



ARCHIMANDRITE OLEG (CHEREPANIN)

Pastoral Address to the Orthodox Faithful and the Russian-Speaking Community in the Kingdom of Thailand

My dear fathers, brothers and sisters, spiritual children, and compatriots: peace be with you!

Recently, our Church in Thailand and I personally have received numerous appeals from concerned and bewildered compatriots. People are deeply troubled by the large-scale inspections being conducted by the Ministry of Interior and the law-enforcement authorities of the Kingdom, as well as by statements from the country's senior leadership concerning immigration policy and the conduct of business by foreigners. As a pastor who has lived in this blessed land for more than a quarter of a century, I consider it my duty to address you with words of spiritual guidance, clarification, and consolation.

In these troubling days for our community, the Church stands together with you, her flock, and is ready to share the trials that have fallen to our lot, trusting in the mercy of God and in the traditional goodwill extended to guests by the authorities of the Kingdom of Thailand.

First and foremost, I earnestly urge you not to give way to panic. The Lord will not forsake His faithful, and fear is a poor counsellor. We must look upon what is happening soberly and with careful discernment. My words may not be received by everyone in the same way, but I will speak openly: I regard the position of the Thai authorities with deep understanding. Thailand is not a foreign land to me, and defending its interests, just as defending the lawful rights of our compatriots, is my direct pastoral duty.

Thailand is a sovereign, deeply religious, and hospitable Kingdom which, for decades, has given us shelter and the opportunity to live, work, and pray in peace. Hospitality, however, must not be mistaken for unlimited licence. Regrettably, in recent years we have witnessed some foreigners violating the principles of this hospitality: establishing non-transparent business arrangements,

using improper means to acquire land, disregarding the local culture, and sometimes introducing destructive habits into this country.

The actions currently being taken by the Government of Thailand do not constitute persecution of foreigners. They are the lawful, just, and necessary efforts of the state to protect its economy, the security of its citizens, and the integrity of its laws. The firm position adopted by the country's leadership on this issue arises from the immense burden of responsibility borne by those entrusted with governing the nation. Have we truly learned anything new? Were we unaware of the existence of semi-legal visa arrangements, risky company-registration practices, and the use of nominee shareholders? Have not many people simply chosen to turn a blind eye to these things? All this has led to a situation in which even lawful visa applications submitted by reputable companies for essential specialists are now subjected to strict and prolonged scrutiny. Need we be reminded of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

We must honestly acknowledge the bitter truth and confront the spiritual ailments affecting our community. The violations involving land purchases and business activities of which the authorities speak are real. But I wish to go even deeper. Regrettably, some have come to view Thailand as a place where they may escape personal responsibility and pursue an easy and idle life. Some who have come here have chosen a path of spiritual emptiness, devoid of constructive purpose and even of the most basic desire to work honestly. They have brought with them a culture of selfishness, idleness, and dependency.

Look at our churches in times of peace and prosperity. Sadly, those most in need of spiritual awakening are often nowhere to be seen. Many remember God only when they encounter serious difficulties, approaching the Church with a consumer mentality. Yet, after receiving help and consolation, they return once again to their idle way of life.

I have the deepest respect for the compassion shown by our faithful parishioners, but we must remember the stern warning of the holy Apostle Paul: "If any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). It is one thing to extend a helping hand to someone who has worked sincerely but has temporarily fallen into hardship, or to assist the sick and the elderly. It is quite another to show thoughtless and indiscriminate pity. Such pity does not save a person; it merely reinforces spiritual idleness. Without lawful status, medical insurance, or legitimate means of support, people find themselves in crisis, create disorder around them, and then place the burden of their problems upon the parishes. Through their provocative conduct, this irresponsible segment of the community disrupts the lives of others and damages the reputation of all law-abiding compatriots. The Church does not reject those who have stumbled, but she calls upon them to come to their senses and begin living with full responsibility before God and society.

Today, I wish firmly to assure each one of you: honest and law-abiding foreigners who respect Thailand, its King, His Majesty's Government, its faith, and its laws have absolutely nothing to fear.

I also address the members of our flock who are citizens of Thailand. Your numbers continue to grow, and you are a source of joy and consolation to our Church. You have every right to defend the interests of your homeland and to expect its guests to respect your way of life. Yet do not allow the state's strict measures to embitter you against foreigners. Be steadfast in defending your national values, while showing love and goodwill towards those guests who treat all that is dear to you with reverence. Shun every feeling of superiority or exclusivity. Holy Scripture teaches us: "There is neither Jew nor Greek... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). And I would add: neither Thai, nor Russian, nor American—but Christ is all, and in all.

Since 1999, the Orthodox Church in Thailand has established and developed its parishes exclusively within the framework of Thai law. All our churches and projects are transparent before God and the state, and it is precisely for this reason that we enjoy the abiding respect of the Royal Family and the Government.

My dear ones, I call upon you to observe strictly the immigration requirements and laws of the Kingdom. If anyone has doubts regarding the legality of his or her status, bring your documents into full compliance with the law without delay, with the assistance of licensed lawyers. If, through lack of knowledge, you have made mistakes in the conduct of your affairs, discuss them with the appropriate authorities. When they see your sincerity and your desire to correct everything in accordance with the law, I am confident that they will assist you for the sake of the common good. The present situation concerns the Thai authorities just as much as it concerns us. The national character of this country seeks peace and harmony in every sphere of life. Remember that we are guests here. In our every action, word, and outward appearance, we must set an example of Christian piety, modesty, and gratitude. Abandon every attempt to circumvent the law. Remember the words of the Apostle Paul: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God" (Romans 13:1).

Remain at peace, pray, work honestly, and give thanks to Thailand for its warmth and kindness. Then no inspection need disturb the peace and security of your home.

I invoke God's blessing upon you all.

Archimandrite Oleg.