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

Your Eminences, Your Graces,

Honored Abbots and Abbesses,

Very Reverend Fathers, Heads of Our Seminaries and Chancellors of Our Dioceses,

Distinguished Members of the Metropolitan Council,

Beloved Children in Christ,

Today the grace of the Holy Spirit gathers us together, the leadership of the Orthodox Church in America, in consultation and preparation for the All-American Council to take place in Baltimore in less than a year. I stand before you as your Primate to remind you of how much remains to be done, not only as we approach the Council, but as we enter the next decades of our Church life. At the same time, I stand before you to offer you some inspiration and encouragement to engage in this work, by reminding you that the self-same Holy Spirit that has gathered us today is, as the Lord has promised, certain to guide us in all things as we strive to fulfill the apostolic work that lies ahead of us.

At the All-American Council in St. Louis in 2018, I offered my vision for our local Church with my *Four Pillars* document. Vision—*theoria*, beholding—is the beginning of our life in Christ. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon"—so begins the First Catholic Epistle of the Holy Apostle John the Theologian. And he continues: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you" (1 Jn 1:1, 3).

And this vision is not only the beginning: it is also the end. As the same Apostle writes in the final chapter of his Apocalypse: "And he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb… I John am he who heard and saw these things" (Rev 22:1, 8).

But now we find ourselves between the beginning and the end. We have seen the True Light—even if only as in a mirror darkly (cf. 1 Cor 13:12)—and we have attempted to articulate this vision as best we can, as appropriate for our place and our circumstances. We have seen the Church. We have been called into the Church. We have glimpsed the heavenly city; we have been offered a place in its courts. But having seen and heard, we are now called to be the Church and to do the work of the Church. So, in our consultations and workshops today, I would like to begin a process of moving from vision to implementation, of making concrete our calling, our vocation, as Christians: as members of Christ in His Body, the Church. I expect that this is a process that will carry on through the upcoming All-American Council and beyond.

This, then, is the theme of my words to you today: that movement from vision to implementation. And in moving from vision to implementation, we are moving from the knowledge that Christ has given His life for the life of the world—the theme of our 2018 All-American Council—to the question of how we are called to follow Him in giving ourselves for the life of the world. Jesus Christ first loved us: how now shall we love in return (cf. 1 Jn 4:19)? Thus, when we ask ourselves how to implement our vision for the Church, how to turn theory into action, we are also probing the question of our vocation: as leaders in the Church, as Christians, and thus, fundamentally, as human beings. So, as I sketch some indications about how we can begin to move from vision to practice, I would

also like to begin our collective reflection on the theme of vocation, which will take centerstage in Baltimore next year.

My intent now is not to review the vision I offered in my *Four Pillars* document and try to trace systematic paths from vision to implementation. Neither will I preview each of this afternoon's workshops about concrete areas of Church life or provide answers or solutions for you. Instead, I want to offer some of my preliminary reflections on what it means to move from vision to implementation, and give some indication about the hard questions that we will need to ask—and not just ask, but answer—in the months and years ahead. These reflections will be divided into three areas.

First, I will consider sanctity, not as something abstract—you know, just "be a saint" and everything will be alright—but as a life lived in response to the Gospel in a particular place and time. Saints had to get their hands dirty (as St. Herman did literally in his garden on Kodiak), do work, and solve problems. Sanctity isn't just something airy and abstract. Sanctity is the virtuous, loving, Christocentric, grace-receptive and thus Spirit-filled response to human, historical challenges and circumstances. Sanctity is not an escape: saints had to take responsibility. So, first, I want to begin with the saints as an example of a vision implemented.

Second, I want to reflect on a few of the many luminaries that the Orthodox Church in America has lost this past year, people who implemented a vision for the Church not just in our own time, but in our midst. We have much inspiration but also concrete lessons to draw from their lives. When we reflect on the real challenges facing our local Church, we should also draw comfort from our real triumphs—or even simply from the real facts of our existence as a community called into being by and for the Lord. Perhaps an

appreciation of a few of the great witnesses to Christ that our Church has lost this year can be an important part of that frank but hopeful assessment.

Third, I want to reflect on some of my own experiences with the concrete areas of Church life that we will be discussing in today's workshops. There are many challenges that each of us individually faces in life and also difficult questions that we must answer collectively. Difficult questions require honest reflection, and our discussions today may prompt out-of-the-box answers. I don't claim to have those answers, and perhaps each of us, on our own, feels unqualified or inadequate to provide such answers. But I do think I can get some conversation started with some of my observations, with the expectation that each of you will continue those conversations within your own local communities and dioceses.

1. Holiness

Let us begin, then, with the saints. We are often reminded of our calling, our vocation to sanctity, to be imitators of the saints as they are of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 11:1). Being a saint, though, isn't easy. The words of St. Sophrony of Essex remind us of the rare genius of holiness, and I quote: "I have said that the nineteen centuries of Christian history have seen throngs of witnesses to Christ's love. Nevertheless, in the vast ocean of the human race they are so few, so rare."[1] So when we hear a preacher or teacher telling us, in essence, "Well, just be saints, and your problems will be solved," this hardly sounds like a solution. In fact, especially in light of the words of St. Sophrony, bringing up the example of the

[1] Saint Sophrony of Essex, *Saint Silouan the Athonite* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991), 2.

saints may seem extremely discouraging. Do we first need to be perfect, and only then tackle the concrete problems facing our local Church?

I would like to suggest that there is another way of looking at sanctity. Instead of starting at the end—seeing the saint haloed in heavenly glory, ready to declare with St. Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7)—we can start at the beginning. Because every saint became a saint by struggling, in his own time and place, under his own circumstances, with his own problems and questions and challenges, small or large, Church-wide or applicable just to his hermit's life. And through all these things, he bore witness to the love of Christ.

Thus, we can envision sanctity, not as a first threshold to cross before we are able to act and carry out our vocation, but rather as a journey. By crossing the threshold, we set out toward sanctity: we answer Christ's call and begin the process of becoming holy. The scholar of literature Joseph Campbell, in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, speaks of the idea of the hero's journey, an archetypal narrative that underlies many myths and stories across the ages, the world over. This archetypal narrative describes how the ordinary human being, by answering the call to adventure, ventures forth into a world of wonders, achieves great things, and eventually returns home transformed—as a hero. Campbell's ideas famously influenced George Lucas when he conceived his original *Star Wars* trilogy, but popular stories from the *Lord of the Rings* to *Harry Potter* follow the same arc.

The human imagination is fired by this notion of the journey of transformation, with becoming a hero. And as Christians, we recognize that this universal human longing is fulfilled in the saints. Ordinary men and women are called forth from the mundane

world into the great adventure of the life in Christ: the struggle for virtue, the struggle to love God, the struggle to love our neighbors. By the grace of God, they achieve great things, and they reach their heavenly home transformed into saints.

But this journey is inseparable from the challenges and circumstances of each particular life. No matter how many stories follow the arc that Campbell describes, we never tire of hearing about an individual hero's journey. It's not enough to know that there are heroes. We want to know how they became heroes.

Likewise, the saints each achieved holiness, not by crossing the threshold into some abstract realm of goodness, but by witnessing to the love of God in the adventure of their lives. This is seen most vividly, perhaps, in the lives of the Holy Apostles and their imitators down through the centuries. Unlike their literary and mythological counterparts, the saints were not striving to conform to some undefined common psychological urge within their psyche. Rather, hearing the call of Christ to go and preach and become fishers of men, these apostles and equals to the apostles and enlighteners of the nations left behind their homes and all they had to go to strange places, face great difficulties, and, by the grace of God, achieve great and wonderful things. But those achievements take place in the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

I already mentioned briefly our Venerable Father Herman of Alaska, and, indeed, his life could have served as the substance of my entire address. Yes, he had a vision for evangelizing the Alaskan people: this is the call that brought him from Valaam to Kodiak. But then his journey continued, often through hard work and conflict and figuring out practical problems. Whether he was teaching agricultural techniques to the local young people or doing the hard work of turning them into a church choir, whether he was writing

letters of complaint to administrators or painstakingly working on some building in the settlement—or on his own hut in the wilderness—whatever he was doing, we are assured by those who knew him that St. Herman did all of this, faced all of this, as his podvig, his struggle, to live out his witness to the love of God. And this is the journey of sanctity: to answer God's call for our own lives, to tackle problems, to face obstacles, while considering all of the rough and earthy ground of real human life to be the very soil in which we are working to bring forth the fruit of holiness.

And we don't have to go to distant lands to answer that call. Some saints answered the call in the desert silence; many of the Holy Fathers of the Church answered that call in busy episcopal roles, dealing with pastoral problems and ecclesiastical conflicts and theological disputes. But in all of their lives we recognize what we recognized in the life of St. Herman: namely, that sanctity is inseparable from the journey towards sanctity. That great witness to the love of God which St. Sophrony tells us is so rare, is something that the saints lived out every day while facing each day's troubles, which the Lord tells us so comfortingly "are sufficient" for each day (cf. Mt 6:34). God has given us enough—enough to bear, enough grace to bear it, enough of His own love and holiness and grace and providential guidance that we, too, may take this same heroic journey toward holiness by facing our own era's questions and turmoils with complete trust in His love. So it is by living out our vocation, by meeting the challenges of implementing the vision, in love, that we become saints.

2. Luminaries of the Church

If the journey towards holiness is not an abstract concept, then we would benefit from reflecting on the concrete lives of those who have gone before us, struggling in their own

contexts. In turning to the second part of my address, I think it is important for us to acknowledge that the past twenty months of global pandemic and health crisis have certainly provided a very real—one might even say unrelenting—context of turmoil and struggle for us. There was no lack of concrete challenges as we were physically separated from our families, unable to visit relatives in nursing homes or hospitals, as we endured the spiritual isolation of suspended divine services and limited social activities, and as we weathered serious and prolonged illness.

During this time, we have also mourned the loss of an unusually high number of Church luminaries from among the ranks of the bishops, the clergy, the clergy wives, and the faithful. In the year since the repose of the former Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, Metropolitan Theodosius, whose one-year anniversary we marked yesterday, there have been forty-three *In Memoriam* postings on our website. One might look at this as simply the addition of forty-three more names to the hundreds of names listed in the recently updated commemorative list of departed servants of the Church. Or one might lament this as a great tragedy for the Orthodox Church in America, with the loss not only of senior clergy, but also those whose lives were cut short at an early age.

Rather than adopting an attitude of indifference or becoming weighed down with mourning, I would propose that it would be more fruitful for us to reflect on some of those lives and on their contributions to the life of the Orthodox Church in America. I offer these glimpses not as a way of ascribing holiness to any of them, nor of pointing out any of their flaws, but as a way to highlight their contributions to the life of the Church on this continent and to encourage us to look to their examples for inspiration. I cannot speak of

all of them, but I offer a few examples and encourage all of us to reflect further on those who impacted our own lives.

Such was **Metropolitan Theodosius** whose not insignificant accomplishments include serving as Bishop of the Diocese of Alaska, being the one appointed to receive the *Tomos* of Autocephaly in 1970, and serving as the Primate of a local Orthodox Church for a quarter of a century. During all of this time, Metropolitan Theodosius remained an altar server at heart, that is, a humble servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as he had learned to be when he stood in the altar of his parish. About a week ago, I received from a parishioner at St. Seraphim Cathedral in Santa Rosa, an email which included as an attachment a copy of Metropolitan Theodosius' 1992 Nativity homily. This particular homily had impressed this man so much that he wrote to Metropolitan Theodosius, just prior to his death, to thank him for his words: words which this man found not only thoughtful and insightful, but that have served as a beacon for him and a summary of the true purpose of the interior Christian life. That the words of Metropolitan Theodosius had a lasting impact on this man for almost thirty years is a testimony to the power of a few words offered in love.

A fellow traveler with Metropolitan Theodosius in the delegation which received the *Tomos* was **Protopresbyter Daniel Hubiak**, who founded, pastored, built, and renovated missions and churches, who served consecutively—and even at times simultaneously—in the positions of Chancellor, Secretary, and Treasurer for the Orthodox Church in America. Beyond this, he established and served as the first representative for St. Catherine in the Fields Representation Church in Moscow. To all of these important and exalted positions, Fr. Daniel brought the wisdom and experience of a seasoned priest

and the gentle shepherd of his flock. Where others would have been distracted by fame and notoriety, Fr. Daniel preserved the kindness and long-suffering of a genuine Christ-like leader.

In the funeral hymns for the burial service for a priest, we hear the words: "Now I am at rest. Now I have found peace. I have escaped corruption. I have passed from death to life. Glory to Thee, O Lord" (Exapostilarion). The **Archpriest Michael Koblosh** is one who is deserving of rest and of peace after an honorable life as a priest of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Fr. Michael is also an example of one who would not dwell on all his accomplishments or complain about all the turmoil that he might have faced in his pastoral ministry. Rather he would simply offer the final words of that hymn: "Glory to Thee, O Lord." He was a theologian, but he was one of those theologians who held that "less is more": he would never overwhelm anyone with an overflowing of extra words, but would rather get right to the point in a very succinct way. He fulfilled the admonition of St. Paul: "None of us lives to himself and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:7–8). Even on the last Sunday before his repose, Fr. Michael prepared the weekly bulletin, offering us the comfort of knowing there is one who is serving at the heavenly altar even as he served before the earthly one.

We should not neglect our clergy wives, whose labors for the Church and support of their husbands require a sincere love for Christ, and a desire to serve both their communities and their families. **Matushka Elizabeth Kachur**, the wife of the late Archpriest Stephen Kachur, fell asleep in the Lord on October 28 of last year. She was known as a wonderful provider of hospitality, caring for the faithful of the parishes Fr.

Stephen was assigned to and welcoming visitors, while at the same time being a devoted mother to her children. I remember Matushka Elizabeth's frequent visits to the cemetery of St. Tikhon's Monastery, bringing flowers and asking for a Panikhida to be offered at the grave of her son, who had died at an early age many years before—the grief of a mother. Such motherly devotion is indeed valuable and instructive to us who so often fall short in our love towards others, even those closest to us.

On several occasions, I have related the account offered by **Archpriest Sergei Glagolev** of a formative moment in his calling to the priesthood. As a child, he witnessed the response of his father—who himself was the priest at Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Lorain, Ohio—to the berating he was receiving during an annual meeting. Seeing his father sitting at the table and saying nothing, watching the parishioners yelling and pointing fingers at him, Fr. Sergei thought to himself: "You know, if my dad does this in order to be a priest, then either he is insane, or he's a nitwit, a dummy. Or there is really something to this, and there's more to this than meets the eye." This was a turning point for Fr. Sergei, because he saw the extent to which his father could love his people, and this inspired him to pursue the priesthood himself.

In a recent interview on the subject of the falling asleep of Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra Monastery, Archimandrite Maximos Constas reflected on the fact that, "It's really difficult to take the measure of a man's life—that's true even for what you might call an ordinary human life—and even more difficult for someone of the stature and influence

of Fr. Aimilianos." He added that it would take "a long time, and a blessed long time" to continue to come to terms with the Elder's life and contribution to the Church.[2]

I would suggest that we also take this long and blessed time to come to terms with the lives of all those we have lost, whether they labored in Alaska, like Archbishop David, or in Mexico, like Fr. Antonio Perdomo; whether they were priests or laymen, like George Soldatow, who tended to the historical record of our Church; whether they lived long lives, like Fr. Daniel Ressetar and Fr. Eugene Pianovich, or their lives ended unexpectedly, like Fr. Anastasy Richter or Matushka Tresja Denisenko. Whether we have known a person for our entire lifetime or not at all, the mystery of the human person is such that the trauma of death often brings forth in us a different perspective, a deeper appreciation, a clearer measure of that person's life. This measure is not merely knowledge, in the sense of a fuller psychological or biographical understanding of that person, but rather a glimpse into the inner working of his heart, his communion with God, and his relationship with his fellows—with us.

I would propose that we too can, even belatedly, discern similar glimmers of sanctity, of goodness, of kindness, of wisdom, of forgiveness, and of love in the lives of those who are no longer with us. It is the person that we honor in these luminaries—who they were, not merely what they accomplished in this life. We ought to never forget that, if St. Sophrony is correct when he says that we are all equal because we must all follow the same commandments, then it is also self-evident that, in the lives of those who

[2] Archimandrite Maximos Constas, Interviewed by Archpriest Josiah Trenham, "Aimilianos of Simonopetra: A Modern Elder of the Church," *Patristic Nectar Publications*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_o7tjdVgEYU&t=1507s, July 31, 2019.

struggle even feebly, we can still discern something beneficial for our souls and inspiring for our lives.

3. My Personal Reflections and Thoughts

In turning now to my third section, I will try to address in broad strokes the specific topics that all of us who are gathered here today at the Falling Asleep of the Ever-Virgin Mary Romanian Orthodox Cathedral will be discussing this afternoon. First, I should offer our collective thanks to His Eminence Archbishop Nathaniel for the blessing for us to gather here in a community of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate, to His Grace Bishop Andrei for sharing his episcopal see with us, and to Fr. Remus Grama and the parish for their hospitality. It is truly a great blessing for us to gather here, to celebrate the Divine Liturgy, and to partake of the precious Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ together.

We are thankful, not for the institutions but for the persons who fulfill their vocation within those institutions, whether it is the bishop in his diocese, the priest in his parish, or the monastic in his or her monastery. We can all agree that the Church is not an institution as the world understands institutions. But at the same time, each of us fulfills our vocation as a human being, as a Christian, in the context of various institutions: the diocese, the parish, the monastery, the choir, the family. But we have something that other secular institutions don't have: we have Jesus Christ, and our institutions are composed of persons, not just biological or psychological persons, but genuine, flawed, struggling, hopeful, forgiving, and loving persons—all striving to unite themselves to their Lord.

We gather as representatives of institutions, of corporate bodies: the Holy Synod, the Auxiliary Bishops, the Chancellors, the Metropolitan Council, the monasteries, the

seminaries. But we are gathered here—indeed, very deliberately gathered here, as we have been reminding ourselves—in person. That is, not just physically gathered together after twenty long months of physical separation and isolation, but gathered as we ought to be, as persons in community. So we are welcomed by Archbishop Nathaniel, and hosted by Fr. Remus. And we look to the monastic wisdom of Mother Christophora, the theological acumen of Dr. Tudorie, the leadership of Fr. Martin, Fr. Thomas, and Fr. John, and the harmonies of Harrison. I won't mention all of you by name because this is not a roll call, but will nevertheless remind you that each of us is a person living and working within an institution, striving to live faithful Christian lives and to offer faithful Christian work together. The task at hand today is to begin discerning how the Church might provide the resources and the context for other persons to fulfill their vocation, to become vessels of grace, as is the theme for next year's All-American Council.

As I offer some of my own personal reflections on the topics we will consider, I am aware of the fact that I stand before you as the Primate of the Orthodox Church in America. I cannot ignore or lay aside that role, but neither will I be providing you with directives or instructions for our discussions later today. I will offer some personal thoughts that might, directly or indirectly, provide some encouragement in our consideration of the topics of monasticism, the seminaries, the youth, the Diocese of Alaska, compliance, parish demographics, and music. These represent institutional components of the Church, and we must indeed address them. But we will find no solutions if we do not discern how these might help persons—help us—to fulfill our vocation as Orthodox Christians.

I will begin with the youth. We often place the youth into a category, a place other than the place where we stand. But we were all young at one time, and as we age, we

continue to long for youthfulness, even as we lose touch with what it means to be a youth today in the 21st century. There are challenges today that none of us faced when we were young: questions of sexuality, of gender, or identity; breakdowns in communication, even as the means and ease of communication proliferate; uncertainty about the Church and questions about faith. But perhaps the struggle that takes place in the hearts of our youth is not so different from the struggles that we encountered ourselves.

I can recall hours spent on my bed, gazing out into the night sky, and wondering where God was, and why he permitted suffering in the world, and thinking to myself: What is the point of walking up and down the aisle of Christ Episcopal Church in Reading, Pennsylvania, wearing a white robe and carrying a crucifix or a candle? I presented myself with the two options in life that seemed to be available to me: to be intelligent or to be religious. With the wisdom and experience of an eleven-year old, I did not hesitate to choose intelligence, of course, and so I convinced myself that I was an atheist. My research into the matter consisted primarily of very questionable sources, such as the classmate who confidently asserted: "The Bible is the greatest book of science fiction ever written." With that, I had my confirmation that the path of atheism was, in fact, the path I should take. I would propose that, though they live in a totally new world, the youth of today face the same questions and uncertainties. And further, I would propose that the youth today do not need the Church to use more social media to reach them, but need a compassionate ear and loving guidance in their lives. Let us begin discussing today how to accomplish this.

It was not until college that I began to slowly awaken from what I now recognize as a deep slumber of unbelief, an awakening which was accomplished primarily through

other persons. I was stirred in my "Religion and Religions in America" class, by the young woman who, on the first day of introductions, said that she wanted to become a Roman Catholic nun. I was stunned that anyone in 1987 at a small liberal arts college would even consider such a path. I was pleasantly surprised by certain professors who were at once intelligent and religious, one a Jewish professor specializing in the history of religion and the other a scholar of Kierkegaard. Suddenly, my entire youthful thesis had to be reconsidered in light of new evidence. Perhaps one could, in fact, be at once religious and intelligent. Above all, it was the persistence of one friend who refused to accept my assertions that I was an atheist, who could not square the words that came out of my mouth with the type of person that I was. This friend argued with me, tried to convince me, gave me books to read, got me to enroll in the aforementioned religion class, all to no avail.

I could not be convinced until I wanted to be convinced. As the Elder Zosima says in the Brothers Karamazov: "One cannot prove anything here, but it is possible to be convinced." And gradually I was convinced by the young woman, though I have forgotten her name, who wanted to be a nun; by Professor Annette Aronowicz and Professor Bradley Dewe; and by my friend, who happens to be His Grace Bishop Alexis of Bethesda, now nominated to be the Bishop of Alaska. This is, I would say, the very foundation of the process of formation that takes place in our seminaries and in our monasteries. These institutions are not simply factories that produce a certain kind of functionary. They are crucibles where individuals from all kinds of backgrounds come together in community to grow in humility, in forgiveness, in love, and also in learning. Within those institutions,

these persons are taught, formed, humbled, and encouraged by their abbots, abbesses, professors, and fellows.

If I am asked what is the most difficult work that I have undertaken in my life, the answer is easy: It is not being the Primate of the Orthodox Church in America; it is not being the Rector of St. Tikhon's Seminary; it is not being a novice at the Monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk. It was being a choir director at the Seminary. Music and the liturgical arts are often neglected in our day, and we must look for ways to strengthen this ministry. This is not an easy task—it is perhaps as difficult as the task of the choir director, who must deal with basses, tenors, altos, sopranos, and divas. He must also contend with shrillness, with tone-deafness, and with immovable opinions about song selection. The manner in which all of this is held together gives us an image of pastoral ministry.

The specific topics we will consider today all relate to the theme of vocation. But we are approaching this theme today in the context of concrete areas of concern such as the demographics of our parishes and compliance issues. Though these may seem like less than inspiring topics to many, I would argue that, in very real ways, they speak to the theme of vocations. There is much to discuss about the approach that we, as the Church, should adopt with respect to all these important topics. My purpose in speaking about some aspects of my own life and journey was not simply to speak about myself (although we should admit that all of us who have not yet reached the pinnacles of holiness have some degree of narcissism lurking in our hearts). Rather, it is because I believe that we must approach these particular topics—and, in fact, everything in our churchly existence—with a certain degree of obedience, which is something that I myself have struggled with.

Above all, obedience is an attitude of the heart which crucifies the fallen mind in its search for the will of God. In obedience, we become wise by becoming foolish, as St. Paul says: "If anyone among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may become wise" (1 Cor 3:18). Throughout my entire life, I can say that I never felt that I had a vocation. But in looking back on my life, I can also see that, all along, I have been called in some mysterious way. But I don't recall ever saying to myself: "I have a vocation to do this." When we throw around the word "vocation," we often envision a bright young man who, as soon as he comes forth from his mother's womb, is swinging a censer and offering pastoral guidance to his older brothers and sisters. Certainly, we know of a few such persons who, from their earliest life, embarked on a path and never swerved. This is indeed a vocation. But I would suspect that most of us, like me, either never felt they had a vocation or took a very wandering path in their life. It required a Fr. Michael Prevas to tell me: "You will go to St. Tikhon's Seminary." It required a Fr. Daniel Donlick who, when I thought that I should delay my entrance into seminary, said to me: "Why wait? God is calling you now." It required Metropolitan Herman, who called me into the altar during a Vigil service and said to me: "I'm going to present your name to the Holy Synod for consideration as my auxiliary bishop."

I will end with one other person, one of my monastic brothers who fell asleep in the Lord some twenty-one years ago, who helped me in my vocation. At that time, one of my main obediences in the monastery was to serve as caretaker for the cemetery. This work afforded me the blessing of being exposed more regularly to death and the burial process. (I will resist the temptation of saying that, in the cemetery, "I had many people working under me.") Even with this obedience, there was only one occasion when I was

present with another person at the exact moment of their falling asleep, which was the case with my brother, Monk Anthony. Now, to those who knew him, worked with him, and lived with him, Fr. Anthony was what one might call "of a grumpy disposition," and also one who was quick to offer his opinion on things.

One day, I was in the front office of the monastery, speaking on the phone with one of my spiritual children, when Fr. Anthony poked his head in the door and motioned to me that he needed something. Now, Fr. Anthony also had somewhat of a demanding disposition, and he was not shy about imposing himself upon others when he needed something. Being familiar with his typical approach, I ignored him at first. But he persisted and, more urgently, went on to tell me that he was experiencing a pain in his arm. Though I am not a medical doctor, I knew enough to know that this was a serious matter, so we got in his blue pickup truck and I drove him towards Marian Community Hospital in Carbondale.

When we set out from the monastery, Fr. Anthony was speaking to me normally, but at one point, as we passed the Lockwood's store, he became silent. Knowing that Fr. Anthony was also a talkative person, I had a brief thought of relief that I would not have to listen to him go on and on as he usually did. But as we neared Carbondale Mountain, I heard a loud inhaling sound and turned to see Fr. Anthony with his back arched and immobile, as if he was an inflated balloon. Realizing that something drastically wrong was happening, I went through various options in my mind: Stop and try to administer CPR? Pull over to a house and ask for help? Neither of those options seemed reasonable, so I continued at top speed, going over Carbondale Mountain. At one point, I thought that perhaps he was constrained by his seat belt, so I unbuckled it—which had the effect of

having him flop over on me. So I had to hold him up with my right arm as I was holding the steering wheel with my left hand, going 70 miles an hour over the mountain. I finally made it to the hospital, where they placed Fr. Anthony on a stretcher.

Fr. Anthony was not what one might refer to as a luminary of the Church: he was grumpy, he was demanding, he was talkative, he was overweight. But I would say that he was one of the most fundamental guides to me in my vocation as a monk and as a Christian, both through what he imparted to me and through what I learned from him. He had his struggles, as we all have our struggles. But he was relentless in his efforts to tame his own passions. He easily rubbed people the wrong way—but he knew that he rubbed people the wrong way. Like many of us who have passions, he was keenly self-aware of his limitations and persevered in his ascetical efforts to better himself. It was his stubbornness that convinced me and a fellow novice, in the first year of my novitiate, not to visit a then uncanonical monastery over the Nativity break. I had it in my mind that surely there must be a better monastery than the imperfect one I found myself at. He conveyed this in his own direct and blunt way, and had Fr. Anthony not convinced me to abandon my plans, I might not have remained at St. Tikhon's Monastery. But more to the point, I would not have learned one of my first monastic lessons in maintaining stability—a virtue that is not easy to attain for any of us, but supremely necessary in the monastic life, and perhaps in the lives of all who would claim to drink of the cup that our Lord drank of.

CONCLUSION

As I conclude, I hope I have left you all with some idea of what I mean about hard questions and sincere reflection. And I hope I have maybe even prompted some desire to find answers to these questions. We have many challenging questions to answer. But we

must begin with the understanding that, even when we are confronted with our present-day challenges—financial struggles, marital strife, mental confusion, depression, and isolation—we do have the gifts and the tools of the Church to help us.

Truth be told, it is too easy to become paralyzed by the desire to go back to the drawing board again and again: either to reiterate the vision or to revise it. But to return to those Pentecost-season words that accompany us throughout most of the year at the Divine Liturgy, those words which I invoked at the beginning of my address: We have seen the True Light. And we have received the Heavenly Spirit. This is the Spirit of Love, the Spirit of the Incarnate Love of God, Love made concrete, with a human body and soul and will, who gives us His Spirit so that we can give flesh to that same Love. And this Love casts out fear (cf. 1 Jn 4:18). So if we walk in love, if we labor to turn our vision into action on behalf of God and neighbor, we shall have nothing to fear, neither in heaven or earth or under the earth, for God is with us (cf. Phil 2:10, Is 7:14).

This is the love of the saints. This the love to which Metropolitan Theodosius, Fr. Daniel, Fr. Michael, Matushka Elizabeth, Fr. Sergei, Fr. Anthony, and so many others bore witness. This is the love that should shape our concrete response to each question that we discuss today, and every question of the life of our Church, and in our own lives. For God is love, and to know Him more truly is to practice more faithfully that love—holy, self-sacrificial, kenotic—by which He has saved us. And to Him who first loved us be all the glory: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.