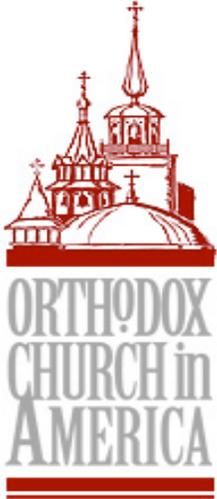


**Archpastoral Letter of His Beatitude
Metropolitan Jonah
Upon the Occasion of the Preparation and Consecration of Holy Chrism
for the Holy Autocephalous Orthodox Church in America
Great and Holy Monday 2012**



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**To the Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the
Orthodox Church in America:**

Dearly beloved in the Lord:

Beloved in Christ:

The mystery of Creation began, so we read in Genesis, when the Holy Spirit moved over the face of the waters, with love and care bringing order where there had been void, and light where there had been darkness (1:1). But when the original goodness of creation was distorted and twisted by the sick will of man, God was moved to destroy what He had created and begin over again, saving only Noah and his family from the flood. When the windows of the heavens were closed and the rain restrained, this righteous man let go a dove out of the Ark, who flew to and fro over the receding waters and returned with a fresh olive twig in its beak as testimony that dry land had again appeared upon earth (8:11). With the holy Apostle Peter, we see in these things a prefiguring of Baptism, wherein we find salvation in the one Ark of the Church (1 Peter. 3:20–21), and we behold the heavens opened and the Spirit in the form of a dove hovering over the waters of Jordan, coming down and resting upon Him whom we call the Anointed – the *Christ*.

We who are *Christians* have been anointed with the same *Chrism* – the Holy Spirit Himself, not in the form of a dove, but in the form of oil made from the plant whose twig the dove bore. From all eternity the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and rests upon Him who alone is Son of God by nature, the Only-begotten of the Father. Yet we too, through anointing with the all-holy Chrism, are given the spirit of sonship, crying out ‘Abba! Father!’ (Romans 8:15). Adopted as sons of God by grace, we become members of the one Body of which Christ is the one Head.

Through the holy Chrism each Orthodox Christian receives grace and strength for his own life and his own salvation. This grace, however, is received in the Church, and this salvation is worked out in the Church. It is the Holy Spirit who ‘holds together the whole institution of the Church,’ as we sing during the Great Vespers of Holy Pentecost, giving her members the grace to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. For, as the Apostle says (Ephesians. 4:3–6), ‘there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all,’ – and, therefore, *one Church*.

The rite of Consecration of Chrism reveals in a unique and beautiful way the deep unity of the Church. Unlike holy Unction, Chrism cannot be consecrated by a priest. Only a bishop can celebrate this rite, and by long-standing tradition the only bishops who may do so are primates of autocephalous Churches. When a local autocephalous Orthodox

Church consecrates its own Chrism by the hand of its primate, this sacred oil is then distributed to all the diocesan bishops who, in turn, distribute it to their priests for use in their parishes. Anyone anointed with Chrism in any of the fifteen autocephalous Churches is recognized as an Orthodox Christian by all the other Churches. This mutual recognition is an essential bond of unity by which the Holy Spirit knits together the whole institution of the Church, through the hands of the primates who consecrate the Chrism, of the bishops who distribute it, and of the presbyters who anoint with it.

The Orthodox Church in America is the youngest of the autocephalous Churches, and we must give thanks to God that all our sister Churches recognize the grace-filled efficacy of the holy Chrism consecrated for use in our own Church.

By God's all-accomplishing grace and strength, and with the consensus of my brother Hierarchs, I intend to consecrate Holy Chrism at the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great on Great and Holy Thursday at the Holy Monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk. This will be the first occasion that I have celebrated this fearful Mystery since I was installed as Primate of the Orthodox Church in America. Yet the office of Primate, and the Episcopate as a whole, exist not for their own sake, but as the visible revelation and instrument of the unity of the entire People of God. The honor of consecrating this Chrism, through which in coming years multitudes of people will be marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit and united to the Body of Christ, is one of which I know myself to be profoundly unworthy.

I therefore beg all of you for the support of your prayers for me, your Primate, and for all the present and future members of the Orthodox Church in America. I ask your prayers also for the many priests and deacons who will be assisting with vigilance and prayer in the careful preparation of the Chrism beginning today, Great and Holy Monday, and continuing around the clock through Great and Holy Wednesday, when the Church commemorates the woman who anointed our Savior's beautiful feet with costly and fragrant oil.

It is no coincidence that holy Chrism is consecrated on the Thursday of the Mystical Supper. In that night, after the holy Supper in which He handed to His disciples the mysteries of His Body and Blood, our Savior gave His disciples His most intimate teaching on the Holy Spirit. He also prayed for them to be strengthened, and not for them only, but for us as well:

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me.
(John 17:20–21)

It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the spirit of prophecy and so opens our ears and hearts to receive the Gospel of truth taught by the Apostles and their successors. It is the Holy Spirit who opens our minds to the correct understanding of this message, and gives us the grace faithfully to preserve what we have heard and to hand it on to future generations in the unity of the Church. And He teaches us how to do this by His own example:

When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16:13)

It is the Holy Spirit who gives us strength to hold steadfastly to the Orthodox Christian faith and way of life, preserving the anointed and consecrated temples of our bodies in holiness and purity, and keeping our minds and hearts free from thoughts that draw us away from the love of God and ensnare us in the love of the world.

It is the Holy Spirit who grants us courage to endure with humility the hatred and mockery of the world, whose ways we reject, and to whose lies we give no heed. It is the Holy Spirit who fills us with the genuine spirit of martyrdom, bearing witness to the Son of God before men who reject and blaspheme Him:

When the Comforter comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning. I have said all this to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor me. (John 15:26–16:3)

But as for us, we know the Father and His Son – not by our own strength, but by the Gift of the Holy Spirit through anointing with the all-holy Chrism. Inasmuch as He gives us the spirit of sonship, He also endues us with the spirit of martyrdom. Inasmuch as He cries in our hearts, ‘Abba! Father,’ He also unites our prayers to that perfect prayer of Christ in Gethsemane: ‘Not my will, but thine be done’ (Luke 22:42). For if we are anointed with the same Spirit who rests upon Christ, we must also be baptized with the baptism with which He was baptized and drink the same cup that He drank (Mark 10:38–39).

These sober words must sink deeply into our ears during this hallowed week of Christ’s suffering. Yet let us never lose hope. ‘Through the Cross, joy has come into all the world!’ If we are united to Christ in a death like His, we know that we shall be united with Him in a resurrection like His (*cf.* Romans 6:5). Through the Holy Spirit we are given confidence and boldness in Christ, who assures us: ‘In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!’ (John 16:33).

Holy Week this year, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, will be the occasion for an extraordinary and abundant outpouring of divine Grace upon the Orthodox Church in America. Let all of us therefore be especially attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, hovering over the often chaotic sea of our life. Hearing His voice, let us answer His call, so that, completing the course of the Fast, we may enter with joy and gladness into Christ’s radiant, holy, and eternal Pascha!

With Love in Christ,



†JONAH
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada