith". The solution is to pray, for in Christ's own words: "...whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (MAT 21:22), and again He says: "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (LUKE 18:27). Today's miracles may not be as dramatic as the parting of the sea, but seeing children in the church.

When we struggle through the greater askesis of Lent – the longer and more frequent services, the silence, the increased reading of spiritual texts, the almsgiving, the correction of fractured relationships, the preparation for a sincere Confession – then Pascha becomes a radiant miracle that sets our souls free from being weighed down by the worldly ... a blessing far greater than what is in the Pascha basket!

In our Lord Jesus Christ,

P.S.: In response to your requests, soon the Skete's Gift Shop will be online at the website: www.queenofallskete.org. Initially there will be a sampling of items, and each month new items will be added. Check the site around the beginning of April.

*Queen of All Skete is a 501(c)(3) religious organization.
Donations are tax-deductible as permitted by IRS regulations.*