

His Beatitude, Metropolitan TIKHON
Remarks to the St Vladimir's Seminary Classes of 2020 & 2021

May 15, 2021

Christ is risen!

Your Eminence and Your Graces, Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers, Father Chad, our esteemed seminary president, and members of the seminary administration, distinguished faculty and hard-working staff, venerable members of the alumni and Board of Trustees, beloved seminarians, honored graduates of the Class of 2020 and 2021, together with your families and friends:

It is a joy to be gathered together again here at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary on this beautiful day on which we celebrate the commencement exercises for the class of 2020 and the class of 2021. It is a particular joy to congratulate today's graduates and to offer you a word of exhortation on this significant moment in your lives.

In the years that you have spent at St. Vladimir's Seminary, you have been taught, from your very first day on campus, that the most important aspect of seminary is that it is a community. This is indeed true, as you surely know. You have lived as a community, prayed as a community, studied as a community, and eaten as a community. And as individual members of the community, each of you has striven to help the community. Each of you has volunteered time, each one has gone out of his or her way to be kind, each one has cared for the wellbeing of the rest. Perhaps every once in a while, you have failed a bit at this, but that is what human beings do. Your overall effort, your daily, consistent, faithful effort, is what matters. And indeed, you made it to today, working together as a community.

In looking back at your experience, you may wonder how it was even possible for all of you to live together as a community. This is because living in close quarters with people is not easy. The newly-glorified Saint Sophrony of Essex said that in order to establish a strong monastic community, you have to shed blood. He spoke this of his own experience. And your experience here at St. Vladimir's Seminary is perhaps not much different.

But this miracle of community life did blossom, in spite of, or perhaps because of the various difficulties. This miracle happened because your community is rooted in Christ, who says: “I am the Vine, and you are the branches” (John 15:5). Here, at this seminary, you have been branches of the one Vine, your daily existence rooted in acquiring the knowledge of Him.

Now, as you move forward, as you continue to grow, I urge you all: be confident that if you remain united to Christ, you will bear fruit. You will bear fruit for the benefit of the world, if you are united to Him.

Our Lord Himself says this with the words that complete the above quotation: “I am the Vine, and you are the branches. **He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit**, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5).

Apart from communion and unity with Christ, apart from being in community with Him, you can do nothing. On the other hand, if you abide in Christ, you will bear fruit.

In whatever ministry you are called to, you will have tribulations, temptations, trials, and stumbling blocks, both foreseeable and unforeseeable. But through all of those, you always will have Jesus Christ—He who has overcome death and the world and given us life.

Christ has given us being, existence, and purpose through the Cross, and through sufferings. And he did this so, not so that we might suffer ourselves, but that through our shared suffering we might have unity. As He prayed to the Father: “The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one” (John 17:22).

Christ desires all mankind to be united. He wants us all to exist as a unity, a communion, a community. The pandemic of the past year has revealed many things to us. But one thing that it has particularly made manifest is how atomized human society is. The unity that Christ desires for us is assailed on all sides and from all quarters. We are increasingly becoming atomized, that is reduced to individual particles to the point that we are losing what it means to be a human being, what it means to be a family, what it means to create bonds of friendship.

I would encourage you to take a lesson from your experience of seminary life, the blessed experience you have had of living in a Christ-centered community, and take it with you,

wherever you go. It will help you to build new Christ-centered communities and to graft new branches onto the one Vine. It will help you to bear fruit, so that others may bear even greater fruit.

The world will tell you to think big. I would say that it's better to think small.

The world will tell you to be confident. I would say that it's better to be confident in your insecurity.

The world will offer you images of virtual community and fake friendship. But it is better to devote your energy to creating genuine community and true friendship through sacrifice, kindness, and selflessness. For this, you have the example of Christ Himself. May He inspire you in this manner and bless all of you, and keep you in all that you do for the Glory of God.

Christ is risen!