

Christmas Epistle

Of His Eminence Valentine, Metropolitan of Suzdal and Vladimir

“Thou wast laid in a manger of dumb animals for our sake, O longsuffering Savior, having become an infant by Thy will. Shepherds hymned Thee together with angels, crying aloud: Glory and praise on earth to Christ our God, Who is born and hath deified the nature of the earthborn.” (*Sessional Hymn from Matins*)

To all of our Archpastors, Pastors, Brothers and Sisters, children of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church, Beloved in the Lord!

Again heavenly joy envelops the Orthodox world. During these holy days of Christmastide, when we glorify the newly born Christ Child, Son of God and Son of man, we borrow the words of the angels themselves in exclaiming: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men!” and “Glory and praise on earth to Christ our God, Who is born and hath deified the nature of the earthborn.” The great mystery of godliness is revealed: God was made manifest in the flesh (1Tim. 3:16). He became the infant Jesus in order to traverse the path of human existence from beginning to end.

Before the redemptive birth of the Christ Child, the world lay in the darkness of ignorance concerning God, in complacency, hypocrisy, was filled to overflowing with sinful abominations, “of which it is a shame even to speak about.” Christ was born in order to renew the world, which lieth in evil, and in order to fill it with the all-forgiving love of His heavenly Father, for “God is love.”

The world again finds itself lying in the darkness of sin. Orthodox teaching, as attested to by the holy Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, and by the Apostolic Rules, has practically been rejected by the contemporary Pharisees and high priests of “World Orthodoxy.” They cleverly recall the Rules of the Apostles and the resolutions of the Ecumenical and Local Councils only when they need them to defend and justify their own lawlessness. The deeds of these hierarchs, these contemporary lawyers and Pharisees, have shown what is on their minds, and in their hearts and souls, not only during the period of atheistic rule, but also during this seemingly persecution-free time. Their lies and hypocrisy are ever becoming more and more apparent.

Orthodox Christians should try to acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit, to become rich in God, and then God will grant them the ability to differentiate between truth and lies. We must seek, most of all, the righteousness of the kingdom of God, and all other things shall be added unto us. We must try to have discretion, for, as St. Poemen the Great wrote, “spiritual discretion is the mother of all Christian virtues.”

The holy Fathers teach us, “See that you do not exchange the clarity of the truth for impious interpretations, and if it happens that you read or hear of something that goes against the universal rule and the Symbol of Faith, expose it as lethal and diabolical. The righteous man lives by faith (Heb. 10:38; Rom. 1:17), and whosoever has destroyed faith through demonic deception, has already succumbed to death being yet alive (1Tim. 5:6), for ‘just as through faith piety is acquired, so also through true faith eternal life is acquired’” (St. Leo the Great).

That sorrowful day, May 17th of last year, has not been forgotten, when through the ruinous efforts of Archbishop Mark of Berlin and those with him, the Act of Unification with the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate was signed. That day will live forever as a day of great sorrow in the historical memory of the Church Outside of Russia and Her God-loving flock, and will cover with the darkness of shame all those who took upon themselves, against the will of the First Hierarch of the ROCOR and of all true Orthodox Christians living in the diaspora, the lot of Judas.

The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, in bygone years, always stood up in defense of Holy Orthodoxy. She loudly bore witness to the persecutions leveled against Orthodox believers in the atheistic state of that time. She canonized the holy Martyred Tsar Nicholas and a host of other New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, without waiting for their “rehabilitation” and permission to do so from the godless government first. In the persons of Her ever-memorable First Hierarchs, she was the first to examine and expose the ruinous heresy of Ecumenism, and anathematized it. The Orthodox living outside of the confines of their historical homeland witnessed to the whole world that Orthodoxy inside Russia had been strengthened by the ascetics and martyrs for the Church and for the Faith. Those who conformed to this world, on the other hand, created a substitute church, and this is a thing worse than destroying churches. And if then the atheists and corrupters of Orthodox conscience were aided and abetted by frightened and spiritually broken hierarchs, they are now aided and abetted by overfed and arrogant frauds.

The Russian Orthodox (Autonomous) Church, being the rightful heir of the pre-revolutionary Church of Russia, the Church of the catacombs, the Church of the New Martyrs, retains not only its historical name (here the Metropolitan uses an older word for Russian; Rossiyskaya, - *trans.*), but has also witnessed, at Her Sobor of 2008, that She has never, and does not now, recognize Renovationism or Sergianism, and anathematizes the ruinous heresy of Ecumenism. The steadfastness of our Church in the truth, and Her unwavering stand for

Orthodox teaching, make Her a target for persecution.

Contemporary Russian society lives in accordance with a completely different and foreign understanding. There is constant talk about some kind of spiritual renaissance; the increasing numbers of clergy and dioceses, and of open churches and monasteries. However, opening a church does not mean the same thing as turning a man's entire being to God and opening his heart to Him. We must recognize that the way that we are living now is not worthy of the glorious name of Christ, and that it has now become the cause of many and various crises, which we see affecting many people.

The truth of our Orthodox confession, unfortunately, has been rejected by the Pharisees and high priests of our day. They subject the solid ground of the teachings of the Gospel, which must be the confession of any true Orthodox Christian until the end of time, to doubt.

For the last eighteen years, from the moment that liberty was first proclaimed, as well as the guaranteed rights of believers and human rights in general, we have endured, and are still having to endure until this day, persecution, assassination attempts, threats, beatings, arson attempts upon our monasteries and monastic communities, court trials, being evicted from our churches, libel, and all manner of repressive measures. We bear it all and are ready to follow the commandments of the holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, with St. Tikhon, Patriarch of All the Russias and Confessor at their head. We are prepared for the realization of the words of Christ, "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you..."

On the day of Christ's birth, it is appropriate for us to remember that the Christ Child Himself was persecuted from the very first days of His earthly life. He had no place where to lay His head. He laid it down only when He was hanging on the Cross. In imitation of Him, we also surrender ourselves into His Divine hands with the words which came forth from His Divine lips, "O Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Recently, there have been many calls for the "splinters" of the ROCOR to unite. And this is a joyous and good intention. At the present time of church separation, it is essential for everyone to have unity, for it is this very thing that the Lord Himself desired, "that they may all be one." The call for unity must be strengthened by love, which "Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own..." It is impossible to love, and remain complacent; it is impossible to insist on truth, and have no love for those for whom love is not yet open; it is

impossible to love God, and at the same time hate one's brethren in Christ. An example of such self-sacrificing love has been left to us by St. Maximus the Confessor, who wrote 400 chapters on love, but was not vanquished by, nor inclined to, heresy.

“Let us rejoice, beloved. Our Savior has now been born! There should not be any place for sorrow wherever Life Itself acquires birth, Which having annihilated the fear of death, gives us joy at the realization of that promised eternity...Let the saint exalt, for the day of his glory draws nigh...Let the sinner rejoice, for he is being given the gift of forgiveness. Let the pagan take heart, for he is being called to life...” (St. Leo the Great).

My beloved in Christ, God-loving flock of the Russian Church, Archpastors and Pastors, Honorable Monastics, I greet you with the feast of the glorious Nativity of Christ and the coming New Year. May the Christ Child grant you His great and rich mercy throughout the coming year of our earthly existence.

Lowly

✠Valentine

Metropolitan of Suzdal and Vladimir
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