



“For the Edification of the Church”

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■ At the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina (Phyle, Greece)

Keeping the Faith in the Midst of a Crisis

An Informative Gathering of Clergy and Monastics

May 1, 2020 (Old Style)

On Thursday, May 1, 2020 (Old Style), His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian invited the clergy of the Holy Metropolis of Oropos and Phyle, representatives from the Metropolis' three convents, and members of the Board of Directors of the St. Philaret the Merciful Guild for an Informative Gathering, following the partial lifting of the restrictive measures in Greece.

His Eminence also invited his fellow monastics, Their Graces, Bishop Ambrose of Methone and Bishop Klemes of Gardikion, who had remained at the Monastery throughout the duration of the lockdown, supporting those near and far in a variety of ways.

The gathering took place in the reception hall of the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina and lasted three hours (7-10 p.m.).

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Metropolitan Cyprian greeted those in attendance, expressing his joy at this “familial” gathering, the first of its kind following the recognition of the Legal Entity of our Holy Metropolis and the social isolation necessitated by the restrictive measures.

His Eminence then asked Bishop Klemes to give a brief summary of events: the emergence of the tribulation caused by the pandemic, the measures taken by the State, the meetings and encyclicals of our Holy Synod, and the pasto-



ral, liturgical, and mysteriological care of the faithful during the lockdown.

His Grace spoke about the consistent efforts of our Hierarchs to help the clergy and faithful to cultivate a spiritual understanding of the crisis, exhorting them to constant prayer, repentance, and the *cultivation of an ecclesiastical mindset*, such that they might ultimately experience the tribulation as a blessing.

The spiritual Fathers in attendance confirmed that many of the faithful who had followed the exhortations of our Hierarchs acknowledged that, on a personal level, they had experienced “the best Great Lent,” and even “the best Pascha” of their lives.

This observation did not, of course, negate the necessity on behalf of the synodal body to defend the legal liberties and rights of our Church, as well as to express its protest regarding certain extreme decisions made by the State. To this end, our Holy Synod sent letters to the Prime Minister and competent government ministers, which were also published on the official website of our Holy Synod.

Agitation and psychological distress, on the other hand, were experienced by those of the faithful who allowed the barrage of conflicting information from the media to overwhelm their lives, which sometimes led them to take extreme actions and to express criticism of the Hierarchs, suspicions, baseless rumors, and so on.

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After thanking Bishop Klemes, Metropolitan Cyprian turned the attention of those present to the spiritual messages of the current tribulation, which he characterized as a “test,” and perhaps even a “dress rehearsal” for a future persecution of the Church; this trial was permitted by God's Providence in order to ascertain how we act personally in times of crisis. Let us ask ourselves, how did each of us behave during this time?

His Eminence made reference to numerous instances from the history of the Church, which demonstrate that at every great crisis—persecution, emergence of heresies, and so on—there is a danger of divisions and schisms when the clergy and laypeople do not cultivate *an ecclesiastical mindset*, and subsequently lose their trust in their Shepherds and Synods, and take matters into their own hands. In particular, Metropolitan Cyprian related the following two examples:

● **D**uring the great crisis that rocked the local Church of Carthage during the years of the **Holy Hieromartyr Cyprian** († September 14, 258) with regard to how to deal with the *lapsi* (those who had denied Christ out of fear of torture during the Decian persecution, and who wished to be accepted again into the Church), opinions were divided between those who advocated extreme severity and those who called for great leniency.



St. Cyprian did not reach a decision by himself, but rather **convoked a Synod at Carthage** in the year 251, which validated his moderate approach: readmission of the lapsed after a period of active repentance.

The extremists, disagreeing with the decision of the Synod, did not trust their Shepherd and the other members of the Synod, and caused schisms that greatly afflicted the local Church.

● **Likewise**, during the persecution under Diocletian, the **Holy Hieromartyr Peter of Alexandria** († November 24, 311) encountered the fierce opposition of the Meletians, who accused him of cowardice (since he had gone into hiding) and of showing excessive lenience towards the lapsed. Moreover, the Meletians urged the faithful to seek martyrdom by handing themselves over *of their own volition* to the idolatrous rulers.

From prison, the Holy Hierarch sent an Epistle on Repentance, in which he set forth guidelines and prohibitions regarding these matters based on examples from the Holy Scriptures. This epistle subsequently received synodal ratification (divided into fourteen canons).

The Saint entrusted the resolution of the issue to the Synodal system: a Synod in 305 condemned Bishop Meletius, but he and his followers did not accept the synodal decision.

Yet again, self-assurance and contempt of the Synodal system brought about the creation of the Meletian schism, which plagued the local Church for many years.

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Metropolitan Cyprian urged us to understand the messages of these examples for the confrontation of the current trial:

● **Let us keep prayerful vigilance**, with the utmost trust in the will of God.

● **Let us not drive away the spirit of repentance** and of in-



ner peace derived from the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

- Let us take care to act collectively, *with an ecclesiastical mindset, with trust in, and unity with, our Bishop and Holy Synod.*

- Yes, we may have our opinions, but let us avoid explosive proclamations and actions, as well as unprofitably “playing the hero.”

- Let us be careful that our zeal remain within the bounds of humility and our speech impart faith, peace, and consolation, not turmoil and bitterness.

- Let us preserve a compassionate attitude towards everyone.

In conclusion, His Eminence reminded us of the Thirty-Ninth Apostolic Canon: “*Let Presbyters and Deacons not carry out anything without the knowledge of the Bishop; for he it is who is entrusted with the people of the Lord, and of whom will be required the account of their souls,*” as well as the pertinent exhortations of St. Ignatius the God-bearer.

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Metropolitan Cyprian then asked the clergy to describe how they ministered to the pastoral and mysteriological needs of the faithful during the lockdown.

The clergy noted that the deprivation of liturgical life in the Church brought many of our faithful to self-reproach, a deeper understanding of the gift of Church attendance, and repentance for their previous negligence or carelessness in that regard.

The clergy also pointed out the dangers of unwise use of the media. In particular, we have seen yet again that the Internet, which is in some ways a very useful tool in the present tribulation—e.g., for broadcasting services and the pastoral care of those near and far—at times became a means of transmitting among the faithful those things that are generated by a *non-ecclesiastical mindset: fears, confusion, disrespect, agitation, etc.*

Finally, in view of the partial lifting of the restrictive measures beginning on the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, His Eminence gave general instructions of a practical nature.

All present expressed their joy and gratitude for this gathering, and also their wish that such meetings may take place again in the future, though, to be sure, under happier circumstances. □