

**PASTORAL LETTER
AT THE FEAST OF THE LORD'S NATIVITY, 2018**

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by the mercies of God
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*To our beloved clergy and Orthodox Christians,
peace and joy from Christ the Lord, and from us hierarchical Blessings.*

*“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in
time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last
days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed
heir of all things, through whom also
He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1, 1 – 2).*

**Most Reverend Fathers,
Beloved Faithful,**

From the words of St. Paul we understand that all the events of the Old Testament constituted a dialogue of God with man through the prophets *"at various times and in various ways."* This dialog has found fulfillment in *the Son's words*, beginning with His birth in time, according to the flesh, from the Virgin Mary. The great Apostle speaks of a progressive preparation of humanity that has been completed at the *"fullness of time."* God is giving man time to hear and embody His healing word.

We can ask ourselves: Why did man need this time for progressive preparation? Father Dumitru Stăniloae reveals to us the meaning of this preparation:

The Prophet was giving man the faith as a certainty about the existence of God and was communicating His will. Man felt God's interest in his destiny and His closeness to him in the birth and support of his faith..¹

Through the prophets, God begins to restore man's faith in His existence, which is the foundation of the renewed human life. God also reassures man of the reality of the dialogue with Him and His constant interest in him. Thus, God restores the vertical dimension of the human word through the Word of God, the Logos. Through His Son, God liberates man from the secular horizontality of drifting away from Him, in order to elevate him by the vertical power of His word. Faith in God was becoming the foundation of restored human life and ethos.

But what is the concrete purpose of this dialogue? St. Basil the Great says: *God in the flesh; not of limited acts, like the prophets, but having His humanity articulated and united to Himself, and turning to Himself, through the body that is related to us, all humanity.*²

According to the great Cappadocian, the word of God has a concrete purpose - the realization of His union with all humanity. The word, although essential in any relationship, ultimately remains a preparatory element, necessary but still insufficient, that awaits further concrete fulfillment. The words of the prophets were preparatory, necessary in re-establishing the

¹ *Jesus Christ or the restoration of man.* Ed. Omniscope: Craiova 1993, p 98

² *Homily at the Holy Nativity of Christ* (p 30) in St. Basil the Great. *Unknown Homilies & Two Sermons on Baptism.* Ed. Doxologia: Iași 2012

paradisiacal relationship of man with God. The words of the prophets, beyond their *boundaries*, were preparing an *unlimited fulfillment*, which was the union of the divine and human natures through the Incarnation. *God's kinship* with all humanity, the expression of the perfection of the relationship between God and man, was the sought endpoint, and the *dialogue* was the necessary means to bring the whole into unity with God.

The great Cappadocian Father tells us why this unity between the divine and human natures was necessary: *Learn the mystery! For this is why God is in the flesh, to destroy in Himself death that had hidden within.*³

The ultimate goal of this restoration through the Incarnation was the victory of the deified man over the ultimate enemy that was abiding in his own nature - death. It represented the expression of the creature's failure to achieve deification to which it had been called and from which it fell away by disobedience and which had affected the ethos of man. The absurdity of the nonsense of the death of man destined for eternity was abolished.

What does this victory by the incarnation of Christ imply?

*Learn that this is why God is in the flesh, - says St. Basil the Great - because He has to sanctify this cursed body, to strengthen the weak, to familiarize with Him the one alienated from God, to raise to heaven that which had fallen from paradise.*⁴

When God restores, He does it in a harmonious, integral and perfect way. In Christ, the *inner-spiritual*, at the same time as the *outer-personal and relational unity of man*, is progressively re-established; the human body is restored through the immeasurable and perfect holiness of the Body of Christ; the weakened nature is strengthened against the assaults of sin and passions that have diminished its initial vigor; man is reintroduced into the natural and familiar presence of God; and eventually man is raised and placed in heaven - the space and time of God's full communion with man.

*Indeed, with Him (n.n. - Christ), man and mankind have a majestic walk on a new foundation of life - says Archim. Mitrof. Vasile Vasilachi. It is a heavenly path of man with God. It is a universal call of all mankind to a new and great unity, to union with the One and the same God. He calls us to shake off all the ideologies and human doctrines that separate us, thus forming one and the same kingdom of God, on one and the same earth, under one and the same divine shadow.*⁵

In the end, God restores the unity of all around Him. In Christ, the passionate laceration that tormented the human existence is abolished, being replaced by the harmonious unity of the whole divine-human. The path to eternity is reopen to man by the preparation through the divine word and the fulfillment in the Incarnation.

Beloved faithful,

We are at the end of an important year for all of us. It is the *Homage Year of the Unity of Faith and as a Nation* and the *Commemorative Year of the Great Union of 1918*. On the occasion of the *Second Congress of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Canada* (June 29 – July 1), we had the opportunity to present the overall situation of our Diocese and of the Romanian presence in Canada, as well as the missionary needs and pastoral priorities that result from it in the spirit of unity and love of faith and nation.

³ ibidem p 31

⁴ ibidem p 31

⁵ *What Lord's Nativity brings us.* (p 223 – 224) in *The Threefold love of God, of the Church and of the Nation.* Theological Collection "Word of Life": New York, 1990

At the symposiums dedicated to the Centennary of the fullness of the Romanian soul (Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton) we had the opportunity to reflect on the role and the contribution at the Great Union of 1918 of various personalities, such as: *Metropolitans Vladimir Repta, Nicolae Bălan and Pimen Georgescu, Patriarch Miron Cristea, Bishops Roman Ciorogariu, Ioan Ignatie Papp* and others. These were the people who wrote a new history, inspired by the living faith and the efforts of the forefathers. Through their ministry and endeavor, through art and culture which they promoted, the Church has kept alive the flame of the living faith, of the Romanian language and culture. The Church, through its clergy and believers, knew how to confront the vicissitudes of time in order to keep alive the hope of the final victory. And this was possible with the certainty of eternal life alone.

We received as gifts the holy relics of *St. Constantine Brâncoveanu* and *St. Gregory the Teacher, St. Andrew Saguna* and *St. Irodion of Lainici* as the foundations of a strengthened unity between the Mother Church and the parishes of our Diocese in Canada. The saints are the living testimony, by word and deed, of the faith in God.

The year 2018, rich in commemorating so many important events, was crowned by the consecration of the *National Cathedral* on November 25, which marked the fulfillment of a more than a century dream of the Romanian people. It is the visible expression of both faith in God and national unity as well as the perseverance of *a hardworking and faithful people*. The year 2018 meant a tangible transition from word to deed, the embodiment of a much-desired ideal.

Just as the word of the prophets has found its fulfillment in the Incarnation of the Son of God, in the same way, in today's society, where realities such as: disfunctioning, inequality, injustice, violence and superficiality are still present, we are expected to find the proper, edifying and unifying word, able to encompass the eternal values of the redeeming Christian faith. Through honesty, truth, generosity, goodness and beauty, the word can restore the values upon which man can build his life in a harmonious and truthful way.

At this festive moment, I would like to thank everyone – *the priests and deacons, monks and simple believers* - members of our parishes, missions and monasteries who have worked hard throughout this year for a more efficient mission, for better organization and functioning, for deeper knowledge, better approach and resolution to the issues we face, in the hope to spread the Word of God to all mankind.

On the occasion of the Nativity of the Lord, New Year and Epiphany, I extend to you all the most sincere thoughts of unity, harmony, joy, peace and blessing in our Lord Jesus Christ!

Many Years!

Your brother in prayer to God, desirous of every blessing

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