



AN ARCHPASTORAL ADVENT MESSAGE

ON THE SIN OF INTERNET, SOCIAL MEDIA AND MEDIA ABUSE

*“Jesus called the crowd to Him and said, Listen and understand!
What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him unclean,
but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him unclean.”*
(Mat. 15:10-11)

MOST BELOVED CLERGY AND MONASTICS, SONS AND DAUGHTERS,
FAITHFUL CHILDREN OF THE EASTERN AMERICAN DIOCESE OF
OUR MOST HOLY SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH,

We find ourselves in the Season of Advent, and in the holy days of preparation for the arrival of the great and radiant Feast of the Incarnation of the Word of God. The birth of the Christ Child brings with it the renewal of all peoples on earth and all creation: *“For the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the Only-begotten, Who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (Jn. 1:14). The Incarnate Logos – the Word of God, through His Holy Church, already here and now, reveals the future Kingdom of God as the eternal community of love. And precisely in that love realizes the union of God and man, and man with his neighbors. The same is always and everywhere revealed in unity, and never in deception or fragmentation.

The ability to communicate is, indeed, a gift from God to humanity. The use or abuse of this gift is a matter of personal choice, that of our God-given freedom, either unto salvation or condemnation. And as it is with the spoken word, so it is with the use or abuse of any word or image – consigned to print or electronically communicated, privately or publicly, individually or through mass media.

Following the example of our Father in Heaven, every conscientious parent is responsible, by their sacred Christian duty, to warn their cherished children that moment when they see that the evil one has laid a ruinous snare for them. In like manner, now at the beginning of this holy Nativity Lent, in Our Archpastoral concern for Our entrusted clergy and monastics, and all sons and daughters, Our spiritual children, once again We admonish on the danger of abuse of the Internet, social media and other means of public information. The Holy Apostle Paul, edifying the Corinthians, reminds us of the words of Christ: *“Therefore come out from them and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty”* (2. Cor. 6:17-18).

All those who choose social media or any other means of public communication, to create or disseminate lies and disinformation, publicly scandalize and deceive the faithful, lead astray children and youth, are guilty of the sin of self-centeredness and love of self, the sin of their *ego*, for they estrange themselves from the eternal community of love, from the Body of Christ, from the Church. They and those similar to them,

only hear themselves and the *father of lies*, and never the Word of God, Who was sent to us from the Father.

“Why do you not understand what I say”, asks Lord of them? “He who is of God hears the words of God” (Jn. 8:43,47). They who do not hear the word of God, are not of God. And for such, blind individuals, who are also in the Church, Christ wisely counsels and warns us: “Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit” (Mat. 15:13-14).

Therefore, be watchful over your hearts, Our dear and treasured spiritual children! As we fast during this Holy Advent Season, both in spirit and in flesh, heed the admonition of the Holy Apostle Peter, who said: *“Rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind” (1. Pt. 2:1). Abusing words – that are never neutral by their nature, nor indifferent, is a sin against the very Word of God. As with every word that we utter, so also for those that we conscribe to print, or publish in cyberspace, we will be held accountable before God at the Awesome Day of Judgment. We must, therefore, guard the purity of our hearts, by shielding ourselves from evil things and slander, in order to make room only for Him, Who was born for us humans and for our salvation.*

We are summoned during this holy Nativity Lent, also to sincere repentance, by placing ourselves before the judgment of our conscience and examination of the secrets of our hearts. And what is it that makes us unclean and brings condemnation upon us? *“For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings forth good things out of the good stored in him and the evil man brings evil things stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word that they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Mat. 12:34-37). “Do not judge, or you too will be judged; for in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Mat. 7:1-2).*

Therefore, We appeal to all of you, Our dear spiritual children, *“do not repay evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:17-21). By fasting, and in repentance before God, through prayers and petitions for those close to you and for those that hate you, you will preserve the purity of your Holy Orthodox faith and the beauty of your Orthodox Christian dignity and identity. In so doing, always and everywhere, you will, and must be, of assistance to your Holy Church and to your people. Walk away from darkness and enter into the pure Light of Christ, “The true light that enlightens every man that comes into the world” (Jn. 1:9). And in receiving Him, Emmanuel, Who is God With Us, He will receive us and we will truly become and endure as children of His Father, Our Father, the Father of Lights, children of the God Most High.*

Given in New York, at Advent,
In the Year of Our Lord, 2019.

Your fervent intercessor before Christ the Word of God,

+IRINEJ

**BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA
THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**