



## That All May Know

Several days ago, I was at the Cathedral and was approached by a group of people who asked if they could see the inside. I assumed that they were interested in possibly buying the building and that the purpose of their visit was to look it over.

During the course of our conversation, it became apparent that the purpose of their visit was not because they were interested in buying the building, but rather to "find out more about us." Having heard about us (specifically me) through the news and the internet, they were curious about who we were, what we believed, which Church we "were a part of," etc.

Normally, I do not mind answering such questions. But this particular time, I found myself bothered. The reason I took offense was the disingenuous way in which they made their intentions known. They came across as being very kind and solicitous, but it became clear after a while that they also had an agenda. In essence, we (namely me) were "accused" of being selective in what we believed and how we practiced our faith. In other words, we condone and support same-sex marriage, advocate birth control, support the ordination of women priests, and welcome openly practicing homosexual men into the priesthood. These were all the standard-fare allegations individuals hurl at those they do not like or approve of and want to discredit or ruin. Obviously, these individuals (they called themselves "faithful" Christians) have not read my many pastoral letters and writings on these matters.

As has always been my custom, I usually do not bother to publicly address these kinds of allegations. I normally respond to such statements directly and privately to the individual or individuals who make them. But, times and people do change, and I feel that I must make clear, once and for all, and in this public forum, exactly where I, personally, and the Church which I oversee, stand on these very important issues.

So, that being said, let me state clearly:

We are committed to the sacredness of human life, from the moment of conception to natural death. We therefore stand in opposition to any and all attempts by any local, state, federal or provincial government entity to decree or legislate otherwise.

We uphold the holiness and sanctity of marriage as being between one man and one woman. We do not support, nor do we advocate, the idea that marriage, as it is understood by the Church, can be an estate entered into by people of the same sex.

We affirm that being homosexual or lesbian is not a sin, but that people of the same sex engaging in sexual activity with each other commit sin, and that those who persist and remain obstinately in sin sever themselves from the Body of Christ and communion with the Church.

We affirm that those who are homosexual, lesbian, and bi-sexual are full members of the Church but that they, like all who are members of the Body of Christ, are called to live chaste and holy lives, seeking always to walk the narrow path of righteousness before God.

Our beliefs regarding human sexuality are consistent with the teachings of the Lord, His Apostles, and the Fathers of the Church. We uphold them and teach them, without compromise, as being noble as well necessary life-giving and life-sustaining values and moral absolutes, upon which are built spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, and morally healthy lives, families, and communities.

We recognize, understand, and affirm that sexual activity between members of the same sex is sinful and that sexual activity outside the Holy Mystery (Sacrament) of Marriage is also sinful. Such activities, unless renounced and repented of, precludes those who participate in them from the sacramental life of the Church.

We believe that God, in His infinite wisdom and love, created mankind male and female. We refute the modern notion that men and women can choose their gender; that a man can choose to be a woman, and a woman can choose to be a man. While men and women may honestly experience such desires, they nevertheless have the duty and obligation to remain faithful and true to the gender which the Creator deigned for them at the moment of conception. This decision may indeed be painful for them, but the Church stands ready to support, comfort, and assist them in living their lives so that they experience the greatest joy and happiness that God desires for all His children.

We believe that men and women are equal members in Christ's body but have different roles and responsibilities. Therefore, we are unable to accept, and we disavow, the

ordination of women to the Holy Priesthood and episcopate. Inasmuch as we recognize that women possess, in fact some to a greater degree, the pastoral and spiritual sensibilities and charisms desired for the sacramental priesthood, nevertheless, the Master and Supreme High Priest, Jesus Christ Himself, did not call women to be bishops and priests in His Church. We, therefore, trust in His divine wisdom and will, which is without flaw or defect, and therefore submit obediently to His will and example. What Christ Himself has established we have no authority to change or abrogate.

Though we are not in communion with the other Local Orthodox Catholic Churches (not by our own choice), we nonetheless revere and honor the Church of Constantinople as our Mother Church and we acknowledge, esteem, and honor His All-Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople as our spiritual father, and we commemorate him, as has been our custom since the late eighth century, in all Divine Services of our Church.

We revere and honor also the Church of Rome, since the Italo-Greek (Italo-Byzantine) Church was originally under her jurisdiction. But, being ever mindful of those matters which still keep us estranged from each other, we do not concelebrate or practice intercommunion. However, we do acknowledge and affirm that there are times and circumstances when it is possible, and even necessary, for us to join with our brothers and sisters of the Catholic Church in common prayer, witness, and service.

We actively work and pray for the reunion of the Orthodox Catholic Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, but we do so in accordance the Orthodox Catholic Faith of the undivided Church as it was lived and manifested in the first millennium of the Church's history. We acknowledge, accept, and affirm that the Sacraments (Holy Mysteries) of the Catholic (Latin and Eastern) Church are valid and efficacious.

We affirm that the Oriental Orthodox Churches (non-Chalcedonian) are our brothers and sisters in Christ and are truly Local and Particular Churches as those terms are understood by the Church. Though there is, at present, no eucharistic or full ecclesial unity between the Chalcedonian and Non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches, we acknowledge, accept and affirm that the Holy Mysteries of the Oriental Orthodox Churches are valid and efficacious. We acknowledge also, as in the case of the Catholic Church, there are times and circumstances in which we can, and even must, join with our non-Chalcedonian brothers and sisters for the peace, well-being, and salvation of mankind.

With regards to other ecclesial communities and so-called Christian "churches" (principally the Anglican/Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, and Baptist communions), we do not recognize, except for baptism, their so-called sacraments.

Regarding those ecclesial bodies which purport to have a "priesthood" (Anglican/Episcopal and Lutheran), we do not recognize their so-called "holy orders" and the "sacraments" conferred by them.

While we acknowledge that the aforementioned ecclesial bodies contain within themselves some elements of the Church and that they have some relationship to the Church, they are nevertheless outside the Church. It is our duty and obligation, therefore, to bear witness to our separated brothers and sisters, many of whom sincerely and daily seek God and strive to live the Gospel of Christ in their lives, to the fulness of the Faith of the Church, and assist them in coming home to Her.

Regrettably, and with great sadness, we state that we do not have any ecumenical relations with communities of the Anglican/Episcopal communion and that corporate reunion with them is no longer a possibility due to the unfortunate fact that the communion has chosen to ordain women as priests and bishops and has also accepted and ordained actively homosexual and partnered men and women as "priests." Clergy and faithful of the Italo-Greek Orthodox Catholic Church are prohibited from participating in common prayer or in any event at which so-called "priests" and "bishops" are present. Ecumenical relationships are permitted with those Anglican communities which have separated themselves from such communities and maintain an orthodox (pre-Reformation) ecclesiology and doctrine.

We are neither "conservative" or "liberal," neither "traditionalist" or progressive." We are simply Orthodox Catholic, faithfully maintaining the Christian faith which "was once for all handed down to the saints." We remain faithful in our adherence to the whole of the Apostolic Faith, to Holy Tradition, and to the teachings, dogmas, and doctrines of the Orthodox Catholic Church.

We are not "Old Calendarist" or "New Calendarist" as those terms are pejoratively used by many in the Church. While we lament the existence of two different liturgical calendars in the Orthodox Catholic Church and the fact that their use disrupts the common life of the Church, we do not consider the use of one or the other calendar by any of the Orthodox Catholic Churches to be "heretical."

When we gather for worship, it is to worship the Omnipotent God and to commune with things unseen. While the divine services of the Church, especially the Holy Liturgy, the Divine Liturgy, were made for the people, they are not about us as much as they are about the God who created us and to whom we owe all glory, thanksgiving, and praise.

Our Liturgy is formal, structured, and ritualized. For our Eucharistic celebrations, we use four liturgies: The Divine Liturgy of St. Peter the Apostle (used primarily as the Pontifical/Hierarchical Liturgy and on some major feast days and holy days), the

Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom (the usual Sunday Liturgy; also celebrated on most feast days and holy days), the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great (used on the Sundays of Great Lent and on certain other feast days and holy days), and the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts (used on Wednesdays and Fridays during Great Lent and on the first three days of Holy Week). In addition to the foregoing, we also use the Divine Liturgy of St. James the Apostle (used exclusively on the Saint's feast day. All these liturgies are of the Byzantine rite.

When we gather together for worship, we, the people, are not the center of attention. We stand in the presence of the eternal and awesome God and so we are expected to show due reverence, respect, and awe. It is understood, therefore, that when we present ourselves before the King, we must conduct ourselves properly and prepare ourselves accordingly for a fitting and worthy participation in the Holy Sacrifice, that our offering may be acceptable and pleasing in His sight.

Because we exist to worship and serve God, we do not concern ourselves with matters of time or convenience. It is right and just, therefore, that we give to God what is rightfully and properly His. That means we give Him our time and full attention. We do not set time limits on the duration of our worship and adoration of God. Our time spent as a community in public worship and adoration of God is a proclamation of our firmly held belief that God, and God alone, is the Supreme and Sovereign Ruler of the world and the human race in the person of Jesus Christ. Further, when we gather together as a community to publicly worship the Holy Trinity, we make manifest the reality that we are first and foremost citizens of God's Kingdom on earth and members of His royal household, the reign, governance, and mastership over which He has given to His Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to Whom alone we pledge our obedience and fidelity.

In divine worship, especially in the Divine Liturgy, the "work" done is not exclusively or even primarily that of the people. It is done *for* them and on their behalf by the priest, who acts *in persona Christi*, or *in the person of Christ*. The Divine Liturgy is then, in its very essence, the action or work of Christ for and on behalf of His people.

As members of Christ's Body, we participate in the Liturgy by worshipping the Holy Trinity, listening to God's Word, giving thanks to God for all the blessings and good things we have received from Him, and offering back to Him a portion of what we have made with our hands and minds. We also come to church to receive God's blessing and to be fed, nourished, renewed, and strengthened by Him with His Precious Body and Blood.

Because the Holy Eucharist is the most perfect manifestation of the unity of believers who share the fullness of Orthodox Catholic faith and belief, we do not practice "open

communion." That is to say, we do not give Holy Communion to those who do not profess or believe in totality what the Orthodox Catholic Church teaches and believes.

To receive Holy Communion at Divine Liturgy in the Italo-Greek Church, Orthodox Catholic Christians must have properly prepared themselves beforehand. This means saying the appointed prayers, fasting from the end of the Vigil Service (or Great Vespers), and making a proper confession (at least twice a month). Orthodox Catholic Christians visiting a parish of the Italo-Greek Orthodox Catholic Church who are unknown to the parish priest and who wish to receive Holy Communion must make a confession before they can receive the Holy Mysteries. Priests of the Church are under grave obligation to reasonably ensure that all those who receive the Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ are in a state of grace.

The Italo-Greek Orthodox Catholic Church condemns, without exception, abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, artificial contraception, sodomy, adultery, cloning, embryonic stem cell research, as well as other attacks against the sanctity of life and the family.

It is the obligation and duty of the Bishop to ensure that the Holy Eucharist is not administered to those who are manifest (public), obstinate, and persistent sinners. Additionally, it is the Bishop's duty and obligation not only to protect the Eucharist from sacrilegious reception but also to protect the faithful from sorrowful scandal.

So that there is clarity, the Italo-Greek Orthodox Catholic Church defines "manifest, obstinate, and persistent" sinners as individuals who are actively and openly living in so called same-sex "marriages"; who support, advocate, or in any way affirm the gay "lifestyle" as being normative; those who are divorced and 'remarried' without benefit of an ecclesiastical divorce; those who work in abortion clinics and Planned Parenthood; those who facilitate, provide or otherwise participate in, recommend, or support abortions; those who are known organized crime figures, drug dealers, sex-traffickers, and other notorious criminals; and couples living openly in fornication or adultery (this is certainly not an exhaustive list of manifest, obstinate, and persistent sinners), and who consider their way of life or behavior to be normative, acceptable, and unharmed to themselves or others.

Let it be known that any individual who is a manifest, obstinate, and persistent sinner is forbidden to receive Holy Communion until such time as they repent of their sin. Furthermore, such individuals are not entitled to be married in the Church, have a Church funeral, or be buried in an Orthodox Catholic Cemetery if they have not repented of their sin prior to death.

We believe in the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage. But we also understand human weakness and that marriages sometimes cannot be salvaged and saved.

Therefore, we allow, with great sadness and even trepidation, couples to separate and divorce. However, let it be known that the Italo-Greek Orthodox Catholic Church permits only ONE ecclesiastical and civil divorce. Members of the Church who, after having exhausted all possible means for reconciliation, must first obtain the permission of the Bishop to divorce both ecclesiastically and civilly. An ecclesiastical divorce must be obtained prior to seeking a civil divorce (the sacramental bond must first be dissolved by the Church).

Individuals who cohabit and engage in sexual activity before marriage or who have obtained a civil divorce without first obtaining the permission of the bishop and obtaining an ecclesiastical divorce may not receive Holy Communion until such time as the illicit situation or relationship is corrected.

The Church reveres and honors the offices of bishop, priest, and deacon. Being a bishop, priest or deacon is not a "career", "job", or "profession." They have no equal in civil or secular society. The offices of bishop, priest, and deacon are sacred and holy offices to which men (males) are called by Christ, affirmed by the Church, and into which they are installed by established rites of ordination and consecration. Therefore, let it be known that anyone who physically harms or in any way unlawfully attacks, whether verbally or physically, any bishop, priest, or deacon is guilty of the sin and crime of sacrilege, the penalty for which is formal public excommunication.

Finally, the Italo-Greek Orthodox Catholic Church condemns all forms of sexual abuse, harassment, and misconduct on the part of its hierarchy, clergy, volunteers, and laity. Clergy and laity found guilty of committing such crimes and offenses are subject to disciplinary and, if warranted, ecclesiastical and civil criminal penalties.

It is my prayer and my hope that this public statement answers any questions and clarifies any misunderstandings people may have about what the Italo-Greek (Italo-Byzantine) Orthodox Catholic Church believes and stands for.

I know that some who read this statement may find some of our beliefs and practices offensive and off-putting, but as a bishop, it is my duty to uphold God's laws and teachings regardless of what people will say or think about me. The reality is, I am not here to be liked. My job is to be mindful of and provide for the spiritual well-being not only of the souls entrusted to my care but for all God's children.

Those who know me know well that I always treat everyone with respect and love. We welcome all with open arms and turn no one away. We care deeply about all of God's children and seek only to assist them in their journey toward heaven and to build an earthly community rooted firmly in love, justice, equity, truth, and peace.

As always, if anyone has any questions or comments, please feel free to communicate them to me. I will respond as quickly as I can.

Paternally Yours in Christ,

+Archbishop Stephen