

# KOINONIA: A Publication of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

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## RECOVERING THE GREAT COMMISSION By Archpriest Eric G. Tosi

*Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

- Matthew 28:16-20

We hear this Scripture at every Baptism. We hear it again as the first reading in the eleven-week cycle of Resurrection Gospel readings for Matins, called "the pillar". It is read on Holy Saturday as the first announcement of the Resurrection. We also hear it on Bright Monday, the first of the Resurrection Gospels to be read as we process with the Cross around the church.



There must be something to this reading since we hear it so often. Clearly a message is being sent to all of us. What is the Church telling us about what we are to do as Her faithful members?

The reading is commonly known as the "Great Commission." In it, Christ Himself instructs us to go and make disciples of all nations and to baptize them. That is our task as a Church. We are "commissioned," or charged, to do this. It is an active commandment, not passive advice – it is clear and direct. It is personal and relational, since this "discipling" takes place in the context of relationships. This is the very heart of what the Church

is and should be. Jaroslav Pelikan wrote in his book, *Whose Bible Is It?*, "Nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus command His disciples to go out into the world and write books, not even the Gospels and the other books of the New Testament. Rather, as the New Testament itself is at pains to attest, He said to them: 'Go to every part of the world, and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.'" (p. 21)

Central to what we do as Christians is to bring the Good News of Christ to the entire world. Are we prepared to do this? Are we even interested? Yet we are commanded to "go forth and make disciples". Our response to this "commission" should be our own willingness to prepare ourselves, to educate ourselves, to put ourselves out in the world as a witness to the truth of the Gospel. We should ask ourselves daily: are we observing what Christ commanded us to do? Because when we do, He is with us to the end of the age. Go forth!

## Mission is the Duty of All Christians

By Archbishop Anastasios of Albania

*“Church without mission is a contradiction in terms. If the Church is indifferent to the apostolic work with which she has been entrusted, she denies herself, contradicts herself and her essence.”*

It is not a question of “can we?” but of an imperative command “we must.” “Go ye therefore and teach all nations.” “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.” There is no “consider if you can,” there is only a definite, clear-cut command of Our Lord... If we let ourselves rest peacefully in this habitual inertia in the matter of missions, we are not simply keeping the pure light of the Faith “under the bushel,” but we are betraying one of the basic elements of our Orthodox tradition. For missionary work has always been a tradition within the Orthodox Church ... Missionary activity is not simply something “useful” or just “nice,” but something imperative, a foremost duty, if we really want to be consequent to our Orthodox Faith.

Church without mission is a contradiction in terms. If the Church is indifferent to the apostolic work with which she has been entrusted, she denies herself, contradicts herself and her essence, and is a traitor in the warfare in which she is engaged. A static Church which lacks vision and a constant endeavor to proclaim the Gospel to the *oikoumene* [“whole inhabited world”] could hardly be recognized as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic

Church to whom the Lord entrusted the continuation of His work.

Inertia in the field of mission means, in the last analysis, a negation of Orthodoxy, a backslide into the practical heresy of localism... It is unthinkable for us to speak of “Orthodox spirituality,” of “a life in Christ,” of emulating the Apostle Paul, founder of the Church, while we stay inert as to mission; that it is unintelligible to write about intense liturgical and spiritual living of the Lord’s Resurrection by us, while we abide slothful and indifferent to the call of missions, with which the message of the Resurrection is interwoven.

Only when it is realized that worldwide mission is an initial and prime implication in a fundamental article of the Creed, elemental for the Orthodox comprehension of what the Church is, and that what is termed “mission” is not an external matter but an inner need, a call to repentance and aligning ourselves with the spirit of the Gospel and the tradition of our Church, only then shall we have the proper and hope-bearing theological start for what comes next.

The Gospel is addressed to all peoples, and

therefore the work of the Church remains incomplete as long as it is restricted to certain geographical areas or social classes. Its field of action is universal and is active in both sectors that welcome the good tidings and those which at first may reject them. Mission was not the duty of only the first generation of Christians. It is the duty of Christians of all ages... Witness is the expression of the vitality of the Church as well as a source of renewal and renewed vigor... Everyone should contribute to and participate in it, whether it be directly or indirectly. It is an essential expression of the Orthodox ethos.

It is not simply obedience, duty or altruism. It is an inner necessity. “Necessity is laid upon me,” said St. Paul, “*Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*” (I Cor. 9:16). All other motives are aspects of this need, derivative motives. Mission is an inner necessity (i) for the faithful and (ii) for the Church. If they refuse it, they do not merely omit a duty, they deny themselves. The Christian who is incorporated into Christ and who really lives in Him cannot think, feel, will, act or see the world in a different way from Christ.

## Ancient Christian Writers: On Witness Quotes from Tertullian

It is only at the last that Christ instructs [the apostles] to *"go and disciple all nations, and baptize them,"* when they were so soon to receive *"the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who would guide them into all the truth"* (John 16:13). And this, too, leads to the same conclusion. If the apostles, who were ordained to be teachers to the Gentiles, were themselves to have the Comforter for their teacher, far more needless was it to say to us, *"Seek, and ye shall find,"* to whom was to come, without research, our instruction by the apostles, and to the apostles themselves by the Holy Spirit.

### - Prescription Against Heretics 8

Christ Jesus our Lord (may He bear with me a moment in thus expressing myself!), whoever He is, of whatever God He is the Son, of whatever substance He is man and God, of whatever faith He is the teacher, of whatever reward He is the Promiser, did, while He lived on earth, Himself declare what He was, what He had been, what the Father's will was which He was administering, what the duty of man was which



He was prescribing; [and this declaration He made,] either openly to the people, or privately to His disciples, of whom He had chosen the twelve chief ones to be at His side (Mark 4:34), and whom He destined to be the teachers of the nations. Accordingly, after one of these had been struck off, He commanded the eleven others, on His departure to the Father, to go and teach all nations, who were to be baptized into the Father, and into the Son, and into the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19). Immediately, therefore, so did the apostles, whom this designation indicates as "the sent".

### - Prescription Against Heretics 20

We have set forth Jesus Christ as none other than the Christ of the Creator. Our proofs we have

drawn from His doctrines, maxims, affections, feelings, miracles, sufferings, and even resurrection—as foretold by the prophets. Even to the last He taught us, when he sent forth His apostles to preach His gospel *"among all nations,"* for He thus fulfilled the Psalm: *"Their sound is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world"* (Psalm 19:4).

### - Against Marcion 4:43

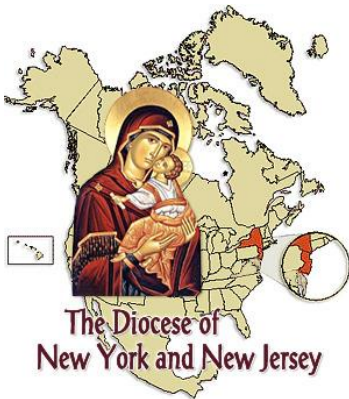
For the law of baptizing has been imposed, and the formula prescribed: *"Go,"* He says, *"disciple the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."* The comparison with this law of that definition, *"Unless a man have been reborn of water and Spirit, he shall not enter into the kingdom of the heavens"* (John 3:5) has tied faith to the necessity of baptism.

### - On Baptism 13

*While not a canonized Church Father, Tertullian has written some incredibly important letters and commentaries that are worthy of study. These are some excerpts from various writings of Tertullian.*

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## The Action in Grace: Holy Apostles Mission

### By Fr. Joel Brady

Alongside our parish's regular Bible study, a few Orthodox people in our area have formed a reading group that looks at a wide range of philosophical and literary texts, trying to understand the world we live in and a Christian response to it. At a recent gathering we were reading Flannery O'Connor's short story, "Parker's Back," and the leader of the discussion brought up this quote from O'Connor's essay, "On Her Own Work": "I have found, in short, from the reading of my own writing, that my subject in fiction is the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil."

I realized that "the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil" could be a wonderful way to think about Orthodox



mission work. I don't just mean striving to keep and proclaim the faith in the midst of an increasingly "post-Christian" society, although I get a good visual representation of that every time I hang up a flier for a church event on a bulletin board full of posters for "shamanic services." But what I have in mind primarily is that our work in Orthodox mission is to be open to that "action of grace": even when we meet people whose lives are to all appearances "territory...held by the devil," to see how God is working there, and do whatever we can to cooperate with Him in leading them to Him.

In listening to the stories of people who have joined the Church, especially during my time at Holy Apostles, I am struck by the fact that it is

often difficult to give a short summary of "why did this person become Orthodox?" Or maybe in some cases it isn't difficult, but the short summaries don't do justice to the subtlety of the ways that God led them here, often over many years and often through surprising detours.

To look at the congregation of a mission parish, or any parish with a lot of converts (and all of our parishes should have them!), is to look at a rich array of stories about the mysterious actions of grace. And our duty as Christians entrusted with this mission is to look at the lives around us – including those that seem "largely held by the devil" – and keep our eyes open for the ways that divine grace is acting there, and how we can cooperate with it.

