

SERMON ON THE SUNDAY OF THE TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOXY – 2017

Lately the faithful are extremely troubled by one contentious issue.

The Church has never pronounced a determination concerning where grace exists and in what form or where it is absent. *“the Spirit breathes wheresoever He desires”* say the Holy Scriptures.

The Ecumenical Councils and Fathers of the Church excommunicated those who violated Church rules; the Councils and Fathers of the Church anathematized heretics and admonished all the faithful to not pray with them and to have no interaction with them. We often and severally encounter the following in various Church rules (Canons): *“If anyone should pray with those who have been excommunicated; may he be cast out and excommunicated as well as **all those in association with him**”*. This is where the Church leaves off. It does not make any determination concerning the demise of those who have fallen away from the Orthodox faith or those who have been excommunicated. Their fate is in the hands of God.

It is not for us to judge. However, lately some individuals have begun to do this and have gone to an extreme. The Synod of the RTOC, under the chairmanship of Archbishop Tikhon, in its Determination of the Blessed Council of October 26th, 2008 announced: *“Outside the True Church of Christ... salvation is **impossible.**”* Through this statement the Synod declares: *The grace of God saves us. Outside the True Church there is no salvific grace, therefore those who are not in the True Church, those will unconditionally perish.* Such a determination contradicts God’s truth! Could it be that we sinners were given the right beforehand, prior to the dread Judgment of God, to define who faces perdition? It is not for us to judge (concerning the possibility or impossibility of being saved). When the Lord was asked: *“then who can be saved?”*, Christ replied, *“With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”* (Mk.10:27). These words must be paid due attention and we must not contradict Christ. Unfortunately, despite the admonition, the RTOC Synod to this day maintains its conviction despite the fact that their Determination embitters and confuses the faithful.

One pious woman writes: *“How can we be certain that in other churches, like the MP or in Slovakia there is no grace of God? I lived out my youth there and grew up in the Church of Christ; that is where I learned my first Christian rudiments. I felt I was a member of the Church. To now think that there is no grace of God there is unimaginable, although I understand that because of the heresy of ecumenism we need to leave. Simple people there do not understand this, and I am convinced that they receive the grace of God according to their faith. But I, since I understand what the heresy of ecumenism is, cannot participate in the mysteries there, but to think that no one there is being saved is painful for the soul”*.

Yes, we know that in Russia under the yoke of the MP, as well as in other countries of Christian confession there are many good, believing people. Will they be saved? We don’t know: their salvation has always been and will always be in God’s hands. God forbid that we should levy some finite judgment against them.

How should we act toward the faithful in the Moscow Patriarchate and others? We must attempt to persuade them to return into the fold of the true Church. But if this is not successful or impossible, then we must pray for them as for those lost, trusting in the mercy of God, that the Lord God may lead them to the knowledge of the truth and to salvation. This is why the Order of the Triumph of Orthodoxy begins with a *Molieben for the Conversion of the Lost*.

But unfortunately, currently a discord exists in our Church; some support the Determination of the Blessed Council of RTOC, while others have taken up the opposite extreme: they assert that in the MP as well as in all the ecumenical churches there is grace.

There is only one place about which we may say with certainty that grace is NOT present – this is hell! *“for in death (hell) there is no remembrance of Thee”* (Psalm 6). Besides this, we have no right to repudiate the presence of grace, no matter where this might be. The action of the Holy Spirit is not subject to our determination. The Holy Spirit *“is everywhere present and fillest all things”* (Prayer: O, Heavenly King). It also says: *“every soul is quickened by the Holy Spirit”*, etc.. We cannot repudiate the presence of grace among heretics. But to assert that their mysteries are effectuated by the grace of God and to remain with heretics is salvific, we likewise cannot and must not! Remember: ecumenism is a heresy!

The ecumenists and other heretics *“have betrayed Christ, and their church is no longer a bearer of grace”* (Holy Hierarch Philaret Voznesensky). However, one must not forget that for false and heretical teaching, the Church binds the individual, but **not** the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Fathers passed judgment to excommunicate heretics, but nowhere exist opinions of the Fathers of the possibility or impossibility of the grace of God abiding in them. And if there were such judgments then how does one establish rules to apply this opinion? Where are there instructions from the Holy Fathers on how to determine in which excommunicated person and in which heresies grace abides, and in which it does not abide? And which criteria does one apply in order to understand which decisive action or which false teaching leads to a complete absence of grace? For such an important question should have a **definite** and **decisive** indication. Or should we consider that grace is present in all heresies?? If we have no answer to such a simple question, does this not mean that in our judgments something is amiss??

We have no right to hinder the grace of God but at the same time it is not our business to determine where grace exists or not. Grace is the action of the Holy Spirit – this is a matter of God’s, not ours.

In conclusion I will cite the brief and at the same time meek words of Archbishop Averky (Taushev) on moderation:

“We see the need to determine a wise and moderate position... not falling into extremes such as defining the absence or presence of grace or re-baptizing those who have already become Orthodox...” (from letters to Fr. Alexei Young written in 1976).

May God bless and have mercy on us!

+Bishop Stefan

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Trenton, New Jersey

The Moscow Patriarchate recognizes the Pope and the Roman Church as a sister-church, recognizes its mysteries and no longer considers them to be heretics. The fruit of ecumenism is evident to all!