

Keynote Address to Youth
My Life in Christ Youth Conference 2012

Blessed art Thou O, Christ our God, Who hast made the fishermen most wise by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit; Through them Thou didst draw the world into Thy net. O Lover of Mankind, Glory to Thee!

Very Reverend, Fr. Philip,
Dear beloved in the Lord Brothers and Sisters,
Participants of the 12th BOYA Conference "My Life in Christ"

I have the pleasant duty on behalf of His Eminence Joseph, the Metropolitan of the USA, Canada and Australia of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church - Bulgarian Patriarchate, to be here at our annual Diocesan My Life in Christ Youth Conference, to greet you in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to give you the Paternal blessings, both, by epistle and by word of His Holiness Maxim, the Patriarch of Bulgaria and of our Most Reverend Metropolitan Joseph, so that being together in one spirit we might be comforted by our mutual faith - yours and ours (Romans 1:12).

For His Holiness and His Eminence, as our Fathers who watch over our souls, there is truly no greater joy or comfort than to hear that we, as their children, walk in the truth (3 John 1:4). At his age of 97, and with his body being really very weak, His Holiness, by the grace of God has a vigilant spirit. After a recent incident which kept Him in hospital for a few weeks, He can again watch over general issues of our Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Until recently, He often served or attended the services and in this way continued to bring his body into subjection for the Gospel's sake that he might be partaker thereof (1Cor. 9:23, 27). Being obedient to God's will, as he humbly endures his cross at this age and does not live for himself, his Holiness, in the real sense of the words of the Apostle, can feel the suffering of one member of the church as his own sufferings and the honor of any as his genuine joy (1 Corinthians 12:26). From faraway Bulgaria our Patriarch, as you have already heard, takes keen interest in the events in our Diocese and in your youth apostolate.

Our Most Reverend Metropolitan Joseph has the same parental cares towards us, as you very well know. Being always with us, he actively lives with our problems, supports us in our hardships with deed and word, and seeks for us comfort in the Holy Spirit. We are looking forward to meeting him at the Convention in the end of the week.

Brethren, if there is any consolation in Christ, any comfort in our love in the Lord, any fellowship of the Spirit, our joy can be completed only if we are like-minded, have the same love as we have seen in our Fathers, if we are in one mind, in one accord (Philippians 2:1).

Although most of us live far away from one another, the success of anyone in the Christian life – to be merciful and to keep oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:27) – evokes thanksgiving

and joy in all of us, while the cooling for the faith of anyone of us makes everybody sad and diminishes our joy.

That is why, in the manner St. Apostle Jude and of our Masters' epistles, I find it needful to remind you of some things which you have already known, so that we can earnestly contend for our faith (Jude 1:3).

First of all, we should be mindful about the high calling and the precious gift we have received as Orthodox Christians. Our calling and gift are not such only by name and by hope in what is promised to us. No, Lord Jesus Christ Himself testifies that in His name, in this corruptive world we have received something which is a hundred times more precious than any worldly possession (Mark 10:30).

Being with the Lord, the Holy Apostles often felt themselves like St. Peter on Tabor who said: "Master, it is good for us to be here." (Luke 9:33). Still, at the Mystical Supper, the Lord said to them: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send Him unto you."

While the Lord was with the Apostles, they were blessed to see and hear Him. When He ascended to heaven and sat at the right side of God the Father and sent unto His disciples the Holy Spirit, they received the grace to be sons of God.

From the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended unto the Holy Apostles in the form of tongues of fire, even to the present day, when we become Christians we receive as a gift the same Spirit in the Mystery of Holy Chrismation.

St. Apostle John the Theologian writes: "the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." (1John 2:27) The Holy Apostle does not mean that we do not need to be instructed by other human beings about the matters of our Christian faith and life, as he himself instructed his disciples, but rather that the anointing which we have received teaches what these instructions mean, gives the skill and ability to fulfill them, something which otherwise no man can do, because the words of the Lord "are Spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). Even the Apostles could not understand many things which the Lord taught them until He opened their minds, sending unto them the Holy Spirit (Luke 20:45; John 20:22). And it was not until the day of Pentecost, when they were clothed with power from on high, that they could fulfill their ministry.

About the same gift St. Apostle Paul writes: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (2 Corinthians 4:7) Here, St. Paul speaks about the fullness of the grace given to the apostles for establishing of the church. As there are diversities of gifts, but the Spirit is the same (1 Corinthians 12:4), as we said, in the Holy Chrismation we receive the grace of the same Spirit in order to live a Christian life, as we can see in the events in Acts 19:2-7.

Obviously, this matter concerns the very essence of our relationship with the Lord, as "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit" (1Corinthians 12:2). Through the same Spirit of adoption "we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:15,16). St. John Chrysostomos comments: "The Comforter, says the Apostle, witnesses about the gift we have been granted because this cry (Abba, Father) comes not only from the gift itself (that we are given the power to be children of God), but comes also from the Comforter Who grants the gift. He Himself, through the gift, has taught us to pronounce these words. As the Spirit Himself beareth witness, is there any place for bewilderment?"

St. Theophan the Recluse affirms that in the very beginning of the Christian life we are given the awareness about this. (St. Theophan the Recluse, Interpretations of Apostle Paul's Epistles, Romans 8:15, 16)

Being Orthodox Christians, we have been granted the gift of the Holy Spirit, as it is a promise and action of God not of man. The greatest concern of the exhortation in the epistles of the Holy Apostles is about the new life which the faithful receive joining the church, about how to stay in this life, and how to acquire and keep this life for eternity.

St. Apostle Paul himself, as a preacher of this grace, labored more abundantly than all the apostles so that even we today might receive the grace not in vain but rather seek for ourselves its fruits: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22).

All the apostles labored with the same care:

"By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand." (1Peter 5:12)

"According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Peter 1:3,4)

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." (1 John 5:13)

"For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.... These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate

themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." (Jude 1:4, 16-21)

The same concern we see in the exhortation of the Fathers of the Church:

"The purpose of all who live in a godly manner is to please Christ our God...by receiving the Holy Spirit and in this way to work for their salvation, because this indeed is the salvation of every soul. If there is no such purpose and such work in us, then every other labor is in vain, and vain is every other effort." (St. Simeon the New Theologian, *Dobrotolyubie*, v. 5, p. 37)
St. Seraphim of Sarov also teaches that the purpose of the Christian life is that we acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit. (St. Seraphim of Sarov, *Talk with Motovilov*)

That is why, our Lord spoke about the order of our earthly cares, saying: "Seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" with the promise that everything else we need for our living will be added to us (Matthew 6:33).

The Fathers understand the Kingdom of God – the Kingdom of Heaven "which is in us" – not as something uncertain, something which we are seeking as if we are beating the air (1Cor. 9:26). They see it as the treasure that we have in the "earthen vessels" of our bodies, a treasure which we received, as was said, with the indwelling of the Heavenly King, the Comforter in the Holy Chrismation. Therefore, since that time, the Kingdom of Heaven has been being built in us, that is, in our bodies, which are God's temple (1 Cor. 6:19). To what stage is the working project depends on ourselves. We can ask ourselves if we are every day on the building site either, as the Fathers say, as slaves, who fear their Master but fear more the eternal torments and therefore force themselves, and in this way violently taking the Kingdom of Heaven by force (Matthew 11:12); or if we are like servants who diligently work and care about their Masters' property with the hope they will hear the desired voice, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make you a ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of your Lord." (Matthew 25:21); or if we are like sons and daughters who love to please their Father and carefully inspect everything being done according to the plans, so that their beloved Father will find the temple in every way pleasing and would love to stay there forever and make them heirs of all His property; or, as we must admit, if we also may happen to be in the position of prodigal sons or daughters, or of wicked and lazy servants who with their desires and thoughts, deeds and life have forsaken or buried their treasure deep inside them and try to find satisfaction in unprofitable things or simply stay idle. In this case, may we as soon as possible, immediately come to ourselves and co-operate with our Comforter for the building of the temple of our soul and body, lest otherwise it be left unto us desolate (Luke 13:35).

Indeed, this is the most important labor we can do, because it is a labor "not for the food which perisheth, but for that food which endureth unto everlasting life" (John 6:27). Our cooperation with God (*synergia*) in the accomplishment of our salvation, is not a mere metaphor, neither does it mean that we cooperate with God by trying to do the commandments of the Gospel, guided in this only by our minds. Rather it is our cooperation with the grace of the Holy Spirit for the cleansing of our heart from the passions, so that our King and God in whom we believe, Jesus

Christ, may come and reign in us – in our heart, in our mind, in the whole of our being – as we profess in the Lord's prayer: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10). In this co-working we are aware that God does work in us. We can feel Him within our being; we can understand what the Lord's words mean when he says that we shall live through Him (John 6:57).

With this regard, the great and first commandment of our Lord: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" and the second like unto it: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Mark 12:30, 31) becomes very definite. We cannot justify ourselves, like that certain lawyer who tried to do so by asking the Lord "Who is my neighbor?" even though nowadays our wicked ignorance has gone much further than his, and we are often in a difficulty to give an answer about our hope, "Who we think our God is?" (cf. Matthew 16:13), This is impossible for us, because we have been given by our Lord His Glory, that we may know Him and be one with Him (John 17:22).

At this my first attendance at the My life in Christ Youth Conference of the Bulgarian Orthodox Youth Apostolate, as a Vicar Bishop of His Eminence Joseph, the Metropolitan of the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Diocese of USA, Canada and Australia, I chose to talk about the gift we have been granted as Orthodox Christians. This is the earnest of the future goods we have been promised. It is a real treasure that we have been given, and if we follow our faith – the teaching of the Orthodox Church – we inevitably come to the awareness of this treasure, and in this way we are inspired and encouraged in our Christian life; because, as St. Apostle Paul says, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

I wish you an inspiring and fruitful conference.

With love in Christ,
+ Bishop Daniil