

"Lord, Thou Hast Been Our Refuge From Generation to Generation" [1]

**Address of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon to the Orthodox Church in America
Nineteenth All-American Council
Saint Louis, Missouri
July 23, 2018**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Your Eminence, Archbishop Leo,
Your Eminences, Your Graces,
My beloved Brother Bishops of the Holy Synod,
And Venerable Guest Hierarchs,
Honored Abbots, Abbesses, and Monastics,
Very Reverend Fathers and Clergy Wives,
Distinguished Delegates, Retired Clergy, and Observers,
Beloved Youth, Young Adults, and Guests,

Christ is in our midst!

We gather in the Name of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, here in the Gateway City within the "Show Me State." This motto is commonly attributed to Congressman Willard Vandiver who, in 1899, is alleged to have said: "I come from a state that raises corn and cotton, cockleburs and Democrats, and frothy eloquence neither convinces nor satisfies me. I'm from Missouri, and you have got to show me." And so, although we Orthodox often pride ourselves on our eloquence, we hope that our converse this week will be neither frothy nor unsatisfying, but rather will show the city of Saint Louis our Christian love through edifying discourse and

through the inspiring words of the ancient liturgical prayers and hymns that will arise from our gathering.

In the Acts of the Holy Apostles, Saint Paul, speaking about the care we should have for the less fortunate, refers to the words of the Lord, Who said that it is more blessed to give than to receive. ^[2] One of the desert fathers provides a variation on this theme when he suggests that “it is better to receive hospitality than to offer it.” ^[3] With these paradoxical words, he reminds us of the effort that is often required of us to accept the invitations of our neighbors. It has taken an effort and some expense for all of us to gather from throughout North America and today, we are grateful to the Honorable Mayor, Lyda Krewson, and the people of Saint Louis for providing the Orthodox Church in America an opportunity to receive the warm hospitality offered by this wonderful city, through the kind words of Mr. Tom Chulik of the Saint Louis Regional Chamber. We pray that, in turn, our brief presence here will provide a lasting blessing to the citizens of this good city and that as we receive the gift of your welcome, we may also leave with you with a Church full of grateful hearts.

We are also honored by the humility offered to us by our visiting dignitaries this week, representing several of the Orthodox Churches throughout the world. His Eminence, Archbishop Leo of the Church of Finland is a good friend of the Orthodox Church in America and the connection of the New Valaam Monastery and the missionary monastics to Alaska has provided a strong bond between our Churches. Representing His All-Holiness, Patriarch Bartholomew and the Holy and Ecumenical Throne, is another friend of ours, His Eminence, Metropolitan Nathaniel, newly ordained as the Metropolitan of Chicago for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese and familiar to many of us through his faithful service on the Assembly of Bishops. The missionary focus of the ancient see of Alexandria is known throughout the world, as are the apostolic labors His Beatitude, Theodoros, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria, represented this week by His Eminence,

Metropolitan Seraphim, a zealous missionary and excellent pastor in his own right. From the Church of Russia, representing His Holiness, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, is His Grace, Bishop Flavian. We are, of course, grateful to the Church of Russia for the gift of autocephaly and for our continuing good relations. Representing His Beatitude, Metropolitan Rastislav of the Czech Lands and Slovakia is His Eminence, Archbishop Michael of Prague. And finally, Archpriest Serge Sollogub, representing the Exarchate of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Parishes of the Russian Tradition in Western Europe. We welcome all of you and are grateful for the gift that you offer us by your presence with us.

I can speak about the city of Saint Louis from experience because I called it home for three years of my childhood, beginning in 1977, which incidentally was the year of the founding of Holy Cross Orthodox Church in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. My family lived in a subdivision a bit West of here, in Chesterfield, and I attended River Bend Elementary School and Parkway Central Junior High. It was here that I met some of my earliest childhood friends -- Steve, Jeff, Tom, John, and Ted. Like the youth who are with us this week, I too attended camps and other such events in my childhood.

These early childhood friends, after a few valiant efforts to stay in touch by letter and postcard, were relegated to memory and to school yearbooks. Until the advent of Facebook, that is. Through the magic of the digital technology that is now available to us, I have been able to reconnect with some of them and, upon my arrival here in Saint Louis, I had the pleasure of having dinner with one of these colorfully clad fellows – specifically the one with the plaid pants on the far left – meeting his family and catching up on our lost years.

Several decades earlier, W.C. Handy composed the “Saint Louis Blues” in 1914, which was the year of the outbreak of the First World War and also

the year of the founding of Saint Nicholas Church in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, as well as Holy Assumption Church in Stamford, Connecticut. One particular version of the song was recorded in 1925 by Bessie Smith, accompanied by Louis Armstrong, in the year of the falling asleep of Saint Tikhon, the Confessor and Patriarch of Moscow and the enlightener of North America.

During his time here, Saint Tikhon held and promulgated a vision for Orthodoxy in North America, which would reflect a multi-national character with the particularities in canonical structure, liturgical rules, and parish life preserved in the unity of faith. In addition, he recommended the active involvement of the laity, as he did when in 1905, the year of the founding of the Monastery of Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk, he wrote: “We must share our spiritual richness, truth, light, and joy with others who do not have these blessings. And this duty does not only lay upon the pastors and missionaries, but on the lay persons as well, since the Church of Christ, according to the wise comparison of the Holy Apostle Paul, is the body, and every member takes part in the life of the body.” [4]

We are here, of course, to fulfill this duty in community, as the Church, through our participations in this All-American Council of the Orthodox Church in America. This is the 19th time that we have gathered in Council since the time of the granting of autocephaly, but the 32nd time that we have gathered since 1907. The purpose of these Councils is to bear witness to the identity, unity, and mission of our Church. This very room is an expression of those values and our task, this week, and in the years to come, is to carry forth the identity, unity, and mission of our Church into the world, for the life of the world. This is not only our theme this week, but the very purpose of our existence as a Church and as Christians.

So, what could we hope to accomplish towards such a lofty goal in a single week of meetings? Do we not have enough meetings in our lives? We

often dismiss meetings and anything that hints of corporate and business life as foreign to the true work of the Church. But even in monasteries, the brotherhood or sisterhood come together, not only in Church for the Divine services or in the trapeza for common meals, but also in regular meetings or synaxes (ἱερά σύναξη), sacredly being brought together to talk about the life, challenges, and aims of the monastic brotherhood. And so, even our meetings this week have a sacred and liturgical character to them, as we meet in the name of Christ to accomplish the practical tasks that are before us.

I therefore have great respect for those who plan for meetings – particularly such large meetings as the All-American Council – because they provide for all of us an opportunity to engage in this sacred activity, together. And so, on behalf of all of us gathered here this evening, I express my sincere thanks to His Grace, Bishop Paul of Chicago, who is not only our host this week, but has also faithfully served as chair of the Preconciliar Commission, overseeing this important group, by his calm and steady manner, in all the many and complex preparations that were necessary to bring us here today. It is no small task, and we offer our sincere appreciation to you, Your Grace, and to the many in the Diocese of the Midwest who helped you, especially Father Timothy Sawchak and Mr. Robert Butchko, the Clergy and Lay Chairs of the Preconciliar Commission, who very excellently engaged the local deanery and parishes and tirelessly coordinated the local planning.

Above all, we must give due recognition to Deacon Peter Ilchuk, our Council Manager, who has shouldered, and continues to shoulder, the monumental task of managing all of this – and if any of you have tried to manage something, you know how difficult a task that can be. Deacon Peter, you have served us most admirably, and we thank you for your sacrificial ministry.

This is my second All-American Council since my election. During the past

six years, I have sought, with God's help and your prayers, to both fulfill the responsibilities of this office and reflect upon the ways that this Church, the autocephalous Orthodox Church in America, ought to continue to forge her identity in this world.

I am, of course, not the first Metropolitan and Primate of our Church. I was preceded by Metropolitan Jonah, who took the helm of the ship as a mighty storm was subsiding. I was preceded by Metropolitan Herman, who was my spiritual father and confessor, who in the midst of that mighty storm, nevertheless brought the ship through the waves and the winds. I was preceded by Metropolitan Theodosius, who served as the Abbot of my monastery and has held the longest tenure as the Primate of our Church. All my predecessors, and the Church that they guided, have faced challenges.

In his address to the First All-American Council, held on October 20-22, 1970, Metropolitan Iriney noted that there was (in his words) "one massive and contaminating obstruction" in the way of arriving at a canonical form for a local and permanent Church in North America, which was the break with "our Mother Russian Church." This break, he added, "for years poisoned our Church life with animosity, court cases, mutual accusations," all of which "served only to hinder Orthodoxy's primary calling – spiritual and missionary – in America."

He adds: "Along with the unfathomable ways of God, where 'the power of Christ is made perfect in weakness,' this break – despite its tragic character – was possibly beneficial, for it taught us, almost against our will, the hard gift of freedom, of common responsibility for the Church. It taught us 'to bear each other's burdens,' and having deprived us of material help from the Mother Church, it taught sacrificial and active participation of all in the life of the Church."

This sacrificial and active participation of all in the life of the Church was

therefore present in the previous decades of our existence as a missionary Church, and it continued through our journey over the past 50 years. Our young Orthodox Church in America would begin immediately to apply itself to making itself worthy of this gift and exercising its responsibility as a Church, for example in the development of a revised Statute that would more precisely reflect our new canonical status. That process has been ongoing even to the present since, although at our last All-American Council this body passed – almost unanimously – a major Statute Revision, we are continuing, as we should, to make necessary adjustments to reflect the genuine life and functioning of the Church.

In a parallel way, since my election, I have been taking a more focused look at one particular aspect of our Church governance -- the operation and functioning of the Chancery. I was keenly aware of having inherited several successive permutations of administrative structures which, while responsive to the needs and challenges of the time, nevertheless could benefit from a full assessment and evaluation within our present context, in which we have the opportunity to breathe. The six years of my primacy provided this opportunity, not only to intellectually consider these questions, but to benefit from their lived experience in practice so that the most effective adjustments might be made.

After an appropriate period of such reflection, I took the step last Fall, with the full support of the Holy Synod, of asking the assistance of His Grace, Bishop Daniel, of Santa Rosa, whom I appointed as my consultant to help me process and evaluate the administrative needs of the Office of the Metropolitan. In May of this year, I further asked His Grace to serve as Chancery Administrator and appointed a committee composed of members of the Metropolitan Council who could assist with the task of fine-tuning a structure for the Chancery that might most effectively assist me in fulfilling my responsibilities as Primate and be of most benefit to the Orthodox Church in America.

My goal is to complete the current specific process – which is a “reset” more than a “restructuring” – by January 1, 2019. As part of this process, and as a matter of course, I have asked for resignation letters from the Officers and Staff of the Chancery effective at the conclusion of this All-American Council. Although I have indicated my intention to accept some, I will not automatically accept all of these letters but will, with personal discussion with everyone involved, be responding to them within the month following our All-American Council. The current staff has been assured that, whether or not any change are made, they may remain in their present positions until December 31 of this year.

In his address to the First All-American Council, Metropolitan Ireney added the following with reference to the sacrificial experiences of those who went before him: “When we see to what a degree the other ecclesiastical persuasions in America are bound to the faraway centers overseas, we can only thank God for those experiences, by which He enlightened and edified us. And I think that especially on this day, at the very beginning of our Council, we must ‘with one mouth and one heart’ acknowledge the Church’s debt in memory and gratitude to those hierarchs, pastors, and laymen, who in the most difficult period of our history guided the ship of the Church unharmed through the turbulent seas.”

And so today, at the very beginning of this Council, I would like to offer my debt of gratitude and appreciation to the present members of my Chancery team. Our Chancellor, Father John Jillions, has been a trusted assistant and advisor to me and has helped me to articulate my own thoughts concerning the life of the Church. He has done this with intellectual integrity and has served as a sounding board for my own thoughts and initiatives. Our Secretary, Father Eric Tosi, is one of the few persons who not only knows the complexities and the abundance of work that takes place in the Chancery, but can balance it all efficiently, as you can see from his report to

the All-American Council. And he does all this, while at the same time, overseeing the planning of the monumental event which is the All-American Council, which you will be able to see all this week. His missionary zeal is an inspiration to me and for our Church.

A central, and contentious, focus of our Church life for the past two decades has been finances. Although many over those years have participated in the grueling process of establishing accountability and restoring trust, our Treasurer, Melanie Ringa, has occupied the most central and effective part, not only managing the overall finances of the Church, but leading the process of arriving at a funding mechanism for the Church that would move us from a per capita system of assessment to a proportional system of stewardship. Melanie has guided the meeting of the Chancellors and Treasurers for seven years, yielding a wonderful model of diocesan cooperation and a financial resolution that will be considered this week as a continuation of the one that was almost unanimously adopted at the All-American Council in Atlanta. Her integrity, honesty, and forthrightness are worthy of the deepest respect.

I am grateful to all three of my Officers and consider them friends and genuine colleagues in the work of the Church. Together with my personal, administrative, and communications staff, they have been the team that has made it possible for me to both function as your Metropolitan for the past six years. Their work has also allowed me the freedom to devote myself to the work of the Church, and even to focus on specific projects, such as the Four Pillars document that you have each received as delegates to this Council.

The most intense community that I have experienced is that of the monastery. There are others who can speak of both the joys and sorrows of such a life. While not quite attaining the same intensity, I must say that the Chancery is nevertheless a place where friendship and a common desire to

work for the stability and safety of the Church has predominated and helped to make this not simply a community, but rather a genuine family. I give thanks to God for that great gift.

About a month ago, I published on the website of the Orthodox Church in America a document titled, *Of What Life Do We Speak? Four Pillars for the Fulfillment of the Apostolic Work of the Church*. As delegates to the 19th All-American Council, you have each received a physical copy of this small volume, which I have offered to the Church as an attempt to articulate a vision for the Orthodox Church in America for the next decades. This document is not a strategic plan, nor is it a program or a project. It is, rather, intended to be a source of inspiration for such plans, programs, and projects.

The Four Pillars is my attempt at laying out the ascetical framework of our life as the Orthodox Church in America. It is not perfect and it is not intended to implement perfection immediately. It is intended to provide a common starting point for discussion, not only at the All-American Council this year, but beyond. It is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to convey the idea that we need to be comprehensive in our approach to the life of the Church.

The Four Pillars, each with four sub-sections, is not a 16-part manual for all of us to slavishly follow. It is, rather, a guidebook that might help us on our journey here in North America. I have offered my thoughts based on my own experience on this journey and my hopes for the direction the path might lead us. These are encapsulated at the end of each pillar with some “enduring goals” that I believe could provide a common approach to our Church life in North America.

There is a certain flow to the ordering of the Pillars, which I indicate with the use of the image of a tree. The roots are the spiritual life, the trunk is stewardship, the branches are our relations with others and the leaves and

fruit stand for our outreach and evangelism. But the reality is that, just as the stages of purification, illumination, and deification are never passed through in a neat order. So it is up to us, in our own context, to determine when and whether some branches need to be pruned, or whether some fertilizer at the base of the tree might bring the barren tree to bear fruit once again.

I welcome not only the feedback of the delegates to the All-American Council this week, but also hope that this framework will serve as the foundation and inspiration for the local work that is accomplished in our parishes and in our dioceses and that my Office will serve, not as the creator of our common work but, rather, the expression of that unity.

The Pillars are put forward to provide a sense of stability and peace like the stability and peace that emanates from every holy altar. Our Lord again and again tells us, “Be not afraid!” “Peace be with you!” But many of us feel overcome by fears and by anxiety about ourselves, about our parishes, about others, about the ideas we hold dear. We get lost in a storm of issues and polemics, seeing nothing but waves, and certainly not Christ walking to us on the water as though it were dry land.

We first need to do the things we are able to do, many of which are present in the enduring goals we need to bring to fruition. When our spiritual life is healthy, when we are good stewards, when we reach out to others, when we reach out to the world, we can address the messiness of life, the problems that face us, because we take our strength from the peace and fearlessness of Christ.

Today, our society is filled with lonely, anxious, and frightened people. Today our churches are filled with lonely, anxious, and frightened people. Changes are happening at a dizzying rate. We all suffer from an overload of information from the web. And in this virtual world, which is a world of

fantasy, we are often at war and making war, just wars and not-so-just wars alike. One of these is over the problem of homosexuality, most recently brought to our attention once again with the publication of several articles on this subject, particularly the latest edition of *The Wheel*, which contained a forward by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware.

First of all, let's put this in perspective. Scripture and Tradition can show us the way. Saint Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" [1 Corinthians 6:8]. Now, Saint John Chrysostom comments on this passage as follows: "Paul does not confine his accusations to a short list of types of sin but condemns all equally. He is not so much getting at particular sins as making a general admonition that will secretly convict anyone who may have such things on his conscience" [Homily 16.8]. To bring a sense of peace and unity, the best emphasis is that we have all sinned. We are all sinners. We all need our Savior. We all can be healed. Singling out this particular sin is not an Orthodox approach, especially in thinking that we are all the more righteous in doing so.

People are broken in different ways and require different types of care. Those who are greedy need to learn to become generous. Those who harshly criticize others need to learn to be long-suffering and loving. And yes, those who are unfaithful to their spouses, and those who engage in same-sex sexual behavior, need to learn purity. The Orthodox Church can teach them, can teach us, if we are willing to learn, willing to change, willing to repent, willing to become the persons that Christ desires of us.

What we need to avoid, though, is abstraction and depersonalization that is not useful to anyone. What revelation defines as "missing the mark"

remains missing the mark. The Father's love for the prodigal remains love for the prodigal of every sort. Each person, each precious soul, needs to be treated with the discernment, love, and honor due to every human made in the image of God. The Christian understanding of marriage and virginity likewise need to be maintained and exalted as the blessed paths they indeed are. This is a both/and, not an either/or, proposition. We are sinners and we are being sanctified by God's grace.

It is not easy to deal with the messiness of life. It is a lot easier to take a position behind the safety of our computer screen than to descend with another human being into the darkness and confusion of his life. It is a lot easier to take a position on gun control and the Second Amendment than to wrestle with the demons of the man who pulls the trigger or to comfort the mother whose family has been wiped out. This is not about being pro-gun or anti-gun. It is about addressing the attitude that says, as one gun rights advocate writes, "I carry a gun because there are two types of creatures on this planet – there are predators and there are prey." If we as a human race are but predators and prey, then we are reduced to the level of animals, and perhaps even lower than animals. We must find the human person in ourselves so that we can love the human person (that is Christ) in the other.

The savior of the world will not be found in the next Supreme Court Justice of the United States, nor will the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* absolve us of advocating for the sanctity of life. There are endless such divisive issues facing us in the world we live in. But we cannot keep talking about them in the abstract. Yesterday, the Holy Synod visited the Saint Louis branch of FOCUS North America as they were preparing to feed their neighbors, and it was beautiful to see broken and wounded people receiving the hospitality of other broken and wounded people, all of them finding some measure of comfort, and perhaps even healing, for their lives. I wondered to myself, "Would it be helpful for these people to receive a copy of the latest issue of *The Wheel*, to be introduced to the debate about the female diaconate, or to

read Metropolitan Tikhon's newly published Four Pillars Document?" I know what answer I give to that question, and it is in this spirit that I offer the Four Pillars to this Church as an offering from this human heart to you, my neighbors.

At the beginning of this address, I mentioned my friend, Ted. I showed you a picture of us in 1978, and here we are at a restaurant last Saturday, right before we went to have a "concrete" at Ted Drewe's. It is remarkable how our lives, fleeting as they are, nevertheless preserve a continuity to them. Where does this continuity come from? Certainly not from Facebook, although such instruments may play a part in facilitating these things. Rather, I believe it comes from our human desire to be part of a community – a neighborhood – and to Jesus Christ, Who is the only One Who can provide us with a real sense of stability and safety in the uncertainty and fragility of a world that offers little concrete help to us. We all long to find that friendship that we had when we were young and that somehow seems lost to us in our shattered world.

A few weeks ago, I was at my family home in France. The cows were there too, up in the pasturage, peacefully grazing. The mountains were there too – a seemingly eternal fixture of the landscape. They seem unscalable and yet, they invite us to climb their summits. I myself never get tired of climbing them. They are a symbol of permanence and eternity in the midst of a rapidly changing world. Our Lord Himself spent time in the water, on the shore, but also in the mountains. He went into the mountains to pray, and it is on the mountains that the major events of His life took place.

Many of the images I used in my presentation this evening referred to water -- the waves of life, the storm at sea. We tend to use this image a lot in the Church and then, even though we know the ship we are on is the Church and it will not sink, we nevertheless perhaps get a little nervous and anxious. To me, the mountain is perhaps a more apt image for us to use for

the Church today because we all need something solid to see, to stand upon, and perhaps even to climb. When I visited the grave of my aunt who fell asleep this past month, I was comforted by the fact that her grave lies at the feet of these mountains.

There is also water in the mountains, and the rushing movements of the torrent near my ancestral home reminds me of the power of such Alpine streams. The rushing waters of rivers are often used, like the stormy waters of the sea, as images of the turmoil and tempest of the world, swirling around us and presenting difficulties to the Church. But another way of looking at this image might provide an image of the Church, the living water that courses and powers its way through the dry and barren lands. And inasmuch as we participate in this movement, we will also be contributing in some small way to the life of the world. I leave you with the words of the Psalmist:

They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion,
which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.

As the mountains are round about Jerusalem,
so the Lord is round about his people
from henceforth even for ever.

[Psalm 125:1-2]

Amen.

[1] Psalm 89:1 (see also Psalm 101 and 102)

[2] Cf. Acts 20:35

[3] Abba James, in *Benedicta Ward*, page 104.

[4] *Ibid*, page 259.