



238. Aug. 22/Sept. 4, 1976 Martyr Agathonicus

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Dear Father Neketas,

Evlogeite!

Alexey Young has passed on your message to us. I would like to assure you that we were not offended or disturbed by your letter to us; we saw there nothing but a sincere and concerned expression of your opinion. But perhaps you thought that my letter to you was written in anger or disturbance? I assure you that it was not—it was merely an attempt to reply just as frankly as you had written to us. I really think that such frank exchanges are worth more than any number of merely polite and correct letters.

What to do?—there is a “disagreement” between us! Really, this “disagreement” is deeper than both of us, and it will not go away with just a pleasant or even a frank talk between us. It can be lived through and surmounted in time, but it will take a good dose of basic humility on all sides, which in practical terms means a willingness to admit that not one of us, or any group of us, has “all the answers” or is some kind of “infallible expert.” The big questions facing Orthodoxy today, from ecumenism on down, are often complex and with subtle overtones or ramifications for which sledgehammer tactics don’t give sufficient answers. I suspect the basic problem among us today is less one of specific disagreements than it is one of different “psychologies” and approaches to the questions of the day.

Let us all try to be a little “aloof” and not quite so passionately involved in defining the details of the big disputes of the day. Who precisely is a heretic? (Demetrios—that’s one question. Patriarch German of Serbia—another question. Fr. Justin Popovich—still another question.) When precisely does responsibility for the heresy of a chief hierarch spread to the whole church body? Where are the precise lines between simply not having communion with a hierarch or jurisdiction, regarding them as schismatics, and recognizing that they have no grace? Must we take a “definite stand” on all these questions, even if Orthodox zealots themselves disagree on them? If we do, it will mean schisms and church disturbances without end.

We welcome a further frank exchange of views and concerns, and ask your prayers for us.

With love in Christ our Saviour,
Seraphim, monk