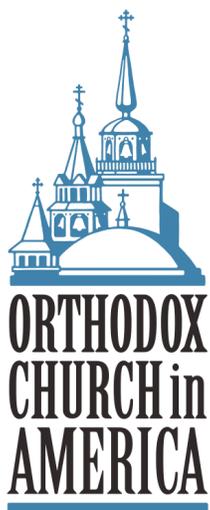


January 22, 2015

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

Dearly Beloved in the Lord:

Today has been designated by the Orthodox Church in America as “Sanctity of Life Sunday,” a day on which we re-affirm our faithfulness to the eternal value of human life and re-commit ourselves to the defense of the lives of the unborn, the infirm, the terminally ill and the condemned.



Our proclamation of life is offered in the context of a world in dismay at the terrorist attacks that recently shook Paris, the latest in a series of seemingly endless tragedies throughout the world that unnecessarily claim many innocent lives. Following this latest tragedy, Christians, Muslims, Jews and non-believers have engaged in discussion and debate about a range of issues, from human dignity to the responsibilities of political cartoonists, from freedom of expression to humanity’s capacity for tolerance. Unfortunately, much of this debate is framed in an atmosphere of ideological violence, whether this be a “war on infidels” or “war on terrorism.” In such divisive engagements, there are rarely any victors but only more victims.

As Orthodox Christians, who hold dear the revealed truth that the life of “all mankind” is sacred, we might reflect, along with St. Nikolai of Zhicha, on the paschal victory of Christ over death and corruption:

“Christ’s victory is the only victory in which all humanity can rejoice, from the first-created to the last. Every other victory on earth has divided, and still divides, men from one another. When an earthly king gains the victory over another earthly king, one of them rejoices and the other laments. When a man is victorious over his neighbor, there is singing under one roof and weeping under the other. There is no joyful victory on earth that is not poisoned by malice: the ordinary, earthly victor rejoices both in his laughter and in the tears of his conquered enemy. He does not even notice how evil cuts through joy.”

Our world is so full of these joyless and dark victories that we might despair of being able to put forward the hope and light of the Gospel message. We would do well to heed the words of St. Nikolai and keep our hearts and minds focused on our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, in Whom alone can solace, hope and joy be found in any meaningful and lasting way.

Indeed, Christ did not say: “I offer one of many complimentary paths”; He said: *I am the Way*. Christ did not say: “I hold to the correct philosophical principles;” He said: *I am the Truth*. Christ did not say: “I subscribe to the only viable political agenda;” He said: *I am the Life*.

It is only possible to attain to this *Way*, this *Truth* and this *Life* through Christ and through the light that He bestows to those who strive to allow even a small beam of that light to enter their hearts and illumine their path.

As St. Nikolai writes: “Christ’s victory alone is like a sun that sheds bright rays on all that are beneath it. Christ’s victory alone fills all the souls of men with invincible joy. It alone is without malice or evil.”

Let us therefore make every effort to offer this “victory of light and life” to those who are surrounded by darkness and death. Let us be bold in our adding our Orthodox voices in support of the value of every human person, born or unborn; let us offer consolation to the mothers who have undergone abortions and offer our prayers to them and to all who have been affected by this tragedy; let us affirm our Orthodox understanding of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God and yet in need of healing in Christ.

Let us, together with St. Nikolai, proclaim the great victory of Christ:

A mysterious victory, you will say? It is; but it is at the same time revealed to the whole human race, the living and the dead.

A generous victory, you will say? It is, and more than generous. Is not a mother more than generous when she, not once or twice, saves her children from snakes but, in order to save them for all time, goes bravely into the snakes’ very nest and burns them out?

A healing victory, you will say? It is, healing and saving for ever and ever. This gentle victory saves men from every evil and makes them sinless and immortal. Immortality without sinlessness would mean only the extending of evil’s reign, and of that of malice and wickedness, but immortality with sinlessness gives birth to unconfined joy, and makes men the brethren of God’s resplendent angels.

With Love in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tikhon", preceded by a small cross symbol.

†TIKHON
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada