

## **His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon**

*Closing Remarks: 21<sup>st</sup> All-American Council*

*July 18, 2025*

In the Gospel reading at the Akathist this morning, we heard how the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. Mountains have been a theme in my remarks during this 21<sup>st</sup> All-American Council, with mountains serving as an image of our spiritual ascent and descent. This ascent and descent have also been a way for us to reflect upon our present moment in the Orthodox Church in America.

In my initial reflections on what our present moment might mean, I was inspired by a liturgical image, the liturgical movement during the vigil for the feast of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross, when the bishop, standing in the center of his cathedral, lowers and elevates the Cross in the four cardinal directions to the singing of the 500-fold “Lord, have mercy.” Even more precisely, it seems to me that we find ourselves at the point where the bishop has lowered the Cross to its lowest point and is preparing to raise it up once more. In the familiar Lvovsky setting of the melody sung at this occasion, there is a point of pause, a certain hovering between the moment the bishop holds the Cross steady at the lowest point and is about to raise it up.

It seems to me that this point of hovering is a fitting expression of where we find ourselves as the Church today. In other words, we are at a moment of reflection, a moment when we recognize that, whether we are ascending or whether we are descending, we are always on the path of the Cross, the

Cross is ever with us. Unlike the ups and downs of our daily life, unlike the back and forth of our polarized secular existence, our movements in the Church follow the path of the Cross. The Cross encompasses both the weight of our struggles and the glory of our victories. We find ourselves at a moment when we ought to reflect on this reality.

To be clear, this image of the downward and upward path of the Cross is not an image of the horizontal lows and highs of our past struggles. Rather, it is an image of our existence as Orthodox Christians and a reminder to us that the Cross is always at the center both of our struggles and our blessings.

Ascent and descent: this is our life as Christians. There are external ups and downs, but they are always internally grounded in Christ and rising towards him. And by remaining faithful to him (and to the Cross), we can navigate the storms and waves of this present life, according to the example the saints have given us.

The final image of our present moment was suggested to me as we prayed the Akathist this morning before the new icon of all saints of North America. Having glorified a new saint, the holy and righteous Olga of Kwethluk, Wonderworker, Matushka of All Alaska, we have added her to the company of the canonized saints, whom Christ has gathered for our benefit and for the blessing of the entire world. Some of us here may remember the days when there was only one saint, our first saint, the venerable Herman of Alaska. Now, we ask intercessions of 19 saints who have shone forth in North America. We do not, of course, depend on the quantitative aspect of this reality. Rather, it seems to me that our present icon is a fitting image of whence we have come and also whither we are

going. We all know of the icons of all saints of the venerable and more ancient Orthodox Churches, whose numbers are even larger than ours. Even without the centuries of ascetical and martyric witness of which our sisters have the benefit, it seems to me that it is our calling and our mission, now that we have been gathered together by Christ, to heed the words that conclude the Gospel reading from this morning:

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”