



January 26, 2025
01/008

To the Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

My Beloved Children in the Lord,

As we mark our annual Sanctity of Life Sunday, I would like to speak to you about martyrdom. Specifically, by understanding martyrdom, which we might consider the most pure, fundamental realization of the Christian vocation, we understand just why we hold life sacred.

At first, this may appear paradoxical. Martyrdom, after all, is willingly surrendering one's life for the sake of the Christian faith. Martyrdom teaches us that life in this world is not to be compared with the glorious and everlasting life that awaits us in the world to come. As the Lord says, "Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mk. 8:35).

Christ promises us in his Beatitudes that "blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:11-12). When we are rejected by the world because we accept the Gospel—when we reject the world in order to take up our Cross—then we display the Christian faith in all its truth and power and glory. Martyrdom, etymologically and in fact, always means "bearing witness," and the greatest and most fundamental way to bear witness to the Gospel is to die for the sake of the Gospel.

However, martyrdom, even when it points us towards the next life, also testifies to the immeasurable sacredness of our mortal life in this world. Here, in this life, it is possible for us to bear witness; here, in this life, we have the possibility of accepting Christ's gift of salvation. This is true for the literal martyrs, but it is also possible for every Christian through the bloodless martyrdom of asceticism. Whenever we die to our fleshly desires for the sake of the Gospel, we suffer a little martyrdom. Whenever we forgo power or wealth or gratification for the sake of Christ's commandments, we are bearing witness, in a small way, to the truth of the Christian faith.

In other words, martyrdom proper, as well as the ascetic martyrdom to which we are all called, are a way of "redeeming the time" (Eph. 5:16). Through Christ's Incarnation and Passion, the fallen world

P.O. Box 31409 Alexandria, Virginia, 22310
516-922-0550 - metropolitan@oca.org - www.oca.org