

Sanctity of Life Sunday

January 21, 2001

To the Hierarchs, Clergy, Monastic, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America

Dearly Beloved:

All life is dependent upon God and is sealed with the very stamp of His holiness. Created life, by its nature and origin, is sacred and destined to reside in holiness for all eternity. This is especially clear when we recall the story of creation. Only mankind is created in the image and likeness of God. This unique relationship establishes the human person as Priest, Prophet, and King over all creation. By sharing God's image and likeness, the human person is given the vocation to preserve, nurture and protect all that God has created out of his abundant love.

However, mankind chose to sin and rebelled against its divinely-given vocation. From sin, death entered the world. No longer clothed with divine life, humanity and all entrusted to man's care and love became shrouded by death. Man chose a way of existence that rebelled against God and therefore against life itself.

Within our own culture the sanctity of life is veiled to the extent that the value and quality of life are now determined by politicians and jurists. The vocation of Priest, Prophet and King has been usurped by a false autonomy, which chooses death over life. Life as a gift to be offered back to God is now placed in the arena of fierce debate and public opinion polls. Consequently, the termination of life as well as the exploitation of life is no longer associated with the dark realm of sin. Ultimately, politics, debate and the ongoing attempt to legalize a particular morality will not restore life to its proper relationship with God. For this reason, the horror of human conflict, culminating in war, class rivalry, social and economic inequality and capital punishment have been joined by the clinical termination of life in the womb, physician-assisted suicide, and the abuse of environment.

Because the Church is the living body of Christ - because the Church, filled by the Holy Spirit, is the manifestation of the world to come - its task is to return all life to God. As the Orthodox Church in America, our words and deeds must convey the beauty, glory and dignity of human life while extending the compassion of our Lord to all who may choose the path that harms and even destroys life. Sojourning in the world, the Church must continue the ministry of Christ, beginning with the call to repentance. It is this call which seeks to restore the human person to union and communion with God. It is this call which seeks to uncover the sanctity of all life.

With love in Christ,

THEODOSIUS

Archbishop of Washington Metropolitan of All America and Canada