

PRAYERS FOR THE NATIONS, LEADERS AND CITIES

(2.1.2022)

During the Divine Liturgy, continuing the Litany of Peace, the Deacon urges the congregation to pray for the whole nation, for the rulers who rule it, and the military which protects them: "For this land, its authorities and armed forces and for every city and land, and for the faithful who live in them, let us pray to the Lord".

We all know how important it is for political leaders to rule justly for the welfare of the people, and not in a selfish or tyrannical way, serving personal or partisan interests. Praying for our national leaders is also a command of the Apostle Paul: *"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for... all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence"* (1 Timothy 2: 1-2).

The next petition is related to the city or village in which we live. In seeing how human societies function today, it is obvious that we all need each other. In times of drought, everyone is deprived of essentials. In a pandemic, like the one we have been experiencing for the last two years, we will not be saved alone, but all together. If we live in a prosperous city, we will presumably live in comfort. That is why we pray as follows: "for every city and land, and for the faithful who live in them, let us pray to the Lord". In this prayer, we can see that we are not only talking about our own city or homes, but we are also praying for every city and country. We especially pray for those Christians who live in countries hostile to Christ, for they have suffered the harshest persecutions by their fanatical opponents.

The Lord had said to His disciples from the very beginning: *"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues... But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."* (Matthew 10:16-20). Unfortunately, many Orthodox Christians even today in various parts of the world are persecuted by repressive regimes. Let us not forget them in our prayers, as they truly need them.

In the Divine Liturgy, special prayers are said for the protection of our environment, which is endangered due to greed and push for profits, on the part of not only international companies, but also of governments. Experts warn with loud voices of the catastrophic consequences that will result for the whole planet due to these reckless actions in exploiting natural wealth. Since 1989, our Patriarchate has dedicated September 1st (the beginning of the Ecclesiastical Year) to the protection of

the environment. It is around that time that special prayers for the environment are offered, and International Conferences organized by the Patriarchate take place. All of this in order to bring attention to this great and crucial issue for the survival of humanity.

Today, more than any other time, we need to pray with faith: "For favorable weather, for an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times...". The pre-eminent mystery with which the peace of Christ returns to all creation is the Divine Liturgy. That is why even now, during the Divine Liturgy, we ask God to protect us from the destructive turmoil of nature, and to make the peaceful work of people prosper. To live peacefully with each other through all times and seasons, be it spring, summer, fall, or winter. We pray for favorable weather, which is beneficial to human health and the maintaining of agriculture. We pray for rain to come at the right time, to rejuvenate nature. This prayer indeed results in peaceful times, and prevents war or strife between nations, allowing us to enjoy the blessings of God in tranquility.

The Church in the Divine Liturgy, as a loving Mother, also urges church members to offer other prayers for people: For those who travel on land, sea and air, facing many dangers; For the countless patients who suffer both themselves as for their loved ones; For those afflicted by disabilities, oppression, injustice, misery, unemployment and so many other social ills; as well as for prisoners of war. These days, let us also not forget to pray for the families of refugees, those who were forced to leave their homelands, and that their homes may be saved.

We are called to offer our love for others everywhere and always, in every occasion, but mainly in the Divine Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy is the highest work of the love of Christ. It is the invitation that Christ addresses to the afflicted, so that they may approach Him and rest from the toils of this life. In the Church there is relief, consolation and peace for those who suffer: "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). What could be sweeter than this invitation?

My dear brothers and sisters, the experience of the presence of Christ is given to us especially in the Divine Liturgy. When we commune with Christ, then Christ, as the prayer says, sails with those who sail; travels with those who travel and heals the sick. Amen.