

## **The Resolution of the Fall Clergy Retreat of the Diocese of Chicago and Mid-America (ROCOR)**

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil." (I Thessalonians 5:21-22)

Gathered together in the God-protected city of Des Plaines, IL for the annual Fall Clergy Retreat, the Clergy of the Diocese of Chicago and Mid-America greet the faithful in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ! We were blessed to once again conclude our fellowship meeting by celebrating the patronal feast of the diocesan Holy Virgin Protection Cathedral.

With joyful sorrow we prepare to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the October Revolution and the martyrdom of St. John Kochurov, the first priest-martyr of the Bolshevik yoke.

St. John's martyrdom was a harbinger of an atheist and ecumenist age within society, and the moral degeneration of the people. This tragic descent into inhumanity serves as a warning to us in our own age of growing unbelief, moral laxity, and relativism. In reflecting upon the secular culture in our present day America, and its many pitfalls and snares set to entrap the souls of the faithful, we are reminded of the high priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of His disciples: "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:15-17)

From where do we derive this sanctifying truth of which Christ speaks? From our Holy Mother the Church, which is "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (cf. I Timothy 3:15) The faithful should understand that this truth is often inaccurately or incompletely presented by some Orthodox Christians in social media and various internet venues due to the limitations of the medium or the erroneous opinions of the writer or speaker.

The truth of Christ is conveyed to the faithful primarily through participation in the liturgical life of the Church, reception of the Holy Sacraments, reading of Scripture and the Lives and Writings of the Saints, and regular interactions with their father confessor, and through him, the bishop of the diocese. Questions of faith, conscience, and morality should first be directed to these God-ordained sources of spiritual guidance, and not investigated or determined without reference to the Church. One trustworthy source of guidance for many social and ethical questions can be found in the document "The Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church" (2000), which can be accessed online:<https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/>

Our concern is equally directed toward sanctifying our whole life as Christians. We are admonished by the Holy Apostle Paul, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" (I Corinthians 6:19) Therefore, we are each individually, both clergy and laity, the house of God and the place of His dwelling, and we are called to holiness and purity. The Holy Apostle Peter affirms this call to personal holiness in his first catholic epistle: "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, 'Be ye holy; for I am holy.'" (I Peter 1:15-16)

We remind the faithful that involvement in the impure and unholy things of the world will hinder or prevent the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, Who will not find within our defiled inner temples a suitable dwelling place. Of particular concern is the consumption of television and internet entertainment that is grotesquely violent, blasphemous, or pornographic in content, such as the popular HBO series "Game of Thrones" which has been the topic of discussion recently in Orthodox circles.

The Church solemnly warns us against the dangers of pornography in Canon 100 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council:

“Let thine eyes look aright, and keep thy heart with all diligence” (Prov. 4:25 and 23), wisdom bids us. For the sensation of the body can easily foist their influence upon the soul. We therefore command that henceforth in no way whatever shall any pictures be drawn, painted, or otherwise wrought, whether in frames or otherwise hung up, that appeal to the eye fascinatingly, and corrupt the mind, and excite inflammatory urgings to the enjoyment of shameful pleasures. If anyone should attempt to do this, let him be excommunicated.”

To what, then, should we give our attention? The Holy Apostle Paul gives clear guidance: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Philippians 4:8)

With pastoral love for the faithful, and deep concern for their spiritual safety and health, we direct our eyes to the pure image of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who calls out to all who are suffering from the wounds of the enemy and the oppression of the passions: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

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