



**Archpastoral Message of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon
Sanctity of Life Sunday
January 21, 2018**

To the honorable Clergy, venerable Monastics, and pious Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ:

From the moment they were born, both Moses and our Lord Jesus Christ faced great danger: as infants someone wanted each of them dead. Moses's life was saved because the Hebrew midwives feared God more than Pharaoh, so they refused to follow the order to kill the newborn males (Ex. 1:17). And our Savior's life was spared because of angelic intervention (Mt. 2:13).

But the Holy Innocents were not spared. Herod's lust for power, or rather his deep-seated insecurity, led to the massacre of a multitude of small children, and the bitter weeping of their inconsolable mothers. We sing of this at the Ninth Royal Hour on Christmas Eve: "Mothers were bereft of their infants, and by an untimely death their babes were bitterly harvested. Breasts grew dry and sources of milk were stopped. Great was this calamity!"

The root of sin and specifically of violence toward our fellow human being has not changed since those times. It has always been our passions: anger, fear, judgment, despair, jealousy, pride, vanity, to name only a few. Moreover, the Fathers of our Church have always taught that the nature of all passions is one and the same: love of the self. This is, in the words of our Lord, "not to think the things of God, but those of man" (Mt. 16:23), or in other words not to think as God does, but as people do. We learn from the Apostle Paul how God thinks. He does not think of His divinity as a thing to hold onto, but empties Himself taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2:6-7). The mind of God is not only *not* to kill, but to give life to the world through His death (John 6:33, 51).

Locking ourselves within our own minds and setting ourselves as the standard of life, not only do we not see God for what He is, but we don't see our fellow human beings for what they are. They become objects of our ideas and plans, props in our own life narratives, subjects of our own desires. We hurt others in so many ways just to make them fit us better. The calamities we inflict on each other are not different in nature since the beginning of time, they are only greater. Today we have means to injure others on extraordinarily larger scales. We have the means to hurt others all the way on the other side of the planet with the typing of 280 characters. We have means to execute the condemned by the thousands. We have means to destroy the enemy by the hundreds of thousands. Finally, we have means to kill the unborn by the millions and billions. The only difference between us and the sinners of ancient times is that we have greater means for putting ourselves first and imposing ourselves on others.

Yet, the scariest of all things is not even the scale of our means of violence. Rather it is the fact that our human mind has devolved in its own universe to the point of finding justification for all these terrible violences. At times it even seems that we are drawing near to justifying anything. Human law, established firmly in "the things of men" and not in those of God, follows suit. So many wars have been legal. So many executions have been legal.

Metropolitan Tikhon, Primate

So many genocides—legal. Christ’s own crucifixion—legal. So much violence has been done in the name of the law and of the good of the human being.

In front of this terrible reality some of us will be drawn to prayer. Others will be drawn to helping all the victims of this terrible violence. Others will be drawn to changing the law. But in front of all of us, regardless of our inclinations, is put forth the only Way and the only conquering of death and victory of life—Christ, the one who “died for the life of the world” (John 6:51). There is a great mystery hidden in this truth, because Christ died for the life of the world at the hands of the world. This is how St. John Chrysostom puts it:

Tell me, what is the goal of the Gospel of grace? Why the revelation of the Son of God in the flesh? So that we bite and devour each other?

...Christ didn’t die only for friends or for His own, but also for His enemies, for tyrants, for impostors, for those who hated and crucified Him...

Throw the net of love, not so that the lame will fall, but rather that he be healed... and thus having searched the hidden depths, pull out from the chasm of perdition the one drowned by his thoughts...

Do not hate! Do not turn away! Do not persecute! Rather, show him pure and true love.

And how Christ died “for the life of the world” at the hands of the world clarifies for us the most crucial thing, namely that life has only one source and only one victory: selfless or self-sacrificial love. Let us be selfless love for all and we—in the one who is Love and Life itself—will conquer death:

Be persecuted, but persecute not.

Be crucified, but crucify not.

Be wronged, but wrong not.

Be slandered, but slander not.

Have clemency, not zeal, with respect to evil.

Lay hold of goodness, not justice.

Justice does not belong to the Christian way of life, and there is no mention of it in Christ’s teaching. Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep: for this is the sign of limpid purity. Suffer with the sick, and mourn with sinners; with those who repent, rejoice...

Be a partaker in the sufferings of all men, but keep your body distant from all. Rebuke no man, revile no man, not even those who live very wickedly.

Spread your cloak over the man who is falling and cover him. (St. Isaac of Syria)

May the world see our love, receive it from our own cross, and fill itself with life in it!

With love in Christ,



+ Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada

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