

Banquet Greetings of His Beatitude Sviatoslav

Sunday, September 16, 2012 Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Your Grace, Metropolitan Lawrence, Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, Venerable Sisters, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Guests, My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

Glory to Jesus Christ! Slava Isusu Khrystu!

First of all, let me express to all of you how happy and grateful I am to be here with you, to be able to see you with my own eyes, and hear what you have to say, and to be able to speak to you here this evening.

For the Head of a Church, such encounters are essential since they give me an opportunity to listen to the heartbeat of the Church over which I preside, and to recognize its unique strength and beauty. Most importantly, such encounters help me understand how I can better serve you, for that is the real reason for my presence here: to serve.

In my brief talk I would like to suggest that our Church in Canada be mindful of three things. That we must: 1) Be Church, 2) Be a Vibrant Church, 3) Be a Young Church.

Obviously, these three points do not cover all that needs to be said about the mission of our Church here in Canada, its hopes, and challenges. Indeed, each one here present must expand on my reflections adding their own thoughts and experience.

Therefore, let us first of all, BE CHURCH. The Church of Christ is a divine and human community in which its members are called to share, here and now, in the Mystery of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ through participation in the Holy Mysteries-Sacraments of the Church, through its liturgical and prayer life, and in practicing works of charity and service. Therefore, let us ask ourselves whether we are living the Christian life to its fullest or whether we're happy to be lukewarm, nominal Christians.

Let me share with you a story about a young man, who went to a staretz, an elder, and asked for advice on how to pray. This elder then took the youth to a river, grabbed him by the neck and thrust his head underwater. The shocked young man realized that he was in danger of drowning, and finally managed to break the elder's grasp, gasping for air. The elder calmly emerged from the river and asked him: "So, what was it like under water?" Still confused, the youth replied: "I screamed a silent scream, trying to get a gasp of air without drowning." At this point the staretz explained that if he will call out to God with that same conviction and seek the Holy Spirit as he sought that breath of air – then he will truly experience prayer. If we allow ourselves to be overcome by daily problems and challenges to the point that we no longer feel the need to pray, to take part in the Sunday Liturgy, and to approach God with the understanding that we depend on Him for our very life – then we will cease to be Church. All of us, Bishops, Priests, monks and religious, and all the laity – we are all called to be men and women of deep prayer, gasping for the breath of the Holy Spirit. Especially in our families, parents need to be an example of fervent prayer for our children, taking advantage of confession/reconciliation and frequent Holy Communion. Without these, our Church will gradually die from within, and the process of secularization will completely take over our lives.

Let us be a VIBRANT CHURCH. I remember when as bishop in Argentina I spoke with a young man who explained to me his difficulties with going to the Ukrainian church of his parents. He listed many reasons: distance, schedule, ill-prepared service, boring sermon, a priest who seems so out of touch... but in the

end he said something really important: “You can visit a museum once or twice a year, but to live in a museum... that’s a bit much!”. I was deeply impressed by these words. Indeed, sometimes our parishes are more like Ukrainian immigrant museums than vibrant communities of faithful. Here we need to remember the words of our Lord: “You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!” (Matthew 23:24). And that is why, in planning the future of our Church, we’ve begun a program of renewal called: “The Vibrant Parish – a Place to Encounter the Living Christ.” Truly! Not a place to encounter the past, not a place to encounter history or culture (although these may certainly be present and are of value), but the focus must always be on the Living Christ! Our parishes need to be places where one can always find the Living Christ. It is only in this living and life-giving context that we can foster and hand down the treasure of our faith and traditions. We may have received them from our ancestors, but they must be relevant and accessible to those, who seek to partake of its riches. A vibrant parish is an inviting place, open and hospitable to all.

Let us be a YOUNG CHURCH! Here I would like to emphasize that I am not speaking of a Church just for young people, but of a young Church. Many have commented that such a young leader for our Church was elected a little more than a year and a half ago. To this day I cannot explain why our bishops chose the youngest among them to be their Father and Head. Maybe my presence is supposed to be a sign of a new spring for our Church. But you should know that this has nothing to do with the age of its leaders or members, and everything to do with its spirit and ability to engage society today. I would very much like to see our Church having a youthful face in contemporary Canadian culture. Above all this has to do with our ability to live a vibrant Christian life in today’s circumstances: to help people encounter the Living Christ in this day and age, to speak to the needs and problems of today according to the Gospel, to fill the sorrow and emptiness of today’s materialistic culture with the joyful light of the Holy Spirit. For it is only through joy and enthusiasm, coupled with a real conviction of faith, that our youth will rediscover the Church of their baptism. They will be able to recognize, as our youth did in recent history in Ukraine, that in it there is something real and true, tangible and unshakeable in a sea of uncertainty, a place where there is a Living Someone, upon Whom one can build their life and for Whom one might even sacrifice their life. This meeting of ours alone, this touch of an eternal yet always youthful God can make us that young Church: all of us, young and old, will grow young in spirit, when we are touched by God’s grace! I am convinced that this is the calling and future of the Archeparchy of Winnipeg and of our entire Church here in Canada. May our encounter today fill you with new strength, energy and perseverance.

Let this encounter be the beginning of all these good things!

In closing, I would like to announce that our Synod applauds the initiative of His Holiness, Pope Benedict in proclaiming the year 2013 a Year of Faith especially in light of the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus’ Ukraine. This Year of Faith is an opportunity for us to thank God for the Gift of Baptism and to renew our Faith the Lord!

Our next Synod will take place in Kyiv August 11-18, 2013. We are inviting the whole world to join us in Ukraine in a pilgrimage to the Patriarchal Sobor Resurrection of our Lord in Kyiv, to celebrate with us the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus’ Ukraine on Sunday, August 18, 2013.

Again, thank you, Your Grace Metropolitan Lawrence, and the faithful of the Archeparchy of Winnipeg, for hosting all of in this great and friendly province of Manitoba!



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