



January 22, 2023
Protocol 01/012

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

My Beloved Children in the Lord,

From the earliest times, Christians have been at variance with the world because of their reverence toward sexuality, marriage, and human life at all its stages. In the post-apostolic Epistle to Diognetus, very possibly from the pen of St. Polycarp, the disciple of St. John the Theologian, we read that Christians ‘marry, as do all others; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh’ (ch. 5).

Rather than viewing pleasure and fleeting happiness as the supreme good, Christians know that virtue, a rightly-ordered relationship with God and the world which he created, is what leads up toward true goodness, which is God himself. Another word for this right relationship with the Creator is *life*.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God and incarnate Word came to tear down the dividing wall of hostility between God and man and restore us to our friendship with the Divinity, which friendship had eroded because of sin (Eph. 2:14). Thus he is revealed to be the Life and Light of the world (Jn. 8:12, 11:25, 14:6), the one in whom and through whom we enter into a rightly-ordered relationship with existence and the Source of existence, and who shows us what that relationship—virtue—is, and where it leads—eternal life, eternal relationship with the Lord and his saints.

Life, for Christians, means far more than biological life. And yet this deeper and broader conception of life should only increase our reverence for biological life. For, in Christ, we understand that every human being is created in the image of God, and that every human life is a free gift of the Father, from whom comes every good and perfect gift (Gen. 1:27, Jam. 1:17).

Thus, we understand that there is no opposition between reverence for life and true human flourishing. Or, to cast the matter more bluntly, we can never accept abortion and infanticide as a solution for other human ills. Rather, we must see the sins of abortion and infanticide as manifestations of the same evils that underlie other social injustices.

This year, Sanctity of Life Sunday has taken on a new meaning. The Supreme Court has undone, as far as lies in its power, the injustice wrought by its decision in the case of Roe v. Wade. But this means that our work in defense and promotion of life is only just beginning.

We know that, as soon as Christians gained a voice in the Roman Empire, that used that voice to speak against the enormities that the Empire committed against human dignity: slavery, gladiator and beast fights, and, yes, abortion and infanticide. As long as we Orthodox Christians have some voice in this pluralistic, democratic society, it is right that we use this voice to defend the weakest among us, including especially the unborn children who still lie under threat of legalized abortion in many jurisdictions.

But we must never, ever allow ourselves to become focused solely on political, and much less partisan and ideological, pursuits. Instead, the defense and promotion of life must start and end with our personal commitment: in our hearts, in our families, in our parishes, in our communities, with alms of time and treasure and talent and effort. With whatever resources God may give us, we must promote true human flourishing, starting with the right to life for all people, at all stages of life. And we must do what we can to orient our life toward God through virtuous living, encouraging the same in our brethren and neighbors wherever and however it is possible. In so doing, we might hope to attain to the everlasting life and bountifulness of the heavenly kingdom, where Christ the Lord reigns with his Father and his All-holy and life-giving Spirit.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read '+TIKHON', written in a cursive style.

+TIKHON
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada

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