



The Diocese of the West
THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
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April 22, 2008
Theodore, Bishop of Anastasiopolis, the Sykeote

To the Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the Diocese of Alaska:

I greet you all with the coming Radiant Feast of Feasts, the Resurrection of Our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

It is in the spirit of this bright and joyous celebration that I write you all this afternoon. As the Paschal Verses of Matins so eloquently puts it:

*This is the day of resurrection.
Let us be illumined by the feast.
Let us embrace each other.
Let us call "Brothers" even those that hate us,
and forgive all by the resurrection...*

There is pain, hurt and, perhaps, even fear among you. I can assure you all, the situation will not stay the same. It will either get better or grow worse, depending on the path we choose to take together. All of us who have taken part in the recent drama, need to forgive each other. There are not, nor can there ever be, "sides" in the Church. There are only those who are with Christ and those who are not. And we are with Christ only if we forgive.

As human beings, none of us are **all** good or **all** bad, **all** success or **all** failure. We are, rather, to one degree or another, "mixed", and complex, fallen creatures. We all have the ability to be noble and ignoble, self centered or generous. Not only am I imperfect, so is everyone else. It is our struggle as Christians to try to refashion ourselves, with God's help, after the image of Christ Himself, the Perfect One Who dwelt among us and poured out His very life for our sake. But it is a struggle, an ascetic struggle. Part of that struggle lies in learning to forgive, to set hurt aside and move on.

The Evil One does his work by scattering Christ's flock. Since our father Adam, men and women have built up walls between themselves and God, and between each other.

Wherever there is bitterness, wherever there is sin, wherever there is fear or resentment, walls have built which need to be torn down. And the only way these walls can even begin to be breached is through forgiveness and prayer. When we fail to forgive we build our own personal prison. We will stay confined in that prison of our own making, alone and bitter. It is when we forgive that we are the most God-like, the most Christ-like. We will hear Jesus forgive those who condemned Him to a cruel and unjust death on Great and Holy Friday. It is that divine generosity on the Cross that is the beginning of our own salvation.

And so, I beg your forgiveness. I ask that you forgive my brother hierarchs and each other. There is nothing that is worth finding oneself outside the Bridal Chamber of Christ because our lamps lack the oil of forgiveness. Let us be wise and not foolish, generous and not stingy. "Let us embrace each other joyously." Then, and only then, will God give us the ability to share His Holy Pascha.

I am grateful to His Beatitude for asking me to assist him in the administration of the Alaskan Diocese. I will be coming several times during the year, beginning with Thomas Sunday.

With great love and respect for you all,

+Benjamin
Bishop of San Francisco and the West