



■ At the Outset of the New Civil Year 2006

Are We “Chosen Travelers”?

*“I am a stranger unto Thee and a sojourner,
as all my fathers were”
(Psalm 38:13, Septuaginta)*

Beloved Children in the Lord:

I pray that, in the new civil year, the Grace of God, through the intercessions of the *Theotokos*, will continuously illumine our minds and warm our hearts, that we might not attach ourselves to whatever constitutes a hindrance to our heavenward journey.

A Christian must never forget the exhortation of the Holy Fathers: “*Have the frame of mind of a stranger*”;¹ that is, always cultivate the feeling that you are transitory; that you are sojourning in a foreign country; that you are a guest of God; and that you are traveling in order to return to your true Homeland.

It is very characteristic that the Apostle Peter addresses his First Epistle “*to the elect sojourners*”²—towards those Christians, that is, who, though chosen in our Lord’s love for mankind to make up the “*chosen generation*”³ and the “*offspring of Christ*,”⁴ yet live dispersed in this world as ones not having a homeland: as exiles.

Indeed, all of those living according to God are, on the one hand, *strangers* to whatever normally “*binds*” people to the earth—ambition, avarice, love of pleasure—, and, on the other hand, are *familiar*s of whatever renders them free in Christ: “*fellow citizens with the Saints and of the household of God.*”⁵

Christians, as it has very beautifully been written, *“live in their homeland, but as strangers; they participate in everything as citizens, but they suffer all things as foreigners. Every foreign homeland is their own, but every homeland is foreign. They are on earth, but live in heaven.”*⁶

The Faithful, through their Holy Baptism and their life in Christ, have been enrolled in *“the [City] to come,” “whose builder and maker is God.”*⁷

Though we were born on earth, yet we are natives of Heaven, because the Holy Spirit descended from Heaven, regenerated us in Christ, and placed within us the fire of love for the House of the Father, the Kingdom of God, the Glory and Radiance of the Divinized, where *“we all will fully become gods without sharing in His essence.”*⁸

It is true that there are moments in which our return journey to our authentic homeland appears slow, protracted, and toilsome; for this reason, our friends and relatives in Christ, the Saints, do not cease kindling our zeal for Heaven when they exhort us with emphasis: *“Begin to be that which you will become!”*⁹ In other words: assiduously cultivate a heavenly frame of mind that you might not be enslaved by anything earthly; break the bonds of your passions by the opposing virtues; cure carnal-mindedness by putting the commandments of our Lord into action, by unceasing prayer of the heart, communion of the Divine Mysteries, study of sacred texts, deifying asceticism, and life-giving repentance.

In this way, we will be true Christians and citizens of Heaven, since we will not be simply body and soul, but the Holy Spirit will abide in us: the Christian, according to St. Gregory Palamas, *“consists of three elements: the Grace of the Heavenly Spirit, a rational soul, and an earthly body.”*¹⁰

Let the prolongation of our journey not be an occasion for despondency and indolence; on the contrary, let us turn each moment to our advantage, so that our lowly nature might be mingled with the leaven of the Holy Spirit, with a view to being renewed and becoming heavenly by Grace.

“If the heavenly leaven of the Spirit, the good and holy salt of the Godhead from yonder age and yonder homeland,

is not mixed and inserted into the lowly nature of men, the soul will not be freed from the malodor of wickedness, nor will it be leavened in such a way as to put off the heaviness and unleavened state of wickedness.”¹¹

Living in this manner, we will put into practice the Divine commandment:

“May the throne of iniquity not have fellowship with you”; “may the power of the Devil not dwell in your heart.”¹²

Then we will become “*elect sojourners*” and “*chosen travelers*,” having from the present time in our hearts the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Metropolitan and Abbot
† *Cyprian of Oropos and Fili*,
President of the Holy Synod in Resistance

Notes

1. Abba Poimen, *Tò Μέγα Γεροντικόν* [*The Great Gerontikon*] (Thessaloniki: 1999). Vol. IV, §126, p. 102.
2. I St. Peter 1:1.
3. I St. Peter 2:9.
4. St. Gregory Palamas, “Homily LVII,” §§14, 15, “*Ἑλληνες Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας*” (Thessaloniki: 1986). Vol. XI, pp. 442-444.
5. Ephesians 2:19.
6. *Epistle to Diognetos*, Ch. 5, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. II, col. 1173BC.
7. Hebrews 13:14; 11:10.
8. St. Maximos the Confessor, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCI, col. 376AB.
9. St. Jerome, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. XXII, col. 425: “Esse incipe quod futura es.”
- St. Cyprian of Carthage would tell virgins: “That, which we will later become, you have already begun to be” (“*Quod futuri sumus jam vos esse coepistis*”) (*Patrologia Latina*, Vol. IV, col. 462A).
10. *Discourse in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, Book I, ch. 3, §43, in *Συγγράματα* (Thessaloniki: 1962), Vol. I, p. 454.
11. St. Makarios of Egypt, “Homily XXIV,” §4, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXIV, col. 665A.
12. St Ephraim the Syrian, “*Ἔργα* [*Works*]” (Thessaloniki: “Ekdoseis “To Periboli tes Panagias,” 1995), Vol. VI, p. 253. Psalm 93:20 (*Septuaginta*).