

The Orthodox Church in America

DIOCESE OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
The Right Reverend Tikhon, Bishop of Philadelphia

September 1, 2011

To the Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania,

Christ is in our midst!

The Ecclesiastical New Year is the day that brings to a close the past year's liturgical cycle and opens the door to a new one. It is a reminder that we are continually immersed in the perpetual cycle of feasts and fasts, a cycle that draws us ever closer to the Kingdom. It is for this reason that we commemorate this feast and ask the Lord to "bless the crown of the year."

The Church has established this particular feast on the first day of September because this is the month that traditionally marks the end of last year's agricultural cycle and the beginning of the new one. By now, all the crops have been harvested and farmers will begin to prepare the land for a new round of growth next Spring. Before the new seeds can be planted, the ground will need to lie fallow during the winter months, after which it will be ploughed, tilled and prepared for planting.

If we join together the images of the agricultural cycle and the liturgical cycle, we have a very complementary image of the spiritual life of our parishes. On the one hand, we participate in a wonderfully rich liturgical life: fixed feasts, lenten seasons, paschal celebrations and the holy sacraments. On the other hand, we recognize that there are times of plenty and times of barrenness, the ups and downs of a parish's spiritual life, which are normal if they ultimately lead to new life, to revitalization.

The message of the New Year, both liturgically and agriculturally, is the message of the Resurrection: the message that from the stone of the tomb the living waters of the resurrection spring forth, that the Son of Man always breathes the spirit of life into dry bones and that death no longer reigns because it has been swallowed up by life.

It is time for us as a diocese, as parishes and as individuals, to take upon ourselves the work that will bring about this transformation from death to life. It is time for us to incarnate in our little corner of the world the cosmic reality of the victory of life over death. It is time for us to remember that if Christ is truly "our sanctification," as we proclaim at the conclusion of every

Divine Liturgy, then we must make this sanctification real in our personal lives, in our parishes and in our diocese.

At our last Diocesan Assembly, we took a small but positive step in this direction by resolving to look honestly at the present state of our parishes and to implement those measures that would allow our diocese to be renewed. As Saint Paul reminds us: *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.*” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The Revitalization Committee, which was appointed in May of this year, has been meeting on a regular basis and the fruit of its work can be accessed on our diocesan website (www.doepa.org) where we have a special tab devoted to “Revitalization.” But revitalization is not the work of this Committee alone: it is our common work and we all need to participate in it. The clergy of the diocese will be gathering at the end of September to establish ways to further the spiritual growth of our diocese and we are looking for input from everyone in our diocese.

In addition, I am asking my clergy and faithful to offer their prayerful support of this common work of revitalization. The Revitalization Committee has chosen St Alexis of Wilkes-Barre to be a special intercessor for its work and is asking all members of our diocese to offer their personal petitions to this saint who holds a great place in the life of many of our parishes. Finally, I am asking each of our parishes to set aside one day every month to gather together as a community and sing the Akathist to St Alexis. In this way, we can give a prayerful expression of our common desire for renewal and receive the blessings of the saint.

May this new liturgical year bring forth much fruit from the barrenness of the winter ground and may our diocese continue on the path of revitalization that will take us from death to life and from earth to Heaven.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+TIKHON

Bishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania