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TO THE FAITHFUL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CANADA

Dear Brothers, and Sisters,
Christ is in our midst

In early September, the Orthodox Church in America experienced a culmination, of sorts, of a long period of anxiety : the report of the Special Investigative Committee, the leave-taking of Metropolitan HERMAN, the interim appointment, by the Holy Synod of Bishops, of Archbishop DIMITRI as *Locum Tenens* of the Metropolitan See (and of the OCA), and me as Administrator, not to neglect the matters in Alaska, the changes to the fiscal management, the personnel, and the administration of the Central Office of The Orthodox Church in America,, and the preparation for the All-American Assembly.

In the wake of this, I have been trying, as your Bishop, to find the words with which to write about all of this to you, the faithful in our Archdiocese, in order to respond to the questions that must be in your minds, and to try to give some kind of wisdom about the time that we are in.

This is an impossible challenge at many different levels. My days, and each moment of them, my heart, and my mind, are overwhelmingly overwhelmed. To respond in a comprehensive way to your concerns, to respond about the past, present, and future, and to respond, in these circumstances, pastorally, as your Bishop, is difficult in the extreme. As to the past, the number of concerns, moments, conversations, information, perceptions, and dynamics of relationships is, simply, the "expanding universe". The questions, and concerns are so many, and so broad as to be impossible to address fully in anything less than a book. As to the present, my motive for this letter now will certainly be questioned. As to the future, my status, as with many others, is in question. I cannot change these reactions. I also cannot abandon my position as your Father.

There has been a real sense that it would be better that I simply say, and do nothing. But of course, this is, in a sense, the major thrust of your concerns about the past. While I am not unaware of your concerns, nor to your response to what I write here, and, in the face of my concern that this may produce more harm than healing, I take the risk of writing this, as your Bishop, in pastoral response.

In August, when the Holy Synod made a general confession of our weaknesses, and

failures to act in response to what had been going on, there was criticism that this was too general, too little, too late, insincere, and self-serving. There are so many issues of time, knowledge, communication, perception, relationship, process, and resultant consequences, as I said earlier, that it is simplistic, naïve, and too-quickly condemning to be a healthy response by the faithful. Furthermore, it was a sincere confession, even in the face of the call for specifics, a sincere confession of all of us together, and at the same time of each of us.

What was this “general” confession? I speak for myself. You know who I am. I do not quickly jump to confrontation. I do not like confrontation as a response to life, nor to the gospel. I am, I suppose, a contradiction to the core -- a “Viking”, and a would-be gentleman. So my crime is this: I let things happen. I believe in people’s being the image of God; I know the weaknesses in the character of Man. I know my own. Is there a need to identify these weaknesses, one by one? How did I respond, in all these circumstances, given that you know who I am, that is such a surprise to you? It is a different matter, however to critique the make-up/weakness of a person, as opposed to his/her integrity.

You must know the expression “discretion is the better part of valour”. It is, admittedly, my way, often to a fault. It is possible that this discretion overtook valour, or that it overcame the obligations of my office. Although I do admit the trouble this characteristic causes others, and the sorrow it causes, I do not accept that it means that I lack integrity, or am therefore weak. I accept responsibility, nevertheless for the negative consequences of my actions, and/or inactions, and I will, by your holy prayers, do what I can to overcome the negative characteristics in my personality, and the sin.

There was an obvious need for accountability, and transparency about fiscal matters. This has been responded to. There are larger issues regarding relationships -- the Metropolitan, the Holy Synod, the Metropolitan Council, the All-American Assembly, decision-making, communication about matters involving the life of the Church, and its members, pastoral needs, and processes of conflict resolution. In this sense, the “culmination” that I mentioned earlier, is an opportunity to enter into a God-breathed, important, life-giving process of reconciliation, and transfiguration. This can be, if we want, a great opportunity for dialogue.

And to you, the faithful in our Archdiocese, I voice my lament, not only about my failures, and limitations, but also, and even primarily about my inability to be present amongst you, to be with those that I love, to be more fully father. There is nothing more, whether with you the clergy or with you the faithful, by which I am more fulfilled.

As your Bishop, transcending my limitations, and sinfulness, may I exhort you to work, and to pray together as “members of one another in Christ”, heeding the words of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians, which is the theme of the up-coming 15th All-American Assembly:

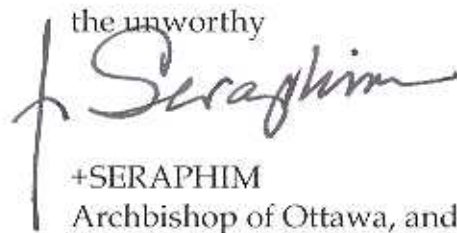
“4:25 Therefore, putting away falsehood, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 nor give place to the devil. 28 Let the thief steal no longer steal, but rather, let him labour, doing honest work with his hands,

so that he may be able to give to those in need. 29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edification, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and slander be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Lord, have mercy ; Lord, have mercy ; Lord, have mercy.

I pray that I, we, together, will be able to live more, and more in the context of Christ's love, and in imitation of Him. I pray that we will be able to let Him turn us to Him, to His Way, and that we will be able to give our hearts truly, and fully to Him. May the Lord protect us, and save us.

Asking your holy prayers, I remain, in Christ, yours,

the unworthy

+SERAPHIM
Archbishop of Ottawa, and of Canada