

*“Gird yourselves with sackcloth and wail you priests.
Mourn, you who serve the altar” Joel 1:13.*



TO OUR BELOVED HIERARCHS, BROTHER CONCELEBRANTS, AND OUR FAITHFUL FLOCKS,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

We write this letter in anguish and pain of heart, carrying a burden we have borne in silence for too long. Today we write with boldness, a boldness that is found not in ourselves but in our desire to hold fast to the Holy Traditions of our beloved Orthodox Faith—the true medicine of the world. We write as a brotherhood of clergy in America not bound by jurisdiction or diocese. The fires of current trials have brought us together, and our brotherhood has been forged in tears, brokenness, and prayer. It is in the ashes of what this past year and a half has wrought that we have felt the disruption of the Church at many levels, but have found like-minded brother priests whose resurrectional joy, silent suffering, and confessor-like endurance kept the spark of zeal ignited. Sadly, because of the nature of our testimony, we cannot publicly disclose ourselves, but we judge our voice to be a necessary voice crying in the wilderness out of love and pain for the Church. We are keeping anonymity not on account of cowardice but for the reason we have been silent for many months: we have deep concern what may happen to our flocks if we are identified. Truly, a lamentable predicament to be in! It is the suffering cries of the laity and our flocks, however, that have inspired us to speak out with a necessary tone of repentance and healing. We will address the laity whom we have neglected, exhort our brother priests to awake, and exhort our beloved fathers and chief hierarchs to fervent apostolic witness.



Firstly, to the faithful. The past year has revealed much in our hearts. It would be easy to place the blame on some outside circumstances or some other person—society at large or authorities in the government or in the Church. Yet we acknowledge that, above all else, sin starts in our own hearts. Above all else, we are personally responsible for the shortcomings and failings that the Lord has laid bare. It is He who has allowed the many tribulations and temptations of the past year on account of our many sins. These trials are for our chastisement and healing; they are for the turning of our hearts back once again to the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe, as the saints testify, “Because of your sins the

Lord has allowed this trouble to come upon you, because you keep forgetting God” (St. John of Kronstadt).

As clergy, we take responsibility for the many stumbling blocks set before the flock of Christ the Lord, especially in the turbulent year 2020. We acknowledge that, in many ways, we, the clergy, acted out of weakness and ungodly fear. We humbly ask for forgiveness. We know that the actions of clergy made dire prophecies ring true. *"The time will come when we will not find even a tiny piece of antidoron, and we will say to ourselves, 'Where can I get a little antidoron? I used to have it every day. I took and ate it by the handful. Where are you my little antidoron, that I might partake of you?' The time will come when we will not have either antidoron or holy water."*¹

Forgive us for not sounding a clear call to repentance. Forgive us for closing churches in a time of deep spiritual need. Forgive us for limiting services and restricting attendance. Forgive us for turning the people of God away from Church and the Holy Mysteries in a time of profound need, effectively *"not allowing those who are entering to go in."* Forgive us for allowing the altering of the mode of Holy Communion for fear of the spread of illness, such as the use of multiple spoons and the wiping of the communion spoon in a disinfectant. Forgive us for refusing in-person holy confession during a time of great crisis. Forgive us for forbidding the proper veneration of icons held by the Holy Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council, a veneration our forefathers and mothers shed blood for. Forgive us for making face-masks a requirement for entering the Holy Temple of our Lord. Forgive us for placing secular narratives above the teachings of the Holy Orthodox Faith.

Forgive us, for we should have served more services. We should have had public repentance, prayer and fasting. We should have had processions with holy icons and fervent supplications. We should have served the service of blessing of holy water and the sprinkling of the people of God therewith. We should have served Holy Unction, for the healing of soul and body. We should have called, in both word and action, the people of God first and foremost to a hope, trust, and faith in God above all else. We should have shown forth steadfast courage and faith in the holy things of the Faith. Forgive us for failing to walk in the way of our Holy Fathers. Forgive us for blurring the divine lines of the Holy Liturgy with the dark ink of fleshly reasoning and justification.

Forgive us for neglecting your children and reversing their catechism, asking them to experience God through a screen and forcing them to conceal their angelic faces behind an iconoclastic mask. We did not heed the words of our Savior, Who calls your children to Him, and we allowed the millstone of directives to drag us into the dark depths of a burdened conscience. We beg for your forgiveness and for theirs, seeking the life giving breath of repentance.

¹ Gerondissa Makrina Vassopoulou, *Words of the Heart*, pg 504. She said these prophetic words on the 19th of December, 1992.

We firmly resolve never to abandon you or your families again, no matter the circumstance or the cost—to the shedding of our blood.



Secondly, to our brother priests and deacons. We must confess, in the words of the New Hieromartyr Peter, *“But this is our grief – we have invented all the wrong means by which we think to be saved from this terrible sickness that has mercy on no one. We try to utilize various serums and vaccines ... and the vast majority of people almost completely leave out the spiritual starting point in a person—his soul.”* We started from externals and not from the spiritual starting point. Our weakness and sin, manifest in the past year, are but symptoms of a more profound ailment, one that surpasses COVID in gravity and it appears has infected a large amount of people.

We have led Orthodox Christians to reason more according to the spirit of the fallen world than by the Life and Spirit of Holy Orthodoxy. Our hearts have gradually grown accustomed to worldly thinking rather than having the mind of Christ. The past year was not the ailment, it but revealed in a more acute light the ailment already afflicting us. When, as priests, we received the Holy Body of our Lord into our unworthy hands at ordination, we pledged to preserve it whole and unharmed until our last breath, acknowledging our accountability at the Second Coming. How have we slipped so far as to forget our promise before God and become so foreign to the ways of our holy fathers who served worthily before us?

We have permitted a humanistic ecumenism to supplant the Divine One Holy Catholic and Ecumenical Church, which is the very Body of the Theanthropos. The predominance of our placing faith in the resolutions of men reveals that we have begun, in the words of St. Justin Popovic, “to replace faith in the God-man with a belief in man, to replace the Gospel of the God-man with a gospel according to man, to replace the philosophy of the God-man with a philosophy according to man, to replace the culture of the God-man with a culture according to man. In brief, they [we] seek to replace life according to the God-man with life according to man.”

In many places we allowed our liturgical life to cease, depriving the world of the sacred power of the divine liturgy which restrains the power of the evil one. “Do you know how much this guards us? An elder once told us that when a person carries the Gospel with him, it protects everyone in the surrounding neighborhoods. Just imagine then, the power of Christ's sacrifice that happens every day.”² Today, clergymen stand in awe at the evil that has escalated over this past year but have neglected to see the cosmic significance that our vocation plays in it. “The Divine Liturgy is the way

² Gerondissa Makrina Vassopoulou, *Words of the Heart*, pg 504. She said these prophetic words on the 19th of December, 1992.

we know God and the way God becomes known to us,” says St. Sophrony. It is the Church’s greatest mission, and we laid it aside! In this great work, the Lord’s work, the same Saint says, “We feel His Divine presence within us, outside of us, at the highest grandeur of the universe, in the face of man and in the radiant intellect. And in the hours that the unwaning light illumines, our hearts we realize we will not die.” However, many of us allowed the divine presence of God that is imprinted on the dear faces of our people to be concealed under a mask and abandoned them to be pursued by the jaws of wolves without participation in divine services. Furthermore, we let down the world and ceased to sanctify it, allowing evil to unmask itself and act more openly.

Much of this was done under the guise of love—but it was not Christian love. It was a “love” defined by politicians and slick spokesmen who also advocate for the “right” to murder unborn children, who bomb our Orthodox countries on Pascha, and who will not even lift a finger for the poor of their own cities. Some of our people died without the Holy Mysteries, without the faithful by their bed, without proper burial. Others withered away in loneliness, battled thoughts of suicide, and were lost to the clutches of this world.

Open and common prayer with heretics and schismatics, contrary to the canons, has become all-too common. And this sad sin has widened its wound now to encompass prayer with non-Christian groups. “What harmony,” we ask, “has Christ with Belial? Or what portion has a believer with an unbeliever.”³ Blatant rejection of the clear Orthodox teaching on morality is permitted in broad daylight, bareheaded, and those who uphold the Orthodox Faith remain silent. The broad and easy path of compromise is continually sought and the healing traditions of the Holy Fathers are neglected.

For these things, we ought to offer the world our public repentance. We have forgotten God by trusting more in the powers of this world. The world now needs priests and deacons who are confessors, men of prayer, and who strive for an austere life of asceticism. If we are lukewarm, not only will we be spit out by our Lord, but also by the world—for it knows all too well the wretched stench of a compromising clergyman.



Lastly, to our beloved shepherds, the bishops. Often when we look back upon the deep wounds experienced by the Church throughout history, we see the abnormal break between the people and their shepherd as the cause of that wound. We, as a brotherhood of your priests whom you endearingly call sons, have now experienced such a break and suffer feelings of orphanhood. The biggest anguish this year has brought is the absence of courageous apostolic shepherds.

³ 1 Corinthians 6:15

The voice of your fatherly guidance and protection became to us the voice of a stranger, for no longer did we hear the consoling voice of the Lord, the Holy Fathers, or the healing medicines of the Church, but the voice of the world, corrupt politicians, and medical advisors that are now profiting off a dire situation. The wolves in politicians' dress co-opted Christian morality, and the same that teach our women to murder their children in their womb pontificated "love for neighbor"—and the hierarchy parroted this shamelessly. "Love for neighbor" became not burying our dead properly and isolating our flocks to the point of suicide. It contributed to the escalating rise in household abuse, and more. Fear and this pseudo "love for neighbor" led our bishops [you!] to instruct us not to allow our people into the temple for healing. All of us in this brotherhood began to realize that your voices had become foreign worldly, full of fear, and not the voice of Whom we pledged our lives to serve—our One Good Shepherd.

We love you and we long for your care, but if you continue to be strange voices we cannot do anything but heed the One True Voice that leads us to the pastures of life. We do not see this path as disobedience, but the ultimate obedience to our Lord and His Bride—the Holy Church. For, under the guise of obedience, we were told to follow this strange new path that is unprecedented in our history as a people of God. In many cases, we have silently resisted this new strange voice that we have heard and have led our people as best we could—struggling on our own in silence. In heartache and despair, we have watched our shepherds become drunk with the drink that this world offers and uncover themselves; we have labored to hide your nakedness from your sheep. They love you—they thank you in their prayers for not shutting them out, not forcing masks upon them, not changing the method of communion, etc., when in reality you told us to force these deadly ideas upon them. Forgive us, but we had to find the Voice of the Master and in grief we had to resist the strange path we have seen you sadly forge because there is no life in it—all we saw in the parishes from these worldly measures was spiritual death.

Please return to us once again as loving shepherds with the Voice that brings us life. We have felt orphaned, without apostolic guides, and have suffered the unnatural severance between father and son. Whether you have been silent or have outright supported the deterioration of our parishes through worldly mandates, you have grieved us and have shaken the innermost depths of our hearts. We cannot fully express in words how this betrayal has affected us—you saw the wolf and ran, you have scattered the sheep, but there is time to return to care for the flock. In great sadness we have watched you now pat yourselves on the backs, congratulating yourselves and boasting that the impositions over the past year were right and correct. Yet, when your people for long months were deprived of the medicines of the Church, were pushed to the brink of darkness, were seized in the clutches of the children of hell, and forced to participate in the liturgy through a screen like starving children watching a feast through a window, you must admit that this truly was not a victory.

As your sons, we must tell you that we cannot be obedient to the voice of the murderous spirit of this age and that we have found it coming from your chanceries in the form of mandates, sermons, political conferences, and zoom meetings. We have great love for you and reverence your office, but sadly cannot follow you down a foreign road so we beg you to return to bold apostolic speech. We know that obedience is discriminate, not indiscriminate, from both our Holy Fathers and the divine Scriptures, for both speak of true and false shepherds. We know the holy examples of St. Maximus the Confessor and the erring hierarchy who aligned with the impious Emperor. We remember St. Athanasius and the heretical presbytery who opposed him. We recollect the faithfulness and boldness of St. Mark of Ephesus and how the compromising hierarchy were shamed by the laity on the docks of Constantinople. We are inspired by the recent boldness of the Russian martyrs who were imprisoned and suffered under Sergianism and its allegiance to an atheistic regime. The path of schismatics is riddled with disaster, and this path we will never take, but we discern in the lives of these holy ones the painful path of blessed disobedience. *“Obedience makes the subordinate one with the one he obeys. The Holy Writ says: ‘and the flocks conceived before the rods’ (Gen. 30, 39) [...]. One may say: the subordinate’s faith can replace the elder’s inadequacy. Wrong! Faith in truth saves. Faith in lies and in diabolical deceit harms!”*⁴

St John of the Ladder writes, *“Above all, you should leave the integral faith and the pious dogmas as a legacy to your children, so that not only your children but your grandchildren too will you manage to guide towards the Lord by walking the path of Orthodoxy.”*⁵ This is the legacy that is not foreign, and in these times it is impossible to be silent as a shepherd in the face of treachery. Teach us, lead us, and leave us the legacy of Truth and Life. St Paisios warned us saying: *“If Christians don’t begin to witness their faith, to resist evil, then the destroyers will become even more insolent. But today’s Christians are no warriors. If the Church keeps silent, to avoid conflict with the government, if the Metropolitans are silent, if the monks hold their peace, then who will speak up?”* Truly, we must recognize that it is because of the Church’s silence that evil has all the more prevailed in these times.

Speak, beloved hierarchs! Speak out against the mandates that have deprived us of spiritual life, speak out against the immoral agendas of the LGBTQ movement that publicly seeks to snatch your children, speak out against false unions! Embolden your priests and do not deprive us of shepherds for the sake of ease, of legal immunity, or out of indifference. We are the prey of this current age, save us! We feel as the prophet wrote, *“As I live, saith the Lord God, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock. Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the*

⁴ Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov, op. cit., tome I, pp.141.143.146ff

⁵ Saint John of Sinai, *On the Shepherd 97*, edition Holy Monastery of Paraclete, Horopos Attica, 19946, p.402 (PG 88, 1201A).

*Lord. Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I shall visit the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock...*⁶ Return to feed us, your poor priests and people.



To all, in humility before God, we vow not to return to the strange path of the past year that so many have experienced and are still suffering under. We will not return to practicing the following.

1. **We will not deprive the people of the life-giving sacraments of the Church out of fear.**
2. **We will not change the method of Holy Communion.**
3. **We will not limit the occupancy in the Temple of God.**
4. **We will not deprive the faithful of the veneration of holy icons, relics, and other holy objects or vessels.**
5. **We will not require the iconoclastic masking of our people.**
6. **We will not urge or require our people to inject themselves with experimental injections, especially those manufactured and/or tested on aborted fetal cell lines.**

We therefore resolve to uphold the Holy Orthodox Faith of our Fathers and we call upon all faithful Orthodox to do the same. First and foremost, this is a call to deeper repentance and spiritual resolve. We all have a responsibility to identify the sickness of the modern age and to heal it by calling on the sweetest name of our Lord Jesus, saying, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me."

Your Servants,

THE BURNING BUSH BROTHERHOOD

July 31st/July 18th ✦ The Year Of Our Lord 2021

⁶ Ezekiel 34, 8-10 (KJV)