



ENCYCLICAL

At the Outset of the New Ecclesiastical Year
(September 1, 2012, Old Style)

From Self-Love to the Love of God by Way of Love for One's Brothers and Sisters The Compassion-Centered Ethos of the Church

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is our wish that we reach the end of the New Ecclesiastical Year, in August of 2013, walking steadfastly towards the Promised Land, to the Kingdom of Heaven, with the guidance, encouragement, and protection of the Most Blessed Theotokos, and with the prayers of our much-revered Elder, Metropolitan Cyprian.

We face ever more complicated obstacles on this journey of ours, since the general ethos of the recent decades in our country has been constantly imbued with the spirit of the world; secularization has been eating away at everything, including even Christian values.

So-called Christians, unfortunately, are also participants in this march of our entire society towards moral decay, and they constitute part of a tragic reality, without possessing—strangely enough—even the most rudimentary self-knowledge, which would lead them to the only resolution of this drama, that is, to repentance that brings renewal.

In the personal, familial, and collective life of contemporary Christians, others—our brothers or sisters—do not occupy a primary place, and perhaps not even the last place, since people forget, if

they are not in fact unaware, that others—our brothers or sisters—are Christ our Savior Himself.

People systematically overlook the fact that the ethos of the Church is centered on compassion: everything in our life revolves around compassion, and compassion is the wellspring of all our blessings.

Genuine ascesis in Christ, as a constant struggle to overcome our selves, is strongly motivated by compassion and by a self-sacrificial exodus from the prison of self-love, such that through love for our brothers and sisters we might be guided towards love for God.

“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (St. Luke 6:36). Only through compassion will we become lovers of God and beloved of God; only through compassion will we become like God and attain to deification.

A harmless, cheap, and compromised Christianity creates complacent and, ultimately, hypocritical Christians, with a superficial spirituality, with a veneer of the Gospel.

“I know many,” says St. John Chrysostomos, “who fast, pray, and sigh, displaying all manner of cheap piety, yet do not give so much as a dime to the afflicted. What profit do they have from the rest of their virtue? The Kingdom of Heaven is closed to them.... The poor and the strangers are the gatekeepers of the Kingdom of God.”

National and international crises are serving as a wake-up call. We find ourselves at a critical turning-point in human history, and we ought, as Christians, to turn the society around us, through our compassion-centered ethos, towards a vision of love for the Divine.

Compassion means ministry to our brothers and sisters, and such ministry has always been a hallmark of true Christians: “To gird yourself about with the towel of ministry is not a degrading thing, but a magnificent thing” in Christ our Savior and God.

† *Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi*
Acting President of the Holy Synod in Resistance

