

**Keynote Address Of
His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas of Detroit
2011 Metropolis of Detroit Clergy-Laity Assembly and
Metropolis of Detroit Philoptochos Conference
Saints Constantine and Helen Church
Westland, Michigan
September 29, 2011**

Beloved Reverend Clergy of our Holy Metropolis,
Honored Members of the Metropolis Council
Esteemed Women of our Metropolis Philoptochos Council
Honored Lay Representatives of our Parish Councils,
Distinguished Delegates of the Sisterhood of the Philoptochos.
Beloved Family in Christ, all:

Here in this house of worship, in this temple of the living God, we come together as the body of Christ. Here we gather rejoicing in the radiance of this sacred place, illumined by the glory that shines from the Holy Altar, that shines from the Holy Icons, that shines from each candle that you lit with prayer as you entered the church today. Coming from seven states – from Arkansas and Indiana, from Kentucky and Michigan, from Ohio and western New York and Tennessee – you, the people of God, come holding aloft in your hearts the flames of faith nurtured in your local communities, from your own house of worship, with the intercessions of your own patron saint ... you come holding on high your own community's heart of love. And thus, we come together now as the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church as she is manifested in our beloved and God-saved Metropolis of Detroit. Even so, today this sunny, spacious, luminous sanctuary is in its own way an icon of you, the Church of God, who are radiant in the Resurrection of our Lord, who empowers us for every good and perfect work.

With paternal joy and pride and with every archpastoral blessing, I welcome you to this Congress. You have sacrificed time and treasure to be here; may the Lord Jesus Christ Himself reward you for your efforts on behalf of the Church which He ransomed with His own blood. From the beginning of our work together this week, I thank God for the talents He has bestowed so richly on you, and I thank you for the stewardship of these talents for the good of our Metropolis. May the same Lord who guided safely the people of Israel by the pillar of fire through the

wilderness, guide us and illumine our path as His people seeking the way into the Kingdom He has prepared for us. And so we begin.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.” (Genesis 1:1-4)

Darkness was the primordial reality. The story of Creation begins with the simple and original fact of darkness and chaos. The formless void constitutes the condition of a world yet untouched by the love and power of God.

And so the first act of Creation, the first impulse of overflowing love to come forth from the heart of the eternal Father, is the presence of Light:

“Let there be light!” καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός γενηθήτω φῶς καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς (Genesis 1:3)

How deeply these words resonate within us. Each of us knows the sense of joy and calm that we have when in the midst of darkness – there is light. We experience this anew each Holy Saturday night, when the undying light comes forth from the altar and is shared with God's people. “Δεῦτε λάβετε φῶς” “Let there be light!” Γενηθήτω φῶς And with the light comes joy and exultation, with it comes life and renewal and reassurance.

To be sure, this first act of Creation is so important that it is echoed even on the fourth day, when the Lord made the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night and the stars to shine for signs and seasons. “Let there be light!” Γενηθήτω φῶς is the continual call of divine command in every encounter with darkness, for the God who is light and in whom there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5), is always the Creator who dispels the darkness and gloom of the physical realm.

But not only of the physical realm. In the spiritual realm, too, darkness and gloom exist as the primordial reality, ever since the rebellion of Satan and the fall of Adam. In the world of men, where the clarity of reason and the glory of divine

likeness should forever shine, there was instead the darkness of sin and the gloom of death.

It is into this darkness that God the Father again spoke that creative command: “Let there be light!” And so He sent His only-begotten Son into the world, the Logos, the Word who was in the beginning and who was with God and who was God. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:4-5) The Light of the world shone forth for the people who sat in darkness and the shadow of death; it shone forth in the Star over the manger of Bethlehem, and from the Cross on Golgotha, and from within the empty tomb, and even unto the depths of Hades. The Light shone forth in the brightness of the dawn of Pascha and in the glory of the Ascension and in the tongues of fire at the third hour of Pentecost.

And yet despite all this, there remains in our world *darkness*. There remain circumstances and societies and situations untouched by the love and power of God as He is known in the person of Jesus Christ. And so the Lord calls forth even today, “Let there be light!”

But my beloved family in God we must ask “What is this light that the Lord now creates?” Brothers and sisters, it is you. “You are the light of the world.” Glory be to this Savior Christ the Lord who has called us by His own name of Light.

This year we have chosen these few remarkable words from the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Gospel according to Matthew: “You are the light of the world.” But then to whom does Christ speak? To the “luminaries” of society? To the rich and famous, to the movers and shakers?

No.

“You are the light of the world,” He says. But then are these words addressed to the spiritual élite, to the Sadducees in their zeal for ancient traditions, or to the Pharisees in their scruples for precepts and commandments, or to the disciples of John the Baptist in their fierce ascetic struggles?

No.

As Christ surveyed the crowd that had gathered on that hill in Galilee at the beginning of His ministry, He saw neither accomplished saints nor learned theologians nor renowned wonderworkers. He saw ordinary people: fishermen and

accountants and tradesmen and servants. He saw a throng of “nobodies” in the estimation of the world.

And to *these* He declared, “You are the light of the world.” For the Lord, who sees with the eyes of eternal truth, does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). By virtue of their character and their desire to be closer to God, these ordinary folk shine in the Lord’s eyes. They came to Him as seekers, not as arrivers in the Kingdom of God. They came to Him, not as perfect, but as *imperfect* people *seeking* perfection. And for this reason, for their holy hunger and thirst for righteousness, Christ calls them blessed and confers on them the name of “Light.”

Today, brothers and sisters, as I look out across this radiant sanctuary, I am called by the Lord to see you through His eyes and so I too behold this same wonder. By Hollywood standards, not one of us is a “star.” And yet I declare to you, beloved of the Metropolis of Detroit, by the very Word of God, YOU are the light of the world. You are the ones who shine with the beauty of holiness. Not like the false light of the celebrity stardom by which our modern culture is so blinded. But with the true light of love for God and yearning for the good which is in Him: you are the light of the world in each and every corner of this Holy Metropolis.

“You are the Light of the world.” But what does it mean to be light?

Firstly we must recognize that light has a tremendous power of attraction. There is something innate in living things that seeks out light. Plants grow toward the light, and even bend themselves in the course of the day to follow the sun. Moths and other insects congregate around the lamps of our porch or garage.

And people are drawn to light. Car dealers know this, and so they shine giant searchlights into the sky in hopes that we will follow the beam to its source. Spotlights and neon signs and flashing arrows all shine with the intent of bringing us in as customers. And even when we forsake the bright lights of the big city and set out for the wilderness, as we walk under the night sky we raise our eyes irresistibly, not to the path beneath our feet, but to the moon and stars above.

Because of this quality of light, its power to draw unto itself, Christ tells His disciples, “A city set on a hill cannot be hid.” (Matt. 5:14) Even the flicker of one small candle or the glow of a single hearth gives away the presence of human

settlement and brings sojourners near. Lost in the darkness we look for a light. Light attracts. Therefore, says the Lord: “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16)

So we too, beloved in the Lord, are the light of the world. Our task is to attract all those around us to our calling and way of life by the irresistible flame of our good works for God.

Let the world see your kindness to the stranger and to the outcast!

Let the world see your generosity to the hungry and the homeless!

Let the world see your care for the sick and aged and dying!

Let the world see your faithfulness to your spouses!

Let the world see your modesty in dress and comportment!

Let the world see your love for one another in the church, for by this shall all men know that you are the Lord’s disciples (cf. John 13:35)!

We know that some of those who sit in the darkness – out of the Light – will jeer; some will shun. But others will see your good works and rejoice that there can be such a life, one with clarity and certainty and focus. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house (cf. Matt. 5:15). You are not called to be self-enclosed – to radiate your light only upon yourselves – but to share the beauty of your light with the world.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have a calling! It is a calling to live consciously before the eyes of others with a view to shining the light of happiness and wholeness upon them, with a view to drawing them to catch on fire with the love of God! At Pascha we sing, Φωτίζου φωτίζου ἡ νέα Ιερουσαλήμ “Shine, shine, O new Jerusalem!” That Jerusalem is you, beloved. Let your neighbors see and be glad, as you shine upon them in your neighborhoods and in your workplaces and in your PTAs and in your service clubs.

Secondly we know that while the light that we shine should be a light of attraction, one of the natural properties of that light is also one of healing.

All of us know this power from our own experience. Nothing brings strength to body and soul like a day in the sun. We now know from science that the body draws an essential element from sunlight, Vitamin D, and that the absence of Vitamin D causes all sorts of problems for physical and mental health. In fact, in

some of the northern states, doctors are seeing a return of the ancient scourge of rickets in children who spend less and less time outdoors and more time in front of computer and television screens.

But beyond that nutritional power of light, medical science has derived all kinds of new therapies from different kinds of light: lasers for surgery and infrared beams for arthritis and ultraviolet rays for skin disorders and full-spectrum light for sleep and mood disorders. Light has an amazing curative power, above and beyond its most basic usage by the doctor or the dentist who shines a bright light on us simply to see what the problem is.

“You are the light of the world.” You, people of God, are healers. You are not all trained to set bones or administer CPR. You do not necessarily have miraculous gifts like Saint Panteleimon. But by the light of Christ that shines from you simply as a believer in the Lord, you radiate a power of healing for this world. Some in greater measure, some in lesser measure, but all Christians in some measure are a source of spiritual Vitamin D to society.

And your healing power comes through your trust in the ascended Christ the Ruler of all things in heaven and on earth. In Him we surrender our claim to be masters of our fate and captains of our soul. We cede our sovereignty to the all-wise Creator, and in this surrender we find peace of heart and mind and serenity of soul. The glow of godly confidence and calmness is like medicine to a society ridden with anxiety and fear.

Your healing power for the world also comes through the strength of your faith in the Church’s unalterable teachings. In a world that changes like the surface of the sea, moment by moment never the same, the timeless and changeless Orthodox faith stands like a lighthouse beckoning a dazed and weary world to a haven of hope.

Your healing power comes through the self-control that you acquire through the ascetic disciplines of the Church. In a society addicted to consumerism and gluttony, your ability to say “No” to basic appetites gives hope to those who see the futility of the endless treadmill of buying and consuming.

The prophet Daniel spoke of you as the light of the world in these words: “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.” (Daniel 12:3) As you shine, you heal a world stricken ill by sin and sadness.

And my friends, there is another quality, a third quality of light. It bears pointing out that the light that attracts and heals is also the light that *exposes*. For in truth, not all things are attracted to light. Turn over a log and you expose a great swarm of creatures that will quickly scuttle away for a new place of darkness. Some things fear exposure, fear the light.

What is true for the world of insects and animals holds true also in the world of men. The Gospel of John spells this out so clearly (3:19-21): “And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.”

From the beginning of the Gospel the Christian way of life has stirred up opposition and hatred, simply because it stands in such stark contrast to the darkness of this world, to the ways hatred and manipulation and abuse of power.

A Christian family is characterized by mutual servanthood rather than a struggle of wills.

A Christian business is characterized by honesty and fairness rather than profit motive.

A Christian church is characterized by the mutual respect and voluntary cooperation of its members rather than by power politics and demagoguery.

For this reason the Lord Jesus said, “The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave.” (Matt. 20:25-26)

But there are those who love the darkness of greed and power, those who view the Christian way of meekness as the ultimate expression of weakness. Such people regard our way of life as a disease to be eradicated and to be replaced by survival of the fittest, they deal in life according to Darwin, Malthus, and Nietzsche – ignoring the creative design of the One True God.

In the face of such opposition, Saint Paul counseled the Christians of Ephesus: “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the

wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” (Eph. 5:6-11)

And it is this light that exposes the darkness, simply by its existence. The very presence of light, the very presence of a Christian witness, draws antagonism, for some regard the light of Christ as an invasion of privacy. “If you were of the world,” the Lord told His disciples at the Mystical Supper, “the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:19)

This is a very real and present dynamic even in our experience, even in a land where the Gospel encounters no formal persecution. The Christian who lets his light shine will know derision and exclusion. This is a given! Not just for what we do, but for what we don’t do, for all the ways in which we don’t go with the flow, for the sense of guilt and shame that we provoke simply by the silent refusal to play the game like everyone else.

You should be aware that this dynamic can occur even in our parishes! Many times the opposition that your priest encounters arises simply because he unwittingly stirs up pangs of conscience in those who prefer the darkness of materialism or power-hungriness.

“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness,” wherever they might arise. Dare to take a stand! Dare to be different! There is a saying that “Only dead fish go with the flow.” The Christian should always be swimming upstream towards the source of life, not being carried away by the latest current of social whims and fads.

And my friends, there is a fourth fundamental quality to the nature of light: it is not intended to be contained. For light to be light, it must extend itself in every direction and as far as it can. Light cannot be captured or held. Light is the ultimate image of freedom.

“Now you are light in the Lord,” (Ephesians 5:8) says Saint Paul. As Christians we have been released from bondage to sin and death and set free to serve the

Lord. Just as the goal of light is to reach out and fill all of space with its energy and glow, so as Christians we express our freedom best by the choices we make daily to reach out and share the light. At the *Anastasi* Service of Pascha, we stretch out our hands and extend the light of our candles to be shared with everyone in our reach. And have you never noticed that whenever you have shared your Easter light, the power of your light is never cut in half – it remains the same, just multiplied. Let this picture be iconic of every moment of our lives, as we strive to extend ourselves in every way for the spread of the inextinguishable light of Christ.

In practical terms, how do we recommit ourselves to being the light of the world? What can we do to increase our luminosity for the sake of the Gospel?

On a personal level, we must strive at all times to live true to the teachings of the Lord. Christ entrusted to us a ministry of reconciliation. But we cannot pretend to be true ambassadors of this ministry if we are not ourselves seeking to make reconciliation with those who are nearest to us. The Apostle John says clearly (1 John 2:9), “He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in darkness until now.” If your brother or sister has anything against you, waste no time in pursuing reconciliation. If you have anything against a brother or sister, Christ puts the burden on you to address the problem and heal the rift.

Again, on a personal level, we can all recommit ourselves to deepening our knowledge of the Orthodox faith and life of prayer. If we truly believe that Christ is the light, how can we be apathetic about coming to know Him more intimately and thoroughly? Especially among you as leaders of the Church there is no place for ignorance or superstition. You should be ready with answers that are correct and timely and in accord with the changeless teachings of the Church.

When Moses came down from the mountain, his face shone with such radiance that the Israelites begged him to wear a veil to hide the glow. Moses became a living light just because he spent time basking in the light of God’s glory. We must do the same. We must, through attention to worship and doctrine, through dwelling in the presence of Christ day by day, soak up the glory of God until we become radiators of that glory ourselves. “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.” (2 Cor. 4:6) My family in Christ, remember that all the darkness in the world cannot put out the light of a

single candle. And if you or I are called to be that candle...think of how God wants us to shine!

We have said that the light serves to expose the works of darkness. This is done even within ourselves. There is, for all of us who would be children of light, a time and a place for self-examination, for self-accusation, and for confession of sin. The Apostle John has written (1 John 1:7), “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” This purification in Christ’s blood comes through the sacramental life of the Church—through confession and communion and through prayers and stewardship and alms.

And then, at the level of parish endeavor, we can serve as the light of the world to the communities around us only if we make a conscious effort to let our light shine and to not let it sit under a bushel. Even in this time of budget-cutting and belt-tightening, even now I challenge each of you to find a way in your parish to increase the budget for outreach and evangelism. I challenge all of you to plan specific opportunities and special Sundays for calling back those who have strayed from the Church. I encourage all of our parishes to continue to aid your local soup kitchens and homeless shelters and food banks. I encourage all of you to establish programs and ministries for the express purpose of spreading the light of our Paschal candles literally and spiritually to the world around us.

My Beloved Family in Christ, "You are the Light of the World."

But make no mistake about it, if we are not standing in the light of Christ, if we have not taken that light into our hearts, how will we even see the path in front of us?

It is not possible for us to be the light of the world if we cannot see five steps in front of us.

You are the light of the world – and your light must shine before you wherever you go. Light in your homes, in the hospitals and the nursing homes, light in your workplaces and offices, light in your neighborhood, light to your children, light to your relatives...yes, you are called to be that light..

You are the light of the world – and your light must be the beacon that shines in the darkness bringing the lost to Christ's holy Church. This age more than ever needs the healing presence of Christ's light of hope, a hope that gives purpose and meaning. Your light can be the beacon that draws your neighbor or your friend to a place where the Living God lives and dwells and reigns forever. You are light where people live in fear; you are light where there is doubt about God; you are light where there is suffering and illness. You are the light of the sun that assures us in the day and the light of the stars that guides us in darkness.

You are the light of the world – and so together we must stand and shine brightly in an age that seeks to put out the light of faith in God and replace it with the darkness of uncertainty and self-absorption. You are the light that will challenge the darkness. You are the light that the darkness cannot hide. For even one candle cannot be put out by the darkest night or the greatest evil.

You are the light of the world – called to share your light with others. You are called to tell of the glory and the wonder of God. And remember that every time you share the light you hold in your heart – your light is never diminished. The power of God's light is to set the world on fire for love of Him.

Beloved in the Lord, I leave you with these few words today. You are the light of the world – so shine! For all that you have received, and for all that you will receive of the Light of God in this world and in eternity... Shine, and Shine forever! Amen.

