



September 1, 2026

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

My Beloved Children in the Lord,

Joyous feast!

The Gospel appointed for this day, the beginning of the ecclesiastical new year, sets before us a scene of remarkable simplicity. Our Lord returns to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, enters the synagogue on the Sabbath day “as His custom was” (Lk. 4:16), and stands up to read. He is handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and He finds the place where it is written that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him, that He is anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind — “to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” Then He closes the book, returns it to the attendant, sits down, and says: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:16–21).

As we enter this new year, let us consider what has taken place. The newest thing that has ever happened in the history of the world — God Himself present in the flesh, the year of His favor inaugurated — is announced by the reading of an ancient text, in a familiar building, according to an accustomed order, by a man doing on that Sabbath what He had always done on the Sabbath. The newness of Christ does not arrive by discarding what came before. It arrives clothed in continuity, and it fulfills the very things it renews.

The holy apostle Paul teaches us that we ourselves have been drawn into this newness, and that we entered it through the waters of the font: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). And again: “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). Every one of us who has been baptized has already been made new. The question set before us at the beginning of each Church year is not whether we shall receive this newness, but whether we shall walk in it.

Here we must be watchful, for nothing is easier than to confuse this newness with the kind we are offered every day. We live in a world with an enormous appetite for the new, and an entire industry devoted to ensuring that this appetite is both always fed and yet never satisfied. Advertisement and marketing are built upon a real thirst in the human heart — the longing for something fresh,

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something unspoiled, something that will make us feel that our life has begun again. They arouse this thirst skillfully and they cannot quench it, because everything they offer begins to age at the moment it is acquired. This is why the world must keep producing more of it. Novelty is a debt that can only be paid with more debt.

The newness that is in Christ belongs to an altogether different order. The Scriptures are precise here: the word chosen to describe it is not the word for what is merely recent, but the word for what is fresh and undiminished — a new covenant, a new man, a new song, a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth. This newness does not grow stale, because its source is not a moment in time but the living God, who is Himself “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). What ages in us is our attention to Him. What must be renewed is not the gift, but our reception of it.

This calling belongs to all of us, without exception. Those recently baptized or chrismated, and those still inquiring at the door, have received or are approaching something they must now spend a lifetime entering more deeply; the first fervor is a grace, but it is a beginning and not an arrival. Those who were baptized as infants and have known the Church all their days carry a treasure of another kind — the faith woven into their memory, family, and the ordinary rhythm of years — and they face a different danger, which is that what is familiar can quietly cease to be seen. Neither the newcomer nor the lifelong faithful may rest. The Apostle exhorts us all to “be renewed in the spirit of your minds and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:23–24), and he addresses this to the whole assembly.

What is true of persons is true also of communities. Some among us are new missions, meeting in rented halls, praying for a permanent home. Others are parishes marking their hundredth year, their hundred and twenty-fifth, and more, built by immigrants and by converts whose names are recorded on the walls. The task is the same in both cases, and in both cases it requires a real spiritual labor: to hold fast to what has been handed down, and at the same time to keep growing, to keep stretching, to keep learning, and not to mistake a mere habit for faithfulness. It is a good and necessary thing to say that we do a thing because we have always done it, when what we have always done is the tradition of the Church. It is a different thing when we say it because the alternative would require effort, or conversation, or risk. Discerning between the two is among the most delicate pastoral works we are given, and it cannot be done well without prayer, without patience, and without one another.

The renewal to which we are called is anchored, always, in what we have received — “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received” (1 Cor. 15:3). The wisdom of our older parishes is not an obstacle to renewal but one of its chief instruments, for a community that has kept the faith through a century of hardship has already learned something about endurance that no new initiative can supply. And our newest missions, in their turn, remind the whole Church what it looks like when the Gospel is heard for the first time. We need each other precisely at this point.

Therefore, as we enter this new year of the Lord's goodness, I invite each parish, each monastic community, each household, and each of the faithful to ask a simple question before God: where, in this past year, have we merely repeated ourselves, and where have we truly grown? Ask it without

discouragement and without haste. Then take up again, with gratitude, the things that have been handed down to us, and let us walk in them as those who are being made new.

To Him who sits upon the throne and says, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5), who crowns the year with His goodness, and who is glorified together with His Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and worship, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

Wishing you all a blessed New Year and many blessed years to come,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada