November 15, 2026
Protocol 11/018

To the clergy, monastics, and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America, beloved children in the Lord,

Christ is in our midst!

We have now entered into a season of growing darkness. For weeks now, the sun has been retreating earlier and earlier, and the cool darkness has descended upon us. This darkness is for some of us a welcome respite from the heat and activity of the warmer months. For others, it is an unwelcome, oppressive invasion into our already complicated and difficult lives.

In our culture, the newly descended darkness is accompanied by a flurry of consumption of all things new and shiny. We engage in a frantic search for meaning and depth, looking to new gadgets and prepackaged experiences to fill the dark void of meaninglessness. We are also regularly reminded of the losses and gaps within our homes and hearts. This season is one where families are expected to gather together. The expectation carries with it the possibility of great bonds of communion and levity. But for many of us, those relationships can be fraught with fractures and reverberate with anxiety. Instead of the warmth of a table full of familiar faces, we find ourselves surrounded by more than a few empty chairs.

My beloved children in the Lord, the darkness is not destined to remain, and the light is just on the horizon!

The darkness that currently prevails is an invitation into kindling an eager expectation for the light which comes into the world at our Lord's nativity in the flesh. The Lord offers us an invitation to step into the light and to hear his offer of relief. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). We are weary from the vanity of the world and we are burdened by the strained and fractured relationships all around us. And it is precisely in the midst of that the light of our Lord's face shines upon us. Vanity and loss are not the end of the story because Christ Himself has entered into the world ushering in a reign of grace and truth (John 1:14). In Christ we find ourselves truly seen and loved by God in all of our complexities and struggles. This is the sweet taste of grace and the victory of truth.

In light of the gift of our Lord's advent we ask what can we offer to Him? We are given by our mother, the Church, in this season the spiritual disciplines of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving to help cleanse and reset our bodily appetites, to refocus and cleanse our mind's eye, and to unburden and direct our hearts towards the light. These ascetical tools are not given to us in order to increase our to-do list and overwhelm us. Rather, these tools are given to us to give us a deeply needed reset in order to embrace and rest in the light of God. We lighten our load by lessening our excessive dependence upon food, focusing our wandering and forgetful minds upon God, and loosening the anxious grip that material goods have upon us. This is how the light may more brightly shine within our hearts.

In addition to these spiritual disciplines I also suggest renewing the light of friendship and fellowship. Unsubscribe, log off, and put the screens away. Help someone in your neighborhood with a practical need, like raking their lawn. Sit with a loved one over tea and coffee and just listen to them with no other agenda than that. Try making your gifts for Christmas rather than just buying them. Remember and pray for those whom we have lost. Write a handwritten note of encouragement or thanks to someone. Make a good meal for someone in need and share it with them. In the light of Christ, we can find truth and grace abounding everywhere, especially in the small things that bring us closer to one another and, therefore, to God.

May God bless us as we enter into these shorter days filling our hearts with an eager expectation of our Lord's coming in the flesh at His Nativity.

Glory to Him who has shown us the light!

With my primatial prayers and blessing for these holy days of anticipation,

+ Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada