



The HOLY SYNOD
of the
ORTHODOX CHURCH in AMERICA

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE CLERGY AND FAITHFUL
OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

October 9, 2008

St. Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow

Dearly Beloved in the Lord:

In all things, it is good to begin with God in whose grace we live and move and have our being. We, the members of the Holy Synod, pray that this same grace will inspire us in our words to you, and will guide each of us in a life of repentance in the communion of the Holy Church.

The past three years have been a time of great temptation and difficulty for our Church, and the weight of the cross has been heavy for all of us. The Lord of Glory Himself was nailed to the Cross and we should not imagine that it is possible for us to attain His Glory without bearing our own crosses. This was the message of the feast of the Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross, which we recently celebrated. In this time of turmoil, it is fitting to reflect upon the great mystery of our Faith, the mystery of the Cross, through which "joy has come into all the world," "corruption has been destroyed, and incorruption has flowered forth" and through which "every gift of grace has shone upon us."

Mankind has been wounded by sin, broken by passions and subject to corruption and death. Yet, through Christ we are able to find healing for our souls, purification for our hearts and eternal life in His Heavenly Kingdom. We offer this pastoral letter as an expression of our desire to share with you the burden of bearing the cross and of our prayer that we might all be guided by God's mercy to the joy, the incorruption and the grace which the Cross offers.

Past and Present Storms

On April 10, 1970, The Orthodox Church in America received her autocephaly from the Russian Orthodox Church. This historic event ushered in a period of great promise and hope for Orthodoxy on this continent and, over the past thirty-eight years, much good has been accomplished by God's grace. At the same time the granting of autocephaly caused quite a stir throughout world Orthodoxy, something which Father Alexander Schmemmann referred to as "a meaningful storm" in an article with that title, in which he offered some reflections on the nature and the causes of the controversy.

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Today, we find ourselves passing through another storm which has overshadowed the life of our Church for some time and appears to offer less promise of blessing than the one that we faced at the dawn of our autocephaly. Nonetheless, it is often in the midst of temptations and struggles that we best respond to God's grace and make spiritual progress. The Lord Himself passed through a cataclysm to which no earthly storm can compare in His Passion in the flesh, Death on the Cross and Descent into Hell. In voluntarily undergoing this unjust suffering and death, Christ paradoxically shattered the gates of death, brought light to those in darkness and rose on the third day, granting all of us who are justly condemned to death entrance into the eternal life of Paradise.

As we face the challenge of emerging from the turmoil we have experienced in our Church these past years, it is our conviction that we too can participate in the resurrection of Christ through our imitation of His voluntary bearing of His sufferings. Though our sufferings cannot compare to His, still, all that we have endured can become a source of growth, repentance and renewal if we voluntarily take them upon ourselves, beseeching God's help in moving forward. As the particular problems and failings of the past are addressed and resolved, it is our conviction that meaning can be found in the present storm and that, by the grace of Almighty God, we can attain to a calm harbor.

A Great Temptation

The Church has undergone a great temptation, beginning with the revelation of financial misconduct and negligence and resulting in a loss of trust, feelings of betrayal, division among brethren and an increase of passions in the hearts of many. We have endured the shame of being humbled in the eyes of the world and seeing the life and the mission of our Church become entangled in earthly cares.

We, as members of the Holy Synod, accept our own responsibility for what has taken place. We acknowledge that we have been both inattentive and negligent. We recognize that we have failed on many levels and we are determined that we will learn from our mistakes. We also acknowledge the reality and the depth of the pain, hurt and confusion that have been endured by many of the clergy and the faithful of our Church.

Though the resolution to our current crisis has been proceeding at too slow a pace, still, we are grateful that the life of the Church has not become paralyzed, and that the work of the Gospel has continued in parishes, deaneries and dioceses. We are also grateful for the patience, advice and support that we have received from our clergy and faithful in all of this.

We feel strongly that now is the time to work to recover the zeal and the courage that once inspired us. The Holy Fathers of the Church remind us that temptation and humiliation can lead either to despair and death, on the one hand, or to humility and life on the other hand. The way of the world leads to despair, the way of Christ leads to humility. We must follow the way of Christ if we desire to be healed and reconciled.

The Path Forward

At the most recent joint meeting of the Holy Synod and Metropolitan Council, the Report of the Special Investigative Committee (SIC) was received, approved and distributed to the Church. All of the recommendations were either acted upon at that meeting, or procedures were set in place to follow through on those recommendations in the immediate future. The Holy Synod of Bishops urged Metropolitan HERMAN to retire, which he did. Archbishop DMITRI was elected *Locum Tenens*, and Archbishop SERAPHIM was appointed Administrator to assist him. The Holy Synod and Metropolitan Council also issued a joint statement of apology to the Church in general and to Mr. John Kozey (former chief auditor) in particular.

The release of the findings of the SIC and the subsequent actions taken were a positive pivotal point in the turmoil of the past three years, but were by no means the conclusion to that turmoil. In the same way, the upcoming All-American Council in Pittsburgh will be a pivotal event on the path to healing and reconciliation, but this single event will not automatically provide that healing and reconciliation. We must all begin today to prepare ourselves, not only for the All-American Council, but for the betterment of the life of our Orthodox Church in America.

We stand at a crucial time in the life of our Church, but it is a time at which we continually stand as Christians: one of repentance. St. Gregory Palamas reminds us that “repentance is the beginning, middle and end of the Christian way of life, so it is sought and required before Holy Baptism, in Holy Baptism, and after Holy Baptism.” As we seek repentance and reconciliation, we must recognize that these are not to be sought only once, but should be the continual focus of our earthly life, and the process of our Christian spiritual growth. It will be important for us to remind ourselves of this and to help each other as we move forward.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The upcoming All-American Council will neither be the continuation of the *status quo* nor the finalization of our mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. The paths of mutual forgiveness and reconciliation are the ones that we all must follow and we must walk upon them beginning this day. Shortly, the Holy Synod will meet for its Fall Session. It is our intention, on one particular day, to celebrate Vespers followed by a ceremony of mutual forgiveness and, on the following day, to concelebrate the Divine Liturgy.

In addition, each local Bishop will recommend that a similar service be held either in all parishes or in deaneries, depending on the local circumstances, sometime before the All-American Council. Although each parish will be represented at the All-American Council, the service of mutual forgiveness is one that is most effective and meaningful in the local community. There is need, of course, for some expression of this at the All-American Council as well, which has been considered by the Preconciliar Commission and is reflected in the proposed agenda for the Council.

Fighting the Passions

Our task now is to work towards the healing of the wounds inflicted upon our ecclesial family through the overcoming of the passions in our heart. In a family, conflict can either bring about the destruction of unity and love, or it can conversely bring about healing and reconciliation. The most direct path to the latter is the nurturing of the virtues within our hearts and in our actions.

The experience of the saints is that all the passions have their root in the heart, no matter what their external cause. The following words of Saint John Cassian concerning anger could be applied to all the passions: “No matter what provokes it, anger blinds the soul’s eyes, preventing it from seeing the Sun of righteousness. Leaves, whether of gold or lead, placed over the eyes, obstruct our sight equally, for the value of the gold does not affect the blindness it produces. Similarly, anger, whether reasonable or unreasonable, obstructs our spiritual vision.”

Let us strive for love so that we might truly fulfill the law of Christ by bearing one another’s burdens. The justice of the world can never comprehend the depths of Christian love, which assumes responsibility even for the sins and mistakes of others.

Prayer and Reflection

St Theophan the Recluse reminds us that “when prayer is right, everything is right”, and therefore we encourage all to devote our energies to this indispensable spiritual work. Let us reflect upon the events of the past three years in the context of prayer, as a spiritual effort, rather than an intellectual one.

Special petitions in preparation for the All-American Council have already been distributed to the parishes. In addition to these prayers at the Divine Liturgy, let us all to offer fervent prayers in our homes, beseeching the Lord on bended knees for the good estate of the Church and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Godly Communication

Much has been spoken and written about the crisis of the past three years. Many have spoken publicly, in newsletters, in blogs, on websites and on lists. Many have shared comments and concerns in smaller and more private venues. Still others have said nothing but have had their hearts darkened and confused by thoughts. There is no medium of communication that can be declared inherently good or evil. It is only the use that we make of these means of communication that renders them so.

Let us all, clergy and faithful, be mindful of the commandments of Christ in our communications with one another. Whether we are speaking face to face, on the telephone or through a multitude of other electronic devices, we must always remember to see the other as a person, as one bearing the image of Christ, as an icon of Christ.

The Immediate Future

The upcoming All-American Council will provide us with an opportunity to reflect more fully on the causes which led to our present crisis and on the means by which we might continue to correct that which needs correcting. In this process, it is important that we be mindful of the proper ecclesiology which should always guide us. The Holy Scriptures used for the theme of this year's Council remind us that we are "members of one another in Christ" (Eph 4:25). There can be no clergy and faithful without the bishop, and there can be no bishop without the clergy and faithful.

At the same time, the storm through which we are passing makes it clear that much thought, prayer and discernment will be needed to clarify the relationship among the various members of the Church. This work will require a serious evaluation and clarification of the Statute of The Orthodox Church in America, which in turn will require both a faithful adherence to the patristic and canonical Tradition of the Church and an honest appraisal of the conditions and needs of modern life on this continent.

In conclusion

As we move forward in this difficult time, let us continue to do the work of the Lord. Let us recall the rich history and tradition of The Autocephalous Orthodox Church in America and continue to offer of our time and our talents for the spiritual growth of our families, our parishes, and our dioceses. The spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the responsibility of all and this work must be continued with repentance in our own hearts and with love for God, which will bear fruit in our love for the neighbor. We exhort you to preach Christ, to support your parish priest and his family, to bring back the lost sheep, to offer hospitality to those seeking the True Faith, to increase inter-parish cooperation and to come together as often as possible within your local communities, and to support local, diocesan and OCA programs and departments as well as the seminaries as they work towards furthering missionary and educational growth.

Finally, we ask for your prayers for the members of the Holy Synod so that all things may be done in good order and for the glory of God and His Holy Church.

With love in Christ,



+DMITRI
Archbishop of Dallas and the South
***Locum Tenens* of the Metropolitan See**

+ Nathaniel

+NATHANIEL
Archbishop of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate

+ Job

+JOB
Archbishop of Chicago and the Midwest

+ Seraphim

+SERAPHIM
Archbishop of Ottawa and Canada
Administrator of the Metropolitan See

+ Nikon

+NIKON
Bishop of Boston, New England and the Albanian Archdiocese

+ Tikhon

+TIKHON
Bishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania

+ Benjamin

+BENJAMIN
Bishop of San Francisco and the West