

ARCHPASTORAL GREETING 2014
To the Tenth Annual Popadias and Diaconissas Gathering
July 17 & 18, 2014 – Des Plaines, IL

Dearest Beloved Popadia Junia Tolbert, beloved popadias and diaconissas,

Welcome again to Des Plaines! Welcome to your 10th gathering!

My prayer for this our gathering is to take one point away and use it to grow.

It is important to talk, for example, about living in the present. Why? Because living in the present is warfare; it is hard, but not impossible.

If you need, here are several practical ways to do that:

- Start with having the desire to do it;
- Next have a plan to do it;
- Then sacrifice and count the cost to do it; and,
- Finally, be accountable for doing it.

For example, using the daily hours to bring your mind back to focus on Christ is easy and already in place. One begins the new day at the first hour (6 a.m., or whenever you begin your day), using the theme of that hour to focus ones first thoughts - “Christ is the light of the world ... am I?”

At the third hour (9 a.m., or mid-morning), the theme is the descent of the Holy Spirit. One can ask the Holy Spirit to come, praying: “O Heavenly King, ...”

For the sixth hour or noon, the theme is Christ on the Cross – Christ dying for the world. One can ask oneself if one is dying, or ready to die, for and to the world.

At the ninth hour (3 p.m., or mid-afternoon), the theme is death on the Cross: one can ask oneself if one is ready to meet Christ.

The daily, weekly, and yearly feasts and cycles of our holy Church can be used as tools for living in the moment and for focusing on Christ where you are. I highly

recommend following the calendar of the holy Orthodox Church, as it is our best educational tool. The Church feasts reveal eternal realities, and the past becomes the present as we worship. We have the opportunity to grow by practice and repetition – until doing the right thing in the right way becomes second nature to us.

Next, I ask you to take stock of your lives and to answer the questions: “What occupies our time? What would people say about our life?” Spirituality should be the fabric of our life. Prayer is more powerful than words to affect change in ourselves and others. It is certainly not “news”, but I remind you to think of everyone else as more important than ourselves and to be totally dependent on God, as children are on their parents. My point is that today we can touch eternity.

I would also like to focus your attention on living a prayerful life. As your Metropolitan I define prayer as standing with our mind and our heart before God unceasingly. I note that this is the driving force behind everything; it is oxygen to the soul. As in the striving to live in the present, there has to be a desire to pray, a plan (or rule) to pray, a sacrificial cost to pray, and accountability in our practice of prayer. Thanksgiving, supplication, repentance, and praise are given us as different forms of prayer. How important it is to engage in them all!

I note that the greatest privilege in the world is to commune with God. Therefore, I encourage every one to develop a relationship with their guardian angel, as well as with as many saints as possible, to help you through this life. I emphasize that we should not let our possessions own us. Our Holy Fathers have told us to look at and strive for the opposite of the sin or vice we need to work on. So, for example, the opposite of greed is charity. And finally, I encourage you to pray for the impossible.

My last point is dedicated to the Holy Theotokos: Her example, her feasts, our relationship with her. As her spiritual child from Troyan Monastery, I want to remind you that her Son and our Lord Jesus listens to His mother. She reminds us that we have Christ formed in us, as He was formed in her, His mother. He was the center of her life and must be at the center of ours, also.

Finally, I pray and hope that you – our beloved popadias and diaconissas – will leave this our blessed gathering for your homes, rejoicing with renewed faith, having some tools to grow and to better serve the Lord.

Thank you for your kind attention and understanding!

Thanks be to God for all things!

May the Lord God, through the prayers of St. Great-martyr Marina (Margaret) of Antioch in Pisidia, (who was a heavenly protector of Patriarch Maxim-Marin, of blessed memory), and our host St. Martyr Sophia and her three daughters: Vera, Nadezhda and Lubov, bless your gathering and each of you with health, peace, joy, wisdom and strength.

Have a fruitful 10th gathering!

With love in Christ our Savior,

+ Metropolitan JOSEPH