

THE WAY ШЛЯХ

Official Publication of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia

VOL. 72 - No. 23

DECEMBER 18, 2011

ENGLISH VERSION

"Today let us all rejoice together..."
(Ukrainian Christmas Carol)

Christmas Pastoral of the Hierarchs of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the United States of America

To Our Reverend Clergy,
Reverend Religious,
Seminarians, and Faithful,
Christ is Born!

Once again, we Ukrainian Catholics recall with affection and devotion the Birth of our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us: and we have seen His Glory, the Glory of the only Son coming from the Father" (Jn, 1,14). Once again, our merciful Lord brings us to the Feast of the Nativity giving us another occasion to greet one another with His praises. Once again we give thanks for you to the Lord God and rejoice with you on this solemn Day.

Christmas is a very visible sign of God's love for us. The cave, the manger, the swaddling clothes - - all these are signs which underline that



This photo is taken from the iconostas at the Cathedral.

great love. And the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of good will" (Lk 2,14).

Within the bosom of each believer Jesus Christ, the God-Man, seeks a modern-day manger where - - if we

allow Him - - He brings the radiance of His Presence and an assurance of His peace that surpasses all understanding. Even in the midst of our hectic lives and troublesome world, we recall the tender compassion of our Father: "God so loved the World that He sent His only begotten Son" to share in our human situation in every way possible, save sin. Not for us, a God who "watches from a distance!" He is our Emmanuel — "God-with-us" — who enlightens the world and brings rays of healing for those who receive Him into the manger of their hearts.

The mystery and the miracle of Christmas are unfathomable. Christ-God became also human like us out of love for us. St. Paul the Apostle says

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Christmas Pastoral of the Hierarchs of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the United States of America

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"God's grace appeared for the salvation of all people" (Ti 2,11). Jesus Christ is God's great gift to us. God gives Himself and becomes like us. In His public ministry, Jesus taught very clearly that His love is for everyone. As He loved us, so we must love one another, says Jesus.

Christ was born for each and every one of us, so we acknowledge this great grace personally. But Christmas is also for everyone, so we celebrate it communally. Our Ukrainian Church and nation have developed such meaningful services

and traditions to help us celebrate. How sad it would be to miss them. Remember Christmas is always special because on Christmas Eve everyone is involved. The Christmas Eve Holy Supper includes everyone, the traveler is seated with the family, the absent are remembered, even the animals are paid special attention, and in church the "God-is-with-us" lingers with us and soothes our soul. "Today, let us rejoice together."

Let us all rejoice on this great Feast of Christmas. Let us show Jesus our love for being born for our salvation.

Make of your life a holy hymn - - a "psalm of thanks" to God for all things by your every word and deed. Do this day by day and you will be able to say ever more sincerely: "Christ is born, let us glorify Him!"

We, your bishops, extend our best wishes to you and to our sisters and brothers in Ukraine and the world over. May the Infant of Bethlehem raise His hands over you and bless you. May the goodness and kindness of the Christ Child fill your souls with new-born love and joy now and in the New Year.

Christ is Born! Let us glorify Him!

+Stefan Soroka
Metropolitan-Archbishop
of Philadelphia

+Richard Seminack
Eparch of St. Nicholas in
Chicago

+Paul Chomnycky,
OSBM
Eparch of Stamford

+John Bura (author)
Apostolic Administrator
of St. Josaphat in Parma

Christmas, 2011



To Metropolitan Stefan and all our readership,

***The entire staff of "The Way" greets all on this joyous
Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord God and Savior, Jesus Christ !***

***May the guiding light of the Bethlehem Star
lead us to The Way of Christ -
the path to salvation.***

***Therefore, let us all sing the Christmas carol,
Boh Predvichny - God Eternal:***

*God Eternal is born today
He came down from above
To save us with His love
Christ, the Son of God.*

Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

The story of the Nativity of Christ is beautifully told in the Holy Scriptures. The story is found in [Matthew 1:18-25](#) and in [Luke 2:1-20](#). No matter how often the Birth of Jesus is told, we realize that it is an important event.

As the story is told by the Apostles, the Roman Empire was powerful. The Romans had conquered much of the then known world. Judea and Samaria, what we know today as Israel, were included in their conquests. Emperor Augustus ordered that a census be taken in all his lands. He needed to know how many people lived in the empire so he could tax them. Everyone had to go to the town of their family's origin to register for the census. This meant that Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem. They were descendants of King David and Bethlehem was the City of David.

Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth and it was a great distance from Bethlehem. It was about 100 miles over very rugged roads. Moreover, Mary was expecting the baby and it was almost time for her to give birth. Bethlehem was a small town and there were many descendants of

David who had come to register for the census. By the time Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem there was no place for them to stay. Joseph tried very hard to find a place to sleep that evening. There was no room at the inn. Finally, Joseph found a cave-like place where they could rest. This place was used by shepherds to protect their sheep in stormy weather. It was here that Mary gave birth to Jesus. The baby was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the straw in the manger.

Now, that night the shepherds were out in the fields guarding their sheep. Suddenly, there was a bright light which startled the shepherds. The light was so bright that it turned the night into daylight. Of course, the shepherds were frightened. Nothing such as this had ever happened. Soon an angel appeared and calmed them. The angel said:

"Fear not for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior; which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign

unto you: You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (Luke 2:11-12).

Then a larger group of angels appeared. They praised and glorified God and sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). When the angels finished singing, they disappeared and the light began to fade. It became dimmer and dimmer until it was dark again. The shepherds were awed. They didn't know what to do. Finally, they decided to leave their flocks of sheep and go to Bethlehem. They decided that they wanted to see for themselves what the angels had told them. When they got to Bethlehem, they found Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus. They fell to their knees and adored Jesus.

Some Wise Men came from the East for they knew of the coming of Jesus. They had seen a star that told them that a new king had been born to the Jews. They followed the star and were looking for the child. At this time the governor of Judea was King Herod. He was a wicked man and was

feared and hated by the people. When Herod heard about the Wise Men looking for the child, he invited them to his palace. Herod asked the Wise Men to find the child so that he, too, could worship Him. But Herod was lying. He did not want anyone to take his place. The Wise Men went on to look for Jesus. The Star led them to Jesus and Mary. When the Wise Men found Jesus, they fell to their knees and worshipped Him. They gave Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The Wise Men left but did not return to Herod. They had a dream that warned them that Herod wanted to harm Jesus. Instead, they returned to their native country by a different route.

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**PASTORAL LETTER
OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV
TO THE CLERGY, RELIGIOUS AND ALL THE FAITHFUL
OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH**

“The Vibrant Parish – a place to encounter the living Christ”

Dearly Beloved in Christ!

Introduction

Our Lord Jesus Christ before his ascension into heaven instructed his disciples, saying: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mat 28:18-29). This commission of Christ to proclaim the Good News was given not only to the first disciples, the apostles, it is directed to the Church in all times, even to the end of the ages. The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, in fulfilling this commission of our Divine Savior, speaking through the Bishops of its Holy Synod five years ago, defined “Holiness of a united people of God” as the goal of her ministry. Holiness is God’s gift, and the vocation of every Christian. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification,” St. Paul reminds us in the letter to the Thessalonians (1 Th 4:2-3).

The parish is the place where Christian holiness most often germinates, grows, and matures. For this reason the Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in 2011, in its concern for the spiritual renewal of our entire Church, focused its particular attention on the parish, that foundational portion of the People of God, which strives for holiness under the guidance of its bishop as father and teacher of the faith. The program, which the Holy Synod approved, is called, “The Vibrant Parish – a place to encounter the living Christ.” The goal of this pastoral program is to help all the faithful of our Church to learn “to live in order to please God” (1 Th 4:1), and thus to grow in holiness and unity in Christ Jesus.

In this Pastoral Letter, I would like to reflect on the key components of a vibrant parish.

The Word of God

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom,” St. Paul teaches us in the Epistle to the Colossians (Col 3:16). Through the Word of God we come to know Christ, we encounter Him, and enter into a living relationship with Him. “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ,” said St. Jerome. In our parishes we want to follow the example of the first Christians so that the Word of God might become the foundation of our ecclesial, parochial, family, social, and personal life. I strongly urge pastors to diligently prepare their homilies based on the proclaimed Word of God in such a way that this Word might become “living and active” in the life of our parishioners, capable of nourishing them, giving them answers to real issues of the day, and inspiring them to service.

The Word of God should bear visible fruit in our everyday lives because only those who keep this Word, that is, obey it, will be called blessed in the Lord (see Lk 11:28). In our parishes there should not be a single family which does not own a Bible. I encourage all our faithful to read the Sacred Scriptures on a daily basis; this is done ideally through participation in parish bible-study groups or through prayerful reading at home. The newly published Catechism of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, “Christ our Pascha,” is another essential volume which should become a handbook of faith for all the members of our Church – children, youth, and adults. The Catechism, according to Metropolitan Andrey (Sheptytsky), is the foundation of Christian life.

On this occasion I wish to emphasize that all the members of our Church have a personal responsibility throughout their whole lives to acquire an ever deeper knowledge of the truth of the Holy Faith, while the clergy must not neglect their responsibility of teaching the faith to their parishioners, not only through

preaching, but also through catechetical instruction. When we speak of catechesis, we understand this to be a continuous process of entering into the mystery of the Church, to be applied not only to children who are preparing to receive the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments). Permanent and continuous formation for various age groups – children, youth, adults, and the elderly – is an essential component of the vibrant parish. Finally, I would to emphasize that just as it is with the Bible, so too the Catechism of our Church should be a handbook for each member of our community as it is a most valuable aid for a proper understanding and reading of the Word of God.

Holy Mysteries (Sacraments) and Prayer

The Word of God is the foundation of Christian life, while the Holy Eucharist is its source and at the same time its culmination. Gathered at the Divine Liturgy, the parish community unites with its invisible head, Christ, and with all the saints and angels, thus enacting a mystical union between heaven and earth, between time and eternity. The Divine Liturgy, which a duly appointed priest celebrates in unity with and on behalf of his bishop, is also a time of building up the Church, the body of Christ, which has our Lord as its Head. There is no moment more precious in our earthly life than the Divine Liturgy. That is why Sunday, the holy Day of our Lord, should be honored by every Christian, and participation in the Divine Liturgy should be considered not as an obligation imposed by the Church, which requires our obedience, but it should be received as a gift from our Lord, who longs to encounter us, in order to fill us with His grace and love. “We cannot live without Sunday!” was the motto of the early Christians of the first centuries, and they preferred a martyr’s death to agreeing under pressure from the pagans to work on Sunday. This motto we Christians of the 21st century must make our own, and we should persistently guard the holiness and inviolability of the Lord’s Day.

Members of a vibrant parish also actively participate in the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments). Regularly, if possible even daily, they gather for the services in praise of our Heavenly Father. They frequently go to Confession and receive Holy Communion. In a vibrant parish church organizations combine their activities with common prayer, finding in it their strength and inspiration. No less important is our private prayer – personal and family prayer – which extends and continues our liturgical prayer in the Church. Our parishes, and in them our families, must again become a school of prayer for all of our faithful.

Serving One’s Neighbour

Another important element, which expresses the inner nature of the Church and reveals the vibrancy of a parish is diakonia, which means serving in love or performing “charitable activity.” This service to our neighbor flows from our rootedness in Christ. Active love of neighbor is the vocation and task of each Christian without exception. It is only faith, acting in love, which leads us to salvation (see Gal. 5:6). Faith without works is dead (see James 2:26). “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mat. 25:40), – says the Lord Jesus.

Let us look around us – in this world there is so much tragedy and poverty, so much loneliness and sorrow, pain and suffering! All the challenging circumstances of our life on earth – these are for us an invitation to active love, which is an expression of living faith. The Lord wants to open our eyes to the suffering world so that we might learn to truly love and to express God’s love to our neighbor – by our attention to them, by our sincere sympathy, support, by our words of encouragement and good cheer, but mainly, through acts of mercy. It is only then that we can consider ourselves vibrant Christians and our parishes can become places where care is given to the orphan, protection for the widow, help for the poor, and where the suffering of the sick is shared. Thus we will reveal to the world the maternal face of the Church and will become the living sign of the presence of God among humankind, according to the words of St. Augustine: “If you see charity, you see the Trinity.”

Leadership

The parish is a community of faithful who, under the leadership of the bishop and their pastors, fulfill their calling to unity with God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus constantly acts in our communities through the Holy Spirit sending down His gifts for the development and growth of His Body. The Apostle Paul thus explains: “And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” (Eph 4:11-13). The leadership of the parish community is exercised under the leadership of the bishop as head and father. Each parish should be an organized community in which, under the care of their pastor and in cooperation with him, members serve one another according to the gifts which they received from the Lord.

Therefore, church leadership is not the fulfillment of a particular administrative office, but first of all service to God and neighbor. In practice this means that for a parish to be vibrant, it must have active parish and pastoral councils. In addition, a parish must have well-formed and mature co-workers who assist the priest in leading catechetical schools, church brotherhoods, charitable works, youth organizations and prayer groups. One of the most important responsibilities of leadership in the parish community is discerning God’s will and searching for the best ways of implementing it in the life of the parish.

Fostering and Serving Unity

The Acts of the Apostles convey a sense of profound unity which existed among the members of the first community of Christ’s disciples: “The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common”.(Act 4:32). This spiritual state of being of the first Christian community can be expressed with the term *koinonia* (communion) which conveys unity, harmony and common life. To be Church is to abide in the communion of the Holy Spirit, the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God the Father. Thus, the unity of the church is an icon of the unity of Persons of the Holy Trinity. This unity can be seen on different levels: on the level of the Universal and Particular Church, the eparchy, and the individual parish. It may happen that through our weakness and sinfulness we do not reflect this unity. Ever aware of this, we all must cherish and foster unity, preserving full communion with the successor of the apostle Peter, the Holy Father, with the hierarchy of our Church, with the local bishops and pastors who act in their name.

The parish is a community of communities. In a parish there will be various prayer groups, brotherhoods, and youth organizations. All of these are called to strengthen unity and love among the members of the parish community. By supporting one another through prayer, by sharing God’s gifts and working together in a Christ-like spirit of service, we will be able to bring to life our synodal program: “Holiness of a united people of God.” We cannot be indifferent to the fact that the descendants of the Baptism under St. Volodymyr today are divided and estranged from one another. At the Last Supper, Christ prayed to His Heavenly Father for His disciples, “that all may be one” (John 17:21). Bearing in mind these words of Christ, I sincerely ask you all today – let us pray for the unity of the Church, let us pray for the restoration of unity of all the churches of the Kyivan tradition. And above all, in the spirit of the love of Christ, let us make every effort to avoid any words or actions which could damage our brothers and sisters in Christ or offend them. Even though at times we may be subjected to mockery and pressure, let us not give in to the temptation to respond to evil with evil. May Christ’s prayer for his wrong-doers and the teaching of the Apostle of the Nations become a testament for us: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21).

Missionary Spirit of the Parish Community

Jesus Christ said to His disciples: “You are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world” (Mt. 5:13-14), and by this He calls us to reach outside our church communities to carry Christ’s teaching into the

world, to transform the world with the Spirit of Christ. A church community, renewed in the Holy Spirit, by its very life becomes a living sermon of Christ and His presence. Here it is worth mentioning one of the favorite phrases of Blessed John XXIII, that “the parish is the fountain at the center of the village, to which all come to quench their thirst.” It is our wish that our parishes become such spiritual well-springs so that people would be drawn to them, and be able to find support and strength, love and grace – in one word, salvation.

Returning to the Lord’s commission with which we began this letter, we will note: Jesus Christ teaches us that we are to be ready to bear witness to Him not only with our life, but also in word. Frequently it is the case today that Christians are ashamed to acknowledge their faith, hiding it by their silence and passivity, instead of defending the Church of Christ and standing in the defense of the rights and dignity of the human person. Our pastoral initiatives, catechesis, Divine services, the reading of God’s word, etc. should make us strong and unwavering in our faith, as well as always ready “to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1Pt 3:15).

With particular recognition and thanks, I would like to mention today those priests and religious, who, guided by a missionary spirit, provide spiritual care to our faithful outside of the territory of our homeland – in particular, to our emigrants. I also acknowledge those who preach the word of God in prisons, in the military, and to all who have yet to know and encounter Christ in their lives. Our Church as a whole must support them and pray that they may be strengthened by the Holy Spirit in this most important ministry.

Dearly beloved in Christ! In listening or reading these words, many of you may ask: who will implement these important and much needed initiatives? Who will ensure that our parishes are truly vibrant? The bishop, perhaps? Maybe our pastor together with other members of the clergy? Perhaps this is partially the work of catechists or consecrated religious if their monastery is located on the territory of the parish? The answer to this question is simple: each and every one of us is responsible for the renewal of our parish communities. Christ’s commandments apply to all faithful Christians without exception. Together, we all form the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. That is why all of us need to be “living stones” as we build our parish community, through which the Church is present where we live.

Therefore, I encourage all of you: open the doors of your hearts and your homes to Christ, allow His Holy Spirit to transform you, purify and strengthen you in God’s love! And I invite all – laity, religious, and clergy – to the renewal of our church life on our native lands and abroad. Let us move forward, strengthened in God’s grace, and trusting in His Holy Providence, which guides our Church through the ages!

I entrust all of you, dearly beloved in Christ, to the motherly protection of the Most Holy Theotokos. May our heavenly Mother lead us to her Son! May the holy protectors of the Ukrainian lands, in particular, the blessed martyrs of the last century, intercede for us. Through their suffering, often with the greatest sacrifice of their very lives, our persecuted Church, which found itself in the catacombs for decades, was truly vibrant and life-giving. By their example and their intercession may they be a sign of hope for us and a promise of the Lord’s blessing in our ministry.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

+ СВЯТОСЛАВ

*Given in Kyiv, December 2, 2011 AD
at the Patriarchal Sobor of the Resurrection of our Lord*