

# ARCHPASTORAL MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE, METROPOLITAN JONAH FOR SANCTITY OF LIFE SUNDAY 2010

January 24, 2010  
Sanctity of Life Sunday



To the Venerable Hierarchs, Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America:

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

As Orthodox Christians, we strongly affirm the value and sanctity of all human life, from the moment of conception to the final breath one takes. This affirmation is theologically based, in that each person bears within him or her self the image of God, and has the potential to fulfill that image by likening him/herself to God. To artificially terminate life is to transgress on that which is holy; it is unthinkable, a grave sin.

Every one of our churches and our homes bear the image of the infant Christ cradled in the arms of His Mother, an image that is supremely human, and supremely divine. It is the image of divine Motherhood, that the Son of God was conceived, borne and nurtured by His Most Pure Mother. God is thus revealed in the Motherhood of the Virgin; bearing us in Her holy embrace of love. This image also reveals God's love for us, that he became like us in every way—a fetus in His Mother's womb, an infant in Her arms, a little child. God has sanctified every aspect of human life, becoming what we are that He might make us like Himself.

As Orthodox, every aspect of our lives is iconic. Every child is an image of the Christ Child, every person an image of God. Each bears infinite potential to attain to the Likeness, to sainthood, to holiness. Marriage also is an icon, as the union of man and woman in the flesh blessed by God, and bringing forth the fruit of children, is an image of our union with one another in Christ in the Kingdom.

Christian marriage and family are the sacred context not only for the rearing of children, but as the basic core of our identity and reference point of stability. The family is the place where we are nurtured and accepted, find solace and consolation, and thus the faithful family becomes the place where these very human emotions and feelings are filled with grace and sanctified. Whether we are very young or very old, the family is the context of our life, in which we work out our salvation. We experience God's Fatherhood, and divine Motherhood; we experience the nurturing love which becomes a participation in divine communion. And as we breathe our last, should we not remember the image of the crucified Christ, carried in the arms of his mother, in her grief, the grief of every mother for her child?

We affirm the sanctity of life, made holy by the incarnation of the Christ. We affirm that every stage of our life has been sanctified. We affirm marriage of one man and one woman as the foundation of the family, the image of our union with God, and the means of sanctifying the lives of all members of that family by the grace of love and divine communion.

These are desperate times. Our society is in despair. It is a despair that manifests itself in the breakdown of essential relationships, of marriage and family. Continued unemployment leads to hopelessness, and the breakdown of trust that one is able to provide; this leads to the breakdown of marriages, and the bitterness that goes with it. Returning soldiers, with posttraumatic stress just below the surface, enter into relationships that often turn brutal and abusive. Marriage, and the very family itself are in question, with the issue of homosexual unions. The majority of marriages end in divorce, and the majority of children grow up without fathers or mothers; and how many pregnancies end in abortion? Despair is the primary context which could make it even possible for a mother to destroy her unborn child.

We offer, always, the way to healing and reconciliation for those who have fallen short and fallen into sin, in an embrace of love. We offer hope to those who have lost hope through the guilt of sin. We offer consolation to those in sorrow. We offer support and guidance to build families that work out their salvation together, and become the rock and foundation of our culture. Through these things, reincarnating Christ's love and redemption in hearts, in real faces, in institutions of concrete service and healing, we offer hope to our people, our culture, our society, and through that hope, joy as we see God reborn in our lives and in those of all around us.

Yours in Christ,

**JONAH**

Archbishop of Washington

Metropolitan of All America and Canada