

Pastoral Life As/And Worship

by Father Alexander Garklavs

Several years ago I purchased a book but, as happens sometimes, did not read it. Recently I finally got to it after spotting it on the shelf. I remembered that I bought the book because of its intriguing title. The book is *Worship as Pastoral Care* by William H. Willimon. The author is now the Methodist Bishop of Birmingham, Alabama and taught at Duke University for many years, specializing in the study of Christian ministry. He is erudite, knows the Bible, has a good familiarity with the Church Fathers and is completely at home with most of the voluminous current *pastoralia*, among which his writings occupy a notable place. The above-mentioned book is written primarily for Protestant pastors. The author either has little knowledge of or intentionally ignores Orthodox Christianity, which is not uncommon in works of this nature. However, the book offers some worthwhile reflections.

In speaking of liturgical worship we Orthodox are certainly in a very different place than most Protestants. We cannot relate to an observation that "our worship seems so shallow, sterile and contrived" (p.18). Orthodox worship is profound, compelling and vibrant. Orthodox Christianity's rich liturgical life expresses "the Church's identity and continuity in the midst of a changing world," in the words of the late Fr. John Meyendorff. But we can always profit from constructive critique and Bishop Willimon's book offers something for us to think about. He challenges pastors to think about their approach to worship by asking a question: To what extent is the liturgical enactment of worship services a *pastoral* act? Worship, especially Orthodox worship, is usually seen as a transcendent,

mystical and heavenly experience. But it is also a corporate experience, which involves the participation of faithful people. This latter aspect is the one that concerns Bishop Willimon, whose central thesis is that worship is a "major aspect of pastoral care" and "can be enriched by a better awareness of the pastoral dimensions of so-called priestly acts" (p. 47).

How does an Orthodox pastor understand this? When we think about liturgical worship, a variety of important questions come up. Is liturgical worship the most important of the priest's tasks which he performs on a regular basis? Is worship to be understood as an immutable absolute, which the priest rigorously protects from deviations and corruptions? Is worship a mysterious "means to an end" where a priest facilitates an encounter with holiness which is made possible through the "grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit"? Is worship a dimension of the pastor's life which enables him to intercede for, connect with and minister to his parishioners and his

neighbors? What about the fact that among all of the major patristic pastoral writings, much is said about the pastor as shepherd of souls, teacher, healer, preacher, intercessor, but almost nothing is said about his being a liturgical minister?

These are only some of the questions that arise as we begin to consider pastoral issues regarding liturgical worship and answering them is more difficult than may appear at first. These questions, however, may be premature, because of what is an immediate pastoral problem today: the prevalent trend of liturgical reductionism, or put another way, the fact that Orthodox Christians in North America go less and less frequently to Church. For a high percentage of our parishioners, worship means only attending the Sunday morning Divine Liturgy. Weekday feasts, evening services, akathists, even the important Lenten services are attended by a small number of people. Older parishioners, who were nurtured on church services, are getting weaker and unable to attend. Younger people, who may have been brought up with some familiarity to liturgical life, are either busy or indifferent, and their children receive little exposure to church services. As a result, most of Orthodox worship is completely absent from the lives of our people, even from many of whom consider themselves very religious. Orthodox worship with its intricate combination of daily, weekly, monthly cycles, full of profound theology and beautiful poetry is a buried treasure! As regular liturgical life becomes atrophied, priests themselves lose interest and become unfamiliar with details of liturgical worship.

***"There can be do doubt
that when Jesus prayed He
was praying for all of us,
for He was not a sinner
Himself, but bore our sins.
Now if He goes to such
pains for us and for our
transgressions, watching
and praying, it follows that
we ought all the more be
urgent in praying in the
same way."***

— St. Cyprian of Carthage

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While our duty as priests requires us to serve, and while we should never not do so simply because people do not come to church, the lack of participation of our parishioners in liturgical life is a serious issue. There are many reasons for this tragic and complicated situation: spiritual, social, economic, cultural, etc. It's easy to get angry at what appears to be peoples' lack of interest, but our reaction to this by confronting them has very little effect. Chastising parishioners with angry and rebuking words may "guilt" some people into coming for services, but not necessarily for the right reasons. Most of us pastors have done this, from time to time, and most of us would agree that the results, if any, are inconsequential. There are other approaches. In some places evening Divine Liturgies are in practice, giving people who work during the day an opportunity to celebrate holy days. In other places, the celebration of the holy day is transferred to the nearest Sunday. Fostering lay participation, whether by distributing sheets or booklets with the appropriate liturgical hymns, or by encouraging congregational singing, will have some positive results. Another way to get people to come for worship is by combining services with social/educational programs (lectures

by guest preachers, discussions, coffee hours, dinners, etc.).

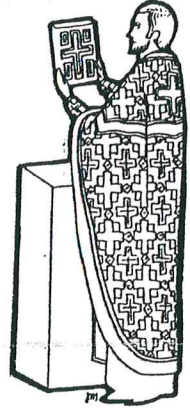
There is some real, even if limited, success in using these and other methods. But the essence of the dilemma remains. Orthodox Christians in North America and in Europe are going through a liturgical "exile." Our faithful people are neither bad nor lazy. In fact many are very spiritual and religious, but they just do not put a priority on attending liturgical services. Is liturgical reform the answer? Probably no other topic, not politics, ethics or philosophy, generates as much heated passion among Orthodox clergy as liturgical reform. A good deal of the passion surrounds the very word "reform"! Whatever may be our position, liturgical change is now, and has always been, taking place. Today the problem is that these changes are going on in fits and starts, often without hierarchical direction, sometimes motivated by personal whims rather than pastoral concerns. The only practical solution for now is for us pastors to pray diligently for the bishops, chancellors, deans, professors and liturgical specialists, so that the Holy Spirit may guide all of us to a consensus of liturgical life that is both meaningful and completely Orthodox.

What about the point made by Bishop Willimon? Can Orthodox worship, as we experience it here in North America, "be enriched by a better awareness of the pastoral dimension of so-called priestly acts"? Also, can our own life, as priests and liturgical ministers, be enriched by a better awareness of the pastoral dimensions of so-called priestly acts?

Sometimes praying in an empty church can be an inspiring and positive experience. Indeed one of the special privileges of the priesthood is to be able to go into the empty church to pray and meditate alone. But liturgical worship by definition involves people. "Leitourgia" means "the work of the people," and the original Greek word referred to people's work of any kind, not just religious. Whether it is merely the "two or three who are gathered" or thousands, worship is a corporate act. Liturgical worship is "not for individual prayer but to *assemble together as the Church*. Therefore, the assembly as the Church is in reality the

first liturgical act, the foundation of the entire liturgy; and unless one understands this, one cannot understand the rest of the celebration. When I say that I am going to church, it means I am going into the assembly of the faithful in order, together with them, to *constitute the Church*" (Fr. Alexander Schmemmann).

In virtually all Orthodox worship services one of the first things is the Great Litany. It is as if, from the very start, we focus the attention of worship on people. The Litany is the prayer of the Church for the Church, and also for our country, for our parishioners,



and for all people throughout the whole world. This fact should never be taken for granted. Even if there is only a priest and the choir director, the service begins with us calling to mind all people and as we call them to mind we offer to God our devout and sincere prayers that He will have mercy on them. There will be other litanies which virtually repeat the same requests, as if the Church reminds us of how important this is. Of course, in the Divine Liturgy, the very acts of consecration call to remembrance all of God's servants, living and departed. The pastor performs these intercessory prayers because Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught us to do so. "There can be no doubt that when Jesus prayed He was praying for all of us, for He was not a sinner Himself, but bore our sins. Now if He goes to such pains for us and for our transgressions, watching and praying, it follows that we ought all the more be urgent in praying in the same way" (St. Cyprian of Carthage). No matter how empty the church may appear, it becomes full during worship. The Great Litany reminds us that all of humanity is present during the Divine Liturgy. The human race is incarnated in remembrance and in our prayers through the sacramental realization of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Then too, angels are present however invisible and inaudible they may be to our sinful eyes and ears.

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PASTORS TO PASTORS is
funded by voluntary gifts
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"Thoughts and Recollections"

"Pastors to Pastors" looks to another of our "elders" for guidance and inspiration.

We are pleased herein to share our interview with...

Fr Nicholas Timpko

Rector, Three Saints Orthodox Church
Ansonia, Connecticut

Q. Fr Nicholas, what people and events shaped your priestly vocation?

A. I was born and raised in Centralia, PA where my father worked in the coal mines and my mother stayed at home to raise us six children. My father was President or as called many years ago "starosta" or elder of this small church community of Sts. Peter and Paul for many, many years. My brothers and sisters and I attended Church regularly and we were involved in the upkeep of the parish on every level; cutting the grass, cleaning, and singing. My father was persistent that both my brother and I learn Church Slavonic at a very young age so we could "help the priest". We would do so by chanting the services, singing, reading the Epistle, blessing homes, etc., being totally involved in the liturgical life of the parish. I can't remember many social activities within my home parish, but I certainly remember the liturgical cycle of the church. With the assistance of my parish priest, Father Stekazov and the influence of my parents I decided to enter Seminary. Thanks be to God!

Attending St. Tikhon's Seminary in South Canaan, PA, where education, prayer, fasting, meditation and contemplation blended together to confirm my decision to serve the Lord. The years passed quickly and before I knew it, I married, was ordained a Deacon and very shortly afterwards a parish priest, because the Church desperately needed clergy.

Q. Could you share some of the highlights of your pastoral life?

A. My family encouraged me to start. My Matushka Anastasia and children helped in so many ways by being part of my ministry and allowing me to dedicate 42 years of keeping my hands on the plow in the Vineyard of Christ. I love being in Church; serving God and my flock; administering the Holy Sacraments,

teaching, preaching and most of all, being with my spiritual family in their joys and sorrows of life. I've had five parish assignments, servicing very small parishes and large parishes. I was involved in CPE training over 35 years ago and worked as Chaplain of a large County Hospital in Chicago. I was Chaplain of the Derby Police Department in Derby, CT, and I currently volunteer as Chaplain of M.T.A. (Metropolitan Transit Authority of NY and CT) and minister to police officers of all faiths, lending an ear and being with them in times of tragedy or disappointment.

Q. You are presently pastor of an older well-established parish. What are some of the characteristics and challenges of ministry in your parish?

A. Yes, I am Pastor of a large well-established parish. The Church of Three Holy Hierarchs or Three Saints has been in Ansonia for over 109 years. In my 25 years of service to Three Saints community there are always people "in church". There is always someone in need. It is a blessing for me to have the health and strength to serve each Divine Liturgy, Vespers, Wedding, Baptism, Funeral, Molieben and other services. There are a few challenges. One is servicing

many of my lifelong members who are now shut-ins. They truly miss Church and we miss them. I regularly visit and bring the Holy Sacraments to over 45 members and pray that as I visit them, I am ministering to them appropriately as they deal with difficult health issues and burdens. My shut-in population is larger than many mission parishes.

Another challenge is attracting new members who have the same fervor and dedication of building up the Kingdom of God, as did our forefathers. Young families are pulled in many directions. Jobs are not plentiful in this Lower Naugatuck Valley area. Many of our young families live a distance from their jobs and also from the church. Travel is just a part of their life, but it makes it more difficult for them to participate fully in the life of the Church. Living the life of an Orthodox Christian and being attentive to one's spiritual growth must be a priority. The challenge of helping each child, each adult, grow in Christ is my everyday challenge. Also, the blending of new parishioners and recent converts into a well-established parish is always challenging and uppermost in my mind.

Q. What advice would you give younger pastors?

A. Some may not be pleased to hear this advice. First and foremost, be sure of your intention. Search your souls and ask "why" you wanted to be a priest. Keep in mind that your Orthodox ministry is a daily calling. If you do not visit the sick, console the lonely and participate in the liturgical cycle of the Church you are missing out on your calling. Secondly, don't let a day pass without putting a smile on someone's face. This may sound simplistic but it does make a difference in your day and in theirs.

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Pastoral Life, continued

So every occasion of worship is meant for the pastor to connect with his people and indeed the entire human race. Every worship service is truly an absolute pastoral act. Yet there is something even greater that happens during worship. As priest the pastor is the liturgical minister of a particular community, that is, he is a facilitator of liturgical worship, by preparing, celebrating, chanting, reading, preaching, etc., and making actual and accomplishing the divine services in a spiritual, beautiful and meaningful manner. He fulfills these obligations as a matter of duty. But there is more. The pastor-priest is the witness to the awesome interaction between God's spiritual gifts to humanity and man's most earnest and contrite aspirations. The priest may be a sinner, even a great sinner, but he is the minister chosen from among his people, to be the one who leads them in liturgical celebrations of worship. During worship the priest himself is transformed from a sinner to a redeemed celebrant. This transformation is wondrous and miraculous, inspirational and enlightening. To "praise God in His sanctuary," to "lift up our hands to the holy place," to be "accounted worthy to stand before the holy altar," means to be a participant in something perfect, pure and excellent! Nothing in life enables humans to experience beauty and truth as times of liturgical worship. Words may fail and awkwardness may hinder it, but the pastor must declare the joys of worship and the glory that he himself

experiences at liturgy. If this can be done meaningfully and effectively, our people will surely find God in our churches and gratefully rejoice for the opportunities to gather and worship "in spirit and in truth!" The inner, personal experiences which inspire our being at and participating in Orthodox worship also become those experiences which bring peace, forgiveness and loving intimacy in our life with all of our human brothers and sisters. ✠



Fr. Timpko, continued

I have learned so much from my church members. Every member can be both a delight and a burden. When frustrated, angry, or disillusioned, remember to pray. When parish life is overtaxing, remind yourself why you wanted to be a priest. Saving souls was never an easy task. There are many, many other professions that offer you more money, more incentives, more prestige. However, none is more important than that of saving souls. Ask yourself "why" you went into the priesthood. If you know in your heart it is to save souls then you will persevere; you will do it; you will continue to serve God and your flock. You will be their "Beloved Pastor", "Otez Duhovne". There is never a day in the life of a pastor that someone does not need your prayers, your phone call, and especially your pastoral presence. If you neglect your flock, you neglect your calling. May God bless you as you work in the Vineyard of Christ! ✠

"Over the next ten years, the Orthodox Church in America will need approximately 500 new priests! These priests will be needed to replace the 400 or so who will retire, as well as to staff the 100 new missions we hope to plant during this period. At present, only 20-25 priests a year are being ordained, so the situation is rapidly becoming critical. And not only do we need to recruit new candidates -- we need also to support existing clergy in every possible way: financially, morally, and through continuing education."

*-- 14th All-American Council Study Papers
Pillar Three: Clergy Formation and Development*

PASTORS TO PASTORS is published by the OCA Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry, PO Box 675, Syosset NY 11791, and is distributed to all hierarchs, parish and institutional clergy, military chaplains, and monastic clergy, active and retired, on the rolls of the Orthodox Church in America, and to OCA seminarians.

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Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry
Orthodox Church in America
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Issue Never Published