

## A letter from a group of laity of the RTOC

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

The Lord commanded us to be sober, to pray, so that we do not plunge into misfortune. What is happening now, with such swiftness before our eyes, clearly tells us Orthodox Christians that the forces of anti-Christ are rampaging, preparing for the arrival of their ruler. The world is panicking, and this panic is deliberately escalated by those who imagine themselves to be “creators of life,” because when a person is panicky and afraid for his life, for the life of people close to him, he ceases to think critically, he is open to any manipulation.

Must we echo this worldwide panic? The Lord told us through His holy Apostles that He did not come to earth to bring peace, but rather to bring a sword - the spiritual sword that will forever, until the end of time, divide all of humanity into those who are with Him, and those who are against Him. We are Christians. We profess to be True Orthodox Christians. We have already seen this separation in our lives more than once. The world demands its own - pride, self-exaltation, primacy, success, the cult of bodily health, worldly "love," entertainment and vain knowledge. God commanded the opposite - meekness, kindness, sobriety, spiritual wisdom, and most importantly - humility before the Will of the Creator.

So, can we now unite with the world in this confusion of its soul, in its lack of hope in God, in its doomed animalistic fear of death? Or, even now, as true Christians have always acted, should we separate ourselves from the role that is being imposed on us in the next performance, played out by “the powerful of this world?” The answer is obvious! If God is with us, then who is against us? The Lord cannot but be the conqueror!

Indeed, in all the events which shook the world that has departed from God, we cannot help but see His wrath. We cannot but notice the phenomena which were predicted to take place during the last times. Yet, the servants of the Antichrist have long been confidently preparing a way for the reign of their ruler and prince. The Apocalypse, as a result of apostasy, must occur, for God has deemed it so. And, it is actually being accomplished – as the world departs from God all the more. And, the further the world departs from God, the thicker the darkness becomes, ready to finally give birth to the son of perdition. Everything now taking place may become a point of no return, the beginning of an active offensive by the forces of darkness, and simultaneously, another stern and formidable warning, such as those which have already occurred in the life of mankind, and, after which, the Lord will extend the time of earthly civilization, through the prayers of the saints, in order to save the few faithful who still remain.

We, believing Christians, should look at everything calmly. We know what we must do. Through prayer, fasting and repentance, we must save our souls. Let us think how providentially the Lord judged all to take place during the days of Great Lent! This is an appeal for us to strengthen our prayer, to deeply repent of our sins - not

formally, not with craftiness, but the way the saints have commanded us to repent – as if on our deathbed, without hypocrisy, to wash our cursedness with tears. “My soul, arise, why do you sleep? The end is drawing near!”

Yes, we grieve with all the world, mourning for the grief that befell people according to the inexplicable judgements of God. We weep with those who weep, and mourn with those who mourn. Yet, we know the Truth, and therefore do not succumb to panic. And we remember that God gives these wonderful days of mournful purification solely out of love for man! The Lord gives this sorrow so that the faithful are encouraged, so that the unbelieving return and fall at the feet of the Heavenly Father: “We have sinned, O Lord, before Heaven and before Thee,” so that the blind, not seeing the Lord, will see, so that the lame, not having the firmness of step on their way to salvation, could acquire a stable gait, so that those relaxed in spirit, not caring about their soul, would rise from the bed of a deadly disease. The judgement is near! The Lord is near! It is not appropriate for us to be afraid of those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul. But fear, as commanded, him who can plunge both soul and body into fiery Gehenna.

The Holy New Martyrs and Confessors showed us through their example, as if in the midst of hell itself - in camps, exiles and prisons, in conditions of complete absence of freedom, enduring mockery and physical pain, they remained free in spirit unto the end. And often, in the midst of this hell, the Lord covered and delivered them from the hands of the executioners - if that was His Will. No one can take away this inner freedom from a person, as long as he himself is not weak in spirit and does not renounce his cross. For us, this is most important.

Everyone will die - one way or another. Yet, a hair from a person’s head will not fall without the will of God. It is appropriate for Christians to be always ready for death, waiting for the Heavenly Bridegroom with the lit lamps of virtues. The Lord takes people both in peacetime, and during the absence of plague and pestilence. He sends his angels, with a sword, severing those whom His right hand will command. Yet, even in the midst of dangerous events, He preserves those for whom the judgment has not yet been completed. “By the depths of Your judgements, O all wise Christ, Thou hast determined everyone’s end of life, its limits and manner.” (Meat-Fare Sunday, Matins, canon, n. 1,2). We may leave the cities. We can take refuge in the mountains and caves. Yet, will this save us from the omnipresent right hand of the Lord, present in every place of His dominion? The forces of evil have no power over any human soul without God's permission. Satan himself is powerless to do anything beyond what God allows him to do. “I allow you to do with him what you want, only preserve his soul,” God told the devil regarding the much-suffering Job. The forces of evil are powerless, and they are doomed.

Let us not allow panic into our hearts. Let us not be enticed to follow after those who deliberately sow it, undermining our faith! Leaving now must not be for the caves or the mountains, but for the spiritual desert, where the corrupting spirit of this world does not penetrate. Let us avoid slander and condemnation, idle and empty conversations and entertainments. Rather, let us study the works of the Holy Fathers of the Church, who have completed their sorrowful earthly journey as conquerors.

God is with us. The Mother of God is with us. With us are all the heavenly powers and the holy saints of God. With us are the holy New Martyrs and Confessors, who with their recent example of steadfast confession of Truth, showed us that for the believer all is possible, and that the fear of physical death is nothing compared to the sweetness of abiding in the Lord. They carried their cross to the end, unafraid and without fear, leaving the powers of the anti-Christ a mockery. With us, we have such an army of Christ's warriors. So, of what shall we be afraid? We will not succumb. We shall remain unshakable in our rejection of the systems of the new world order. We will not give-in to its and fear mongering, neither today nor tomorrow.

Be it as it will, the Lord expects from us a living and active faith. We firmly know that after mournful and difficult days, full of tears and labors, the great and joyful Day of the Lord will come – the Feast of feasts, and the Triumph of Triumphs! This is a time of repentance, this a time most auspicious, for the Kingdom of Heaven has drawn nigh!

Come, O Lord Jesus!