

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Your Eminence, Metropolitan Joseph, your Graces, reverend clergy, brothers and sisters in Christ, Christ is in our midst!

We are enjoying such gracious hospitality and peace in Christ during this holy convention, but don't forget: We are warriors! Our foes are fierce, the battlelines drawn, and casualties piled high.

America's greatest generation beat the communists on foreign shores. We won the cold war. But the time bomb of atheistic Marxism was snuck into our society through the academy and exploded in the sexual revolution (woodstock was 50 years ago this summer), undermining traditional church, family and humanity.

Marriage is mocked by divorce and debauchery. Babies are avoided and aborted. We outsource our loved-ones to daycares, secular schools, nursing homes, and funeral parlors. We bring anti-Christian media into our homes to mesmerize and catechize us. 60% of our children leave the faith. Why?

Perhaps we are the salt losing its saltiness. Perhaps we are the city hiding on the hill. Perhaps we are forgetting our call as a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.

Perhaps we have only half-renounced the world to begin with, and are torn between our two masters.

Perhaps we're persuaded by the propaganda of our opponent suggesting we replace dogma and holiness with accommodation and compromise.

Perhaps we need to listen to Elder Paisios who gives us the answer to anxiety by reframing the problem: *not drugs, alcohol, tranquilizers, psychiatric treatment... Yoga, new age or eastern meditation... The problem is that we have lost God as the center of our lives.*

Perhaps we are just simply weak and weary, isolated and satiated, distressed and distracted, leaving many of our parishes bleeding, infected, and on life-support.

No wonder we are considered successful when we merely keep the doors open. No wonder we are tempted to betray the faith in shame, vanity, and laziness. No wonder we stay silent, clinging to society's acceptance and our tax-exempt status.

Let's stop and ask ourselves: Have we laid aside the great commission, like fishing nets, to jump into the sea and swim with the fish? Have we become too sophisticated for the Holy Fathers, allowing science and scholarship to supplant scripture and tradition? Have we like Esau sold our birthright for a bowl of lentils?

We are warriors! Not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers,
...against the rulers of the darkness of this age,

...against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. The battle is for the hearts and minds of our people. Do we have the courage of David, to step out against Goliath with only a sling and a prayer?

I do. I have courage in Christ with you because of clergy and faithful in a forgotten California logging town who introduced me, a spacy, self-centered flower-child, to the One who clothes the lilies of the field.

I, We, have courage in Christ who illumines many, like us, hung-over from nihilism and narcissism, progressivism and individualism.

We have courage in Christ under the protecting veil of our Champion Leader, surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses, and the heavenly hosts.

We have courage in Christ in today's readings and saints: In our Lord's healing the bleeding woman and calling us out of isolation; In St Paul's reminder that, though enslaved to the world, in putting on Christ we are redeemed, liberated, adopted by God; In St Paraskeva of Rome who dedicated her wealth and beauty solely to God's glory; In St Jacob of Alaska, who overcame obstacles in language and logistics, failing health and fellow-ministers to preach the gospel to his people.

We have courage in Christ in our convention theme (thank you, Sayedna, for your courageous leadership!), "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me". This apostolic drum beat, the very heartbeat of God, pulsing in His people's steady march, is entrusted to us for transmission without improvisation to the next generation.

We have courage in Christ to keep our churches strong,
...pulsing with prayer and repentance,
...surging with service and sacrifice,
...living in liturgy and community,
...existing for education and evangelism.

We have courage in Christ to keep our churches strong,
... not confused about biology but constant in the Bible...
... not in conflict over rubrics and recipes, micro-tones and bureaucracies, but cooperating to share the medicine of immortality...
... not complacent with institutional survival but confident in our Savior's promises...
... not comfortably numb but crucified with Christ.

We have courage in Christ ...because He is with us receiving our repentance ... honoring our intentions ... inspiring our virtue... and crowning our success!

We have courage in Christ because He is bearing with us the hatred and persecution of Satan and his servants as we stand for truth. Our people, especially or youth, need clear example, instructions, and boundaries regarding orthodox life, marriage, procreation, sexuality gender, spirituality and ecclesiology.

We have courage in Christ because He is with us, purifying, illumining, and deifying us in the sacraments and asceticism.

We have courage in Christ because He is with us, *right now*, making this convention a turning point in our service to God, leading His people in a way of life that is pleading to Him.

We have courage in Christ knowing that He has already conquered sin, the devil, and death. We *are* warriors, rightly rejoicing with the saints and angels at the victory banquet of Christ our Lord.

But, stop the music a moment! The war may be won but our duty isn't done. What about our brothers, the fallen, the wounded, still embattled and captive. They need us.

A closing question to haunt us: I know we have courage in Christ but do I...you...we have enough love for Christ to return to the bloody battlefield with the good news of his victory?

To Him be all glory forever and ever. Amen!