

Sermon Delivered at the Holy Trinity Parish in Oxnard, California

This is an extemporaneous sermon delivered by His Eminence, Archbishop Chrysostomos at the Feast Day of the Holy Trinity parish in Oxnard, California, on Pentecost 2008. It was hastily transcribed by a listener. We requested that His Eminence fill in any missing elements from memory, which he kindly did. We feel that the sermon should be passed on to our faithful—Holy Trinity Parish

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I greet all of you on the parish Feast here at Holy Trinity Church and thank the parish for receiving us with such kindness in this beautiful edifice. I would like to make a few comments in English, apologizing for my deficits in the Russian language. For the Greek-speaking faithful here today, I will offer some thoughts in Greek at the end of the Liturgy.

It has been a year, now, since the momentous and courageous decision of your Church Council, its officers, and the heroic founders of your parish to reject the union of the Moscow Patriarchate and the exiled Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia)—for so many years a bastion of resistance to innovation, ecumenism, the deviations of world Orthodoxy, and the Moscow Patriarchate and the political forces of Communism which created it and dictated its policies—and to petition for acceptance by our Synod of Bishops.

Since that time, we have made great progress. Though His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian, our spiritual Father and the President of the Orthodox Church of Greece, Holy Synod in Resistance, suffered a massive stroke last November and fell into a coma, where he remains today, his beloved spiritual child, whom he selected as his successor—His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi—, has, as Acting President of the Holy Synod, carried out the policies and the goals of the Metropolitan, continuing his work without interruption.

In our unitive work, aimed at bringing all Orthodox into communion in Holy Tradition and the Truth, the Holy Synod, under Bishop Cyprian's guidance, has reached out to other Orthodox, initiating a dialogue with one of the other significant Old Calendarist groups in Greece, hoping for the establishment of good relations and mutual recognition between our Churches. The Holy Synod has also confirmed our relationship as a Sister Church with the Synod under Bishop Agafangel, the one Bishop who did not accept union by the exiled Church with Moscow, having helped His Eminence Consecrate two new Bishops.

As well, we have made clear our intentions, in continuance of activities initiated by Metropolitan Cyprian, to pursue contacts with the New Calendar Church of Greece, not with the intention of union with that body (in contrast to

the apparently hidden goals of the dialogue that led to union between the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and Moscow), but for the purpose of cultivating good relations and cooperation, whenever possible, between our Church and the New Calendar Church. After all, although ailing in their Faith and, in some instances, having lost so much of the essence of their Orthodoxy, the innovators are Orthodox, and our resistance is aimed, not at alienating and rejecting them, but at bringing them back to the standards of Holy Tradition and the exactitude of the Orthodox Faith, if possible.

Even in our anti-ecumenical efforts, our goal is not to breed religious intolerance or to preach against those in error—let alone to divide Christians. This is not the spirit of the Fathers. Our aim is to protect the identity and the integrity of the Orthodox Faith, so that all might be united within it. Not only that, we also wish to preach Orthodoxy in a pan-Orthodox way, such that Greeks, Russians, Bulgarians, Romanians, Syrians, and all Orthodox, as well as those converts who have returned to the Orthodoxy that their native cultures and nationalities lost over the years, will all be one in Orthodoxy. We exclude no one, including the Jews, who indeed, if they convert to Orthodoxy, actually have primacy among us. We wish to bring all people to Orthodoxy. Our anti-ecumenism protects the integrity of Orthodoxy, as I said, but for the purpose of calling all people to its perfection and primacy.

In the same way, in rejecting the union of Moscow with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad—your former jurisdiction and our former Sister Church—we have not acted to divide the Church. We have acted to protect its integrity, with the hope that those who have erred will return. In an act of what can but be called betrayal, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad united with the Moscow Patriarchate, justifying this move with fantasy and by exploiting ethnic loyalties. It erred gravely in so doing. Our first loyalties must be to Orthodoxy. As for the element of fantasy, we hear fantastic stories about Putin, who sponsored this Church union for purely political reasons, having been a secret Christian, coming from a Christian family, and so on. In fact, his grandfather was a cook in the Kremlin for the dreaded NKVD, a communist, and an atheist. Putin's atheist credentials and those of his family and friends are well known. To have joined in something created by him was to betray the Church, even if many naively did this.

My former mentor, spiritual son, and friend, Dr. Nikolai Khokhlov, one of the first high-ranking KGB officers to have defected to the West, trained many of the people, then virtual children, who now fill the clerical ranks of the Moscow Patriarchate. They were chosen from a young age, in many cases, to fill their future roles. While I do not doubt that there are pious and dedicated clergy and faithful in that jurisdiction, for the greater part, as Nikolai often told me, one cannot trust the administrators of the Church. The majority of them are agents (or former agents) in cassocks, formed by the KGB (or the new FSB), and their inexorable cause is that of advocating something which is inimical to true Orthodoxy, which exists to transform us, to unite us to God by Grace, and to restore us to communion with the Energies of God.

For this reason, I must tell you that, over this past year, you, the parish, and its founders have inspired me. You have encouraged me by your loyalty to True Orthodoxy. You have stood up for your Orthodoxy, placing it above ethnic concerns and the threats of political powers. You have contributed to a pan-Orthodox witness and have strengthened the witness of the Church. There are those, of course, who have tried to intimidate you and to destroy your work. You have been slandered and insulted. You are being sued for your property. Many of you, like me, are being personally sued by your former Bishop. There are those who will further slander and betray you and spread the most vulgar and disgusting things about you. But blessing when you are reviled in this way, you will have the final victory. There are also, of course, agents among us. And there are agents who resist your work with us, since together we impede their work. These, too, we will overcome with our witness.

I congratulate you for your courage, your resistance, and your honorable stand. I encourage you to continue doing what you are doing. I encourage you to stand firm against those who attack you. I encourage you in your work for Orthodoxy. I am humbled to have you with us, and I ask you always to stand firm and to resist any attempts to discourage you in our common work. I am immensely proud of all that you have done, and I hope that we will be together many, many years in our efforts. Conveying to you the blessings of our Acting President, Bishop Cyprian, and assuring you that it is a great privilege for His Grace, Bishop Auxentios and me to be with you here today, *s' prazdnikom* for the Feast, *Mnogaya Lyeta*, and *Spasibo*.

