



# PASTORS TO PASTORS

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## THE FUTURE OF ORTHODOX MINISTRY IN AMERICA

by Fr Alexander Garklavs, Editor



"God's providential hand is directly involved in the work of our mission. As we look around, we notice that there is a lack of funds, we barely subsist, and there is a shortage of good people. At the same time, the conditions of our work are extremely challenging and expectations are always increasing. Without fanfare or ostentation, we must affirm that only with unceasing prayer can we achieve the great task of establishing Orthodoxy in America."

-- St Alexander Hotovitsky, December, 1913

While St Alexander recognized that the future, as it looked to him in 1913, presented a number of challenges and difficulties, he had no conception of the immense and destructive consequences that the Orthodox Church would face after 1917. When he returned to Russia, he became sacristan of the famous Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow. Eventually arrested, he gave his life as a new martyr for Christ in 1937. Earlier he spent almost twenty years as an enthusiastic missionary in North America, acting as both Cathedral Dean in New York City and the right hand to Bishops Tikhon and Platon. The issues of the *Russian Orthodox American Messenger*, of which St Alexander was the Editor, candidly

chronicle those formative years of Orthodox America. While we may regard that period with rose-colored romanticism, the articles of the *Messenger* describe the great difficulties that the early missionaries faced. But in his sober and humble assessment of the work in North America St Alexander was not pessimistic. A serene dignity and joy resonate in his writings. One senses the abiding power of a deep faith and hope in God's mercy, a faith and hope fervent enough to not even fear death for the glory of God and His Holy Church.

We look to that past now to determine our future. The hundred years between St Alexander and our own time have seen dramatic change.

However, the missionary ideals and the fundamental objectives of pastoral work remains remarkably similar. St Alexander's quote above could have been spoken by any contemporary clergy of the OCA. Our pastoral vision does not require reformulation, only a reevaluation. While there may be, as for St Alexander, unexpected and unwanted political or social changes, the quality of pastoral work remains dependent only on core, gospel-based, spiritually-valid norms. These may reflect social mores, but they are not *conditioned* by them. As Fr. John Meyendorff wrote, for the Orthodox church "the norm is the apostolic age," not the changing values of the modern world. The good Orthodox pastor of the future will be following the same ideals that have regulated Christian ministry for the past two thousand years.

What are some of these ideals? The Orthodox priest must always be a **man of prayer**. "At evening, at morning, at noon and at all times, let our prayer arise in Your sight as incense, O Lord." Without the sanctifying and vivifying power of prayer the priest remains an empty shell of a man. St. Paul's appeal to "be constant in prayer" is the foundation of all Christian activity

(over)

## ON BEHALF OF ALL AND FOR ALL

As we gather in Pittsburgh for the All-American Council, we are called to reflect upon the Mission of the Church as articulated by our **Holy Synod of Bishops**.

"The mission of the Orthodox Church in America, the local autocephalous Orthodox Church, is to be faithful in fulfilling the commandment of Christ: "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all [things that He has] commanded" so that all people may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth; to preach, in accordance with God's will, the fullness of the Gospel of the Kingdom to the peoples of North America and to invite them to become members of the Orthodox Church; to utilize for her mission the various languages of the peoples of this continent; to be the body of Christ in North America and to be faithful to the tradition of the Holy Orthodox Church to witness to the truth, and by God's grace and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to reveal Christ's way of sanctification and eternal salvation to all."



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including ministry. From the Prophets to the Apostles to St Alexander until the Second Coming, prayer is the foundation of righteous thinking, speaking and doing. The priest's dignity, purity and strength are impossible without prayer. Pastoral love, wisdom and patience cease to exist when the priest does not pray. Every single priestly function is to be preceded by prayer. When is the priest is trouble? When he forgets to pray. When is he most successful? When he prays.

Like all true Christians, the priest is a **child of God**. He may also become a true spiritual father, but only by a conscientious acceptance of the divine gift of being a child of God. **"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are"** (1 Jn. 3.1).

In those exalted passages of St John's Gospel and First Epistle where we are informed of this incredible gift, becoming a child of God is nothing less than the greatest honor possible. We also find this concept in St. Paul's writings. **"When we cry 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God"** (Rom. 8.15).

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This is especially significant for the priest. He cannot be a good father until he is an obedient child. The basis of spiritual fatherhood lies in this: one can never expect obedience until one has learned to be obedient. Perhaps because of our era and society, where self-will and ego-gratification are so prevalent, obedience is becoming a rare virtue. Often we become "still-born" fathers, inadequate and deformed fathers by prematurely renouncing "spiritual childhood" and its implicit quality of obedience. The priest must struggle to be humble and obedient, to God, to the Word of God, to the Tradition of the Church, to the bishop. He also prays to discern just how to be obedient to the will of God as revealed in the life of the parish. This can be so uncomfortable and difficult at times, yet it is in such obedience that the pastor is most Christ-like, laying down his "life for the sheep." Understanding obedience as God's will can require great effort and skill, which is why ministry is "in very deed the art of arts and science of sciences" (St Gregory the Theologian).

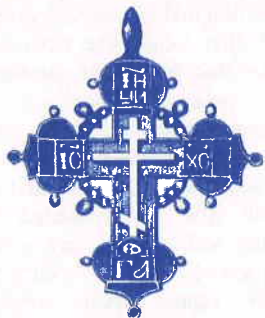
The Orthodox priest is a **shepherd**. As such his activity models that of the one, true Shepherd. "Only those who know the One Shepherd can be shepherds on earth" (Archbishop John [Shahovskoy]). Like the One Shepherd, the priest's shepherding is of a special nature. He is to lead and to serve simultaneously! This is not done in a demanding manner, but in the spirit of joy and love. The priest is called on to **"tend to the flock of God not by constraint, but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but by being examples to the flock"** (1 Pet. 5.2). Being a strong and gentle leader is one of the most difficult of accomplishments. So too, humility is a sign of great maturity and the cherished goal of spiritual effort. "It is clear that the Kingdom of God the Father is for the humble and gentle" (St. Maximus the Confessor).

As the shepherd and servant-leader of his flock, the priest is constantly in the midst of people. He is to guard, protect, collect, nurture,

educate, encourage, heal and comfort his flock. But being among people is not enough. The good shepherd does not only lead his flock, he has to love it. Through love the flock of sinful, human beings, becomes the Body of Christ, a community held together by mutual love. Loving people, even non-parishioners and non-Orthodox, is a pastoral requirement. It is never easy. Yet it is the quality that all clergy, indeed all Christians, strive for. This was a distinguishing characteristic of one of our great spiritual forefathers, St. Tikhon of Moscow, bishop of North America at the turn of the century. At his funeral in 1925 he was eulogized as one whose "disposition achieved the highest Christian spiritual qualities: meekness, humility complete obedience to the will of God, a burning love for all people, for good and the not-good, for friends and for those who were not friends".

As the Orthodox Pastor faces the next century and the next millennium there is no little apprehension. The world, and the Church that exists in this world, endures crisis after crisis. These are complicated, difficult and evil times, no doubt about it. Yet we face the future with resolve and courage. The salvation of human souls, as precarious and wonderful a notion as the Holy Scripture could possibly articulate, has been and will remain the aim of the Church's prayer and the function of its ministers. Therefore the future of Orthodox ministry in America is not a mystery. The task that awaits us is to patiently fulfill what has already been started. We are in the company of great heroes of faith, who went before us and accomplished much while facing enormous difficulties. We follow in their honorable footsteps. In fact, they are the footsteps of Christ and the Apostles. The future pastors, like those of the past, will be diligently responding to the same call of Jesus Christ, to "come and follow me." In so doing, there will be **"glory and honor and peace for every one who does good"** (Rom. 2.10). □





# "Thoughts and Recollections"

"Pastors to Pastors" looks to another of the "elders" of the Church for guidance and inspiration. We are pleased herein to share our interview with

## Fr Joseph Hirsch

Pastor of Transfiguration of Christ Cathedral, Denver CO

**Q. Fr. Joseph, before becoming an Orthodox Christian priest, you were an Episcopalian priest. What factors led you to become a priest in the first place?**

A. I was raised in one of the "Evangelical-Catholic" Presbyterian Churches which were heavily involved in the so-called "liturgical renewal" movement of the 1940's and 50's. From the time I was a preschooler, I have recollections of great interest in and love for everything that had to do with God and the Church. I especially loved the Holy Scriptures and felt that God was speaking directly to me and to my generation in the Bible.

When I was about fourteen, I noticed that our church leaders spent a lot of effort criticizing the Catholics and their rituals. At this early age, I made the observation that Protestant culture had plenty of rituals of their own, but had chosen to separate these out from religious practice *per se*, which was highly cerebral. When I was eighteen years old, our Presbyterian minister preached a sermon in which he favored the "restoration of the historic episcopate." I was curious and made an appointment to talk with him. This was an accomplishment in itself, in a 3,000 member congregation. I asked him, in light of his sermon, why he didn't just become an Episcopalian. He remarked that he "had too much money in the pension fund."

Next Sunday, I began regular attendance at our neighborhood Episcopal Church. Suddenly, I found that my two career choices, law or foreign service, took a back seat to an emerging conviction that God was calling me to be priest. Everything I undertook from that point on was directed toward this object.

**Q. Your conversion into the Orthodox faith took place together with that of many members of your former Episcopal parish. Was the decision to**

**become Orthodox mainly yours or did it arise within the community?**

A. As an Episcopalian, I lived with the belief that truth is univocal. I felt that my fellow Episcopalians would, ultimately, agree to the truth that is the "Catholic faith." By the time I finished my M.Div., I was no longer deluded in this way. Many of my classmates in 1967-70 were in seminary to evade the military draft. Others, as I discovered later, were some sort of homosexual cultists for whom the affectations of Anglicanism provided an excellent cover. This is not to say that many in each group were not believers in God or Episcopalianism. Rather, it was the case that there was some other agendum being worked out in most of their lives which could, and later often did, subordinate doctrinal and moral principles to itself.

In my Episcopal parish, where I served for five years, we grew from about 45 to over 250 souls. Many of these new members were converts for whom I provided a great deal of instruction and all of these people had to hear me preach at least once a week. They shared most of my convictions, my "style," which I would have identified as classic High Church. This was, however, by no means a cult of personality.

In time I could no longer conceive the Episcopal Church as the "True, Catholic Church of Christ." I went on a short vacation with my family while I contemplated giving up my ministry. When we returned, we found a flock of parishioners literally on our doorstep. They were, "as sheep, having no shepherd"! The Archdeacon who had supplied me during vacation told them that creeds, Scriptures, liturgies and moral codes were just "old ideas that no one can live by any more." Previously, I did not tell them, out of some kind of false pride, that our family had felt called to Holy Orthodoxy. When I saw the degree of their confusion and consternation, I was moved and revealed our plan. From that point on, they set

out, on their own, to contact the local OCA priest and, through him, Archbishop John of Chicago. Their conversion was corporate and, at that time, entirely a lay movement. Later, Archbishop John inquired as to whether I would seek Holy Ordination and serve as their priest. Of course, I was honored by His Eminence's confidence in me, but it had been neither my request nor my expectation that I would be ordained so quickly, if ever.

**Q. As you look upon pastoral ministry today, what are the major differences between a "good" Protestant minister/priest and a "good" Orthodox priest?**

A. If you mean to ask what is the difference between a conscientious, praying, hardworking, Protestant minister who loves God and God's people as he understands these and a similarly motivated Orthodox priest, the difference is that the Orthodox priest *is in, of and acts on behalf of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church*. He is also blessed to know and hold the "fullness of the faith" and to be an heir and steward of the Mysteries of Christ. However, here are two great marvels, as I see it: 1) How much some Protestant clergy accomplish with the few tools they possess and with the errors that accompany their system. 2) How little, seemingly, we Orthodox accomplish for the Kingdom of God, seeing that all of the treasures of that Kingdom are ours. Sometimes it seems that we go beyond the "wicked and unfaithful servant" of the Bible who "buried his one talent in the earth" and bury the entire Royal Treasury.

I can't help but add that I am convinced that the Church which took Jews and Greek pagans and made them bishops, priests and deacons in the first centuries, can be greatly enriched by those sincere converts from among "the Gentiles" who are led to the Church.

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## PASTORAL ISSUES

### Addressed by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church

*(We thought that our readers would be interested in the following excerpts from a meeting of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church -- Editor.)*

The Holy Synod considered the increasing number of cases in which some pastors abuse the power "to bind and loose" (Mt. 18.18). In part, the resolution on this matter states the following: "Inasmuch as there are complaints of lay people against the unjustified actions of some pastors, priests, in their function as confessors, are instructed that any coercion or enticement of their charges to make decisions against their will -- such as taking monastic vows, undertaking a particular church obedience, making a donation, marrying or not marrying someone, except where marriage is not possible for canonical reasons, refusing to serve in the military, refusing to take part in civic duties, refusing medical care,

refusing education, finding or changing employment, relocation -- is inadmissible.

The pastors of the Russian Orthodox Church are reminded of the spiritual discipline of strict adherence to the standards of the letter and spirit of Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church, the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and the Canonical declarations. It is inappropriate for pastors to introduce any kind of moral or other practices into the spiritual discipline which are outside the bounds of the given standards and which, in the words of Our Savior, 'load men with burdens hard to bear' (Lk. 11.46).

Pastors are reminded that they are called to help their charges by counsel and love, without violating the God-given freedom of every Christian. The implicit obedience that lies as the basis of relationship between a novice and elder in a monastery cannot be applicable in parish practice in the relationship between the priest and his flock. Any interference of pastors in matters concerning the choice of a bride or a groom is inadmissible, except

when the faithful specifically ask for advice. In matrimonial questions, pastors are reminded that while the Orthodox Church dictates that the Church marriage ceremony is necessary, there is a respectful consideration of the civil marriage as well as those marriages in which only one member is Orthodox. Pastors should also be reminded to observe decency and pastoral care while discussing aspects of family life with their flock. They cannot create around themselves communities where opposition and criticism are voiced against either the leaders in Church administration or other parishes. The Orthodox faithful are encouraged to appeal to their Diocesan hierarch in cases where the pastor abuses the power to bind and loose.

Through Holy Ordination, priests receive from God the responsibilities of spiritual direction. However some pastors regard this as unconditional authority over people's souls. They forget that the relationship between the priest and his spiritual children is to be based on mutual respect and trust. Such pastors have the impression that the strict monastic compliance of the novice to the elder is to be observed between the lay person and pastor. They pursue questions of an intimate and personal nature, subordinating parishioners and forgetting about the God-given freedom to which we are called (Gal. 5.13). These pastoral methods have had tragic results among the faithful, when the abused parishioners' reaction of anger at the pastor is directed to the entire Church. At times such people leave the Orthodox Church and become an easy catch for various sects."

(Translated from the Russian text of the "Report of the Holy Synod Meeting of the Russian Orthodox Church, Dec.28, 1998," which was in the **Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate, No.1 - 1999.**)

#### *Fr Joseph Hirsch, continued*

**Q. You have been pastor in a young, mission-like parish and are now in an older, well-established parish. What differences between the two are most striking? Are there similarities?**

A. For the most part there is a lack of differences. I have done the same things here in Denver, for fifteen years, that I did in Kansas City for nine. I serve as many services as I can. I teach, preach, try to visit the people, tithe and try to teach the people to tithe. The one advantage of an older parish has been a rectory located adjacent to the Temple. We have had perhaps a hundred converts who walked up to the rectory and rang the doorbell.

One similarity between Denver and Kansas City is that both parishes are multi-ethnic. In Kansas City we were all sort of "ethnic Anglicans" at the outset, but we were in an upward mobile community where people kept getting transferred in. Very quickly, we became a Greek, Syrian-Lebanese, Serbian Church. We were always compelled to tolerate each others customs and were blessed to be able to be enriched by them. In Denver, most of the transfers -- about a hundred -- have been "from this life to the one to come." Nevertheless, we are a diverse community with many sets of deep roots extending into the soil of almost every native Orthodox homeland. □

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