

Navigating the Storm

By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

Our Holy Fathers have often compared the Church to a ship sailing on the salty sea of this world. By the “salty sea,” they indicate the storms, waves, and winds that hit and attack this ship. The Church of Christ constantly faces all kinds of wars waged by demons because Satan does not want to see it strong and growing—destroying his power in this world and saving the souls of many whom he wants to destroy. As for the Lord of the Church, He often allows turmoil and persecution in order to discipline His faithful children and purify His Church.

Loud is the voice of those who view and consider the Church as an institution of this age rather than the living Body of Christ, composed of believers seeking to sanctify their lives. We may find some who sow doubts and spread unreliable opinions and teachings with their unsubstantiated words, which strengthen the spirit of division and attack and stir the soul with anger and hatred. In this way, the fires of doubt are fueled, and the spirit of discord and division is sown.

In times of distress and turmoil, devout believers resort to prayer for divine mercy, enlightened minds, and calm hearts, so that their actions will lead to solutions that please the true God and save the Church—its people and institutions—from what the sins of believers themselves (first and foremost) are causing. Indeed, the Apostle Paul described the dangers of the Church as “wars without and fears within” (2 Cor 7:5).

Don’t let the stumbling blocks trip you up; they have always been there. The Church is a community of “repentant people,” and repentant people are sinners, not angels. Stumbling blocks have always been the result of the sins of Church members before anyone else. Look up to Christ and imitate Him; pray for your spiritual fathers, that God will inspire them to do what is good for His Church and, therefore, for you; and help them to do so.

I encourage you to pray, turning to God and asking for His light and inspiration. Rest assured that inasmuch as you purify yourselves, the Church will be purified. Do not separate yourselves from it—the Church is you, and you are the Church.

St. John of Kronstadt teaches us that “prayer is an expression of the unity of the Church. By praying for each other, we participate in each other’s lives and share in each other’s burdens.”

My beloved, the Church can only be built with a spirit of prayer, peace, wisdom, and patience. Whoever seeks to make the Church a bride of Christ, without blemish or wrinkle, must be patient, peaceful, humble, and wise, knowing how to think and plan, and willing to be nailed to the cross. My hope is that you will have these qualifications whenever you discuss ecclesiastical and spiritual issues. This is how you will invoke the Lord's grace and blessings on you and the Church.

I encourage you to love, to pray, and to dialogue constructively, and I ask for your prayers.