



ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

July 28, 201

Beloved Fathers, brothers and sisters in Christ,

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:6-10)

In our own lifetimes we were blessed by an act of prophetic witness in July 1992, when the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America issued the magnificent “Affirmations on Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of Life.” Two decades later we Orthodox who live in the diocese that includes our nation’s capital city need to be reminded of some of the moral verities contained in the Affirmations. It should be obvious to any attentive observer that those verities are under increasing assault by the intellectual, social, and cultural elites in this country—and even by many of our public officials, particularly in the federal government headquartered here in Washington, DC. More alarming is the erosion of those moral verities within some of our Orthodox congregations.

The dire need to preserve and protect the sanctity of human life from the moment of conception has been the focus of the annual encyclical of the OCA primate for Sanctity of Life Sunday each January for many years. I wish to remind you, in the prophetic spirit of the apostles, that the Holy Mystery of Matrimony and the moral limits of human sexuality are ancient traditions of the Church not subject to whatever winds of change may be blowing through our society at the moment

The 1992 Affirmations enunciated clearly and forcefully the following principles and guidelines among others:

- God wills that men and women marry, becoming husbands and wives. He commands them to increase and multiply in the procreation of children, being

joined into "one flesh" by His divine grace and love. He wills that human beings live within families (Genesis 1:27; 2:21-24; Orthodox Marriage Service).

- The Lord went even further to declare that people who look at others in order to lust after them in their hearts have "committed adultery" (cf. Matthew 5:27-30).
- Christ's apostles repeat the teachings of their Master, likening the unique marriage between one man and one woman to the union between Christ and His Church which they experience as the Lord's very body and His bride (Ephesians 5:21-33; 2 Corinthians 11:2).
- Marriage and family life are to be defended and protected against every open and subtle attack and ridicule.
- Sexual intercourse is to be protected as a sacred expression of love within the community of heterosexual monogamous marriage in which alone it can be that for which God has given it to human beings for their sanctification.
- Homosexuality is to be approached as the result of humanity's rebellion against God, and so against its own nature and well-being. It is not to be taken as a way of living and acting for men and women made in God's image and likeness.
- Men and women with homosexual feelings and emotions are to be treated with the understanding, acceptance, love, justice and mercy due to all human beings.
- People with homosexual tendencies are to be helped to admit these feelings to themselves and to others who will not reject or harm them. They are to seek assistance in discovering the specific causes of their homosexual orientation, and to work toward overcoming its harmful effects in their lives.
- Persons struggling with homosexuality who accept the Orthodox faith and strive to fulfill the Orthodox way of life may be communicants of the Church with everyone else who believes and struggles. Those instructed and counselled (sic) in Orthodox Christian doctrine and ascetical life who still want to justify their behavior may not participate in the Church's sacramental mysteries, since to do so would not help, but harm them.

Our life in Christ is constituted by repentance. If we are to be faithful Christians, we must be constantly turning toward God, away from our sins and passions, realizing the seriousness of our sin in a spirit of repentance, and striving to change our lives. We cannot approach the Holy Mysteries without living a life of repentance, and examining our consciences and confessing our sins. When we have fallen, we repent, and try to stop our sinful behavior. Otherwise, we risk communing unto judgment and condemnation. This discipline of the Christian life leads to salvation, enlightenment and the healing of our souls. We must be faithful to that discipline of life, if we are to call ourselves Orthodox Christians.

In light of the above, what Orthodox Christian in good conscience would dare to approach the chalice containing the life-giving Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Our Lord, while refusing to acknowledge, confess, and eradicate from his or her life sins against authentic Christian marriage, including fornication, homosexual activity, or adultery? Which sexually active couples co-habiting without the Orthodox sacrament of marriage can expect the Church to bless their unholy union and welcome them to the life-giving Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Our Lord, unless they find separate accommodations and cease their fornication and get married in the Church?

We are all called as Christians to live a life of chastity, pleasing to the Lord, married or single. If we are Christians we are all called, whatever our attractions or past habits, to the same saving discipline that will heal our souls. Otherwise we are living in hypocrisy, a living death; just as when we judge others struggling with their sins. This has been delivered to us from the Apostles and Holy Fathers, and remains unchanged to this day. The Orthodox teaching on chastity and Christian marriage is a fundamental element in Christian life and discipline. We are called to conform our lives to the Church and its disciplines, not alter the teachings of the Church to fit either a cultural fad or our own passions. Where we stand against the prevailing cultural trends, we must stand fast, because we know that obedience to the Church's teaching leads us to communion with God and eternal life; and disobedience leads to alienation from God, spiritual death.

As the Lord proclaims in the Gospel of St. Luke, "Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required. . ." (Luke 12:48, RSV). We Orthodox Christians have been granted eternal life as a free, unmerited divine gift. Virtuous struggle against sexual temptations is hardly too much for the Lord to ask of us. The Lord honors the genuine intent of those who, with humility and repentance, so struggle, even as He judges those who, moved by a spirit of pride and defiance, persist in the spiritual delusion that unnatural or unholy sexual activity can be blessed. I have already instructed the clergy of our Archdiocese to honor their ordinations by acting in full accordance with our uncompromising Orthodox moral tradition. I expect all of us faithful to honor our baptism and unique calling as Christians.

These teachings are not onerous, but rather, part of the light yoke and easy burden of being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

With love in Christ,

+Jonah
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada