

THE HOLY ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF BOSTON
His Eminence, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

Pastoral Encyclical
of
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To the beloved clergy, monastics and faithful of our Holy Metropolis,

Christ is risen!

In this joyous Paschal season of the year, I thought it would be entirely appropriate and fitting to bring to mind the many blessings that the Lord has granted us over the last twenty years — that is, since the incorporation of our Church under the spiritual guidance of our ever-memorable Father in Christ, Archbishop Auxentius of Athens.

In the last twenty years, though starting virtually from scratch, our Church in North America has witnessed a remarkable growth, despite all the attacks that we have endured.

We have gone from a group of clergy and laymen governed by a council of Presbyters to a full Eparchial Synod ruled by three Metropolitans and two Suffragan Bishops. In addition, and just as important, the number of our monastic establishments has more than tripled, and the number of our clergy has almost doubled. Furthermore, the vast majority of our parishes now have church temples, either built from the ground up, or acquired and appropriately renovated, whereas twenty years ago, this was true only of a few parishes. We have, in addition, a plethora of excellent publications and pamphlets available now, as well as fine periodicals, the envy of any religious organization. By the grace of God, two of our Metropolises have acquired diocesan headquarters for the efficient administration of their dioceses. Our St. Xenia's Camp is an unforgettable experience for both the young and the assisting adults. We have seen an increase in the number of missions, both here and abroad, and the institution of benevolent programs to assist orphaned children in East Africa.

All this in only twenty years, and only by the grace of God.

One other thing should be pointed out: all this growth has been granted to us by our Saviour despite the difficulties that all our people face as Orthodox Christians living in a secular and increasingly anti-Christian society.

Also, I might add, this impressive growth has not been accomplished by dances, bingo, "Greek Festivals," and the like. No, rather than this, we have all been instructed to

follow the humble footpath traced out by the Saints of God. We have instead asked our people to pray, to make prostrations, to keep the holy fasts, to stand in attendance in long church services, to give alms according to heart and ability.

One may well affirm: "By means of this austere lifestyle, you are only going to drive people away."

To this, our response must be: "We are simply trying to be faithful to our baptismal vows, in which we declared war on Satan and united ourselves to Christ." Or, to paraphrase Psalm 16, "For the sake of Thy words, I have kept the ways that are hard." Our Saviour did not tell us that following Him would assure us of a life of comfort and luxury. On the contrary, we were forewarned by Him that we would be hated and despised by the world, and that we should expect every type of tribulation, and furthermore, that we should rejoice and count ourselves blessed for being deemed worthy to suffer such things. And, in any case, if there is some austerity (or, what we call "austerity" here in North America) in following this path, it has been more than offset by the joys and the edification that we receive from the lives of the Saints of God, both ancient and contemporary, and also from celebrating their feasts!

If God permits, this steady growth must continue solely on the basis which we have sought to ever uphold: fidelity to the teaching of our Saviour and the Saints.

In addition, your hierarchs, and many of you as well, feel the need and the obligation to seek, by all means, to heal the rifts among the traditional Orthodox groups of hierarchs and faithful throughout the world. This must become one of our foremost goals. When the innovators want to cast reproach on the traditional Orthodox Christians, all they have to do is to point to the divisions among the traditional Orthodox Synods. How indeed can these divisions be healed? What is it that separates us? Have some of these other Synods of traditional Christians realized what is happening, and have they revised or modified their stance against the already condemned heresy of Ecumenism? Have they understood that it is no longer only a matter of thirteen days that separates us from the innovators? Have they perceived that it is not only the ideology of Communism that is seeking to destroy the Church? Have they understood, as well, the true nature of Freemasonry?

Unless these questions are answered and resolved, unless these rifts among us are overcome, our witness to the world will be diminished and fragmented, and, ultimately, ineffective. But if we can eventually unite our voices, we have much to gain, and even more to offer to those that are earnest about their salvation.

With the self-destruction of the Russian Church Abroad, many of the Orthodox Christians who were trying to remain faithful to the Apostolic Faith were left in disarray and confusion. But now that the dust is beginning to settle, and many bishops and faithful throughout the world are able to see more clearly, they see also more clearly the need to reach out to one another.

This is something that we all should pray for more ardently. Ultimately, it is every man's union with God that is our goal, and whatever can help us reach that goal is desirable and worth our effort.

I ask you to pray for this, my beloved, and also I ask you to pray that your hierarchs and clergy may be guided by the grace of the Holy Spirit in seeking to achieve these objectives in the years to come, according to God's will. Amen. So be it.

Your fervent suppliant to God,

✠Ephraim, Metropolitan of Boston

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