

His Eminence  
The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend  
Bishop THOMAS



Archbishop of New York and  
Metropolitan of  
All North America

Diocese of Oakland, Charleston,  
and the Mid-Atlantic

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE  
OF NORTH AMERICA

September 1, 2018

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ!

*"You crown the year with Your goodness,  
And Your paths drip with abundance." Psalm 65:11*

I greet each of you in the name of our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ as we embark upon a new church year. The Lord grants us to see the dawn of another new year for our repentance, nothing else. It is not given carelessly or frivolously and because it is God's gift to us; we will have to give an account of how we spend the gift freely given to us.

We mark the passage of time primarily in one of two ways: 1) according to the secular calendar or 2) according to the church's cycle of fasts and feasts, the commemoration of saints, and the great feasts of the Lord. If we mark our time according to the secular calendar, we will find little time for God and the spiritual life. Our lives will pass rapidly (this in and of itself should give us pause) and our days will be passed with work responsibilities, family responsibilities, and holidays. There is nothing wrong with any of these things in and of themselves. However, when these responsibilities crowd out the spiritual life we begin to adopt a secular or worldly attitude about life and death.

The Orthodox Christian's ultimate goal is *theosis*, or union with God. That union with God can only be accomplished through the time-tested method of purification and illumination in which the *nous* becomes purified of the passions and is able to experience God's love and forgiveness. The processes of purification and illumination presuppose a life in the church. Prayer and fasting are prerequisites in the process of purification and illumination.

A life that revolves around the life of the church calendar is a good place to start. No one can expect success in overcoming the passions without a deep and intimate connection to the life of the church. This means regular attendance at the majority of church services, a daily prayer rule, frequent communication with one's spiritual father, keeping the prescribed fasts, and confession as deemed appropriate by a spiritual father.

If we haven't been doing these things, the new year is a good time to consider a new start. We should be more concerned for eternal life than this earthly life. I listened to an interview of a famous person recently and he was asked if he would return to a practice of his faith. He responded that he wanted to wait until the end of his life to do that! The problem with his response is that we don't know when the end will occur. None of us are promised tomorrow. We have today and that is for our repentance. As we approach a new church year, let us begin by taking the words of our Lord Jesus Christ seriously: "Repent! The Kingdom of God is at hand!"

Yours in Christ,

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)  
Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

*"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)*

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