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Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee
19 January 2015 (Old Style)

To the Clergy and Faithful of the Newly
Established Diocese of Etna and Portland:

Dear Fellow Clergy and Faithful,
Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Asking for your blessings and prayers, and humbly extending my own blessings and prayers to all of you on this auspicious day of the beginning of the *Triodion* and our course toward Pascha, the Feast of Feasts, I hope that we might begin this journey with the humility, self-effacing repentance, and Christian love—for humility before God engenders love for our fellow man, as we set aside the personal highmindedness that somehow blinds us to our need and deep affinity for others—that are so beautifully portrayed, in today's Gospel, by the entreaty of the Publican. And may we be preserved from the self-promoting false humility of the Pharisee, whose self-love tragically separated him from God, even though he thought himself to be a man of religion and spiritual striving. Loving himself more than his fellow man, he lost any true notion of God.

I have just returned from Greece, where, as you all know, I was elected Bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Etna and Portland. Until my enthronement on the second Sunday after Pascha, on the Feast of the Myrrh-Bearing Women, April 26 (New Style), I am simply your designated Bishop; indeed, Metropolitan Demetrios, whom you are commemorating, will be serving as *Locum Tenens* of the Diocese of Etna and Portland until then. Thus, I am writing to you under the letterhead of our study center and monastery, lest I seem to be acting presumptuously. Nonetheless, I can tell you that our new Diocese will consist of the parishes and monastic communities within the following Western American states and Western Canadian provinces: in the U.S.A., California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Alaska, and Hawaii; and in Canada, British Columbia and Alberta. May we one day have parishes in all of those states and provinces.

Some of the parishes belonging to the former American Exarchate of the Holy Synod in Resistance, before our union with the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece, and the Metropolis of Etna, after the union and before the retirement of His Eminence, Metropolitan Chrysostomos, though outside of the geographical territory of the new Diocese of Etna and Portland, have for personal reasons asked to maintain their spiritual ties, for the time-being, to their former Exarchate and Metropolis. The Holy Synod and the President of the Eparchial Synod in

America, Metropolitan Demetrios, have graciously allowed for economy in this exceptional circumstance, and these communities will commemorate me in the Liturgy after the name of Metropolitan Demetrios (a practice that will be followed throughout the diocese for the sake of consistency). They will be listed in our statistics as communities with special status in our new Diocese (informal dependencies), though I will encourage them to cooperate with and honor the local Bishop under whose jurisdiction they find themselves geographically.

After my enthronement, we will further address administrative matters in the Diocese. For the moment, I can tell you that, in accordance with the legal structure of the former Archdiocese and Metropolis of Etna, I would ask that all of our parishes and monastic communities see to it that they are individually incorporated in their respective state or province and obtain federal tax exemption by virtue of the ecclesiastical umbrella of our Diocese and of our broader Church structures (the Holy Synod and the Eparchial Synod in America). Financial and property matters belong to each parish or monastic community. As well, the Cathedral of the Diocese of Portland will retain its Cathedral status, since it is in a large city and has greater promise for expansion and growth than Etna, where a Cathedral, as such, has never been established. Those who held diocesan appointments under the Diocese of Portland will hold those same appointments in our new Diocese (e.g., the *Protopsaltes*, or Chief Chanter of the Cathedral, will hold that same distinction diocese-wide). Our monastery and study center in Etna, where I reside, will simply serve as the administrative center of the Diocese, and it is at the monastery that I will be enthroned.

I should add that the retirement of both Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Etna and Bishop Sergios of Portland at the same time left what appeared to be a vacuum in our ecclesiastical administration. I would warn against any such perception. First, until my enthronement, the new Diocese will not have an official Archpastor; nonetheless, we have the able guidance of a competent and gifted Shepherd in the *Locum Tenens*, Metropolitan Demetrios. Likewise, behind the scenes Metropolitan Chrysostomos and Bishop Sergios have acted responsibly and generously, even since retiring, to assist in a smooth transition from “what was” to what, God willing, soon “will be.” Moreover, I intend to avail myself of the experience of both of these Bishops, asking their advice and guidance with regard to matters with which they are more familiar than I. I assure all of you that the same respect you will surely show them, for their years of sacrifice and service to the Church, will prevail in my every interaction with them. We will form, from all of the elements that have made up our union, a new entity, of course; but this entity will have all of the earmarks of the past, as a consequence of my cooperation with those whose positions I am assuming.

With regard to our new union, all of us come from different places. His Eminence, Metropolitan Chrysostomos and I, though while at Princeton both affiliated with the then independent and ever-memorable Bishop Petros of Astoria, were tonsured monks, ordained to the Priesthood, and elevated to various ranks within the *Ekklesia ton G.O.Ch. Hellados* at a time when it was united (under Archbishop Auxentios), before the process of division and splintering occurred. Within the Synod in Resistance, we and the communities with us in America maintained full communion with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (from which our Church, now united again, received its Episcopacy), from 1994 until 2007 and the tragedy of its reunion—prematurely and unwisely, in the view of many—with the Moscow Patriarchate, when we broke communion with it. At that time we received communities directly from the ROCA, when they decided to join us, a Sister Church, rather than join with Moscow. Many of you have come to the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece (i.e., the *Ekklesia ton G.O.Ch. Hellados*) under Archbishop Chrysostomos (Kiouses), the predecessor of Archbishop Kallinikos, and others through the Holy Orthodox Church of North America and various independent traditionalist groups. Still a handful of others are from the Sister Churches of the Synod in Resistance, the Old Calendarist Churches of Romania and Bulgaria, which followed us into union with the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece last year.

Though we come from *very different* circumstances and backgrounds, almost all of us, as Metropolitan Demetrios insightfully wrote recently, have our roots in the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. We also have our roots in a common distrust of ecumenism and its scion, the New Calendar innovation, and a desire to preserve the Orthodox Faith in its purity and as a gift to those Orthodox

who have deviated from it and to those who are seeking it from outside the Church. It is thus obvious that our new union must look at *what unites us* and not at *what divides us*. If this sounds like an ecumenical formula, it is. It is the ecumenism of those who are united in Truth, where such a formula is a *sine qua non* for Christian oneness in love and the avoidance of the deadly sins of contention and fruitless argumentation against which St. Paul warns. If the ecumenists have made this formula a path to betrayal and compromise in the Faith, we must make it a hallmark of Christian reason, charity, and fellowship. What binds us together in our Orthodox confession, despite our different experiences, is what is essential in the Faith: that “golden thread” that holds together, if I may borrow an image expressed by the late Father Georges Florovsky, the fabric of the Orthodox Church community, where we hold to what our Savior gave, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers preserved, as a Patristic axiom states. In Orthodox union, we can accomplish love, and in love all differences are reconciled, and what was separate becomes one.

Penultimately, I would like to invite all of you, whenever you can, to visit our monastery and convent in Etna. They can serve as a center where you can retreat and where we can all get to know one another. I would also hope that as many of you as can will be present for my enthronement, which, though we wish to keep it low-key and modest, so as not to dishonor the two Bishops who still honor the Throne of the combined Diocese that I will assume, is open to all, and especially, of course, the clergy. I must also, as though to follow a hand reached out with one withdrawn (and please do not take my words in this way), humbly apologize, and do so with immense embarrassment, that we have extremely limited guest facilities at our monastery and convent in Etna, and our tiny parish, which has grown smaller and smaller over the years, simply does not have enough lay people to offer ample accommodations. I am afraid that we will have to ask those who attend to find accommodations either in the one small motel in Etna (plain but clean and modestly priced) or in Yreka (which is 27 miles from Etna), just off Interstate 5, where there are numerous motels serving travellers (also clean and modestly priced). As the time comes closer for the enthronement service, we will supply more information. I can say, however, that after the service, we will serve a complimentary celebratory meal to all who attend.

And finally, I want to inform you that, having been kindly contacted by the webmaster of the present website of the Portland Diocese, we hope, with her as a co-worker, to develop a website for our new Diocese that can serve as a source of news and information for all of our communities. This will take some time, so I ask for your patience. I would also ask that any of you who are interested send your names and addresses to the monastery here in Etna, so that we can place you on the mailing list for “Orthodox Tradition,” our monastery journal, which contains a section on Church and Diocesan news which will no doubt be of interest.* I will note that the journal, which has a circulation of about 1,000 individuals, is read widely by Orthodox outside of our circles. It is therefore financed with a modest subscription fee (\$15.00 yearly). But we gladly send it *gratis* to clergy and to those who cannot afford the subscription, which is entirely voluntary. (It is collected once a year, in September, when we include an envelope for subscriptions in the third and last annual issue. Donations *are not matched* against names and addresses of those to whom the journal is sent.) I would therefore ask that no one hesitate to ask for it because of an inability to subscribe.

Asking for your prayers and good thoughts, once again, and wishing all of you a wonderful Lent, I very much look forward to seeing and visiting you in person sometime following my enthronement after Pascha.

Least Among Monks, † Bishop Auxentios

* Send to Archimandrite Gregory at <frg@ctosonline.org>.