

Let Us Not Be Afraid! Let Us Be Full of Zeal and Courage!”



The Polish Council of Bishops' Exhortation to Their Priests and Monastics During the Pandemic

On Tuesday, November 3, the Polish Council of Bishops met in Warsaw under the chairmanship of His Beatitude Metropolitan Sawa of Warsaw and All Poland. Among other matters, the hierarchs discussed the life of the Church in this extended time of pandemic.

As a fruit of their discussion, the hierarchs issued a message to the priests and monastics of the Polish Orthodox Church, calling on them to both observe sanitary and hygienic standards and to stand brave and strong during this time, remembering their priestly and monastic oaths to die to themselves and ever serve the Lord.

In this way, the clergy and monastics can offer an example of faith and hope to all the faithful of the Orthodox Church.

The earthly life of man is subject to constant changes. Today, these changes affect our spiritual, economic and social life. God's permission, seen in the coronavirus pandemic, has disorganized our Church life. Therefore, in our message to you, venerable brothers, priests, monks and nuns, we wish to sensitize all of you to the seriousness of the situation which may, unfortunately, change every day and disturb the existing order.

In view of the above, it is extremely important to be deeply aware and responsible, all of us, for the work of God entrusted to us during priestly ordination and the monastic tonsure. When we took an oath to God on the Holy Gospel, we vowed that, regardless of objective external conditions, we would be ready to carry out a pastoral ministry full of sacrifice, remembering the Savior's words: Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock (Acts 20: 28).

At a God-appointed moment in your life, you heard Christ say, "Come and follow Me" (cf. Mark 10: 21). You followed Him willingly to serve Him, regardless of the changes in the world. Knowing also that everything changes, and only Jesus Christ remains always the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever (Heb. 13:8). As our Lord, He is the foundation upon which we build our pastoral life. And if that's the case, then you mustn't be threatened by changing living conditions. It is He, Jesus Christ, Who constantly reminds us: Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid (Mt. 14:27). In Him, therefore, lies our strength and the strengthening of our spiritual struggles. It is from Him that we derive spiritual energy for our new and tireless pastoral work. For Christ is the Son of the living God (Mt. 16:16). Every priest and every monastic follows this path. It also reveals the essence of pastoral work. No one and nothing can cause fear in an Orthodox priest who, on the reverse of his first priestly cross, bears the words: Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity (1 Tim. 4:12). These virtues turn fear into faith in the wisdom of God's unsearchable judgments. And let the monastics read the testament written on their monastic paraman: From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus (Gal. 6:17).

Let us not be afraid! Let us be full of zeal and courage! We bring to our faithful and to the world around us the joy of the Resurrection of Christ. He has defeated death. Thus, He will also overcome the trial of the pandemic. After all, we have many examples of this from the history of our Church. Such an example is our holy places, such as the Holy Mount Grabarka and others, where our ancestors, with deep faith and hope, gathered in crowds around the Christ the Redeemer Icon and other icons, thanks to which they saved their lives and returned to their homes in good health.

Let us strengthen the weak in faith by giving the faithful our personal priestly example. Let us strengthen our pastoral work in the “little church” of the Orthodox family. Let us be active in parish life. Let us make our catechetical and charitable work more dynamic by helping the sick, the poor, orphans, and all those in need. Let us devote ourselves more to prayer, both individual and communal. Let us devote even more attention to our youth. Let us also include our Church brotherhoods of the Orthodox Youth, Sts. Cyril and Methodius, St. Athanasius, and others in our active work. All of them are called to help promote Orthodox culture, the spiritual wealth of our Church, and the preservation of the rich family customs of our ancestors.

Without violating the principles of our faith and tradition, let us all follow the sanitary and hygienic requirements and recommendations of the administrative authorities. Following them will help us get through these most difficult trials. Let us also remember the words of Christ: If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you (Mt. 17:20).

Brother priests! You are the spiritual reapers! Christ has sent you into the field where He sows with your hands. The priesthood is the daily sacrifice of ourselves and our families to God. A priest is one who teaches and admonishes, in season and out of season, when he is strong and on his sick bed, day and night, by word, action, prayer, and example, so that the Word of God may spread as widely as possible and help those who fear trials, pandemics, or various other diseases.

Brother priests! We address these words both to you and to ourselves. Let us remember that salvation begins here and now. Heaven and hell begin in the soul of the living, not the dead. Therefore, earthly life is the proper time to work out our salvation. By God’s grace, salvation comes from the depths of our hearts, with our faith, love, and hope leading us to Heaven. May the trials of today serve to strengthen these virtues: faith, love and hope, that they might sanctify the world

around us.

Full of love and faith, let us pass these truths on to our faithful.

Almighty God, bless us to serve Thee and Thy Church as faithfully as possible!

God's blessing be with us all.

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