

UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH
Major Archbishop of Kyiv and Halych

PROCLAMATION TO THE FAITHFUL OF UKRAINIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC CHURCH
2009 – THE YEAR OF CHRISTIAN VOCATION
WITH A PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON THE PRIESTLY VOCATION

To the Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy and Religious,
Beloved in Christ Brothers and Sisters:
Blessings and Peace in the Lord!

Dearly Beloved in Christ!

As resolved by the Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church in 2007, the year 2008 was dedicated to Christian vocation. We sincerely hope that, as the year is coming to a close, we all – clergy, lay people, young and old – have enriched our lives with the awareness that every human being born into the world, in addition to the gift of life and the holy faith, receives from the Creator a particular task – a vocation. We also hope that each and every faithful sought to discern more attentively his or her vocation, cultivating it and conscientiously fulfilling it for the glory of God, for the good of one’s neighbors and, most importantly, with a view towards understanding the meaning of his or her life. For this we prayed each time we sang in the fervent supplication of the Divine Liturgy: “We also pray for all people, that they may willingly accept the vocation given them by God, sincerely thank God for it, conscientiously and faithfully fulfill it, and in it gladly serve God and the people”.

The Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church held in September of this year, decreed to extend the theme of Christian vocation into the 2009 year, with a particular emphasis on priestly vocation, and in place of cited-above supplication to sing in the litany: “We also pray for our priests, deacons, and seminarians and for their holy vocation”.

In this message addressed to you, beloved in Christ, I would like to further explain this main theme for 2009. An additional and special address will be issued for our clergy and seminarians.

First of all, I would like to direct your attention to the need for continued prayer and reflection on the theme of Christian vocation in general, but even more, for seeking a fundamental and more profound understanding of it, and, most importantly, for seeking its fulfillment in our daily life. Throughout 2008 you certainly heard homilies, read books and participated in various initiatives on this theme. Such initiatives were particularly undertaken by eparchial and inter-eparchial commissions, each one working in its specialized field (family, youth, laity, etc.) Each one of us should all continue to ask ourselves whether we are carrying out our given vocation with dignity and a Godly spirit, and whether we are helping our children and youth recognize and fulfill their vocations. Furthermore, in 2009 the Synod of Bishops calls all of us to pay particular attention to priestly vocation. Why? Because for the development and growth of our Church good spiritual leaders are greatly needed, and such leaders are, first and foremost, properly prepared and duly appointed priestly ministers. The bishops invite all Church members to meditate on the sacred nature and importance of the vocation to the priesthood, as well as reflect on what we as a broader church community can do to help our priests be exemplary ministers for the glory of God and the common good of the entire Church and our people. We would like to propose a few thoughts on this aspect of next year’s spiritual theme.

When we speak of vocations and, especially, when someone asks us to pray for priestly vocations, we usually think that our main and only task is to ask the Lord our God to call a sufficient number of candidates to the priesthood, or to put it simply, that He fill our seminaries. Entering a seminary is, without a doubt, a very important element, since it marks a first step towards fulfilling a priestly vocation. However, it is a long way from exhausting the full meaning of a vocation to the priesthood. First and foremost it must be said that there are other stages which precede seminary studies. A good priest frequently preaches on vocations and carefully assesses the members of his community, seeking to recognize the early signs of a vocation, and having noticed one, he carefully fosters it. A good parish is the fertile soil, which gives abundant fruits of priestly vocations. One of our parishes in Pennsylvania in the United States can serve as an example: in the last century in 20-30 years it produced 37 dedicated priestly and monastic vocations. The priests, monks and nuns who grew up in that community unanimously give credit to their parish priest. An even greater factor in awakening and cultivating priestly vocations is a good Christian family, which acts as a cradle or greenhouse for new religious vocations. In a family of believers the priesthood is treated with respect. Even in the case of an unworthy priest, the matter is mentioned with pain and not malice. And when there are boys in the family – this vocation is considered one of the best possible.

Besides the work of parish priests and the diligent prayer of the church community, heroic examples of faith can equally awaken priestly vocations. In this regard we recall the words of Pope John Paul II of blessed memory during the Pontifical Divine Liturgy in Lviv on June 27, 2001. During the beatification of twenty-seven blessed martyrs of our Church, the Holy Father addressed the priests in attendance: “If the Lord blesses your land with numerous vocations, and if your seminaries are filled - and in this there is the source of hope for your Church - then all this, without a doubt, is one of the fruits of their sacrifice. But this places on you a great responsibility”.

We should have no doubts that the Lord our God, as a good Father and Master, is calling a sufficient number of workers to his harvest (cf. Lk 10:2). If there are still not enough worthy candidates, then quite often it is our fault, particularly due to the decline of spiritual life in our families, to the lack of adequate preaching and encouragement, and also because of a lack of respect for the priesthood. It is unrealistic to expect a high regard for the priesthood in families where the chief value is money or where the greatest concern is enhancing family ties. We should also mention here the negative influence of mass media, which today frequently promotes antichristian ideas and points of views. And the poor living example of a priest, especially the local pastor, is especially damaging.

These obstacles are great, but they are not insurmountable. Recently we have more than once heard criticism of the clergy’s unworthy behavior or its superficial fulfillment of priestly duties. Let us ask ourselves: have we prayed for the restoration of such priests – individuals, who have fallen into a great spiritual crisis? To what extent did we help them overcome such a tragic situation? For the priest is not a lonely island in a middle of a broad sea of humanity. He especially needs support from the people around him, since he is always in the limelight and his every step is public knowledge. Nor should we underestimate the assaults of the enemy of the Church, who operates according to the well-known principle: “*I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered*” (cf. Zech 13:7; Mt 26:31)

Among the means of support, which the entire church community provides for its priest, of primary importance is prayer. A priest’s being and action depends on the power of prayer, not only his own, but also of the community he serves. This is why the Synod of Bishops calls all members of the Church to pray for priests and deacons - not only that there be a sufficient number, but above all, that

those who have undertaken this holy office may find in it their life vocation and piously fulfill it according to God's will.

The faithful people support their priest. Indeed, immense demands are placed before him: as a person, as a priestly minister, as an administrator, as a teacher, as a citizen, and if he is married – as a husband and father. The priestly life is not a road covered with roses, except in cases where he wants to be a false prophet and appease the whims of the people instead of leading them to the Kingdom of Heaven. If, however, he truly seeks to please God, then his life is a thorny path. If we bear this in mind, we better understand whom it is we want to imitate in our treatment of priests: the Pharisees who mocked Jesus Christ, or the man of Cyrene who helped Him bear the cross.

Dearly Beloved in Christ! We begin 2009 – the Year of Christian vocation with a special emphasis on priestly vocation. Let us examine ourselves and think of our vocations. Let us also reflect on the vocation to priestly ministry, since we all desire to see our priests as exemplary servants of God, servants whose meaning of life is to lead the souls placed in their trust to the Heavenly Father. Let us together with Jesus Christ the High Priest pray and support our priests and deacons.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

+Lubomyr

We recommend to all the faithful of our Church the prayer of the Servant of God Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky for a good Ukrainian clergy:

Lord, O Lord, look down from Heaven, behold and visit Your vineyard, which Your right hand has planted.

May Your mighty hand be always upon this people, whom You have beloved.

O Eternal God, grant Your people in every generation to the end of the world holy bishops and priests filled with Your Spirit – pastors and teachers of Your Law, capable of preserving unaltered the truth of Your holy Revelation and lovingly teaching and leading this great people.

Grant to the Ukrainian clergy the grace to never fear any sacrifice, whenever it concerns Your glory and the good of this people.

Ignite the hearts of Ukrainian priests with a spirit of zeal for the salvation of souls. Open before their eyes the wisdom of Your Revelation and grant them a deep sense of the holiness of the task to which You have called them. Bless their work and their intentions. Protect them from every evil. And unite them by Your grace so that in love they may be one – as You, Father, are with the Son, and the Son with You. Amen.

Given in Kyiv, at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ
December 31, 2008