

Archbishop Elpidophoros Exhortation to the Metropolis of San Francisco Clergy Laity Assembly Contemplate, Reconcile, and Unify



Your Eminence, Metropolitan Gerasimos, Beloved Brother in Christ,
Your Graces, Bishops John and Spyridon,
Reverend Fathers and Presvyteres,
Dear Sisters of the Philoptochos,
Esteemed Archons of the Ecumenical Throne,
Honored Members of Leadership One Hundred,
Delegates to the Clergy Laity Assembly,
Sisters and Brothers in the Lord,

I rejoice to be with you in person for this important Metropolis Clergy Laity

Assembly, an opportunity to share in the vision for our Church and to participate in the life-giving teachings of our Faith.

I am particularly happy that we are gathering here at the Saint Nicholas Ranch and Retreat Center, which was one of the exemplary initiatives of the ever-memorable Metropolitan Anthony. Tomorrow, we shall pray as the community of the Metropolis for his everlasting rest in God, marking a little more than nineteen years since his falling asleep in the Lord on Christmas Day, 2004. He was a faithful shepherd to this flock, now guided by his worthy successor, Metropolitan Gerasimos, and we are all grateful for the ministry with which he graced us. May his memory be eternal!

Your theme for this Assembly: Contemplate, Reconcile, and Unify, seems a most auspicious one to me, for it challenges us as to how we will commence the Holy and Great Lent. You will, of course, have the reflections of Protopresbyter Nicholas Louh to guide you through this theme, but I would offer a few remarks as well.

In the Patristic Tradition of our Church, “contemplation” is not a passive stance – which some have caricatured as “navel-gazing” – an insult once levelled at the Holy Monastic fathers and mothers of the Hesychastic tradition.

In the language of the Fathers, “contemplation” is θεωρία, which is the active beholding of the mystery of God. Not passive at all, while yet being utterly tranquil, θεωρία is the concentration of our mental and spiritual capacities upon the magnitude, and the magnanimity of God.

“Reconciliation” is the second aspect of your theme. Saint Paul speaks of καταλλαγή many times in his writings, a word that also possesses an active meaning – one of exchange, as in this verse from Second Corinthians:

Just as God was reconciling the world to Himself by Christ, not counting up people's failings against them, He also planted in us the Message of reconciliation. In truth, we are emissaries on behalf of Christ.... *

Because being reconciled to God is like being reconciled to another human being – you must have an encounter. It's personal.

So not only are we called to be reconciled to God in an active exchange of faith for grace, humility for mercy, and love for forgiveness; but we are called to be Christ's emissaries, His ambassadors to the world, manifesting His Message of reconciliation. It is a high calling that each and every one of us can fulfill, simply by the intentions we bring, and the dispositions we maintain, in our everyday lives.

Finally, your theme speaks of “Unity,” which is exemplified by our Lord Jesus Christ outstretched in love upon the Cross. For the orientation of the Cross is not only vertical, creating the ladder on which we can rise up to Heaven; but it is also horizontal, stretching from the one thief who railed against Him, to the one who confessed the Lord. Through His ineffable love for humankind, the Lord joins us to one another, and it is this love that creates Church unity.

Whether it is your parish, your Metropolis, our Archdiocese, our Mother Church, or the worldwide Orthodox Church taken together, our unity is a measure of our love. For without love, there can be no Church.

Love is what brings us together at this Clergy Laity Assembly today. Love for our God, love for our Faith, love for our traditions. And love for the Church, which can be seen in every one of your shining faces. As the Evangelist John tells us in his First Epistle:

If you do not love your brother or sister whom you have seen, how can you possibly love God Whom you have not seen? †

Therefore, beloved brothers and sisters, let us enjoy this time together as the Church, as the Body of Believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I congratulate all of you for this Metropolis Clergy Laity Assembly, and I look forward to your work, so that it may be added to the coming Clergy Laity Congress of our Archdiocese this coming July here in the Metropolis, in San Diego.

And let us never be lax in exercising the virtuous activities of contemplation, of reconciliation, and of unification. For as we pursue them in Christ, we will gain immeasurably of God’s gracious gifts that He so desires to give to us all.

Thank you, and may the Lord bless these proceedings with every success.

* II Corinthians 5:19-20a.

† I John 4:20b.

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