

**Pastoral Letter of the Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church
To the Faithful and all People of Good Will**

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you,
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Dearly Beloved in Christ!

The Synod of Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church met this year in Kyiv from August 11-18, 2013. In attendance were Bishops of the UGCC from Ukraine the Diaspora, along with those who are responsible for our faithful in Russia, Kazakhstan, Greece, and Belarus. Throughout our sessions and prayers we felt that today the Holy Spirit is calling our Church to proclaim the Word of God with renewed vigour, both to those, who are already among the faithful of our Church, and to those who have yet to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Lord is calling us to teach every person today to observe all that our Divine Teacher has commanded us (see: Mt 28:19-20).

This Apostolic ministry, which implies an awareness of being sent by Christ to share our Faith, is entrusted to all who have been baptized in the name of the Blessed Trinity. Today all the children of our Church need to rekindle the fire of the Spirit, as Christ Himself tells us: “I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!” (Lk 12:49). The apostle Paul also warns us: “Do not quench the Spirit.” (I Th 5:19).

The Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles at Pentecost. Filled with the Spirit, they were no longer afraid to be witnesses of Christ. Every faithful Christian, having received this same Holy Spirit in the Mystery of Holy Chrismation, is called, not to keep this gift for oneself (so as not to extinguish it), but to nurture the fire of personal faith in God as a lamp shining upon others: rekindling the fire of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who have rejected their faith or fallen away from Christ’s Church; sharing this fire with those who do not have it; warming and enlightening the hearts of those who suffer spiritual cold and emptiness, and wander in the darkness of never having known God as a loving Father.

In these days we are closing the Year of Faith which we, as children of the Church of Christ, have undergone in response to the appeal of the Holy Father, the Pope of Rome, and at this time we are concluding the commemoration of the anniversary of the Baptism of Rus’ Ukraine. Celebrating both of these significant events, we are again reminded how the Christian faith has always been for us, Ukrainians, our common foundation, the unshakeable power of God, which 1025 years ago by providence and the divinely-blessed decision of St. Volodymyr, Equal-to-the Apostles, united us as a people and made us an inseparable part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Our faith gave our people the strength to endure grave trials, so that we may with gratitude acknowledge along with St. John the Theologian: “the victory that conquers the world is our faith” (I Jn 5:4).

Our Ukrainian Church culminated this year with a special blessed commemoration in Rome: celebrating the golden jubilee of the transfer of the relics of our great saint Bishop-martyr

Josaphat Kunchevych to the Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome. In reflecting on the example of this great saint and on the other new martyrs and confessors of our faith in the 20th century, we learn from them to value as a priceless treasure the great gift of our faith and our membership in the Universal Church which our Divine Saviour established upon the rock of St. Peter. Their example teaches us to witness our faith in the world today, entrusting our faith to our children and sharing it with all, who seek and need God's saving and divine grace.

Thus, standing today at the tomb of St. Josaphat in the Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome, and in spiritual unity with our entire Church, with "one heart, and of one mind" we offer prayers of thanksgiving on the altar of the Almighty, thanking Him for all the graces bestowed on our Church throughout the centuries of its history, and especially, for the grace of faithfulness to Christ during those difficult decades of persecution in the past century. The fact that our Church was able to survive in those most grave and trying circumstances was not our human achievement, but, above all, a gift of our Lord God, Who would not allow the gates of hell to prevail against His Church (see: Mt 16:18). Our confessors of the faith perfectly understood this power of God's grace. It was not by accident that the first prayer uttered by the blessed Bishop-confessor Mykola Chernetskyj when he returned from exile to Lviv was the hymn glorifying God, "We Praise You, O God." May our Lord be praised not only in His numerous martyrs and confessors of the faith of the last century, but let Him also be praised in the lives of each faithful believer today, and may He be praised in the present history of our Ukrainian Christian people.

In order that the faith of our people may not be extinguished, we as Christians must keep our faith alive in our hearts, in our families, and in our parish communities, so that it may be like a light placed on a lampstand (see: Mt 5:15), showing others the way to God. When a person truly and deeply believes, then that person feels the need to share his or her faith with others. The words in the Prayer Before Communion cannot be separated: "I believe O Lord, and profess..." Faith is always connected with profession – a witnessing of one's faith before others. As Christ teaches us: "Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him'" (Jn 7:38). A person who by faith is united with God, with the source of living water that is the Holy Spirit, has an inner need, a desire to unite everyone with God. Just as one cannot stop a raging river, so it is impossible to prevent the witness of our faith, the missionary zeal of the Christian, and the personal need to share one's faith with one's neighbours.

Along this path of witnessing the faith, one may encounter difficulties and dangers, as illustrated by the history of the Church. Today, while religious freedom is widely proclaimed, one particular danger which may lead to a loss of faith in Christ is the conviction that one should be a Christian only on a personal level. Faith in God is frequently presented as a private matter, one which should not concern anyone, except the individual person. Such an understanding may lead to depriving a believer of the right to publicly confess his or her faith. Furthermore, if a person of faith, pressed by external circumstances or out of fear of being ridiculed by the world, is ashamed to admit that he or she is a Christian, or fails to find the courage to acknowledge their faith whether in words or in action, such a person is inevitably in danger of losing his or her faith. For who does not share their faith, progressively loses it. As Christ reminds us: "Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this faithless and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mk 8:38). That is why we, ever conscious of this commandment of our Lord, aspire and desire that in every son and

daughter of the UGCC there burn a fire of living faith; and that this fire come to be handed on to others through the missionary activity of our faithful.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit strengthened the apostles and sent them to preach the Good News. Today, the Holy Spirit also sends us to others, to the non-baptized, to those far from God and the Church, entrusting us with the mission to go and make all nations disciples of Christ. Christ Himself emphasizes the extraordinary nature of this mission: “Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves” (Mt 10:16). However, He also comforts us with the words: “Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom” (Lk 12:32). To fulfil this mission, we like the apostles, need to “go outside” and meet others. We need to go beyond the confines of our confessional community, our nation, our family, in order to encounter those of another faith, children of other nations and cultures, and, finally, our neighbours. If we are truly inspired by a missionary spirit, if we begin to do this, then we will be surprised to discover that these “others” have been waiting for us for a long time. For the word of faith carries particular weight among those who have lost confidence in human words; and an active love brings to life that which may have died through apathy. But this won’t happen without us!

Our missionary activity should be directed not only to those people who are far from Christ and His Church, but to “our own” as well, to those who are baptized, but are not practicing their faith. They too need to be led to Christ. The witness of our faith can spiritually strengthen our baptized brothers and sisters, remind them of their Christian roots, and help them grow in faith through our faithful witness to a genuine Christian life.

However, the first and most important place where we need to maintain, foster and hand down the treasure of our holy faith is within our immediate and extended families. We want to particularly emphasize that for children the first teachers of faith are their own parents. No one else, neither a priest, nor a sister-nun, nor a catechist can take the place of a child’s parents in fulfilling this sacred obligation, which they assumed on the day of their child’s Baptism – to raise that child into a mature Christian, capable of living according to the commands of the Gospel, according to the mandating words spoken by the priest when he presented them with the lighted candle: “Take this lighted candle, and strive throughout your entire lifetime to shine brightly with the light of faith and of good deeds, so that, when the Lord will come, you may go forth in radiance to meet Him together with all the saints, and may enter unhindered into the court of His heavenly glory and reign with Him throughout all the ages.” We remind all fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, that the greatest gift they can and must give to their children and grandchildren, as they mature on the road of life, is the gift of a living faith. One cannot overemphasize the importance of this gift of faith, since both the temporal life and eternal salvation of their children and grandchildren depend on this gift. In the words of Metropolitan Andrey: “What is the value of a life which does not lead to salvation?! In truth, I tell you: it is better to lead a short life in this world in poverty and suffering, and after death to inherit eternal life, than it is to live a few years in this world with the greatest opulence, wealth and strength, and then after death to be excluded from every blessedness, and to be condemned to eternal wailing. ‘What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?’ (Mt. 16: 26).”

In order to assist every member of our Church to share their faith, and be inspired with a missionary spirit, the Synod of Bishops of our Church has resolved to proclaim in all our parishes a ten-day period of Missionary Days, calling for the active participation of all the faithful of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church: the clergy, monastics and religious, and you, our, beloved in Christ, laity. This ten day period will be held every year beginning with the feast of the Ascension of our Lord and ending with the feast of Pentecost. Just as the apostles spent these ten days in prayer, in order to be “clothed with power from on high” on the day of Pentecost, so too shall we in prayer open ourselves to the “power from on high” in order to fulfil our missionary action, inspired by the Holy Spirit and blessed by the Church.

As we conclude the Year of Faith, proclaimed by His Holiness and our Particular Church, our life of faith nevertheless continues. May the Almighty Lord bless each of us, that our faith may not diminish, but that we, living according to God’s grace, may also strengthened our brethren in the faith (see: Lk 22:32). May the Blessed Mother of God be our Guide on our journey of faith along with all the saints and righteous of our Ukrainian nation!

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love the God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all!

In the name of the Synod of Bishops
of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

† Sviatoslav

Given in Kiev, at the Patriarchal Sobor of the Resurrection,
November 14, 2013 A.D.,
On the day of the Holy Wonderworkers and Unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian