



ARCHPASTORAL MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE METROPOLITAN TIKHON CONCERNING THE MEETING OF PATRIARCH KIRILL AND POPE FRANCIS

To the Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America:

Christ is in our midst!

On Friday, February 12, 2016, the world watched as Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis greeted each other at the Havana airport in Cuba, bringing the leaders of the Church of Russia and the Roman Catholic Church into dialogue for the first time in history.

While some may question the motivation, the timing or the purpose of this event, we, in the Orthodox Church in America, should give thanks to God that we are witnesses to such a historic meeting between two important Christian world leaders. Their personal encounter is a further step in the nourishing of fruitful relationships between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches, relationships already affirmed by the Pope's previous meetings with His All-Holiness Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch, and Primate of other Orthodox Churches. Now, the meeting of the Patriarch of Moscow with the Pope of the Catholic Church offers a sign of hope that the Orthodox Churches are walking together on the path of collaboration with the Catholic Church. As the Orthodox Churches prepare for the Great and Holy Synod being convened by the Ecumenical Patriarch in June on the Island of Crete, we acknowledge that all signs of hope, unity, and reconciliation are gifts of God's mercy and grace.

This most recent meeting can only serve to strengthen the foundation for Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, particularly in the face of the many challenges faced by Christianity in the modern world. The Joint Statement issued at the conclusion of Friday's meeting will certainly serve as an important document, one that not only outlines those challenges, but provides a direction for a unified Christian response to issues that include the persecution of Christians and other religious groups, the erosion of traditional Gospel values, threats to religious freedom, and the crisis of the family.

At the same time, the Joint Statement also highlights many points that have a practical application to those of us living in North America. For years, the Orthodox Christian faithful here have found common cause with their brothers and sisters of the Catholic Church, joining together in giving witness on a number of moral issues, such as the sanctity of life and social justice, and engaging in theological dialogue, especially over the last 50 years. In this sense, our experience as Orthodox Christians in the United States, Canada and Mexico could serve as an example of hope for those regions in which Orthodox-Catholic tensions are painfully evident.

Friday's meeting gives evidence to the reality that world religious leaders can set aside differences in order to draw attention to the very real suffering of people around the world, whose freedom to live as their consciences direct is under constant threat or outright persecution. We,

Orthodox Christians in North America, ought to heed the call of the Patriarch and the Pope to give witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ by calling upon the international community to act urgently to prevent the further extermination of Christians in the Middle East and to end the violence and terrorism in Syria and Iraq by every peaceful means possible.

We should continue to pray, as we have been, for a peaceful resolution to conflicts in regions such as Ukraine; for the release of those kidnapped, especially Metropolitans John and Paul in Syria; and for the victims of violence and their communities in Syria, Iraq and the Middle East as a whole. We also can bear witness, in our own local communities, to the peace and joy of the resurrection and by the remembrance of the words of the statement that “No crime may be committed in God’s name, ‘since God is not the God of disorder but of peace’ [1 Corinthians 14:33].”

Finally, I would highlight the emphasis the Joint Statement placed on the central role our young people have to play in all of these areas. At a time when our deeply held faith in Jesus Christ and the Gospel is under threat, in these very disturbing modern times, our young people should become the leaders who help our world focus on the spiritual values preserved as a great treasure by our Orthodox faith.

Friday’s meeting of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill, with God's blessing, may be a milestone in the rediscovery of the shared spiritual tradition of Orthodox and Catholic Christians during the first millennium of Christianity. But it should, above all, be a source of inspiration for each of us in our own journey to remain faithful to Jesus Christ, through a life of prayer, of humility and of love, so that, in whatever simple and undramatic way, we may do our part in fulfilling the Lord’s prayer, ‘that they may be one as You and I are one’ [John 17:21].

With love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tikhon', with a small cross symbol to its left.

† Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada