



OF WHAT LIFE
DO WE SPEAK?

*Four Pillars for the Fulfillment of the
Apostolic Work of the Church*

The Most Blessed
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Archbishop of Washington
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A Guiding Framework for the
Orthodox Church in America

*The Most Blessed TIKHON
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THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
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*Of What Life Do We Speak:
Four Pillars for the Fulfillment of the
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The Orthodox Church in America

I am the living bread which came down from heaven;
if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever:
and the bread that I will give is my flesh,
which I will give for the life of the world.

—JOHN 6:15

Contents



- 1 Preface
- 6 Words of Life and Living Bread
- 10 Will Ye Also Go Away?
- 15 The Four Pillars of Our Healing
- 20 Pillar One: The Spiritual Life
- 30 Pillar Two: Stewardship
- 40 Pillar Three: Relations with Others
- 47 Pillar Four: Outreach and Evangelism
- 54 Conclusion: The Prophetic Way of
the Church

Preface



Behold, there went out a sower to sow...

— MARK 4:3



IN the year 2020, the Orthodox Church in America will mark the 50th anniversary of the glorification of Saint Herman of Alaska, the first saint of North America, and the one who, together with his seven missionary companions, planted the Apostolic and monastic seeds in North America. His glorification was one of the first acts of the Orthodox Church in America as the local autocephalous Church and both the granting of autocephaly and the lifting up of the humble hermit of Spruce Island as a saint were the fruit of over 150 years of the watering and nurturing of those seeds by great figures such as Saint Innocent, Saint Jacob, Saint Tikhon, and Metropolitan Leonty of blessed memory. By their prayers and through their labors — as well as those of countless other bishops, clergy, and faithful — a local North American Church sprouted, first as a tender shoot, then as a frail sapling, and finally as the young tree that it is today.

This young tree is still tender and in need of nurturing and strengthening. It is not yet the mustard tree which is greater than all the other herbs and shoots out great branches so that the birds of the air may lodge under its shadow.¹ And yet, even as a grain of mustard seed, the Word that was sown fell on good ground, as witnessed by the accounts of the first missionaries on this continent:

I have been living on the island of Kodiak since 24 September 1794. I have, praise God, baptized more than 7,000 Americans, and celebrated more than 2,000 weddings. We have built a church and, if time allows, we shall

¹ Cf. Mark 4:31-32.

build another, and two portable ones, but a fifth is needed. We live comfortably, they love us and we them, they are a kind people, but poor. They take baptism so much to heart that they smash and burn all the magic charms given them by the shamans.¹

How has Holy Orthodoxy in North America fared since those days full of apostolic zeal and missionary activity? The Church has certainly expanded geographically, from Alaska to the Midwest, and numerically, with waves of immigration to the East Coast; missions have been planted, seminaries established, and converts welcomed; liturgical services have been celebrated and the holy mysteries offered for the salvation and healing of souls; a wealth of books, musical compositions, lectures, and podcasts have been shared and have impacted not only this continent but the entire world. There is much that has been accomplished and much for which we should give thanks to God.

At the same time, the Church faces great obstacles and tremendous change in the world as she makes her way through the 21st century. We ought to ask ourselves if we love the people of our lands, and if they love us? Do they voluntarily accept baptism and smash the idols that are provided to them by the shamans of our age? Can we, as the Church in North America, genuinely sing along with the paschal hymn: “Lift up your eyes, O Zion, round about and behold. Lo, your children like divinely shining stars assembled, from the West and from the North, from the Sea and from the East, to bless Christ in you forevermore.”² Do these words ring true for us or do they remind us of the reality that the light of the resurrection may have not yet

¹ Letter from Archimandrite Joasaph to Igumen Nazarii, May 1795, in *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2010), pp. 38–39.

² Paschal Canon, Ode VIII.

completely pierced through the darkness of the world and of fallen humanity?

When we gathered for the 18th All-American Council in Atlanta in 2015, I shared with the assembled delegates some of the difficult realities that we face as Christians today and some challenges that we have already shouldered as a community. I also sketched out four broad areas that I felt required our attention and could provide a framework within which to recapture the Alaskan missionary zeal of our forebears. In preparation for the 19th All-American Council in St. Louis, I have expanded upon those four broad areas, using the image of four pillars. This image refers to the four pillars of the altar table, which are the first items to be blessed during the beautiful and moving service for the consecration of a church temple. I chose this image as a way of calling to remembrance the centrality of Jesus Christ to absolutely every part of our existence as Christians and as authentic human beings. Christ is the King of Glory Who is enthroned upon the altar, which also represents His tomb. It is around this tomb and this altar that we gather to worship and glorify Him.

The image of the Four Pillars is a poetic one but the substance of that image is practical, with an emphasis on four concrete areas — the spiritual life, stewardship, relations with others, and evangelism — that require our attention and our action. Saint Herman is an example of one who made real those poetic ideals through his life, his example and his intercessions. He stands for us today as both a model and a source of encouragement as we confront the desert of our own existence. Saint Herman was truly a living and fiery pillar of prayer and asceticism and an inspiration to us in the spiritual life; he was a faithful steward who cared for both his own compatriots and the native peoples of Alaska, particularly the widows and the sick; he maintained good relations with all those with whom he came in contact, preaching Christ without respect of person or rank but also boldly speaking out in defense of the oppressed; and

he was a genuine missionary in his fulfillment of the Apostolic work through his consoling words and healing prayers.

In the pages that follow, I am proposing a framework for us to continue such a witness, a framework that will guide us from our Church-wide gathering at the 19th All-American Council through our long-term approach to forging our identity and mission as the local Church on this continent. There is no single person, single book, or single program that will bring this about. At the same time, every single person, every single book, every single program is crucial for this task. What is called for is a Church-wide endeavor, involving every parish, institution, and individual of the Orthodox Church in America, to tackle the enduring goals that lie before us. As there have been challenges in the past, so there will be many new ones along the way, but such struggles are part of our Christian journey. We need to consider and respond to those challenges, but we can only do this if we are willing to personally and collectively experience and share the gift of communion with Christ. I invite you to join me in setting off upon this path towards Life, a path that may seem uncertain or even treacherous at times, but one that has been traveled already by those who went before us and who now show us the way to follow Jesus Christ.

Twenty-five years after his arrival in Alaska, Saint Herman wrote the following to the Igumen of Valaam Monastery: “We also beg you, as you have been so kind as to remember us and write to us, to remember and pay heed to our humble state, before almighty God, in your holy prayers. We are not on the storm-tossed waves of the sea but are suffering amongst the tempting and tempestuous world and on a pilgrimage of the Apostolic word.”¹ All of us are called to join this pilgrimage of the Apostolic word — with our families, with our communities, and within our dioceses. May the intercessions of our Venerable Father Herman comfort and strengthen all of us — bish-

¹ Letter from Monk Herman to Igumen Jonathan, 13 December 1819, *ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

ops, clergy, monastics and faithful — on our evangelical journey within North America, and may his life serve as a light for our feet on the common path we walk as the local Orthodox Church in North America. ❀

THE MISSION OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA, *the local autocephalous Orthodox Church, is to be faithful in fulfilling the commandment of Christ to “Go into all the world and make disciples of all Nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all [things that He has] commanded” so that all people may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth:*

To preach, in accordance with God’s will, the fullness of the gospel of the Kingdom to the peoples of North America and to invite them to become members of the Orthodox Church.

To utilize for her mission the various languages of the peoples of this continent.

To be the body of Christ in North America and to be faithful to the tradition of the Holy Orthodox Church.

To witness to the truth, and by God’s grace and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to reveal Christ’s way of sanctification and eternal salvation to all.

—Adopted by the Holy Synod of Bishops of
the Orthodox Church in America, 1990

Words of Life & Living Bread



THE WORDS of our Lord Jesus Christ are found throughout the Scripture and are familiar to all Orthodox Christians who dwell within the bosom of the Church. And yet, our hearts often fail to grasp the deep meaning of these words and to recognize the transformative impact they could have in our life. We are bombarded daily with competing words, images, and ideologies which drown out the simple, yet direct, message of the Holy Gospel and make it more difficult, not only to hear the Lord's words of life, but to incorporate them as the foundation of our very existence. We know that the Christian path requires an ascetical effort on our part, but this ascetical effort is not limited to fasting, prayer and attendance at liturgical services. The latter are tools at our disposal, not simply to shield our minds from the noise of this worldly assault, but to help us acquire a genuine life of piety, guided by the fear of God and activated by real humility, all of which can lead us towards an authentic Christ-like existence in the world.

The words of Jesus Christ cannot be placed on equal footing with the noise and chatter we encounter in our daily existence precisely because they can only be fully experienced within the context of our life in the Church, which is in the world, but not of the world. The Christian experience is a very real and actual immersion in God's grace, not merely an intellectual understanding of abstract commandments or emotional response to Divine revelation. The Lord spoke of Himself as the bread of life not so that His words could remain as written letters on a page, but to welcome us into an experience: "Verily, verily, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood,

ye have no life in you.”¹ It is through our participation in the Holy Eucharist, by literally having Christ within us, His blood coursing through our veins and His body sanctifying our bodies, that we enter this life-giving experience.

Our communion with Christ occurs not only at the precise moment of our partaking of the Holy Things but through all the mysteries by which we participate sacramentally in the life of the Holy Trinity. From the moment that the priest blesses the water of baptism, showing it to be “the water of sanctification” and “the fountain of life,” to the final exclamation at the funeral service where Christ is proclaimed to be the “life and the resurrection” of the newly departed, a Christian is never denied access to the gift of life. This sanctification moves beyond the individual person to affect the entire world. There is an unbroken movement of life from the Liturgy of Preparation when the priest cuts the holy bread cross-wise, saying: “Sacrificed is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, for the life of the world and its salvation”² to the paschal explosion when we “arise at the rising of the sun” and “behold Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, Who causes life to dawn for all.”³ All of this, reflected in the fullness of our sacramental and liturgical life, is what it means to be a communicant in the Church.

The final six of the words printed on the epigraph of this document, taken from the Gospel of Saint John the Theologian, serve as the title of the short, but influential, work of Protosbyter Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*. In a few brief chapters, Father Alexander sets forth an outline of the Christian world-view in the face of secularism and proposes “the approach to the world and to man’s life in it that stems from the liturgical experience of the Orthodox world.”⁴ The

1 John 6:53.

2 From the Liturgy of Preparation.

3 Irmos of the Paschal Canon, Ode V.

4 *For the Life of the World*, p. 7.

above six words have also been chosen as the theme for the Nineteenth All-American Council of the Orthodox Church in America, not only to honor the 55th anniversary of the book's publication, but to set the stage for a Church-wide reevaluation of the issues raised by Father Alexander and to help us articulate our mission to the world in the 21st century.

As clearly as Father Alexander lays out the challenges facing Orthodoxy in North America in 1963 and as enthusiastically as he recommends approaches and solutions to those challenges, we must ask ourselves what we have done over the past 55 years, as the Orthodox Church and as Orthodox Christians, to continue addressing those challenges and implementing those recommendations. Certainly, Father Alexander was a pioneering architect for many of the elements that characterize today's Orthodox Church in America, including: the granting of autocephaly, liturgical renewal, an emphasis on the sacramental life of the Church, the use of English in the Divine Services, and the large number of missions planted throughout this continent. At the same time, changing realities have provided new challenges for us today: an evolving landscape in world Orthodoxy, the resurgence of ethnic identity through global movements, and ever-increasing complexity in moral and bio-ethical questions.

And let these Holy Gifts be unto my healing and purification, and enlightenment, and protection, and salvation, and sanctification of both soul and body, unto the averting of every fantasy and evil deed and diabolical operation working noetically in my members; unto confidence and love towards Thee, unto amendment of life and stability, unto an increase of virtue and perfection, unto fulfillment of the commandments, unto communion with the Holy Spirit, as a provision for life everlasting, and as an acceptable defense at Thy dread tribunal, not unto judgment, nor unto condemnation.

We must certainly celebrate the contributions that Father Alexander has made to our present circumstances as the local and indigenous Orthodox Church in America. And we should acknowledge that his analysis of the realities of secularism and

the modern world in his time was both insightful and clear in its prescriptions. But Father Alexander would undoubtedly be the first to urge us not to rest on past accomplishments, including his own. Rather, he would challenge us to make our own contribution to the living tradition of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in the 21st century and to engage in an authentic Apostolic witness in North America, as individuals, as communities, and as a local Church.

We ought to consider and respond to this challenge, but we can only do this if we are willing to collectively experience and individually undertake a certain degree of self-examination and, above all, a willingness to ask ourselves:

ARE WE WILLING

to eat the flesh of the Son of Man and to drink His blood so that we might receive His Life and share that life with the world? ❀

Will Ye Also Go Away?



We live in a death-denying culture.

Secularism is an “explanation” of death in terms of life. The only world we know is this world, the only life given to us is this life — so thinks a secularist — and it is up to us men to make it as meaningful, as rich, as happy as possible. Life ends with death.¹ —FR. ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN



ALL HUMAN BEINGS share the common biological state of coming into existence at conception and departing this world at death. The time in between these two dramatic moments is what we refer to as “our life,” and it is this brief time which has been given to us to do with as we choose, making use of our God-given freedom and our humble obedience to the life-giving commandments. For many human beings, the choice is often understood as a straightforward one: *life*, which is to be clung to as desperately as possible, or *death*, which is to be avoided as long as possible. The whole drama of human existence often unfolds between these two realities of life and death. Christianity offers a more challenging, and yet more hopeful, option: *life through death*, in which both the beginning and ending reality come together in an incomprehensible, yet ultimately life-giving, manner.

“By struggling to find the right relation to suffering, to our own death, we shall simultaneously find God, and not simply find Him, but acquire Him and indeed conquer Him completely.”

—ARCHIMANDRITE AEMILIANOS

It is in reference to this mysterious space between birth and death that Father Alexander presents the following question in

¹ *For the Life of the World*, pp. 95 and 98.

the opening pages of his book, a question which sets the stage for his discussion and for ours:

Of what life do we speak, what life do we preach, proclaim and announce when as Christians we confess that Christ died for the life of the world? What life is both motivation, and the beginning and the goal of Christian mission?¹

Father Alexander's question still resonates with us today, perhaps because it contains an echo of all the questions which Christ Himself posed to His disciples: *What would you that I do for you? Who do men say that I am? Can you drink the cup which I drink? Could you not watch for one hour?* Often these questions were asked in moments of tension or confusion at the hard sayings of Christ. When our Lord said that we can have no life in ourselves unless we eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man, some of the disciples, hearing this, went back, and walked no more with Him. When this happened, the Lord turned to the Twelve and presented yet another question:

WILL YE ALSO GO AWAY?

This is not merely a theoretical or rhetorical question but a challenge to those who would follow Christ. The Lord is asking if the Apostles are willing, not only to leave their nets, but to follow Him into the new life that He is offering them; whether they are willing to lose their earthly life so that they might gain the life of paradise; whether they will remain in their biological existence which ends in death or follow Him into the resurrection. He is asking whether they are able to confront their own mortality by voluntarily following Him to the Cross and to death.

It is Peter who offers an answer in the form of his own question: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."² The Apostle is clear: He believes

1 Ibid., p. 12.

2 John 6:66-69.

in Christ, the Son of the living God, and there is none other to whom he can go to receive the words of eternal life. And yet that same Apostle would shortly deny that he even knew this man with a Galilean accent.

“Of the rational beings created by Him and honored with the dignity of free-will, some are His friends, others are His true servants, some are worthless, some are completely estranged from God, and others, though feeble creatures, are His opponents.”

—ST. JOHN OF THE LADDER, 1.1

Is this not where we often stand in our own life? Sometimes we are with Peter in his moment of certainty and other times with him in his moment of doubt; sometimes we turn to God with deep prayer and other times we hide away in fear; sometimes we are strong in the practice of the virtues and other times we become enslaved to our own passions. The turmoil taking place in the depths of our heart is also reflected in the world around us, a world that is desperately seeking immortality but only ever attaining a false shadow of eternal life, mistaking the pleasures, luxuries, and comforts of this world for eternal joy, consolation, and love.

What is our own response to, our own commitment to, our own obedience to, the words of life offered by the Lord? When we are confronted by the deep questions of life — Who am I? — What is the purpose of my existence? — Who is my neighbor? — How should I live my life? — Do we run to the One who has the words of eternal life or do we fall back on our own human understanding? Do we have the courage to take up our Cross and follow Christ? Or are we sometimes tempted to also “go away?”

To all such questions, Father Alexander suggests, “there exist no answers in the form of practical ‘recipes.’ ‘It all depends’ on thousands of factors — and to be sure all faculties of our human intelligence and wisdom, organization and planning, are to be constantly used.” But beyond these faculties, the primary factor that should define us as Christians is “our being

real witnesses to the joy and peace of the Holy Spirit, to that new life of which we are made partakers in the Church.” Our present task is to ask ourselves whether we have become such witnesses — in the depth of our hearts, in our families, and in our communities. Do we see the Church, in the words of Father Alexander, as “the sacrament of the Kingdom — not because she possesses divinely instituted acts called ‘sacraments’ but because first of all she is the possibility given to man to see in and through this world the ‘world to come,’ to see and to ‘live’ it in Christ”?¹

In the eyes of the world, the worth of a human life is often established by what one has accomplished to further civilization, by what fame one has brought to one’s name, or by what fortune one has amassed. Those of us who have not achieved such worldly glory may be disappointed when we reflect upon our own life, wondering if we have accomplished anything substantive or worthwhile. This is a false criterion by which to judge ourselves because it takes into account only the outward and visible expressions of a person’s achievements. In his biography of Saint Silouan, Archimandrite Sophrony introduces the entire work with the following line: “Outwardly, Blessed Staretz Silouan’s life presents little of interest.” He then quotes the one-paragraph notice from the Monastery Register relating to the life of the Elder and notes: “From ‘born’ to ‘died’ — how meagre the picture!” And yet, Father Sophrony went on to compose a 500-page book on the life, teachings, and prayers of this outwardly simple monk who yet contained in himself the grace of the Holy Spirit.

In this, Saint Silouan stands as a true image of his Lord, of Whom it was written both that “He had no form or comeliness, no beauty that we should desire Him”² and that “there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be

1 *For the Life of the World*, p. 113.

2 Isaiah 53:2.

written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.”¹ It can be the same with our life in Christ and our life in the Church. Our earthly time may slip by quickly — hours, days, weeks, and years — but we nevertheless can experience the fullness and timelessness of Christ’s love, life, and light within all of those chronological intervals, even as we draw closer to our own death. A typical work week may bring little reward, but in Holy Week, we experience something truly eternal, triumphant, and life-giving as we walk with the Lord through His Passion, Crucifixion, and Death, and Burial. And then on Pascha and throughout Bright Week, time is further transfigured as we experience the glory of the single Eternal Day of Resurrection for eight earthly days.

These experiences are available to us at every moment in the Church if we choose, not merely to “not go away,” but to actively pursue the Lord, to seek out the healing that He offers us, regardless of the difficulties (which are unavoidable) and no matter what the temptations (which are ever present) of a world which seeks to mask the ugliness of death through a false and superficial façade. To do this, we must lay aside our proud reliance on our own self-determination and strength and place all our trust in God’s divine grace and in the community of the Church. We must, in a word, understand that we are already dead, having been buried with Christ in baptism. And yet, like Lazarus, we are alive once again, having been raised by Christ. Archimandrite Sophrony once said that there is no occupation or work that debases a man — only sin debases a man. He also said that all human beings are equal because the same life-giving commandments are given to each of them to fulfill. With these two insights, Father Sophrony points us to a higher criterion for valuing the worth of a human being: a heart which finds rest in, and communion with, Christ in the Holy Spirit. ❀

¹ John 21:25.

The Four Pillars of Our Healing



She spreads her branches in generous growth over all the earth, she extends her abundant streams even further; yet one is the head-spring, one the source, one the Mother who is prolific in her offspring, generation after generation; of her womb are we born, of her milk are we fed, from her Spirit our souls draw their life-breath. The spouse of Christ cannot be defiled, she is inviolate and chaste; she knows one home alone, in all modestly she keeps faithfully to one chamber. It is she who seals for the kingdom the sons she has borne. Whoever breaks with the Church and enters on an adulterous union, cuts himself off from the promises made to the Church... You cannot have God for your Father if you no longer have the Church for your mother. — ST. CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE

On the Church, 5-6



THE CHURCH is often portrayed iconographically and liturgically as a ship. Christ holds the rudder and the breath of the Holy Spirit fills the sails as the ship sets a course for the Father's Heavenly Kingdom. But we are not merely passengers "along for the ride." Our life on the ship is not simply a passive one, but rather an active participation that extends beyond the few hours a week that we spend in the Church temple or in our icon corner. We are called to a new life in the Church and this requires a radical transformation and a willingness to devote our every breath to sailing on that ship through both calm and choppy waters. This transformation is a living participation in which we are called to unity, to sanctity, to conciliarity, and to apostolic ministry in the Name of Christ. These are the means by which we truly become members, not of an organization, but of a body: the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, whose head is Christ.

O Thou Who, in that nature taken upon Thyself, didst accept Thy life-creating and saving Passion, the Cross, the nails, the spear, and death: do Thou mortify all the soul-corrupting passions of my body.

If the Christian Church is the Body of Christ, then she is, indeed, ONE and “breathes with one breath.”¹ In the same way, all of the members of the body ought to live, move, and have their being within that same breath. But to breathe in this way requires that we ourselves enter into union with the Archetype, Jesus Christ. As we enter into union with Him, we are drawn into communion with one another, just as Christ, through the Cross draws together the four corners of the world: “And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto myself.”² Our life has no meaning outside of Christ, and we remain outside of Christ if we do not take up the Cross to make Him the beginning, the middle, and the end of our existence.

Thou Who by Thy life-creating Resurrection on the third day didst raise our fallen first parent: raise me up who have slipped down into sin, and set before me the ways of repentance.

The Church is also HOLY and her members can partake of that holiness through the sanctification offered by Christ through the Resurrection. However, our partaking of this gift requires that we exercise good stewardship of the great blessings bestowed on us by the Church through the holy mysteries: baptism and chrismation, confession and holy unction, marriage and monasticism, among others. The path to sanctification requires work, not only to receive those mysteries, but to allow them to transform who we are as human beings, and to allow that transformation in turn to assist in the transfiguration of creation and the world within which we dwell.

Thou Who by Thy glorious Ascension didst deify the flesh that Thou hadst taken upon Thyself and didst honor it by Thy session at the

1 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.6.

2 John 12:32.

*right hand of the Father: by my partaking of Thy holy Mysteries
make me worthy of the portion of the saved at Thy right hand.*

The Church is CATHOLIC in that she reflects the unity of the Holy Trinity, three persons in an unconfused and undivided unity. We manifest this catholicity in a personal way by making ourselves worthy of the name of “Christian” through our life of prayer, repentance, and the acquisition of the virtues. We also manifest this catholicity in our efforts to live a genuine life in communion with our neighbors in a spirit of truth and of love.

*Thou Who by the coming of the Comforter, Thy Spirit, didst make
Thy sacred Disciples precious vessels: show me forth also as a
receptacle of His coming.*

In fulfillment of His promise, the Lord sent the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, and we participate in this APOSTOLIC calling by sharing in their ministry, that is, by sharing the Gospel with the world. But we cannot participate in this sacred work if we do not enter into the labors of purifying our hearts and preparing our entire being to receive the gifts of grace. Our evangelical work has less to do with programs and structures than with our efforts to become images of Christ and vessels of the Holy Spirit.

These are the eternal and unchanging marks of the Church, but precisely because they are eternal and unchanging, it may not be evident to us how to incarnate them in our own context. To this end, I am proposing the following Four Pillars — not as replacements for the eternal features of the Church — but as concrete areas in which we, as clergy, monastics, and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America, might apply ourselves so that, in some small way, we might give expression on this continent — even if imperfectly — to the fullness of the Orthodox Christian Faith, incarnated and revealed by Jesus Christ, handed down by the Apostles, and preserved by the witness of the Martyrs and Saints throughout the ages.

This faith and witness are pre-eminently a path towards the

healing of broken human beings. If the Church is to be truly prophetic, then she needs to bring those broken human beings (first of all ourselves) to Christ. The Old Testament Prophets and Righteous Ones were sent as Physicians to offer healing to Israel, but they failed in this task because the disease was too great. Christ alone, by becoming man while remaining God, could serve as an effective Physician for humanity. This is the heart of the Divine Liturgy: Christ is offered and received as the “Physician of souls and bodies,” and our participation in the fullness of the sacramental life of the Church is the means by which we participate in this healing.

Just as there are four writings from the Holy Evangelists but only one Gospel, so the following Four Pillars have meaning only within the broader context of our common life and healing in Christ and in the Church. They are not precisely defined categories, but rather variations on a single theme: how to live our lives on earth in a manner which helps us to know God, to find healing for ourselves and to uncover the mystery of eternal life with those around us. Neither are the Four Pillars outlined below intended to be exhaustive, but rather to provide some concrete expressions of, and reflections on, our mission as the Orthodox Church in America. They are presented as a framework for our Apostolic work and it is my hope that the bishops, clergy and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America will actively participate and collaborate in the filling in of this framework through our common efforts and united prayers to build the house of the Lord. ❀

“Yea, O Master, Lord our God, the hope of all the ends of the earth, hear us sinners who make our supplications unto Thee, and send down Thy all-holy and adorable and almighty Spirit, and sanctify this temple and this altar; fill it with light everlasting; elect it for Thy dwelling place; make it the abode of Thy Glory. Adorn it with Thy divine and celestial gifts. Appoint it for a haven of the tempest-tossed, for a healing of passions, for a refuge of the weak, for an expelling of evil spirits. Let Thy eyes be open upon it day and night, and let Thy

THE FOUR PILLARS OF OUR HEALING

ears be heedful of the prayer of those who shall enter it in Thy fear and in devoutness, and shall call upon Thy all-honorable and adorable name; that whatsoever they shall ask of Thee, Thou will hear it in heaven above, and will show mercy and be gracious unto them.”

—PRAYER AT THE CONSECRATION OF A CHURCH

Pillar One: The Spiritual Life



O God, my God, unto Thee I rise early at dawn.
My soul hath thirsted for Thee;
how often hath my flesh longed after Thee
in a land barren and untrodden and unwatered.

— PSALM 62:1



THE Orthodox understanding of the spiritual life should be clearly distinguished from the modern concept of “spirituality,” which often claims to reject the rigidity and dogmatism of “organized religion” in favor of personally tailored practices to help one attain such exalted states as “inner wholeness,” “oneness with the universe,” and “transcendent love.” Wholeness, unity and love are certainly concepts that are found within the Orthodox ascetical tradition, but they find their legitimate expression only in a relationship with Jesus Christ and within the community of the Church. At the same time, authentic spiritual life is not to be relegated to the exclusive domain of specialized persons or institutions. The spiritual life is for everyone, at every time and in every place.

Illumine our hearts, O Master Who lovest mankind, with the pure light of Thy divine knowledge. Open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of Thy Gospel teachings. Implant also in us the fear of Thy blessed commandments, that trampling down all carnal desires, we may pursue a spiritual manner of living, both thinking and doing such things as are well-pleasing unto Thee.

Saint Onuphrius the Egyptian (commemorated June 12) spent over 70 years of his life in ascetical struggle in the desert. Towards the end of his life, he was discovered by another

great ascetic, Paphnutius, who was deeply edified by Onufrius' way of life. After sharing the story of his life, Saint Onufrius asked that Paphnutius return to live among men, "that he might teach them about the manner of life of the hermits and that they might imitate them, each according to his strength."¹ And indeed, Saint Paphnutius, after burying his fellow ascetic, returned to the world, where he "witnessed to the truth that men of flesh and blood were able to live as angels in this world." This is the goal for all Orthodox Christians: to live as angels in this world, but to do this each according to our strength. The spiritual life is not something that we can turn on and off, like a Wi-Fi hotspot on our mobile phone; nor is it something that we can learn by reading books or blogs, even the most edifying ones. Rather, the spiritual life is the foundation of our Christian experience — it is the struggle to "put on Christ," whether at Church or at work, whether alone or in the company of friends or strangers. It is the effort we make to prepare a small space in our hearts for the Holy Spirit to dwell.

The spiritual life is often understood to be an individual undertaking — and in many ways it is — but although our goal might be to make our own hearts receptacles for the Holy Spirit, we are not isolated in that undertaking. A community (whether we consider this humanity as whole, the Church, our diocese, our parish, or our family) should not be understood as a forest which is made up of individual and separate trees. Rather a community might be better likened to a single tree which we are all part of. Using this image, the roots of the tree would be the spiritual life, by which we receive the healthy nutrients for growth through prayer and participation in the Holy Mysteries; the trunk represents our common stewardship of the gifts within that community; the branches stand for our witness and ministry in the larger community; and the leaves, fruit, and seeds

1 Hieromonk Makarios, *The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church*, Volume V, Holy Convent of the Annunciation of our Lady of Ormylia (Chalkidike), 2005, pp. 464-465.

represent our mission of outreach and evangelism. Essential for the development of the tree, therefore, are the roots, that is, the cultivation of the spiritual life.

Liturgical and Sacramental Life

Abba Sisoës said to a brother, “How are you getting on?” and he replied, “I am wasting my time, father.” The old man said, “If I happen to waste a day, I am grateful for it.”

To help us in this cultivation, the Church has given us many tools to use. Chief among these are the ascetical and liturgical traditions within which we participate in the Holy Mysteries and grow closer to God. The liturgical cycles and hymns of the Church are rich and complex, yet there are simple movements that flow within this complexity: ascent and descent, joy and sorrow, praise and repentance. These movements are not reflections of the emotional ups and downs of our often-turbulent existence but rather serve as a helpful rudder for our hearts to navigate those ups and downs in Christ.

The ascetical and liturgical life is a powerful resource that is present in every context in which we may find ourselves. Whether we are part of a monastery, an established parish or a newly planted mission, we have the opportunity to partake of the cycle of liturgical services, to receive the Holy Mysteries of baptism, chrismation, confession, marriage, and all the others, and to experience the Glory of God within the depths of our hearts. It is important for the Orthodox Church in America to maintain its identity liturgically. We have established a strong tradition of offering the cycle of services in English, French, and Spanish — the primary languages of North America — while also ministering to the many faithful of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Our liturgical practice is also an established tradition, originating from the Russian Orthodox practice, but incorporating local variations. Those local variations (themselves originating from established practices in

world Orthodoxy) make it difficult to maintain a consistent and common approach to liturgical practice.

Whether we are personally partial to Slavic or Byzantine practices, to open or closed royal doors, or to classical or contemporary language, the Holy Synod of Bishops, which provides oversight of such matters, is committed to navigating these waters in order both to maintain the tradition of our Orthodox Church in America and to pave the way for the future liturgical expression of Orthodoxy in North America, which itself is dependent on the direction taken, and the progress achieved, by the Assembly of Bishops process. Though the final outcome of this process may remain uncertain at this point, there need not be similar uncertainty within the Orthodox Church in America. We should give thanks to God for our long-standing tradition of liturgical practice and tradition and continue our common efforts to develop it even more.

Orthodox liturgical music is one of the most effective ways that this takes place, and is one of the most tangible outreach tools available to churches today. Music is often the first thing which deeply strikes people when they walk into an Orthodox church, even before they absorb the iconography, the architecture, the words of the services, or the preaching. Moreover, beautiful church music has a remarkable capacity to meet people on, as it were, neutral territory. Where words and concepts can feel threatening to many people, beautiful sacred art — and sacred music especially — forces and threatens no one. Rather, it works to soften their hearts, preparing them to receive the things of God without their even realizing it.

This powerful tool — beautiful church music — has, however, become sadly blunted in many of our present-day parishes: choirs are struggling to sing even the simplest music well; parishes are unable to find capable choir directors; and despite more than five decades of liturgical publication in English, churches are often still missing basic resources necessary for carrying out a normal cycle of services. In an era in which mu-

sical culture is declining across American society — in schools and local communities as well as in churches — it is imperative that the Orthodox Church in America step forward to work against this decline, and that a clear focus of our mission be the building up or even re-building of our musical tradition and practice as a whole.

The Department of Liturgical Music and Translations has been one of the most active and productive ministries of the Orthodox Church in America with thousands of pages of liturgical music and texts produced and hours of training for singers and choir directors provided for use world-wide. At the same time, a more strategic approach to publication of both liturgical music and liturgical books needs to be implemented. The Orthodox Church in America should be able to create a library of liturgical books that is complete, authoritative, practical, easily acquired and transmitted, and most of all, beautiful. We should also lead the way in training the next generation of church musicians through the expansion of our online music programs and in-person summer music intensives for training singers and choir directors, and by developing certificate programs for church choir directors and internship programs for future church music leaders.

Vocations and Clergy Health

We must always have before us the example of Christ, Who saved us not through His almighty power, so as not to annul our freedom, but through the weakness of His love, which attracts us more powerfully than anything human. Likewise, if we are priests, we should not approach our flock with the authority of the priesthood that we have been given, but with a humble heart which knows how to love purely and to console every broken soul with peace.¹

1 Archim. Zacharias, *The Engraving of Christ in Man's Heart*, p. 147.

The pastoral ministry of our clergy has been made more difficult by the many burdens and requirements placed upon them by the changing realities of the world. Today, the pastoral oversight of a community is more difficult than ever, not only because human beings seem to be ever-more fragmented and broken, but also because of the additional administrative, legal and personal issues that need to be juggled by the clergy as they minister to those human beings — and this includes caring for their own spiritual health and that of their families.

It is important to remember that Christ is the true priest for all of us, whether ordained or not, and that the priestly work He accomplished was the reconciliation of man and the world with God. He accomplished this through His ineffable self-emptying in the incarnation and by His extreme humility on the Cross. Our need for vocations is not simply to encourage men to serve the Lord in the positions of readers, subdeacons, deacons, or priests, but to provide them with the formation and ongoing support necessary to become effective preachers, teachers, and celebrants of the divine mysteries.

If the core of our lives as Christians is the Holy Altar of the Church, then the core of our responsibility as members of the Church should be to care for the health of those who stand and serve before that altar and impart to us the Holy Mysteries. The clergy are set apart for the sacred task of bringing their faithful, and the whole world, into the glory of the Kingdom, to reconcile them to God. At the same time, they themselves remain human beings in need of healing and salvation so that they might help lead others to the same. It is a common journey that clergy and laypeople are on. But it is through the grace of the priesthood that the salvific healing of the Church is imparted to all the members of the body. Therefore, it is crucial to renew our efforts at fostering clergy health — physical, spiritual, emotional — so that our parishes and institutions may be guided by pastors and lay leaders who have a deep understanding of the Orthodox therapeutic and pastoral tradition.

The Holy Synod of Bishops relies on several official bodies to encourage vocations and maintain clergy health. The Board of Theological Education assists in addressing not only questions of ordination and formation of deacons through the Diaconal Vocations Program, but likewise the broader issues of theological formation and the establishment of standards for ordination. In addition, the Department of Pastoral Life has been actively advancing initiatives relating to the ministries, collegiality, and health of clergy and their families. Of particular note in that area is the success of the HOPE peer-group program, which has provided a model for possible use throughout the Church. Our parishes can help in this area by providing their clergy with adequate compensation and benefits, both in the short-term with proper salaries and opportunities for continuing education and growth in spiritual/physical health, and in the long-term through contributions to the Pension Plan and opportunities for sabbaticals or other avenues for “recharging.” It is also within the local community of the parish that new vocations can be encouraged, not only to the priesthood and the diaconate, but also to the monastic ranks and positions of lay leadership.

Prayer

Much emphasis has legitimately been given in past decades to the notion of the “royal priesthood” or “the priesthood of the laity.” As important as this subject is, the emphasis has often been on the functional liturgical aspects of the priesthood. Different ways to involve the laity in liturgical and pastoral ministry have been proposed and implemented with the goal of introducing more people to a true experience of the Kingdom. While such practical approaches might be useful, it is equally important that the inner work of prayer in the heart be cultivated. In order to promote a true and healthy understanding of the holy priesthood, we must be willing to explore the riches of our tradition of prayer, both liturgical and private — each of which has

the same goal of bringing our hearts into closer relation with Christ.

It is in the monasteries where we find this culture of the heart in the most intense way, in the context of community life and in an organic relationship with the surrounding world. In almost every monastic community, there is a clear relation between the inner life of each monastic, the communal cycle of worship and work, and the surrounding environment. We have 28 monasteries planted throughout this continent, located in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. The monastic life is a model for all of us, not to be imitated in exact detail or with such intensity, but to inspire us in both searching into our own hearts and in developing therein a genuine life of prayer.

Enter eagerly into the treasure-house that lies within you, and so you will see the treasure-house of heaven; for the two are the same, and there is but one single entry to them both.

—ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

Theological Formation and Education

We live in a world where trivia is exalted and wisdom is neglected. Just as the liturgical life of the Church is rich and complex, so are the thoughts of human beings. But there is a difference in this complexity between those whose minds are filled with inconsequential thoughts and ramblings, on the one hand, and those whose words and actions are guided by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Theological education refers not merely to an academic discipline, but rather to the sacred task of the acquisition of the knowledge of God, inasmuch as this is humanly possible. It is a task that takes place in our monasteries, in our seminaries, in our parishes, and in our homes — and it provides inspiration for our life by immersing us in the patristic, liturgical and ascetical treasure of our Orthodox Faith.

Our seminaries have been, and remain, crucial to the formation and training of clergy and lay leaders and this needs to re-

main a reality. However, one of the main burdens weighing on the seminaries (over and above the financial burden of running the schools) has been the necessity of providing an expanding array of formation and training, not limited to the spheres of theology and liturgy, but encompassing everything else from reading and writing skills, to basic understanding of the Bible, to normal human behavior and social interaction in a community. The Church as a whole (not simply individuals, but dioceses and parishes) needs to also take responsibility for her part in the sacred enterprise of theological education.

Whether or not our young men and women desire to follow a path of graduate level theological education, it is of utmost importance that they receive the foundations of Orthodox spiritual life and theology from the earliest age. Those who do receive the call to go to seminary will thereby have received a fitting formation for their later studies, and those who do not will nevertheless be equipped to respond in an intelligent manner to the challenges of the world. In the same way, graduates from both schools of higher theological education and other educational institutions or programs would benefit from ongoing education in theology, which is a lifetime occupation for all Christians. Therefore, theological education is not simply something that takes place in the seminary during a limited period of time. Rather, it is a necessary component of the spiritual development of all Orthodox Christians that must be cultivated in the parishes as well.

The Orthodox Church in America is blessed to have three seminaries serving us in the formation and educating of clergy and lay leaders. In each of those communities, theology is practiced and lived, and in them we have a treasure of theological and ascetical training and guidance. But this treasure should not be confined to those institutions; rather, it must be shared with all within the Church and, in turn, nourished by the Church through prayerful and financial support. There is an incalculable value to be placed in both our seminaries and

our monasteries, not because of the great costs associated with the administration of those institutions (particularly the seminaries), but because they are sources of the theology, the life by which all of us can achieve communion with Christ. ❀

ENDURING GOALS

- To establish and sustain Christ-centered parishes and communities which welcome all into the beauty of the Kingdom through a full liturgical, sacramental, and ascetical existence. To encourage in particular the sacred arts of iconography and music, especially the training of singers, chanters, and choir directors.
- To nurture vocations to the Priesthood, the Diaconate, and the minor orders of the Church and to foster the spiritual, emotional, physical, and financial health of the clergy and their families so that they can pastor and lead their flocks towards healing in Christ.
- To inspire monastic vocations and to encourage, support, and foster an appreciation for the beauty of the cenobitic life and the sacred value of prayer and hospitality.
- To form the most comprehensive and unified North American system of Orthodox Christian theological education, firmly rooted in the patristic, scriptural and liturgical tradition of Holy Orthodoxy and serving as the backbone of our Church schools, our seminaries, and our adult continuing education programs.

Pillar Two: Stewardship



The first, the basic definition of man is that he is priest. He stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God — and by filling the world with this eucharist, he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the “matter,” the material of one all-embracing Eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.¹

— FR. ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN



Two years ago, I served the funeral for a remarkable young woman, whom I had previously only met once when I brought Communion to her and her family as she lay on her bed of recovery after an amputation. She was a gifted 11-year old who sang, danced and played the piano and the violin on a professional level. The year before, she had been diagnosed with a rare form of terminal cancer and bore that cross until the Lord received her into His Kingdom. Even as she faced physical suffering, the difficulties of treatment, and the reality of her own death, she never lost the joy of living, nor did she grow bitter or angry. A few weeks before her falling asleep, she sent out a message: “It was snowing today [here]! The snow was so strong and the grass was white! It was majestic! I hope you can visit me soon. You are always welcome! Hope to see you soon!” Her courageous and joyful example, along with her Christ-like long-suffering, confirmed for me that truly the Glory of God is revealed in a human person, sometimes more brightly in the most trying of

¹ *For the Life of the World*, p. 17.

circumstances, and that there is no work that is more necessary than the caring for our broken and hurting fellows, all of whom, like us, are made in the image and likeness of that Glory. This is the foundation of genuine stewardship.

Stewardship is the application of our spiritual life to the realities of the fallen world. Creation itself is in need of healing, but those of us who dwell within that creation are also in need of healing, since it is on our account that creation fell. And healing requires a therapeutic method of treatment, which the Church offers to us through the Holy Mysteries and the liturgical and sacramental life by which we become true human beings and, by God's grace, saints. If Christ is the Divine Physician, then He is the Physician for all of us and for all of creation. His Body, the Church — reflected in her monasteries, parishes, and communities — serves as a hospital for the souls of all who are broken, beaten down or wounded.

Let a man so consider us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. —1 CORINTHIANS 4:1

Our spiritual life is not simply a routine that we follow; it is the foundation by which the human person finds healing. When we partake of the Holy Mysteries, not only our hearts, but our bodies also are filled with the life of the Holy Trinity; when we pray before our icons, it is not only our soul, but all of mankind which is transformed; and when we care for our fellows, we not only give value to their existence, but we become authentic human beings ourselves, placed within a transfigured creation which we must care for as a garden planted by God Himself. This is the universal witness of all the saints throughout the ages, and a witness that has taken root in our North American soil and grown into a “trunk” by the experience and sacrifices of those who labored with the saints: the bishops, clergy, and faithful who carried forward the vision brought to these shores by Saint Herman and his fellow monastic missionaries. It is our responsibility to be the guardians of this witness, which is the patrimony of the Orthodox Church in America. It is a patrimo-

ny which it is our responsibility to guard, nurture, and develop, and is reflected in the saints, their lives and their teachings.

The Human Person and the Family

It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to be king over the ends of the earth. I seek Him Who died for our sake. I desire him who rose for us. Birth-pangs are upon me. Suffer me, my brethren; hinder me not from living, do not wish me to die... Suffer me to receive the pure light; when I shall have arrived there, I shall become a human being (anthropos). Suffer me to follow the example of the passion of my God.

—ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH,

LETTER TO THE ROMANS, 6

In April of 2018, the pop group ABBA announced that it would be undertaking a world tour using holograms of the members of the group to simulate a live concert. Although some might characterize this undertaking as a crass commercial effort at generating millions of dollars in profit for an aging franchise, an even more sorrowful critique might view it as a valiant effort to stave off the inevitable process of aging and dying that all human beings must face. We now live in a world where the human person has been reduced to an avatar, giving the appearance of permanence and indestructibility, but in fact destined to vanish at the first power outage. And yet, as long as the power is restored to our virtual realities, there is always the illusion that our lives will resurrect, in the same manner as a video game character is instantly revived by finding a magic crystal.

One need only consider the many icons in the world of entertainment, sports, and government who have vanished as the result of various sexual, financial, or other abuse scandals in recent years. Their oversized media images disappeared almost overnight, leaving barely a trace. Unfortunately, the victims in those cases also have tended to disappear, despite valiant efforts of various social and cultural movements to keep them and their causes alive in the public consciousness. In reality, move-

ments and causes tend to generate more movements and causes: for every “black lives matters” there is a “blue lives matters”; for every #metoo movement, there is a Promise Keepers movement. Each of these causes and movements (whether one agrees or not with their motivations) seeks to provide an identity to its adherents and is frustrated when the wider culture does not pay attention or when counter-causes and movements arise in opposition.

In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis, having traveled there to support the sanitation workers during their strike. This particular strike was part of the larger civil rights movement, and those sanitation workers held up their own signs to express their grievance. Those signs were composed of four simple words: “I am a man!” These words speak clearly of the desire of human beings to be accepted and respected as human beings by others, which is perhaps the basic cry of all civil rights movements. But one might also suggest that these cries speak to a deeper longing for genuine personhood, a recognition that the purpose of the incarnation and the economy of Christ is for all human beings to find healing in Christ and to become truly human, to become “a man” in the image of the archetype, the God-man Jesus Christ.

A nun once related to me that, on the day she was tonsured and clothed in the angelic schema, her elder called her to himself and said to her: “Now you are a true human being.” He said this because she was completely clothed in the monastic habit except for her face: and it is in one’s face that our real humanity is revealed because it is an image of the face of Christ. All of our faces are marred and broken in some way, reflecting the brokenness in our hearts or in our bodies. We struggle with various addictions — alcohol, drugs, food, and pornography — as well as a whole range of emotional and psychological problems — depression, co-dependency, greed, and anger. In addition, our children have an increased source of confusion in the area of sexuality, with very public discussions relating

to sexual orientation, and gender identity. Beyond this, we are bombarded almost daily with temptations: coffee, sugar, sports, television shows, social media, and breaking news, which make it more difficult to know who we are as persons.

It is difficult not to become distracted by the media and public attention that is given to such issues, which often focus the discussion on the most extreme cases and engender divisive and polarizing debate. This public debate has a deep impact in our own communities, but it particularly impacts our families, where such struggles take place in the most personal setting. There, it is often anxiety that leads to further confusion about how to deal with these problems, and public debate is often less than helpful to parents and to families in sorting them out. In order to get to the root of these problems, it is not enough to debate the symptoms; rather, we must help provide the means for all of us to understand the causes of the brokenness we see too often today. We must return, calmly and with discernment, to the ancient therapeutic approach of the Orthodox Church which, in collaboration with the significant contributions of modern medicine and psychology, can most directly help all human beings regain their humanity.

The Orthodox understanding of the human person is a deep well from which we can draw much wisdom and knowledge. One of the reasons to nurture and preserve the spiritual health of our clergy is precisely so that they can serve as leaders in conveying the therapeutic approach of the Holy Fathers of the Church. Our priests and monastics can most effectively serve as spiritual guides and confessors when they themselves have received both the experience and the tools necessary for this sacred task. But all of us can draw from this well.

Through death and the resurrection, we enter into salvation, which is the healing offered by the Divine Physician to those who, without despair, accept their mortality and, with hope, undertake a genuine examination of their brokenness. Acceptance and examination are often difficult and painful, but inspired by

Christ through the Holy Spirit, and nurtured through the scriptural, liturgical and ascetical experience of the Church, they lead us to hope and to receiving divine wisdom on the questions surrounding the mystery of the human person. The mystery of confession is a fundamental place to begin this process. But in addition, there are a growing number of Orthodox professionals and institutions that offer help in the form of a balanced patristic and therapeutic approach to the healing of the person. Some of these professionals are in our local communities and we should not be afraid of seeking them out, in consultation with our spiritual fathers and confessors.

Creation and the Environment

Christ is “the source of life and immortality, and the Maker of all creation, both visible and invisible,”¹ but today, the topic of creation is too often narrowly restricted to controversies surrounding the environment, to which only polarized and politicized answers seem acceptable: is global warming real? Are humans responsible for the melting of the ice-caps? Are we protecting endangered wildlife? But the relationship of humans to the creation is a fundamental relationship which finds its roots in Paradise, where the primary task of the first created man was to tend a garden, name the animals and live off of the fruit of certain trees.

When it saw Adam leave Paradise, all of the created world which God had brought out of non-being into existence no longer wished to be subject to the transgressor. The sun did not want to shine by day, nor the moon by night, nor the stars to be seen by him. The springs of water did not want to well up for him, nor the rivers to flow. The very air itself thought about contracting itself and not providing breath for the rebel. The wild beasts and all the animals of the earth saw him stripped of his former glory and, despising him, immediately turned

1 Prayer of St. Basil the Great, first pre-Communion prayer.

savagely against him. The sky was moving as if to fall justly down on him, and the very earth would not endure bearing him upon its back. —ST. SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

The sacred hymns of the liturgical year overflow with references to the creation, not as a self-contained element, but always in relation to the Creator and, by extension, to humanity. In the beginning, it was creation that was first brought into existence by the Word and Spirit of God. Man, created at the conclusion of this work, and placed within this creation, as in a garden, fell and was unable to remain worthy of God's blessing, turning away from Him through disobedience. As a result, the renewal of creation is dependent on the renewal of mankind:

[The Creator] wills that all creation serve man for whom it was made, and like him become corruptible, so that when again man is renewed and becomes spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal, then creation, too, now subjected to the rebel by God's command and made his slave, will be freed from its slavery, and, together with man, be made new, and become incorruptible and wholly spiritual.¹

In other words, we cannot express care for the creation unless we first take care for the healing of our own bodies and souls. An environmentalism that is concerned only for cute and furry animals, or for the financial impact of environmental policies, falls far short of the majesty of creation that we encounter in our liturgical hymns and in our actual day-to-day existence. This applies even more directly on the local level: our diocese, our deanery, our parish, and the wider community. It is in our local community that we can have the most direct impact on the creation that we inhabit.

¹ St Symeon the New Theologian, *On the Mystical Life*, vol. 1, p. 29.

*The Saints and the History of the
Orthodox Church in America*

The greatest benefactors of the Orthodox Church in America are not the wealthiest donors or most generous contributors, but rather the saints who have lived and labored on this continent over the past 220 years. The history of the Orthodox Church is a rich history with which all of us should be familiar. The witness of the saints within that history is one of the primary windows by which we might gaze into that history. But there is much that surrounds those saints, including the struggles, successes and failings of our communities over the past 220 years. Those experiences can be an inspiration to us today as we continue the journey of our Orthodox Church in America.

The saints are not distant from us but bring us closer to God and to one another. It is the life of holiness that will bind our communities into a unity in Christ. As Archimandrite Vasileios writes: “Man is in the image of God because he exists as a person in communion with others, in community.”¹ To become more fully in the image of God means to strive for sanctity. But sanctity is not a magical state that is given to a select few. It is the fruit of our genuine efforts to be humble and to love. “[The saints] do not pretend to be great — they really are. On the other hand, we who are not saints pretend to be saints, and for this reason debase others. A real saint is truly great, and the test of his greatness is that in his company we who are insignificant feel important.”²

Just as all the saints, regardless of the nations within which they lived and died, convey the universal reality of holiness, so we honor the saints who sanctified our lands, regardless of their ethnic origin. It is in this unity among our North American saints that we ourselves will find unity for Orthodoxy on this continent. No matter how young our mission or parish com-

1 Archimandrite Vasileios, *Ecology and Monasticism*, page 10.

2 Archimandrite Vasileios, *The Saint: Archetype of Orthodoxy*, p. 17.

munity is, it has a history, just as every parish and community in the Orthodox Church in America has a history. This history is not simply a black and white record of past events, but a colorful painting of the lives and accomplishments of colorful people, some of whom were simply colorful and others who were genuinely striving for purification and for holiness. The Department of History and Archives is a good place to start in uncovering this rich history, and many have made use of its resources. But there are other local historical and archival repositories — sometimes in the homes of individuals — that are also available and should be more widely shared.

Financial Stewardship

Almost every aspect of this present document relating to the Four Pillars can be characterized as stewardship: the care and nurturing of the gifts that God has given to us. But in the world in which we live, there is no getting around the importance of financial stewardship. In the recent past, much attention has been devoted to proportionate giving between the Dioceses and the Orthodox Church in America, and between the parish and the Diocese. At the same time, we must also focus on the needs of the parishes, which requires attention to the need for nurturing stewardship between the individual and the parish. Many of our parishes are struggling — some in danger of no longer being sustainable — and even those that are healthier are in constant need of support. Our Dioceses and our Autocephalous Church are only as strong as our parishes. Our people need to be encouraged to express their love for their parish, for the Orthodox Faith and for our Lord in a tangible way — sacrificial giving. ❁

ENDURING GOALS

- To address human brokenness by assisting in the healing of the human person and the strengthening of the family through the offering of our Orthodox experience of sanctification; to alleviate human suffering related to physical, emotional and mental illnesses by making use of the therapeutic tools and experience of the Church and judiciously incorporating the expertise of healing professionals.
- To care for the environment that we live in, recognizing the beauty and importance of God's creation as well as the local needs in our neighborhood, our parishes and diocesan communities, finding inspiration particularly in our monastic communities.
- To learn our history and patrimony as the Orthodox Church in America and to value the contributions of the many saints who labored and prayed on this continent, as well as the sacrificial efforts of our ancestors and the legacy that they have left us and all who will be led to embrace the Orthodox faith.
- To nurture a healthy culture of financial stewardship on the personal and parish level to support the broader stewardship of the Church and to provide for pastoral ministries that have the potential to transfigure the world.

Pillar Three: Relations with Others



Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in Whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in Whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. — EPHESIANS 2:19–22

“



“WHY can’t we all just get along?” This is a refrain we hear repeatedly in our age of utopian longing for peace, love and understanding. Certainly, there is a basic human desire for unity, which is reflected in the past decades through songs, movies, and other expressions of the broader culture. And yet, those same decades do not appear to have brought about a decrease in violence and division, whether on the global level or in our local communities and institutions. Suspicion, judgment, fear, anger, and an inability to dialogue have continued even as the means for communication have expanded. We must preserve an Orthodox Christian attitude of humility to navigate the stormy sea of this life and not, on the one hand, give in to the negative spirit of this age nor, on the other hand, naively place our hopes in a superficial quest for love and peace in the world.

The great high priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ (John 13–17) makes it clear that unity and love are central to the Kingdom of God and in the life of those who would follow Christ. But it should be noted that this great prayer, which serves as the first reading on Great and Holy Friday Matins, is offered immediately before the passion, crucifixion, and death of the Giver of Life. If we seek to receive the healing offered by the

Divine Physician, we cannot expect to attain this without the Cross. It is the Cross which stands in the midst of the earth, and it is through the Cross that joy comes into all the world.

It is also the Cross which should guide us in our relations with others, whether this be the wider culture within which we dwell as the Church, in the struggle to establish a truly local presence of the Orthodox Church in North America, or in our dialogue with other Christian bodies and other faith traditions. The love that should always be present in these complex relations is grounded in the Cross and the unity provided by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by means of the branches from the Tree of the Cross — love, humility, sacrifice — that the Church community, rooted in prayer and united in the care of their gifts, can reach out to those around itself.

Genuine Christian unity is possible only where men are one in Christ and the Holy Spirit, fully united in the truth, love and holiness of God. This unity is possible only in the one Church which Christ founded, against which "the gates of hell shall not prevail." (Matthew 16:18), This unity is possible only in that Church which has preserved whole and unchanged the teachings of Christ and His apostles, prophets, martyrs and saints. This unity is possible only in that Church which continues to proclaim the revelation of God in its fullness, not only in its doctrines and morals, but also in the whole order of spiritual, sacramental and hierarchal church life as established in the apostolic Christian community. —ENCYCLICAL OF THE HOLY SYNOD OF BISHOPS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

Culture and Society

When Abba Zosima first came upon Saint Mary of Egypt in the desert, one of the first questions she asked him was the state of the world that she had left 47 years before:

Why have you come, man of God, to me who am so sinful? Why do you wish to see a woman naked and devoid of every virtue? Though I know one thing — the grace of

the Holy Spirit has brought you here to render me a service in time. Tell me, father, how are the Christian peoples living? And the kings? How is the Church guided?¹

Like other ascetics and monastics throughout the history of the Church, Saint Mary did not, as is perhaps commonly understood, flee a corrupt world in order to find perfection in the desert. Rather, uncovering the passions in her own heart, she left to pursue a path of repentance through love for God and desire for His mercy. Though she did not meet a single human soul (or even a wild beast) during her time in the desert, she nevertheless was brought to a genuine communion with God which in turn led her to feel deep compassion for the world and its salvation.

The Church has always had an ambiguous relationship with the cultures and societies within which she sojourns. The tension between the broad ways of the world and the narrow path of the Gospel is often intense, and made more acute by various political, economic, and philosophical currents that make it even more difficult for the Church to articulate a genuinely Christ-centered position on “hot button” topics. The list of such topics is endless: gun control, abortion, immigration, racism, privacy, the sexual revolution, gender identity, and poverty, among others. The difficult question is how to address these issues as Orthodox Christians without being swallowed up by predetermined and rigid public opinion. A broader question is: can the Church be involved politically without becoming politically involved?

Every stand that we take as a Church carries political implications. To walk in a nation’s capital, whether to promote the sanctity of life or to end racism, places us in the company of others with whom we might not share full theological agreement. And yet, to not participate removes from us the possibility of presenting or maintaining our position with humility,

1 The Life of St. Mary of Egypt.

yet with charity. Such efforts are often highlighted on the global and national levels, but efforts on the local level are perhaps even more effective.

World-wide Orthodoxy

On March 31, 2020, the Orthodox Church in America will mark the 50th anniversary of the reception of the Tomos of Autocephaly from the Russian Orthodox Church. This act, granting canonical self-governance to our Church, was the culmination of a long process that started with our historical beginnings as a Mission of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1794, its expansion into the Diocese in Sitka in 1843, and its subsequent relocation of the See to San Francisco in 1870 and New York in 1907. Since 1970, the cathedral of the Orthodox Church in America has been located in Washington, DC, and the Orthodox Church in America has expanded in many geographic and spiritual ways.

The Orthodox Church in America understands herself to be an indigenous, multi-ethnic, missionary Church, laboring to bring Orthodox Christianity to all citizens of this continent. We live as other self-governing Churches do: electing our own bishops and Primate, without confirmation by any other Synod; maintaining inter-Church relationships with all other Churches; and consecrating our own chrism. As envisioned in the Tomos, we believe that the autocephaly given to us will be fully realized when the promise of Orthodox unity in North America is fulfilled, and the Orthodox Church in America, together with all the Orthodox faithful in North America, become one united Autocephalous Church of America, recognized by all other Orthodox Churches. We commit ourselves to work within the Episcopal Assembly in order to realize the goal of unity.

“The Orthodox Church in America is autocephalous not in order to be self-sufficient and isolated, but in order to be in living communion and close contact with all Orthodox Churches... The Orthodox Church in America received autocephaly not in order to be master

of Orthodox unity in America but in order to be a servant of this unity.” —ARCHBISHOP DMITRI, ADDRESS TO PATRIARCH PIMEN, 1978

These affirmations remain true today, even in the present Assembly of Bishops process. Here also, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America has maintained that the ultimate solution to the canonical anomalies in our region can best be achieved through the formation of a broader, local, autocephalous Church. We maintain this position even within the difficult climate that still prevails, in which the resurgence of ethnic identity is competing with different interpretations of primacy and authority within the so-called diaspora.

To maintain such a position, it is important that we do this not only locally in North America, but globally as well. It is important for the Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church in America to make primatial visits or pilgrimages to the other Autocephalous Churches and to prioritize funds to make this possible. It is also important for our bishops, clergy, and faithful to undertake such visits, whether in formal contexts or as pilgrimages.

Orthodoxy in North America

From the beginning, the desire and vision of the Orthodox Church in America has been that a truly local and indigenous Orthodox Church be established in North America. To that end, the Holy Synod of Bishops has faithfully participated in the process initiated in 2009 by the most holy Patriarchs and Primate of the Orthodox world. This process has been taking shape through the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America and the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in Canada.

Our Synod is prepared to undertake steps to incarnate our humble, servant role in promoting the unity of the Church in America. We need to put resources into sponsoring and hosting

conferences that promote pan-Orthodox co-operation between us and individual jurisdictions and that promote improved relations with all the various jurisdictions. We need to solidify our leadership role through service to others.

On the local level, I would encourage our parishes to work with non-OCA communities to promote pan-Orthodox unity on the parochial level. Common efforts include addressing the needs of children, making improvements in the city and community, and so on. Likewise, our parishes should encourage co-sponsoring or co-hosting events with non-OCA parishes that our parishes could not finance themselves. Together, three or four parishes could host guest speakers, conferences, etc., which would nurture inter-jurisdictional co-operation and overcome financial limitations facing each parish individually. Even a small effort can yield great results.

Ecumenical, Interfaith, and Civic Relations

“It sounds like a paradox, but the basic religion that is being preached and accepted as the only means of overcoming secularism is in reality a surrender to secularism.”¹ With these words, Father Alexander Schmemmann identifies one of the key points of tension in the discussion of the degree to which Orthodox Christians should participate in ecumenical and interfaith dialogues. Some place great value on such dialogue, while others believe it to be fruitless or even apostasy. Part of the weakness of the present state of ecumenical dialogue with other Christians and relations with other faiths is that it is understood to be a specific field in which only certain people engage. Our participation in ecumenical bodies cannot simply happen in order to have a presence, if that presence is limited to a superficial participation. Our presence must be a bold and substantial one, where we both encounter the other and remain firm in our proclamation of the authentic faith of our fathers.

1 *For the Life of the World*, p. 109.

External Relations are not simply a technical area of expertise, although we do have specialists in that area. It really refers to how we relate as a Church to our fellow Orthodox Christians, to other Christians and to those of other faiths. It also encompasses how we interact with the civil authorities, institutions and governments of the countries in which we sojourn here in North America: Canada, the United States and Mexico. ❁

“There are those among us who are referred to as progressives, who are eager for dialogue. And those who are regarded as conservatives, who generally reject contact with others. This is where the authenticity of our faith is decided: because we do not preserve the truth by cursing those who are in error, nor do we offer what the human soul is looking for through acts of phony compliments. Here we have need of the true heroes of the faith, who save their souls by losing them for the Lord’s sake.” —ARCHIMANDRITE VASILEIOS

ENDURING GOALS

- To radiate the humility, peace, and love of Jesus Christ to our surrounding culture, whether on the international, national, local, or personal level, and to address every issue that faces our communities with patience, truth, and compassion.
- To humbly, but steadfastly, uphold the vision of the Orthodox Church in America for the establishment of a universally recognized and canonically sound ecclesiological structure for Orthodoxy in North America; to strengthen our relations with other Local Orthodox Churches; and to actively participate in pan-Orthodox endeavors, particularly in the Assembly of Bishops process.
- To prioritize our participation in ecumenical bodies, maintaining our faithfulness to Orthodoxy while presenting a worthy witness to other bodies, both Christian and non-Christian, and to appropriately engage civil and governmental bodies.

Pillar Four: Outreach & Evangelism



The righteous man shall flourish like the palm tree,
As the cedar in Lebanon shall he be multiplied.
They that are planted in the house of the Lord
Shall blossom in the courts of our God.
They shall still multiply in their rich old age
And they shall enjoy every good thing,
So as to proclaim that upright is the Lord our God,
And that there is no unrighteousness in Him.

— PSALM 92:10-13



WITH realistic statistics, there are about 1,000,000 Orthodox Christians of all jurisdictions in the United States, which is a very small fraction of the 325,000,000 people in that country. In North America as a whole, the general population is approximately 500,000,000. Since 1794, the Orthodox Church in America, in her various ecclesiastical incarnations, has seen the establishment of over 700 communities on this continent, with numerous new missions planted since the granting of autocephaly in 1970. Over the last 10 years, the Mission Planting Grant Program has distributed over \$1,000,000 to new communities throughout this continent. Along with all this positive development and growth, there have been parallel challenges: certain dioceses and parishes have faced great changes in demographics and environment leading to decline, in addition to major shifts in people's openness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in some areas in the form of self-proclaimed incomprehension or even outright hostility.

Such a situation has placed pressure on us to develop strategies and plans for the expansion of the mission of the Church. Often, however, such pressure is born out of the anxiety and

fear that we feel when we see our shrinking parish populations or lament that our children and grandchildren are no longer in the Church. We look to Western confessions with their well-developed mission and evangelism programs and are tempted to implement similar programs even if we know that they will not yield any fruit in our Orthodox context. The reality is that none of those strategies and programs will be effective if they are divorced from the spiritual and liturgical life, and if they do not serve to convey and share the reality of the healing that we have received in Christ.

This Pillar is placed as the final one, not because it is the least significant, but because it is impossible to implement or act upon it without effort in the preceding three Pillars. All the Pillars are interdependent, and therefore there can be no missionary outreach, no path to reach those who question Christ and the Church, to inspire those who doubt, to console those who suffer, and to heal those who are broken, without our having first entered the arena of our own experience. Our Apostolic ministry is revealed as the flowers and seeds of the tree which has grown through our effort to become genuine persons in the image of Christ, to exercise good stewardship of the blessings we have received, and to live as Christians in community.

Philanthropy and Social Responsibility

Our apostolic work cannot be confined merely to recruitment and expansion. If our goal is to “make North America Orthodox,” such a goal is self-serving, negative, and almost violent: its focus is on either how to preserve ourselves or how to impose our faith on others. Undoubtedly, many converts to the Orthodox Church will have stories of very persistent and convincing advocates for Orthodoxy; but most of them will also likely emphasize that their entrance into the fullness of the faith was completely voluntary, in the same way that all of us willingly follow our Lord Jesus Christ on His voluntary entrance into His passion, death, and resurrection during Holy Week.

The key to numerical growth is spiritual growth, and spiritual growth cannot take place without a sacrificial effort. If we are to be Apostles to the nations and bearers of Christ's healing and salvation to a broken and hurting world, then we must reach out to that broken world through prayer and concrete action. Although for convenience, we often refer to this concrete action as "Matthew 25" ministries, it is important to remember that these ministries are found throughout the Gospel, and not simply in that single chapter, as important as it is. It is also good to remember that the feeding of the hungry, the visiting of those in prison, and the clothing of the naked are the responsibility of all Christians, not just a few volunteers.

The Orthodox Church in America's Department of Christian Service and Humanitarian Aid has a multitude of resources for parishes to use in offering ministry to the local community and to those in need. Of particular importance is the Compassion in Action program which provides an avenue for parishes to engage in active listening and compassionate support in a very focused way. Most of our parishes engage in some degree of outreach into the local community and participate in pan-Orthodox organizations and events spearheaded by pan-Orthodox organisms such as International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC), and the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve (FOCUS North America). Often these efforts become even more effective when partnering with other community programs that are already in place. Our presence as Orthodox Christian in any of these efforts is an excellent way to fulfill our responsibility to care for and have compassion on those in need.

Youth and Young Adults

While some might argue that discussions relating to youth and young adults should be considered under the pillar of stewardship, since our young people are a great treasure which we are

to preserve, educate, and inspire, it seems more appropriate to place such discussions within the context of outreach and evangelism. The youth of our Church are in the forefront of the realities of a changing world, and it is they who have to wrestle most directly, and live within, those ever-changing realities. We need to hear from them questions they need to address, challenges for which they need strengthening, and the obstacles they need armor to confront.

The unfortunate reality is that we have too often abandoned our young people and failed to provide them with the nourishment — intellectual, emotional, and spiritual — to help them face the world, let alone find life within the world. The more we ask ourselves: “Why have our children left the Church?”, the more we confirm that we have failed, not merely to keep them in the Church, but to have engaged meaningfully with them as human persons in the image of Christ. Could it be that we find it difficult to answer these questions because we ourselves have failed to grasp fully what it means to be a person in the image and likeness of Christ, what it means to be a Christian, and how to find healing and salvation in Christ?

Outreach and evangelization begins in the parish, in the home, with the individual parish members whom we have. Education in the Faith is part of the life-long process of theosis. Our people need to be encouraged to strengthen their personal faith. This can be accomplished through Orthodoxy 101 classes, Bible studies, Orthodox book clubs, discussion groups on moral issues, etc. These are all ways of promoting adult education, even as we involve our young people. Some parishes are beginning to hold “family nights” during which education is offered on all levels at the same time — activities for the little ones, religious education for children and teens, and adult education for parents. Being anchored in the faith is vital to remaining in the ark of salvation which is the Church.

The entire historical existence of the Church is founded on experience: the experience of God and His Glory, the experi-

ence of life through martyrdom and the experience of healing through struggle. We look to those who have entered this experience: the saints, martyrs, confessors and ascetics, but we often become paralyzed when we try to follow this path ourselves. We should not be afraid to both introduce our youth to this experience or to allow them to introduce us to it. The goal is not to find the one who “knows the answer,” but to collectively enter into the experience of the Church.

The Orthodox Church in America’s Department of Youth, Young Adults and Campus Ministry has for many years been actively coordinating many activities and events for our young people. This particular department could benefit from more active support and contributions from the local dioceses, many of which have very robust youth programs and summer camps. In addition, the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America (FOCA) has a long history of bringing youth and young adults together for various social and sporting events. A more active coordination of such efforts and an increase in the development of local youth ministries will go a long way to providing our young people with resources and companionship on their Christian journey.

Communications

For many years, debates have raged about the language that should be used by the Church for her missionary activity. These debates continue to this day and, as is often the case with long-term discussions, there does not appear to be a clear or simple solution. In many ways, communications is one of the mysteries of our human condition. In linguistic theory, this mystery has been expressed by the “black box” or linguistic acquisition device: how do babies universally learn language so quickly and effortlessly and yet lose that facility as they grow into adulthood? Although this might be a physiological or neurological

“mystery,” there is perhaps a parallel in our efforts to communicate the Gospel and the Faith.

In its essence, missionary work involves communication. Communication should not be identified solely with the external modes of sharing that modern technology places at our disposal, but rather with the prayerful Christian manner in which we shine the eternal truth of Christ through the living and preaching of the Gospel, the conveying of the Orthodox patristic and ascetical experience and the Christian care and love we extend to our neighbors, to strangers, and to our enemies. It is about preaching the resurrection with our life, a life illumined by that resurrection.

We live in a world in which communication is the means by which humans interact with each other. There are many pitfalls and challenges, but also many opportunities. But these will require our careful and prayerful attention, as well as the harnessing of the many resources that are available. For this reason, the Church needs to invest in competent and experienced individuals who can effect this good communication and can serve as conduits for the truths of the Gospel by sharing the good work that is taking place in the Orthodox Church in America. We must, as His Holiness Patriarch Kirill has said concerning the mission of the Church in the world, “fill all the space with Orthodoxy.”

Mission Planting and Parish Revitalization

Ultimately, our outreach and evangelism take place in our parish and mission communities, and it is crucial that we encourage all of our communities to continue their efforts towards mission growth and revitalization of existing parishes. There are so many areas in this country where there are no Orthodox parishes at all. Co-operative efforts between the local community, the Diocese, and the Orthodox Church in America (through the planting grants and the Mission School) can continue to

address this matter, one mission parish at a time. This begs the need for more clergy — the need for more seminarians — the need for more vocations, as expressed in the First Pillar.

Our venerable and historical existing parishes must not give up on growth. They need to re-define themselves as “mission” parishes with the facilities of a temple and church hall and a rectory. They need to approach those who have left the parish, those who don’t come every Sunday, those who are married to parishioners but are not practicing their family faith, those who have no parish, and those who have become “nones.” There is a lot of mission work to do even in small communities with terrible demographics — there are still souls to save there.

For this reason, although we should continue to implement and expand upon the programs and plans that we currently have in place, such as the Mission Planting Grants and the coordinating work of the Department of Evangelization, we should not expect that those plans and programs will accomplish the task on our behalf. Evangelism is a responsibility that is placed upon every Christian, a responsibility to live our life in Christ to the fullest within the beauty of our faith. ❁

ENDURING GOALS

- To reach out to those in need, both within and outside our parishes through the effective ministries offered by Christ and the Holy Gospel.
- To call upon our young people to give the example of missionary zeal and apostolic ministry.
- To effectively communicate the Gospel of Life by words, deeds, and silence. To manage our internal and external communications to reflect both the truth and the compassion of Christ.
- To plant and preserve our Orthodox communities — missions, young parishes, established parishes — as a haven within which the Church and human beings might blossom.

Conclusion: *The Prophetic Way of the Church*



Revolutionaries are always in the wrong since, in their juvenile fervor for everything new, in their hopes for a better future and a way of life built on justice, they always base themselves on theories that are abstract, and artificial, making a clean sweep of the living tradition, which is, after all, founded on the experience of centuries.

Conservatives are always wrong, too, despite being rich in life experience, despite being shrewd and prudent, intelligent and skeptical. For, in their desire to preserve ancient institutions that have withstood the test of time, they decry the necessity of renewal, and man's yearning for a better way of life. —VLADIMIR LOSSKY



YEAR and a half after the publication of *For the Life of the World*, a great friend and mentor to Father Alexander Schmemmann, Metropolitan Leonty, of blessed memory, fell asleep in the Lord. At the Metropolitan's funeral, Father Alexander said of him that he "had no fears, no suspicions, no frustrations. He was equally alien to pseudo-conservative negativism and to pseudo-progressive compromise."¹ These are the very polarizing tendencies that Father Alexander helps us navigate in *For the Life of the World* and through his life's work and ministry. These are also the same tendencies that we find in our world today: some lamenting that the world has drifted further from God and needs to be forcibly brought back to its senses; others feeling that the Church has become irrelevant to the modern condition and needs to adapt herself to ever-changing circumstances. Partisans of both tendencies cry for the Church and her leaders to

¹ *The Orthodox Church*, June-July 1965, p. 7.

exercise a prophetic witness to the faithful of the Church and to the surrounding culture.

But there are different ways to understand prophecy. Archimandrite Zacharias reminds us that: “In the New Testament, a prophet is not so much a person who foretells future events, but rather he is someone who has knowledge of the mystery of the ways of salvation for every soul.”¹ Saint Gregory the Great also speaks of prophecy taking place when “the secrets of [the] heart are made manifest.”² One of the most important legacies of Metropolitan Leonty was that he was a man of God who touched and changed people’s hearts with the humility and love of Christ. “He lived in and by God, and no one has ever approached him without feeling that he has touched and entered the reality of the spiritual world.”³ In this way, he lived as a true prophet who brought people into the presence of Christ by his life and own presence.

Because he was a man of God, Metropolitan Leonty was also a man of the Church who understood that neither Christ nor the Church can be measured by the philosophies and ideologies of the world. As Christians, we ought to be, first of all, followers and disciples of Jesus Christ and children of His Bride, the Church, who gives birth to us. We cannot contribute to the life of the world if we have not grafted ourselves onto the living body of the Church by striving to conform ourselves to what the Church is. We cannot be a part of the Body if we do not live a life of communion with Christ, in sanctity of life, with love towards our neighbor, and with zeal for the mission of the Gospel. This is our prophetic witness.

It is sometimes lamented that the Church has failed in her prophetic witness in the face of an ever-changing world and

- 1 Archimandrite Zacharias, *The Engraving of Christ in Man’s Heart*, (Essex: Stravropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 2017), p. 150.
- 2 Cf. 1 Corinthians 14:24–25.
- 3 Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, Eulogy at the funeral of Metropolitan Leonty, 1965.

that we have moved from a “post-Christian world” to an “anti-Christian world.” But neither a desperate effort to artificially force the Church to become relevant, nor an anxious clinging to a fossilized understanding of tradition will help us in the realities in which we live. The importance of Father Alexander’s work, *For the Life of the World*, lies precisely in that it traces the middle way between these approaches and, more importantly, offers a prophetic witness in the present, that is, to the heart of man. Because Christ is the foundation of all things, we cannot be swayed by whatever philosophical, political, or ideological winds may blow one direction or another. Only through a deep abiding with Christ in our hearts through prayer, obedience, humility, and love, can we hope to stand on the solid rock of faith and to thereby make a small contribution to the questions and problems of the world. ❀

The safest place for ships is in the harbor, but that’s not why ships were built.

— ANONYMOUS