

Opening

“Christianity can be reduced neither to moral teaching, nor to theology, nor to church canons, nor to liturgical services. It is also not the sum of these parts. Christianity is the personal revelation of the *theantropos* (God-Man), Christ, through His Church.

The Church preserves and imparts its teaching and the ‘divine dogmas’; it proposes the ‘rule of faith,’ the order and statutes of piety. But the church is something immeasurably greater. Christianity is *not only the teaching on salvation but salvation itself*, accomplished once and for all by the *theantropos*” (God-Man)

From Orthodox Christianity Vol. I

Clergy who have fallen asleep in the Lord

During this past year several of our clergy and monastics have fallen asleep in the Lord. Archpriest George Sundergard, Father Jacob Meyer, Father Martin Lebrecht, and Mother Lyubov of blessed memory.

May their memory be eternal.

Metropolitan Jonah

As many of you already know, during the pilgrimage to St. Tikhon's Monastery this past Memorial Day Week end, the Holy Synod and Metropolitan Jonah signed mutual agreements regularizing his status and all of the hierarchs present celebrated the Divine Liturgy together.

Regarding a diocesan bishop

As we approach the two year anniversary of the falling asleep in the Lord of Archbishop Dmitri, of Blessed Memory (+ August 28, 2011), the faithful of the Diocese of the South are keenly aware of the need for a ruling bishop in residence. As much as I have tried to meet the archpastoral needs of this expansive missionary diocese as locum tenens, and I shall continue to do so as long as necessary, but all of us readily admit that the Diocese of the South needs a diocesan bishop. The Holy Synod is certainly aware of this need but we also recognize that we cannot simply find “a bishop” for the Diocese of the South or simply find a bishop for any of our widowed docese. Rather, our task, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, is to find the right bishop for the Diocese: the archpastor whom God appoints to guide the clergy, monastics and laity who continue to build up the Body of Christ.

Presently, the Holy Synod is preparing a list of candidates eligible to serve as diocesan bishops. The second step in this process is to perform a thorough vetting of those candidates who are best suited to serving a particular Diocese. This process includes: a background check; a psychological evaluation; a review of the autobiography/CV of the candidate; and meetings with the entire Synod. As soon as a list of candidates has been vetted, the diocesan Episcopal Search Committee will again have an opportunity to conduct interviews with potential candidates should that become a necessity. The Holy Synod through me will then consult with the episcopal search committee to determine whether or not a slate of candidates or candidate can be presented at a

special diocesan assembly for nomination to the Holy Synod. Furthermore, the Holy Synod might deem it best for a candidate to serve for a time within a diocese or as an auxiliary bishop within the diocese first, or in another capacity in order to make sure that he is able to work well with the clergy, monastics and laity of the Diocese.

Unlike a political election, the process of identifying an episcopal candidate for a widowed diocese is about discerning the will of God. It is a process not entirely unlike a widow with children, discerning a vocation to re-marry. At times, certain parts of the process work best if they are not published far and wide on the Internet. Rather, there are times when a prayerful confidentiality is more helpful in discerning the will of God. Naturally, the clergy and faithful of the Diocese are an essential part of this process, your opinion matters, and your opinions and thoughts are extremely important. I would ask for your continued prayers and your patience as we continue this more confidential part of the process.

As many of you know, there is a good deal of concern on the part of the Holy Synod regarding episcopal appointments. From recent experience, we understand that it is absolutely critical that we exercise due diligence in the selection of bishops, not only in terms of our ability to gauge a candidate's potential for effective archpastoral ministry, but also to discern the will of God. While the relative speed of this process might be a source of great frustration, we would much prefer to err on the side of caution, than to make an error in judgment.

With the demands that I face as Archbishop of the Diocese of New England, the Albanian Archdiocese, and locum tenens of the Diocese of the South, perhaps nobody desires a swift resolution to this situation more than me. However, I cannot understate the importance of being extremely careful as we work through this process. As always, I welcome any and all thoughts and concerns you may have regarding this matter.

Episcopal Assembly

The Council of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America formally known as the Episcopal Assembly will be holding its fourth meeting this September in Chicago.

I feel that last year's meeting was most fruitful as we had the opportunity to break up into small groups to discuss issues and programs for the assembly to consider.

Many of you may not know that we have a website so that anyone can access the site to learn of the activities of the assembly. There is a link to the website from our own diocesan website.

Last year the by-laws were discussed and approved so that the assembly would have a 501c3 tax-exempt status.

Probably one of the items that our legal team will present will be the legal interpretation of the word consensus.

There are a number of active and working committees as part of the assembly.

Namely: addressing Canonical Affairs

 Canonical Regional Planning

 This committee is scheduled to make several presentations during our upcoming meeting.

 Church and Society

Clergy matters
Ecumenical Relations
Financial Affairs
Legal Affairs
Liturgy
The Committee for Military Chaplaincy – of which I am a member and Bishop Isaiah is the chairman of this committee
Monastic Communities
and Pastoral Practice

Each of these committees has a bishop as chairman and members of the clergy and laity if required from many jurisdictions, calling upon their expertise and experience as all of us have gifts to offer. They meet during the year and share their thoughts or reports between the formal sessions of the Assembly.

Fr. Marcus is one of the members of the Pastoral Practice committee, along with several others from the OCA. Please allow me Father at this time to thank you profusely for your 164-page summary of the work of this committee.

In addition there are the Committees for:

Theological Education
And Youth

One of the proposed topics for the agenda for our upcoming meeting in September is the planning and discussion for a national Youth Conference

Local Activities

On a more local note the OCA departments of Youth and Young Adults, Christian Services, Humanitarian Aid, Sacred Music and Christian Education recently sponsored the parish ministries Conference in Virginia. One hundred and twenty individuals participated, both clergy and lay church workers.

There were back to back workshops and presentations sponsored by the various departments. The workshops were not only educational but provided the means for networking and fellowship for those with similar interests in Church service. The participants in the conference came from numerous diocese of the OCA. Alaska, Seattle WA, Washington DC, Eastern Pennsylvania, and others.

Participants from the Diocese of the South were Fr. Basil Zebrun and Fr. John Cox. Matushka Christine Zebrun was one of the presenters.

Plans are already in place for an Evangelization Summit in Charleston, SC. The summit was organized by Fr. John Parker, the Chairman of the department of Evangelization.

Within our diocese as well, several of our parishes and missions have or are in the process of acquiring property to build and expand. In addition a few of our missions have grown enough to be granted parish status.

These exciting activities within our diocese inspire all of us to live and grow in our life as the Holy Church, the Body of Christ.

Travel within the Diocese

Although my travel is limited within the diocese this past year was most fruitful. I was privileged to visit St James Mission in Port St. Lucie and have firsthand experience of the wonderful work completed there. In addition I celebrated Palm Sunday at our Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Miami Lakes as well as visits to Santos Apostolos Mission housed at that time at Sts Peter and Paul in Miami.

As you may know our mission moved from Sts. Peter and Paul to the Miami Cathedral. A visit to Holy Spirit Church in Venice, FL was most fruitful and we are now able to schedule regular services for this community.

I was accompanied on these travels across the whole state of Florida by our chancellor. His responsibility was to drive and my responsibility was to look for the fountain of youth. I was unsuccessful. I must comment that the chancellor is most frugal when it comes to diocesan funds. As we were driving through the state and the gas gauge was on empty, running out of gas because he wanted to return the car with as little gas as possible, he pointed out that since it is a rented car and he is the only designated driver, it would become my responsibility to push, should that become necessary. Fortunately my guardian angel found a gas station in the middle of nowhere. And we proceeded without incident.

Thanks and Recognition

Our Diocese is fortunate and blessed with dedicated clergy and laity who continue to till the soil in this vineyard, which God has planted with His right hand.

I speak of all of you, dedicated clergy and laity in the Diocese of the South. And I especially wish to thank the work of our Deans, our seemingly tireless chancellor, Fr. Marcus Burch and assistant chancellor Fr. Thaddeus Werner for their dedication to me, the diocese, and their own parishes.

Conclusion

We are the Church, in the world, but not of the world. Allow me to conclude with part of a homily relative to Pontius Pilate, from the Prologue from Ochrid.

“Pilate was a student of secular wisdom. But secular wisdom does not give strength; it inspires fear. Secular wisdom sustains not the soul but the body. It does not inspire fear for the soul but for the body and for all things physical. In Pilate here is a clear and grievous example of the sort of people educated in secular wisdom, neglecting God and opposed to Christ. But Pilate’s weak and vacillating soul is a picture not only of a pagan but also of an unstable Christian. Some Christians daily, imperceptibly and often unconsciously, want at one moment to free Christ from the dark and evil working instinct in themselves, and the next moment are ready to abandon Him the instinct for crucifixion. This is always the case when a Christian breaks a commandment of God for the sake of indulging some physical desire of his own. At one moment the light of the commandment illumines the heart of the hesitating Christian, at another...

physical darkness so attacks us that we give ourselves over to it. O long suffering Lord, turn not away the light of Thy countenance from us even for one blink of an eye, lest darkness overcome us. O Lord, help us, that we may remain faithful children of light to the end. To Thee be glory and praise forever.”