

The Orthodox Church in America – Department of Liturgical Music & Translations
Music Chatroom Transcript – May 8, 2007

Moderator: *Monk Sergius (Bowyer)*

Chat room topic: **Commitment to Christ through liturgical participation**

Professor David Drillock, Chair of the OCA Department of Liturgical Music and Translations

It is my pleasure to welcome Monk Sergius as our presenter and moderator for this evening. Fr. Sergius first went to the Monastery of St. John of Shanghai in Point Reyes Station in 1998 and then in 2000 to St. Tikhon's Monastery.

He has been the choir director at St. Tikhons for six years and directs both the monastic kliros, and the Seminary Choir and Mission Choir. In addition to this, Fr. Sergius teaches liturgics, music and sacred music history. Fr. Sergius once said he models his classes on "a premise from Father Robert Arida: 'If there is to be a renaissance of Orthodox evangelical work, there must be a rebirth of Liturgical Life.'"

Welcome Father Sergius.

Monk Sergius:

Thank you, Dave.

Please let me begin by saying that an Orthodox life is, by definition, a liturgical life. Consequently, the liturgical life and ethos of the Holy Orthodox Church must never be considered some "extra" part of the new Life that is given us in Jesus Christ, (i.e. something that we "do" in addition to the rest of our "normal" Orthodox Life.

Rather, liturgical life is the very essence of this new Life in Christ and the way through which we nourish it.

In his book, "Ecclesial Being" Prof. Constantine Scoterios elaborates this point saying 'in the tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church, doctrine and worship are inseparable. Worship is, in a certain sense, doctrinal testimony: reference to the events of revelation.

Thus, dogmas are not abstract ideas in and for themselves but revealed and saving truths and realities intended to bring mankind into communion with God.

One could say without hesitation that, according to the Orthodox understanding, the fullness of theological thought is found in the worship of the Church" (pg. 88.)

To fail to recognize this principle is to fail to find the key to the mystery of Orthodox Christianity. The Church's liturgical life provides a means for us to receive the grace which we have no other way of receiving and learning to contain. It is the door through which we must enter in order to meet the Lord Himself.

With this concern and care for serving, attending, and praying deeply with the Church (and at home too) services often become lifeless and the music and liturgical art are sometimes relegated to a utilitarian position within the Church.

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In stark contrast, the Liturgy is meant to become our life because the Liturgy is LIFE! In grateful reciprocation, our life must become a “Liturgy.” Through this, we find that taking care and concern for the services really means taking care of Christ Himself, His Body for it is one of the primary ways that we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Triune God and in our relationship with the Saints.

Comment:

The one thought that comes to my mind immediately is this: What you say is so very true, and for those who are able to lead a fuller liturgical life, growth in Christ through the liturgical life takes place without too much an effort. But for so many, this is not so, participation in liturgical services is limited reduced to a bare minimum and even then, attention is very difficult and as a result of both limited services and very little participation, growth is very limited.

Response:

This is a good question....

It is not necessarily attendance (all though it is of central importance) however, it is our approach to life and how we consciously reconnect our world to the Lord.

Services show us how...and infuse us with the Spirit to do so...however, life itself must be renewed through a constant turning of the heart to the Lord. And this is key to Liturgical prayer and personal prayer. The home is meant to have an family altar and the heart is meant to be alive to the Lord. How we do this is different from person to person, however, priorities in life are often a choice...

Nevertheless, it is through personal prayer that brings the Liturgy to Life and it conversely, equally so, Liturgical life that brings personal prayer form, context and life. They need each other and if one is missing, the other will be lifeless to accepting Christ and to wanting to be “with Him”. We all have priorities...what is ours?

Question:

So, are you saying that there needs to be first of all a conversion a changing of the mind, changing of the person’s life, attitude, etc?

Answer:

Absolutely...however...if we make the smallest effort in these two areas...a profound change can take place within us.

The grace that is available through the Church is amazing. Nevertheless God wants us to do our small part. Elder Porphyrios had an excellent quote which shows us how we might overcome our difficulties and sinful fallings. He tells us “do not fight against sinful passions but transform them....occupy yourself with hymns of praise, with the poetic canons with the worship of God. All of the holy books of our Church: the octoechos, the book of Hours, the Psalter, contain holy loving words addressed to Christ.

When you devote yourself to this effort, your soul will be sanctified in a gentle and mystical way without you even being aware of it. He continues...”the hours spent closest to Paradise are the

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hours spent in Church together when we celebrate the Divine Liturgy and sing and receive Holy Communion.

The Church's Liturgical life shows us how to make our Life itself an "anaphora" or a lifting up of everything we encounter, and permeates us with the spirit that enables us to do so whether we are in Church, outside Church, or even in hell itself.

The key is the turning of the heart to Christ no matter what we are doing and where we are. The Liturgy provides the model. Metropolitan Anthony explained that "we are called to be children of God, yet no man can attain this through his own efforts. The way in which we realize this are through the sacraments of the Church.

"The sacraments are the action of God within the Church in which God grants us his grace.....the grace, which we CANNOT ACQUIRE BY ANY OTHER MEANS." (*The Mystery of Faith*, 166.)

Bishop Hilarion (Alfeyev) even went so far as to say that 'every service in the Church and every word of liturgical prayer has the potential to become an encounter with God. (ibid, 169.)

However, it is the task of us in the Church to reveal this to others...within the Church and without. That is why the monasteries have traditionally been so important in Orthodox Life and culture because they provide a context in which people can experience this.

Question:

Would you agree, then, that a person must first of all be "open" to receiving the grace of God, by whatever means, church services, personal prayer, his life, work, etc?

Answer:

Certainly...God holds human freedom in deep respect.

Follow-up question:

Should a person go to the liturgical services and claim that he got nothing from them, it might not be the fault of the singers, or the priest, or whatever "liturgical" act but simply because the person was not "open" to receiving the goodness of the Spirit?

Follow-up answer:

Prayer on behalf of those who are in charge of such people can work miracles.

Elder Porphyrios explains that when we want to change others we tell God first and then ask Him to tell them for us. Yet, this is a mystery as C.S. Lewis stated once 'Pain is usually God's megaphone to rouse a sleeping world to meet Christ' and is often to meet with a crisis either personal or at a corporate level....family, nation, etc.

Comment:

That is so true, but how unfortunate it takes pain to bring someone to Christ.

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Response:

Pain is a part of life that we often try to avoid because that is what our culture teaches us. However, the Cross is the Cross. And the only way we can understand Christianity in our own lives is when we are personally nailed to the Cross voluntarily...either through the commandments, which St. Ignatius Brianchininov says draw the Cross onto our backs, or by asceticism, or other involuntary privations, brought by providence.

As choir directors, I know you have a deep understanding of the Cross. Yet, that pain gives birth to a creativity, and a deep understanding, and compassion which it is almost impossible to attain otherwise.

St. Maximus tells us that it is through this providential pain through which we enter with the Lord on our own Cross back into paradise.

Like the wise thief we say “it is just” and then we turn to the Lord...as was stated early “remember me....”

In closing, although a lot more could be said. St. John of Kronstadt reminds us of just how valuable the Liturgy is. He says, “If one was to put all of the world’s most precious things on one side of a scale, and the Divine Liturgy on the other the scales would tip completely in favor of the Divine Liturgy.”

And of course, he knew this, lived it and he served it every day.

Professor Drillock:

Thank you, very much, Father Sergius. For those of us who were here, we appreciate your participation and your presentation. I hope that many people will take these thoughts into consideration and apply them in their lives. We all appreciate your willingness to be with us tonight and hope that you will return again next year.

Monk Sergius:

Thank you for having me. And thank you for giving me my first opportunity at cyber space teaching.

Professor Drillock:

On Tuesday, May 22, 2007 Ivan Moody will offer a presentation on Composing Methodology. We hope you can join us!
Good night.