

# OCA

## ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

The Holy Synod/Official Statements & Speeches/The Holy Synod of Bishops

### Synodal Affirmations on Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of Life

*These affirmations on marriage, family, sexuality, and the sanctity of life are issued by the Holy Synod of Bishops on the occasion of the Tenth All-American Council of the Orthodox Church in America.*

Miami, Florida, July, 1992

### Sickness, Suffering, and Death

From the very beginning of human life on earth the rebellion of men and women against God has resulted in sickness, suffering and death. This is the meaning of the story of Adam and Eve, and their children and descendents, found in the first chapters of the Bible (Genesis 1-11).

Jesus Christ has come to save the world. He has come to free human beings from the tyranny of sickness, suffering and death through the forgiveness and expiation of their sins by his own sinless suffering and death.

Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes upon himself the sins of the world. He is the new and final Adam who comes from heaven to give human beings the opportunity to begin life over again by dying and rising in him, and being sanctified and sealed by his life-creating Spirit (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 15).

Jesus Christ shows us that human suffering has redeeming and sanctifying significance. It can be the means of finding God in the fallen world, the means

of purification from carnal passions, the means of enlightenment and communion with God for everlasting life.

Through Christ's death, death itself is destroyed and transformed. Man's "final enemy," the "wages of sin," has become through Christ's crucifixion the way into paradise for those who fight it to the end, who refuse to surrender to its power, who destroy its very foundations by faith in God and love for Him and His good creation which has been corrupted and polluted by the evils of men (1 Corinthians 15, Romans 6).

The whole of creation—all the plants and animals, fish and birds, rocks and planets—is "groaning in travail" as it "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God;" for in the final coming of Christ all of creation "will be set free from the bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Romans 8:18-21)

The apostle Paul tells us that "the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Romans 8:18) He says that our earthly sufferings are but the "slight momentary affliction" which "is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Christians are waiting for the salvation of the world in God's coming kingdom where the Lord "will render to everyone according to his works." (Romans 2:6) The apostle continues, "to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil...but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good...for God shows no partiality." (Romans 2:7-11)

*Convinced of these God-revealed truths we offer the following affirmations and admonitions for the guidance of the faithful:*

*All efforts to heal physical and spiritual sickness, to alleviate physical and spiritual suffering, and to prevent physical and spiritual death are to be supported and defended.*

*Those who suffer, and those related to the suffering, are to be helped to find God in their affliction, and so to acquire the divine grace and power to transform*

*their pain into a means of purification from evil, illumination from darkness and eternal salvation in the age to come.*

*Adequate health care is to be made available for all men, women and children regardless of their, race, religion, social status, or financial condition. Great care must be taken so that healing services are not restricted to the affluent or the apparently “deserving.”*

*Extreme caution is to be exercised in decisions involving medical treatment, especially in the face of death. Extreme care is always in order to find the “royal path” between providing all necessary healing measures and merely prolonging the biological functioning of organs when human life is no longer possible, or even present.*

*Scientific research and experimentation are to be undertaken with extreme caution in order not to bring greater evils and sufferings to humankind in place of intended blessings.*

*The natural world is to be treated as the friend and servant of humanity. It is not to be raped, corrupted and polluted for purposes of power, pleasure or profit. Its resources are to be used with respect and gratitude for the well-being of all people on the planet (see Message of the Primates of the Most Holy Orthodox Churches, 6. Phanar, March 15, 1992).*

*Human beings are to be reminded by every means that they are not isolated individuals but are members one of another who will give account to God and to their fellow creatures for their every thought, word and deed; and that their eternal destiny depends on what they have done with their lives on earth.*