

Archpastoral Message of His Beatitude, Metropolitan HERMAN  
at the Beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year  
September 1, 2007

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

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

In the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of the St. Matthew, our Lord Jesus Christ confronts His apostles with a question: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter speaks for the twelve, uttering words which we repeat at every Divine Liturgy: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Mt. 16:15, 16). In spite of this definitive confession of faith, the question of who Jesus of Nazareth was continued to be addressed, often attacked, throughout the ages. In the face of a variety of erroneous teachings about our Lord, the Orthodox Church has echoed the proclamation of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, declaring Jesus Christ to be "...Light of Light, True God of True God, Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man...."



Just as the true Orthodox teaching about Christ has been contested over the centuries, a proper understanding of the Church has also come under the attack of false teachers. This is to be expected. The Church is the Bride and Body of Christ; the life of Christ is essentially linked to the life of the Church. If Christ is to come under attack, so too is His Church. Some would say that the Church is simply one of the various social institutions that make up a society or an ethnic group. The presence of the Church and Her voice are but one of many influences upon a people. This view robs the Church of Her divine origin, and Her singular place in the world. It makes Her precepts negotiable in all aspects, and thus robs Her of Her authority and voice.

Orthodox Christians know the Church to be the living presence of Christ in the world. In the Church, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, our Lord Jesus Christ continues to accomplish that which He declared through the words of the Holy Prophet Isaiah when He began His ministry of salvation: "To preach the gospel to the poor; to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19). How apt that these words are part of the Gospel reading on the Ecclesiastical New Year.

Orthodox Christians also know the Church in another intimate and personal way. The Church is a sacred Family, rooted in the Fatherhood of God. It is not without significance that we call upon God in the Lord's Prayer as "Father" – and not only as "Father" but as "Our Father" and not "my Father." Both Church and family are sacred rather than social institutions, and there is much in both that is similar.

Families must take the time to get together regularly to enjoy interaction and fellowship, to share experiences and concerns, to be lifted up by the company of one another. Without such times of close communication, a family will disintegrate. The Church Family must also gather together for a similar purpose. It is for this cause that we now begin preparations for our Church Family to gather together in 2008 for an All-American Council. At this sacred gathering, under the guidance of the Holy

Spirit, we will look at our Church's current strengths and areas of need. We will share our concerns and hopes. We will plot our future, lifted up in the company of one another, of the Saints, and of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity one-in-essence and undivided.

Families share moments of joy and strength, and also those of sorrow and struggle. Family members are there with each other and for each other in all things. A Church Family is no different. We find ourselves in what some have called the most difficult of times for the Orthodox Church in America. There are even those who have gone so far as to suggest that our present struggles herald the end of our Church. Many others, however, me included, see it differently. The demise of our Church would only come if we were to allow cynicism and self-interest to rule the day. On the other hand, through faith in our heavenly Father and with good will towards our brothers and sisters in the Faith, emerging out of our current unrest will be stronger ties that hold us together, along with the possibility for a brighter future. Let us entreat God to grant us strength to flee division and dissension and to embrace unity and harmony.

With heartfelt love I greet you all at the beginning of this New Ecclesiastical Year. May this be a time for renewed dedication to our Lord Jesus Christ and to seeking out the good estate of all of members of our own Church Family – the Orthodox Church in America. May all of our prayerful encounters, our deliberations, our moments of shared joy and struggle, be sources of sanctification, drawing us ever closer to the blessed Kingdom of our Heavenly Father. Let us pray and work together in a spirit of selfless love, that this indeed may be “the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Invoking God's blessings and assuring you of my prayers, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Herman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

+HERMAN

Archbishop of Washington and New York  
Metropolitan of All America and Canada