

# Patriarchate Of The Old Catholic Church



Mar + + Andrew Mathew, C.J.  
Patriarch

## PATRIARCHAL LETTER

On the 106th Anniversary of the Dormition of St. Matthew of South Mimms

(Archbishop Arnold Harris Mathew) † December 19, 1919

Apostolic Blessing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Beloved,

In a spirit of faith, recollection and deep gratitude to God, **We address you on this holy day when the Church commemorates the 106th anniversary of the Dormition of our holy Patriarch and Defender of the Faith, St. Matthew of South Mimms, whom the Lord called to his eternal rest on December 19, 1919, after a life marked by fidelity, sacrifice and trial.**

It is not only a matter of remembering a historical date, but of discerning a legacy, of examining our ecclesial conscience, and of renewing our commitment to the work that God entrusted to his Church through this faithful servant.

On this anniversary, We wish to invite you to reflect deeply on two writings of His Holiness Mathew, which are of singular importance, born in their time, but which retain full validity and relevance for the Church today.

## I. The Church is not a private construction or an independent association

The first of these is the **Pastoral Letter promulgated on August 6, 1915**, addressed to the entire **Old Catholic Church**, in which, after the customary greetings, he expresses the following:

*"It seems pertinent to Us in the exercise of Our Office as your Chief Pastor, to point out to you that We cannot, as Christians or as Catholics, allow Our Holy Church and Religion to be placed on a level with other religions or philosophical systems, which, however excellent their followers may be and however good some of their maxims and precepts may be, they are not essentially Christian or Catholic.*

*The Catholic Religion is the final and complete Revelation made by Almighty God to the human race. It admits without hesitation, dispute or question, but it must be accepted obediently, fully, and with absolute faith and trust in the Word and Promises of God incarnate.*

*We, therefore, feel that owing to various expressions of belief or disbelief on the part of the members of the Theosophical Society, and of the Order of the Star in the East, who have come under Our notice, We must definitely and absolutely forbid Our Clergy and Faithful, to join any of these Institutions, and if any of them already belong to those Institutions, we require them at the same time, upon receipt of this notice, to renounce their membership. Catholics are not allowed to accept doctrines such as the transmigration of souls, or reincarnation; Nor can he accept the very painful and blasphemous assertion that our Divine Lord Jesus Christ, far from being what the Nicene Creed describes him, is simply the reincarnation of some other probably mystical personage.*

*We deeply regret to have to condemn absolutely and irrevocably any association, on the part of our faithful people, with societies that tolerate the publication of what, in our eyes, is blasphemy and paganism, presented in a seductive and dangerous guise.*

*We exhort You, Our beloved Fathers and Our dearest Children, to render to Us that obedience which is due to You in a matter concerning your spiritual welfare, and We do not doubt that You will nobly and heroically sacrifice your private judgment and your personal predilections, should these be touched by Our comments, in order that the Unity of Faith and the Bond of Peace may remain inviolable between Us.*

*We recognize the many excellences of outstanding members of the Societies to which we have alluded, and we freely acknowledge and bless their many philanthropic and other good works.*

*We pray that Grace and light will be sent to them. These dear souls loved by God, are looking for a "Master of the World," and that Master is already here, and they will be recognized by all who*

*pray well for guidance and light, in that Divine Institution to which Almighty God Himself said, "Go, teach all nations, preach the Gospel to every creature, and behold, I am with you always, even to the consummation of the world."*

*Faith is summed up in our Catechism, which everyone should study diligently, and having done this, they should make it the basis of daily meditation and self-examination.*

*GIVEN under Our hand and seal, this feast of the Transfiguration of our Divine Lord Jesus Christ, 1915.*

++ ARNOLD HARRIS MATHEW  
Archbishop and Metropolitan  
St. Willibrord's Oratory, 28,  
Red Lion Square, London, W.C.

St. Matthew of South Mimms spoke with prophetic clarity in his time, when he warned that **the Catholic Religion and the Old Catholic Church cannot be placed on the same level as other religious or philosophical systems**, however noble their intentions may seem or some of their members virtuous. For him – and for the Catholic faith – the Church is not one option among many, but **the final and complete Revelation of God made to humanity in Jesus Christ**.

For this reason, he firmly forbade his clergy and faithful to belong to **non-Catholic societies**, which, under seductive appearances, tolerated doctrines incompatible with the apostolic faith and undermined the revealed truth and unity of the Church.

Today, that same warning rings out with new urgency. Churches **that are headless, self-erected, separate, independent or detached from true and valid apostolic succession** are no less dangerous than those societies that our Patriarch condemned. The names and contexts change, but the error remains: **to pretend to live a Christian faith without a Church, without a visible head, without real communion, without apostolic obedience**.

We exhort you, therefore, with charity, but with patriarchal firmness:  
**Do not allow yourselves to be seduced by ecclesial models that are easy, autonomous or without roots**, which promise freedom, but engender fragmentation, and which speak of the Spirit while separating themselves from the Body that he himself gives life.

## **II. The Church in the Hour of Trial: Poverty, Fidelity and Hope**

The second text is taken from the open letter to Randall Thomas Davison, Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of the Church of England, entitled *The Episcopal Odyssey*, on November 1, 1915, in celebration of All Saints' Day. *"An Episcopal Odyssey"cxviii and headed it with the words "Ergo inimicus vobis factus sum verum dicens vobis"cxix*

The conclusion of this booklet is particularly significant in the time that it summarized the situation of St. Mathew's church too precisely:

*"Our body is small and extremely poor: So poor, in fact, that his destitution defies description.*

*My clergy receive no remuneration or emoluments, and work without hope, and, it seems, without prospect of any earthly reward for their labors. There is not a man with me today who has not endangered everything, and some of my clergymen have made sacrifices which I would not be permitted to mention, in order to accomplish the work which we honestly believe Almighty God has committed to us. So far we see little result beyond failure and disappointment. The greatness of our work in the interest of Catholic consolidation is the measure of our trial and, when we have proved ourselves most worthy, we can be blessed to the extent that our work has not been totally in vain. The Movement will continue in spite of all difficulties, and in spite of the persecution and contempt of our enemies, however serious it may be." Arb. ++Arnold Harris Mathew.*

The second teaching that we must contemplate today arises from the state in which the Church was at the time of St. Matthew's death. He described himself with pain, but without bitterness, a reality marked by **smallness, extreme poverty and the absence of any human reward.**

Its clergy worked without salary, without security, without earthly prospects. Many had risked everything. Some had made sacrifices that could not even be narrated. And, humanly speaking, the fruits seemed scarce, if not non-existent.

And yet, **they did not abandon the work.**

They did not betray the faith.

They did not change the doctrine to draw crowds.

They did not negotiate the truth to ease the ordeal.

They did not assume justifications according to their limitations.

They did not pretend to be what they were not.

They did not invent excuses to justify their failures.

They did not put their rational conclusions and personal agendas as a priority.

This memory challenges us directly.

Today we enjoy realities that they did not have:

Ecclesial structure, traditional and historical continuity, legal recognition, proper ministerial formation, valid and accessible sacraments, a priesthood transmitted legitimately and validly.

All this is **a gift**, not a conquest.

**Grace**, not acquired right.

If we forget the price with which this inheritance was guarded, we run the risk of trivializing it.

### **III. To love what God has given us: Church, priesthood and salvific work**

Saint Matthew of South Mimms, despite having titles of the British nobility, died poor according to the world, but **rich before God**, because he loved the Church as Christ wanted it: one, holy, catholic and apostolic; visible in history; demanding in truth; purified by the cross.

Today we call you, as your Pastor, to **love what God has given us**:

- to love the **Church**, not as an abstract idea, but as a real and suffering Body;
- to love the **holy and orthodox priesthood**, not as a function, but as an oblation;
- to love the **salvific work**, even when it seems barren in the eyes of the world.

May the legacy of our Patriarch not be in vain. May we not inherit his name without inheriting his spirit. May we not invoke his memory as we flee from the cross he embraced.

### **Conclusion and final exhortation**

Beloved, sacrifice, if necessary, private judgment and personal predilections, so that **the Unity of Faith and the Bond of Peace may remain inviolable among us**, as he himself exhorted.

Pray, examine your conscience every day, and remain firm in the Orthodox Old Catholic Church that God has given you, because **the Master that many seek is already here**, and remains with his Church, a Church that is carried in the heart of each one until the consummation of the world.

We entrust all of you to the intercession of **St. Matthew of South Mimms**, and We cordially impart to you Our patriarchal blessing and filial love.

Given at the Pro-Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel, Medellin, Colombia, on the 19th day of the month of December, in the year 2025 of the Christian era and on the 106th anniversary of the dormition of our holy Patriarch.

Servant of the Servants of the Old Catholic Church

  
Mar Andrew Mathew, CJ  
Patriarch