

Yet this intercession is not limited to prayer; it must extend to the way we embody Christ's love. A welcoming spirit within our parishes is integral to this mission. When newcomers attend our services — perhaps stepping into an Orthodox Church for the first time — they should feel embraced by the warmth of Christ's presence, reflected in the hospitality of His people.

### **Liturgical Petitions and Prayers for Catechumens**

The Divine Liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil provide for this in the petitions and prayers for catechumens. These sections of the Divine Liturgy, often overlooked or omitted in some parishes, are not mere historical relics. They are a vital part of our tradition, reminding us that the Church is always in the process of growing, always welcoming new members into the fold.

Moreover, the preservation of these petitions and prayers in the Presanctified Liturgy alone often creates confusion because there seems to be an inconsistency between our Lenten practices and those the rest of the year. If we were to retain these elements more consistently throughout the liturgical year, the faithful would naturally come to see their place during Holy and Great Lent and understand their purpose as part of the Church's ongoing mission to welcome and prepare those seeking entrance into the Body of Christ.

With this in mind, **beginning on Sunday, February 2, 2025 (the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple) through the end of Bright Week, we will offer the petitions and prayers for catechumens in every parish of our Holy Metropolis of Chicago.** This great feast of the Lord commemorates the moment when the Christ child was brought to the Temple and revealed to Simeon and Anna. It is a feast of revelation, inclusion, and promise, marking Christ's fulfillment of the Law and His opening of the Covenant to all peoples.

During this period, we will accept the feedback of clergy and the faithful to discern how these petitions and prayers have enriched overall engagement in the life of the Church. Guided by your experiences, we will evaluate and make any necessary adjustments to ensure that these practices continue to serve the spiritual life of our parishes effectively. After giving prayerful consideration, you may share your experience directly to the Metropolis through email, or by speaking to your parish priest or regional Vicar.

### **Things for Clergy to Keep in Mind**

While the early Church once practiced the physical departure of catechumens immediately after these petitions and prayers, our current pastoral context calls for a different approach. Today, catechumens are not to be asked to leave or depart at this point in the service.