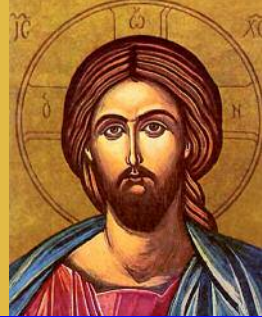


the *Presbyter*



The Publication of the Archdiocesan Presbyters Council

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

November 2008 • vol. X • issue 2

Losing One's Soul in Ministry

For what does it profit you to gain the whole world but lose your soul?

Is anything worth more than your soul? (Matthew 16:26)

My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46)

Some of you may have heard of a book written a couple of years ago by Barbara Brown Taylor called *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith*. Well known within many circles as an award winning preacher and prolific author, Brown was for nine years an Episcopal minister serving on staff in a large Episcopal community in Atlanta before accepting to serve a small congregation in rural Clarkesville, Georgia (population 1,500) for six years. Ordained in 1984, she has left ministry and the church and now teaches religion at a small college.

Her book, in my opinion, chronicles what its like to serve in ministry but find one's soul gradually slipping away in the meantime. She writes: "Many of the things that were happening inside me seemed too shameful to talk about out loud. Laid low by what was happening at Grace-Calvary, I did not have the energy to put a positive spin on anything. Beyond my luminous images of Sunday mornings, I saw the committee meetings, the numbing routines, and the chronically difficult people who took up a large part of my time. Behind my heroic image of myself I saw my tiresome perfectionism, my resentment of those who did not try as hard as I did, and my huge appetite for approval. Drawn to care for hurt things, I had ended up with compassion fatigue. Above all, I saw that my desire to draw as near to God as I could had backfired on me somehow. Drawn to marry the Divine Presence, I had ended up estranged, like the bluebirds that sat on my windowsills, pecking at the reflections they saw in the glass. I could not reach the greenness for which my soul longed.

For years I believed that if I just kept at it the glass would finally disappear. Now for the first time I wondered if I had devoted myself to an illusion (pp. 101-102).

Reading this passage raises a lot of questions for me, as I'm sure it does for you. Those of us who have been in the ministry for any length of time are under no illusion that we are exempt from such outcomes in our own lives. Some of us, I know, feel that we're losing bits and pieces of our soul every day.

I also recently read a book about the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta called *Come be my Light: the Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta*. Written by the priest responsible for promoting the cause of Mother Teresa's canonization in the Roman Catholic Church, it reveals for the first time some of the private letters that she had written to her spiritual fathers over a span of more than four decades.

Most people are familiar with the story of Mother Teresa receiving a call from Christ to serve "the poorest of the poor" while traveling by train from Calcutta to Darjeeling in 1946. Her work with the

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poor and dying, first in the slums of Calcutta and then in cities around the globe, became renowned the world over and she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. People who met her often said that she was the most joyful person they had ever met. She glowed with a kind of “luminosity,” Malcolm Muggeridge wrote of her in his book, *Something Beautiful for God*. That’s why the publication of her letters came as such a shock to people and made newspaper headlines, *Time* magazine and even network television news: her letters reveal a side of Mother Teresa that few people had seen before. In them she describes her “dryness,” her “darkness” and her “fear.” Writing to a priest in the summer of 1959, she says: “I am told God loves me – and yet the reality of the coldness, darkness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul.” In a letter to a Jesuit priest written in 1961, she agonizes that “the place of God in my soul is blank. There is no God in me. Sometimes I just hear my own heart cry out ‘My God’ – and nothing else comes. My very life seems so contradictory. I long for God. I want to love Him, to live only for love of Him – and yet there is but pain.” These letters, nearly 40 of them, reveal that for decades, Mother Teresa – who had brought God’s love to so many people that she was revered as a living saint – often felt abandoned by God and cut off from His presence. She often felt as if her soul was empty, a blank space. Yet, unlike Barbara Brown Taylor, Mother Teresa continued her ministry in the Church until the day she died. Why the difference between these two gifted and remarkable women? And what can we as priests learn from their stories?

First, unlike Barbara Brown Taylor, Mother Teresa had no “heroic image” of herself or her ministry. Just the opposite. She firmly believed – and had always believed – that the “work” she was doing was *not* hers at all but “really and solely His.” Writing in 1985 to her spiritual father, now a cardinal, she says, “The conviction of my nothingness...has made the work completely His.” Do we believe this about ourselves and our ministries?

Second, unlike Taylor, Mother Teresa had no “huge appetite for approval.” In case you haven’t heard, the studies are now in and the results tabulated: it is a psychological fact that many of us who enter ministry are “people pleasers.” Not so with Mother Teresa. Whenever she spoke of “total surrender,” it was always to Jesus. Her desire was always to please Jesus. She needed no one else’s approval. She loved people fiercely, but sought to please no one except Jesus. Is this true of us?

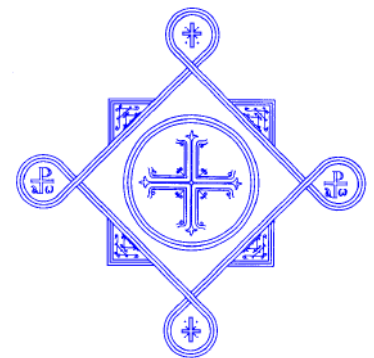
Third, although both women describe their estrangement from the God whose presence they so longed for, Mother Teresa – emptied of her ego, convinced of her own nothingness, and in total surrender – could write at the end of one of her most moving letters: “Let Him do with me whatever He wants, as He wants, for as long as He wants. If my darkness is a light to some soul – or even if it be nothing to nobody – I am perfectly happy to be God’s flower of the field.” How many of us could write such words honestly?

Over the course of her many years of working with the “poorest of the poor” Mother Teresa’s life had become an interior agony, an agony that she identified completely with Christ and His death on the Cross. Unlike so many of us Mother Teresa had come to understand, at an existential level, the meaning of that line from every Sunday’s *Orthros*: “through the Cross, joy has come to all the world.”

May God bless your soul.



—Rev. Steven P. Tsiichlis
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Cover Icon of Christ

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Sacred Image, Sacred Marriage: Incarnating the Images of Marriage Given to Us in the Church

I would like to begin by describing to you three types of marriages. Most married couples tend to fall into one of these three types with some overlap.

1. *The first is the “Make Do” marriage*—in this type of marriage, couples learn to manage with an acceptable level of harmony to stay together and maintain the marriage. Some conflict may occur.

However, each spouse knows and fulfills his or her responsibilities at a level that is satisfactory to keep the marriage going. Some physical, emotional or spiritual intimacy may be present in this marriage. However, stagnation has set in—the couple has found a way of managing the marriage and just stays there.

2. *The second is the marriage in distress*—this type of marriage is characterized by regular conflict, fighting and bickering, or simply silence and resignation. Both husband and wife are miserable, but the marriage hangs on by a thread. For all practical purposes, the marriage has ceased to exist; it has died. But the couple, for some reason, stays together, perhaps for the children or religious convictions or finances or a myriad of other reasons.

3. *The third is what I will call the “dynamic, vitalized” marriage*—in this type of marriage, husband and wife are growing persons in a growing marriage. Both are actively committed to personal and couple growth. They have their conflicts, but together they work to resolve them, rather than giving in to them or sweeping them under the carpet. Some issues may remain unresolved, but they are out in the open and dealt with as they arise. For my husband and me, one of our unresolved issues involves the raising of our children. It is one of those things we are regularly negotiating; I tend to be a bit harder on the kids, he is a bit more easygoing. Vibrancy, life, health, and authentic love characterize this kind of marriage, though it does have its rough spots along the way.

It is my experience that the majority of marriages, among both laity and clergy, tend to fall into the category of “make do” marriages. As clergy couples, we also tend to have a false perception that even if our marriages are not all they could be, they are secure because we take seriously the sacramental nature of marriage, and thus, we often take our spouse and our marriages for granted. However, as we all know, clergy couples are not immune to the tragedy of broken or miserable marriages. With the ever-increasing number of clergy divorces and clergy couples seeking marriage counseling, we all know clergy couples who have either been divorced or are struggling in their marriages. My brother was a priest and divorced after almost twenty years of marriage. I cannot begin to tell you about his pain or the pain our family experienced. Further, my husband and I have served in two parishes where my husband’s immediate predecessors had been divorced. Both parishes suffered as a result. I will never forget one woman approaching me about a year after we had been in one of these parishes and apologizing for not reaching out and befriending me. She told me that she had been very close to the previous presvytera and would never allow herself to get close to another presvytera again because it was so hard for her when the divorce occurred. Or the young mother whose 10 year-old son asked her if Fr. Harry was going to get a divorce like the previous priest had.

Clergy divorces impact much more than the husband, wife, children and the extended family. They profoundly impact the communities whose priests get divorced and send shock waves through the church.

As Orthodox Christians, we are called to “vitalized and dynamic” marriages. If we truly believe that as married people the primary human relationship in which we are being saved is our marriage, then we must begin to shift the way in which we both look at and live our married lives and more intentionally commit to the working out of our salvation in the context of our marriages. How we live our married lives has everything to do with our salvation. As married people, how aware are we that our closest daily neighbor is our spouse, and that Jesus’ teaching to love our neighbor as ourself applies not just to those in our parishes or the occasional “Samaritan” with whom we have contact, but day in and day out to our spouse? Do we see and treat our spouse as our closest neighbor? In the words of St. John Chrysostom, “There is no relationship between man and woman so close as that

between man and wife, if they be joined together as they should be." Particularly as clergy couples, we need to be reminded that our first marriage is to our spouse. The church has shown profound wisdom in mandating that men who intend to be ordained must be married prior to ordination unless they choose celibacy. Further, the church greatly honors the sacramental institution of marriage and the wife of a potential clergyman by not allowing any ordination of a married man to take place without the written consent of his wife.

Within the richness of the Orthodox Christian Tradition, we are exceedingly blessed with three powerful iconographic images of marriage to help us and teach us about marriage: Jesus the Bridegroom, Saints Joachim and Anna, and The Wedding at Cana.

In this presentation it is my intention to explore a few themes concerning marriage that emerge from these icons and to find ways of incarnating these themes, especially in light of some of the unique challenges we face as clergy couples today.

Christ the Bridegroom

I will begin with the icon of Christ the Bridegroom. This is the icon of THE Groom, Jesus Christ, being wed to His beloved, the Church. What does this icon teach us about marriage? It teaches us that the authentic love of a husband for his wife is sacrificial and self-giving. It shows us that love is vulnerable—Jesus made Himself fully vulnerable when he wedded His bride—vulnerable to the point of dying naked on the cross. Christ is the supreme model of the lover – one who stops at nothing to win over his beloved; who lives the virtues perfectly, not just by teaching them but incarnating them in his life through faith, hope, love; humility, patience, truthfulness; who sacrifices everything, even death on a cross for his beloved.

We must empty ourselves of ourselves, our egos and self-centeredness, so that Christ may live more fully in us

When Jesus, the Groom, was presented to us, his Bride, in the ultimate act of love, he emptied himself—He who is rich became poor; He who was full became empty for our sake. In order for us to authentically love our spouse, we must give from a place of fullness, not out of a tank that is empty or half empty, as we often do. What does it mean to give from a place of fullness? It means first that we empty ourselves of ourselves, our egos and self-centeredness, so that Christ may live more fully in us, in order that we may grow in grace to become who we really are in Him. So, we are emptied in order that Christ may fill us, then we empty ourselves in love for the sake of our spouse from the fullness of Christ in us.

How often, especially as clergy couples, do we give the BEST we have to our spouses? Our resources are often depleted, and our spouses sometimes only get the crumbs that are left over after we have almost exhausted ourselves for the sake of others. Wives often feel as if they are second fiddle to the parish, the person in need, the choir director, the parish council president, etc. Sometimes wives even get to the point of referring to the church as “the other woman” or her husband’s mistress. In working with young couples preparing for marriage, I recall one young woman whose husband was a seminarian. Her greatest fear was that she would lose her husband to the church, the “other woman” in his life. This fear was born from many conversations with presvyteres.

Husbands often feel as if they are second fiddle to the children and the running of the household and have lost the loving attention they once enjoyed from their wives. After children are born, men often experience a sense of loss, despite the joy that children bring into their lives.

How do we grow to love our spouse from a place of fullness and authenticity? First, we are called to live our lives knowing that Christ is the only complete/whole/holy person, and that we are most fully human when we are “in Christ” and he lives more fully in and through us. For this we are wholly dependent on God’s grace.

Secondly, we grow to love our spouse more authentically by doing our part to become more fully human through practicing healthy, holy self-care that involves the whole person—the spirit, the mind, and the body. It means that we are persons of prayer and worship, always growing in

our relationship with Christ and accountable in our faith journey to a spiritual father or mother and to others, beginning with our spouse; it means that we take care of ourselves physically—healthful eating, physical exercise, time for rest, relaxation, and leisure. Husbands, it means that you take a Sabbath—a sacred time and space for worship and prayer, rest, relaxation and recreation. God in his infinite wisdom built the Sabbath into Creation and modeled it himself. If done at all, clergy may take a “day off” in order to do household chores, run errands, or attend to the children, rather than to take an authentic Sabbath. Wives: honoring the Sabbath means giving yourself and your husband space to observe this time and saving the honey-do list for another time. Things that need to get done will get done. Healthy, holy self-care also means being mentally and emotionally healthy. If we have unresolved issues such as anger, anxiety, control, depression, or grief, we are called in humility and honesty to recognize and attend to them. Further, we are challenged to manage the ever-present stress in our lives in healthy ways.

If we do our part by practicing self-care, our marriages will become more vibrant, and we will more naturally and authentically give of ourselves to our spouse, and by extension, to our children and our communities.

In this icon of Christ the Bridegroom, we also see Jesus wearing a crown of thorns, the crown of crucifixion and martyrdom that is transformed through the Resurrection into glory. When Christ joins us in marriage, crowns of martyrdom and glory are also laid on the heads of the bride and groom who become king and queen of a new household modeled on the kingly dimension of Christ’s ministry. What does Jesus’ kingly rule look like? Christ rules with humility and love; he does not rule with exploited authority, abuse of power, or control.

Let’s look at the significance of the crowns of glory, honor and martyrdom for the daily living out of our marriages.

Husband and wife mutually rule in the marriage

1. First, marriage is a partnership in which both spouses treat each other with honor and respect. It goes without saying, but do we live it? One spouse does not lord over or control the other; rather, husband and wife mutually rule in the marriage, making joint decisions with respect and honor for the perspective of the other, and they work hard to hear and understand the perspective of the other.

2. Second, the living out of the crowns laid upon our heads in the sacrament of marriage involves deep intimacy, which necessitates knowing how to love our spouse. In his book, *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman explores five primary ways in which people best

receive love. Through many years of working with married couples, he has concluded that we all have one primary love language. The five love languages he has identified are: words of affirmation, quality time, physical touch, gifts, and acts of service. He contends that it is important for each of us to identify our primary love language and to know our spouse’s primary love language. So, husbands, if you have a free Saturday morning and want to mow the grass before you do anything else, thinking your wife will be pleased, you may want to think twice or ask her what she would like you to do. She may want nothing more than fifteen quiet minutes with you over a cup of coffee. Wives, at the end of a long day at work for both of you, whether you work in or out of the home, you may want to cook a nice meal for your husband, but in doing so, don’t even notice when he walks in the door. Instead, what your husband may want more than anything is just a long hug or a short backrub to help relieve some of the tension of the day, and he may not even care what he will eat for dinner.

I can only know how my husband needs to be loved if he communicates it to me. The more time we spend together, getting to know one another, the more we will grow to know the hearts of our spouses. After 27 years of marriage, my husband and I are still getting to know each other. If we are growing persons, this process never ends, because we continue to evolve. We can never be sure how our spouse will respond to something or

what he or she may be thinking because as each of us grows and matures in Christ, our responses and thinking also grow and change.

Love is a word in great need of healing in our culture

3. Finally, honoring the crowns given in marriage involves offering sacrificial love—choosing to act in love even if you do not want to. This can only be done by the grace of God at work in us. Love is a word in great need of healing in our culture. Love in the biblical sense is far more related to the will than to emotion. Recalling the words of St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, “love does not insist on its own way,” how do we practice this self-giving love on a daily basis? If one of you likes to take walks and the other doesn’t, how can you reach a compromise that honors both of you? If your wife loves the opera, and you don’t, either buy tickets and take her to the opera, or buy her tickets and give her the evening out with a girlfriend. If your husband loves Italian food and you don’t, take him out for Italian food from time to time. If you pray together but have different ideas about how to pray, find something that works for both of you or vary what you do on a daily or weekly basis.

For about the first 20 years of our married life, I would occasionally ask my husband what he would like for gifts on his birthday and at Christmas. The answer I always received was “books, or money for

books.” So, I would go out and buy him clothes instead, partly because I thought he didn’t dress very well and partly because I would want clothes as gifts. Sometimes I would include a book with the clothes. He would graciously accept the clothes and enthusiastically accept the books. It has only been in the last several years of marriage that I have finally come to honor and respect his desire for books, and now I give him books and an occasional piece of clothing.

These examples may seem small and mundane; however, small kindnesses and acts of love on a regular basis help to grow genuine love in a marriage.



Saints Joachim and Anna

Let us now move to the icon of Joachim and Anna where we see a husband and wife in their later years exuding tenderness and affection, gentleness and kindness, for each other. In today’s language, it is evident that Joachim and Anna are deeply connected to one another.

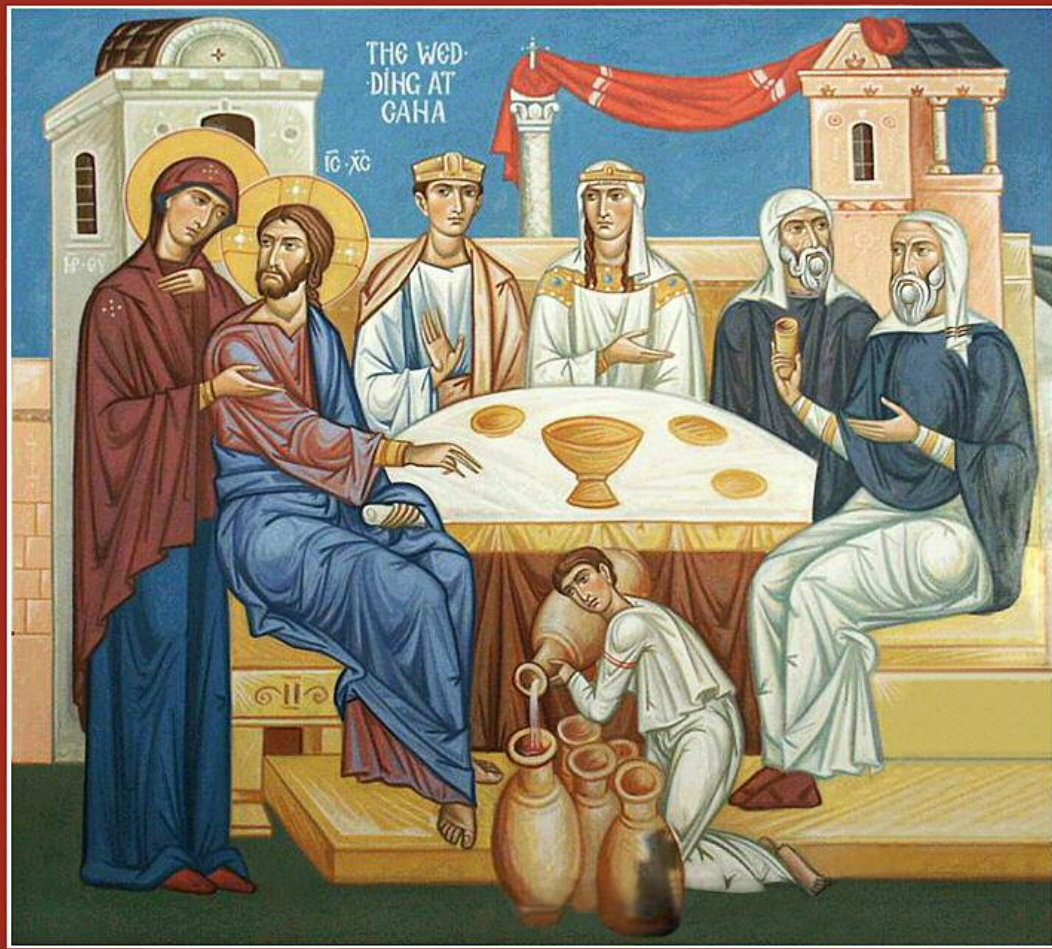
How do we grow to be more connected to our spouse, keeping in mind that this process of growing together continues to the extent that each of us is growing in Christ daily?

I have found two simple practices to be most beneficial for growing our daily connection to our spouse and opening the door of God’s grace for us to love our spouse more authentically. These practices also honor the differences between men and women. Research has shown that men primarily connect with their wives through physical touch, both sexual and non-sexual. Women, on the other hand, primarily connect through meaningful conversation.

1. The first practice is three 30-second hugs each day. Each person drops everything for the other and simply takes the time to be in the presence and embrace of the other in silence. It is a powerful practice that has huge benefits for the husband, the wife and the couple. I am not talking about a long, sensual hug, just a relaxed hug in which both persons stand together without leaning into each other too much. If you begin this practice, at first it may feel a little silly and perhaps contrived, but if you stick with it for a week or so, you will begin to experience the benefits. This practice is also a gift to your children. It teaches and models for them that you consistently take time for each other and care for one another, no matter how hectic or difficult life may be. I often remember the teaching of Henri

Nouwen, the prolific Roman Catholic priest and writer who regularly taught that the greatest gift parents can give to their children is their love for one another, a gift far more important than giving children “quality time.” This practice of hugging is one small way in which we model this love for our children.

2. The second practice that is very beneficial in building intimacy into our marriages is a daily commitment to conversation. This is not just any conversation, however, and it may only last 5 minutes, though at times it might be longer. It has purpose and meaning and can grow and evolve. It begins with each person asking the other open-ended questions like the following -- What was the best part of your day today and why? What was most life-giving to you today? And then secondly: What was the worst part of your day? What sucked or drained the energy from you today? The point is, when we talk with our spouse about the meaning of daily events, not just what happened, we make the time to reflect in the presence of each other and we give our spouse a window into our hearts and minds. This conversation can take place before you go to bed, in bed before going to sleep, or it can be incorporated into evening prayer. What is important is that we do it. When beginning a practice such as this, it is best to begin with small doses, perhaps once or twice a week, and to build upon it with time.



These two practices of hugging and meaningful conversation, by themselves, are not going to create intimacy; however, they can be part of the process and hopefully will also create springboards for additional time together.

In the past, when many wives did not work outside the home, clergy couples often struggled with having time together because of the husband’s schedule. Now, with many wives working outside the home, this challenge becomes even more pronounced. This is why consistent practices such as the hug and brief, meaningful conversations and reflections can be so helpful—they do not involve much time, yet provide opportunities for genuine connection between husband and wife. As we all know, we find and make the time to do what is important to us.

The Wedding at Cana

The final icon, the Wedding at Cana, also has much to teach us about marriage. First, let us look at the context of the miracle Jesus performed at the wedding. It is interesting that this miracle is recorded only in the Gospel of John, the gospel that most explicitly reveals, not the human but the divine nature of Christ. It is the first miracle recorded in this gospel. Significantly, the changing of the water into wine is the only recorded miracle in all of the gospels that does not involve healing. This miracle is purely in the context of the celebration of life. It is Eucharistic in that it gives us a celebratory image of God’s kingdom using the medium of wine. Of all human celebrations, Jesus chooses marriage to teach us about the kingdom of God.

However, he also teaches us much about marriage in this miracle. I would like to look at two themes that emerge from this icon.

In the ancient world, it was most common at a celebration to serve the good wine first and save the cheap wine until the end. What we may not know is that wedding receptions often lasted much longer back then. In fact, some could last up to a whole week! For those of us who have paid for our children's weddings, we can be grateful that nowadays wedding receptions only last for one evening. Jesus turned convention upside down when, changing water into wine, he made the best wine available during the latter part of the celebration. So it is with marriage. In the world we live in, so much is put into the celebration of the wedding, the beginning of the marriage. And, unfortunately, couples often experience the high of their marriages with the wedding and the honeymoon period, then just settle for a tolerable existence after the hormones stop producing the highs of the "in love" stage of a relationship. However, Christian marriage is qualitatively different. If Jesus Christ is central to our personal lives and to our marriages, the best is yet to come for all of us, whether we have been married for five, twenty-five, or fifty years. Again, I go back to the theme of life and vibrancy, which can only be realized if we are growing in grace and faith. Several years ago, I had a

wonderful conversation with a priest who was then in his late 60s. He made it very clear that he loved his wife more than ever and that marriage just kept getting better and better as the years passed. Just recently I was privileged to be in the presence of this priest and his wife over the course of a few days. The adoration, love, affection and respect they have for each other was contagious, even when they did not completely agree with each other or recalled events in their lives differently. What a witness to the grace of God at work in the lives of two people and in marriage.

The second theme that clearly emerges from the icon of the Wedding at Cana is the presence of community with the couple in the celebration of their marriage, that is, the necessary communal dimension of marriage. As we live our married lives, let us remember that God Himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, lives in community. However, the clear reality is that across the board, those in professional ordained ministry experience isolation even when fully immersed in communal life. It is one of the hallmark challenges we live with. What do we do—when we feel all alone over an issue with our church community, on holidays when we yearn to be with family but cannot, or when we have a serious problem with one of our children and are trying to maintain appropriate boundaries with our community? As Orthodox, we have incredible resources from

which to draw—prayer, Scripture, spiritual mentorship, a desert tradition composed of elders who have experienced and grown through the dry and parched times of life. However, we still have periods when we feel all alone and it hurts. I remember an incident in our first parish when my husband took a stand on a moral issue involving entertainment at a church festival. No one on the parish council understood or agreed with the clear moral implications, and the chair-people went behind my husband's back and brought in the belly dancers. Here we were, young and in our first parish, and experiencing a deep sense of aloneness and isolation. We sought support and found a way to work through the situation together, but the isolation we experienced was very painful.

*We can have friendships
in the church as long as
we maintain
appropriate boundaries*

Nonetheless, in our day-to-day living, we are not created to live in isolation. It is not healthy for us as persons, couples or families. We need meaningful and mutual relationships in our lives. We need look no further than to the example Jesus gives us in his earthly life. We know he had a close circle of 12 disciples, a larger circle of followers and acquaintances and even good friends like Mary, Martha and Lazarus with whom he broke bread and enjoyed fellowship.

So, how do we create community? Some clergy couples have been creative and have found ways of establishing a sense of community in their lives; others make little effort and resign themselves to living relatively isolated lives, maintaining that it goes with the territory of being a clergy couple and/or family. I have come to believe that as clergy couples, we will necessarily experience times of isolation in our lives; however, our normal, daily mode of existence need not be one of isolation and loneliness. In fact, I believe we are called as Christians to live in community, and living in community necessarily involves getting close to people in our lives. We have lots of options for fellowship and meaningful relationships; however, we must be willing to take initiative and the risk. We can choose to have friendships in the church as long as we maintain appropriate boundaries. If we make that choice, we must accept the reality that this choice may be a topic of conversation or gossip for some and learn to live with that. We also take the risk of being hurt. We have taken that risk in our lives, and though we have been hurt and used in a few instances, we would not choose otherwise because we have been immensely blessed with dear friends, people we have even grown to consider as family. If we are in smaller parishes, close friendships will be more visible than if we are in larger parishes. Regardless, if we choose to have friendships with other individuals, couples or families in the church, it is most appropriate to be discerning and for the husband

and wife to discuss and agree on the boundaries for those relationships, seeking the feedback of more experienced clergy couples in doing so.

Further, when it comes to relationships within our communities, it is important for us to remember that one of the greatest blessings we have as clergy couples is the gift of serving God and his people. We have a unique relationship with our churches as clergy couples that create many opportunities for living in authentic community. However, there are two sides to this coin. Yes, our Lord taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive. However, receiving also has its proper place in our daily lives. From the Desert Fathers, we learn the following: Abba James said, "It is better to receive hospitality than to give it." Just think of how Jesus graciously accepted the hospitality of his good friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. We sometimes give, give, and give as priests and presbyteres and do not learn to receive—when we live like this we are actually stealing the opportunity of our brothers and sisters to give to us! In other cases, we expect and feel entitled to being on the receiving end and do little to authentically give ourselves to our people. We need to learn both to give and to receive if we are going to live authentically as members of a community.

Some of us live in areas where we have opportunities to have friendships with other clergy couples and families. In other areas, clergy couples may find themselves a hundred miles

from the nearest Orthodox Church. Another option, if you are so inclined, is to develop friendships with clergy couples from the larger ecumenical community. Other options include friendships with work colleagues if the wife works outside the home, neighborhood friends, people we meet through our children's schools and activities, and people we meet through our own interests and hobbies.

Many clergy couples, including my husband and I, have found friendships outside the life of the church to be life-giving and important for the well-being of their marriages and families. These friendships offer opportunities for clergy couples/families to relax and "let their hair down" in ways they do not always feel comfortable doing with parishioners.

Second, the icon of the Wedding at Cana has something to teach us about the quality of the celebrations of our married life. Clearly in this icon, the best was saved for the latter part of the celebration. Do we work at growing and improving the quality of our celebrations as married people, from the daily to the annual events? Daily celebration of life can be incorporated into our married/family life as we eat meals together. What are mealtimes like in our homes? Are we committed to at least one meal as a family daily, or have we succumbed to the wider culture in which we live and not have regular mealtimes with our spouse or family? Are mealtimes rushed, or do we take time to savor the food and

simply be in the presence of one another? It would do us well to remember that in the earliest church the Eucharist was celebrated in the context of a meal. Mealtimes are holy times for couples and families.

And, how do we celebrate our anniversaries? As each year of married life passes, does the quality and depth of marriage grow and mature, as fine wine gets better with time, or do we allow yet another year to pass as our marriages become commonplace and we have little to celebrate on the day when we remember Christ's joining us together as one flesh?

In conclusion, let us take one last look at these three icons, which graphically and compellingly present the three interconnecting dimensions of marriage. In the first, we see the Bridegroom, Jesus, as He lays down his life for his beloved, offering the supreme sacrifice to win us over. This icon reminds us of the personal dimension of marriage, that is, as Orthodox Christians, our commitment to be centered on the risen and crucified Lord as the foundation and rock of who we are as persons and as husband or wife.

In the icon of Joachim and Anna we see the married couple, embracing as man and woman united in Christ. In this icon we are most reminded of the tender, loving intimacy of the married couple.

And finally, in the icon of the Wedding at Cana, we are reminded of the relationship of the couple to the community of faith. Especially as clergy couples, we have a unique relationship with that community.

May our marriages continually become a source of God's grace and love so that from our marriages, his love and grace will naturally flow to the communities of faith in which we live and minister. And may we realize in our marriages the words of Fr. Alexander Elchaninov (1881-1934), the early 20th century Russian émigré priest in Paris, as he so eloquently wrote in *The Diary of a Russian Priest*, his published diary: "In marriage the festive joy of the first day should last for the whole of life: every day should be a feast day; every day husband and wife should appear to each other as new, extraordinary beings. The only way of achieving this: let both deepen their spiritual life, and strive hard in the task of self-development."



—Presvytera Kerry Pappas

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She and Father Harry Pappas have been married for 27 years.

The above article was presented at the Clergy-Laity Congress in Washington, D.C. as part of the clergy family enrichment programs coordinated by the APC and NSP with funding provided by Leadership 100



A St. Nicholas Day Reflection on Ministry in the Church



The truth of things has revealed you to your flock as a canon of faith; an icon of meekness; and a teacher of self-control. In humility you were exalted; in poverty you were enriched. O Father and hierarch Nicholas, intercede with Christ God that our souls may be saved.

The Orthodox Church's main hymn (*troparion/apolytikion*) for the feast of St. Nicholas of Myra is the general hymn used for all of the Church's holy bishops. As such, for example, it is sung the day after the feast of St. Nicholas for the celebration of St. Ambrose of Milan. This hymn tells us what a Christian bishop - and, by extension, what a presbyter - ought to be for his people. And so it tells us not only how our pastors and shepherds should be but also how all Christians should be.

The hymn begins by telling us that "the truth of things" reveals a real Christian pastor "to his flock" as three things:

First, "the truth of things" reveals the bishop (or presbyter) as a "canon of faith." This means that a holy pastor incarnates God's Gospel in Jesus Christ in a living and vital way in absolutely everything he is, says and does. He not only "rightly divides the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), but he himself is a living "rule" and "norm" for everyone about what they should know and believe, and how they should live and behave as Christians.

The pastor becomes a living pattern and image, literally a living icon to his people

Second, "the truth of things" reveals the bishop (or presbyter) as an "icon of meekness." This means that a pastor must learn from Christ, the Good Shepherd, who said "learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). Having so learned, the pastor becomes a living pattern and image, literally a living icon to his people about Christ-like meekness which, according to the teaching of the saints, is a divine quality that no human being can adequately comprehend or explain. This meekness is the ability to express, exemplify and incarnate God's Gospel in Jesus Christ in a clear, sound, true, sober and gentle manner, without anger, annoyance, irritation or aggression in any way. It is to be and to act like Christ himself: to affirm people's freedom, to safeguard their dignity and to instruct them by example.

Third, "the truth of things" reveals the bishop (or presbyter) as a "teacher of self-control." Self-control is how the Greek word *enkrateia* is translated into English in the RSV Bible, as, for example, the final virtue in St. Paul's listing of "the fruit of the Holy Spirit" (Galatians 5:22). In the KJV Bible this word is translated as temperance. Sometimes in English translations of ascetical writings the word is rendered as self-discipline or self-limitation, or as abstinence or continence. Sometimes it is rendered as spiritual freedom.

So the Christian pastor is a canon, icon and teacher for his flock. He is a canon of faith, an icon of meekness, and a teacher of self-control.

Two other things are then proclaimed in the hymn about the holy pastor.

Humble people understand that everything is a gift and a grace given by God

The first is that "through humility" the godly pastor is "exalted." The word humility (in Greek *tapeinosis*) means lowliness, emptiness, powerlessness according to the flesh. It means that a person has nothing of his of own: no knowledge, wisdom, power or authority of any kind. Humble people understand that

everything is a gift and a grace given by God, and as such, they live by God, and not themselves. They realize that none of their words, actions, abilities or possessions belong to them, to do with as they please. Humble people have the ability to see themselves not merely as the same as everyone else, especially the lowest and weakest, but they view themselves before God as beneath every living creature. Thus such pastors are completely devoid of conceit, arrogance, lust for power, vanity, vainglory and pride. The Lord Jesus Christ joined humility (*tapeinosis*) with meekness when he said "Learn from me for I am meek and lowly in heart (*tapeinos en kardia*)."

*The saintly pastor
becomes wealthy in the
things of God by
emptying himself of all
things earthly*

The second proclamation about the saintly pastor is that "in poverty" he is "enriched." He becomes wealthy in the things of God by emptying himself, without exception, of all things earthly. In this sense the bishop (or presbyter) possesses nothing at all of his own. He is not an owner of anything in any way. He is rather, as the Holy Scriptures say, a "slave" (*doulos*), a "servant" (*diakonos*) and a "steward" (*oikonomos*).

The word bishop (in Greek *episkopos*), which literally means overseer or supervisor, was the title in an ancient household (*oikos*) for the chief slave. The "epi-skopos" was the head servant and first steward who "over-saw" and "super-vised" the work of all the other slaves, servants and stewards. The "episkopos" spoke in the Master's name, held the Master's authority, wielded the Master's power, cared for the Master's properties, guarded the Master's possessions, directed the Master's services and distributed the Master's goods. But he was not the Master himself!

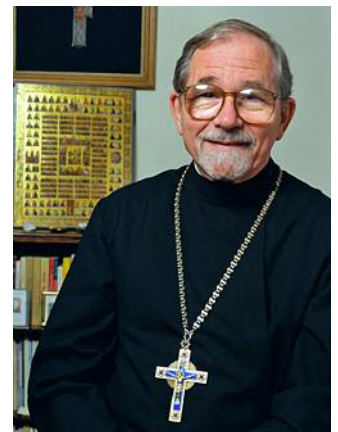
Thus, in the memorable saying of St. Gregory the Great, the 6th century pope of Rome, the Christian bishop (or presbyter) is the chief "*servus servorum Dei*," the preeminent "servant of the servants of God" in the household of God.

In reflecting on the main hymn for St Nicholas and all Christian bishops, we cannot help but recall the words of Holy Scripture about the Church's bishops and presbyters.

"For a bishop (*episkopos*), as God's steward (*oikonomos*), must be blameless, must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or an active alcoholic or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, master of himself, upright, holy, and self-controlled; he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and to confute those who contradict it" (Titus 1.7-9; See also 1 Timothy 3:1-13, 4:11-16).

"So I exhort the presbyters among you, as a fellow presbyter and a witness (*martys*) of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Shepherd the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising oversight (*episkope*) not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd (*archipoimenos*) is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:1-4).

The hymn to St. Nicholas, and to all holy bishops, concludes with the plea: "O Father Hierarch Nicholas, pray to Christ God that our souls may be saved." "The truth of things" on this holy day clearly reveals what God wills for us as pastors, and for the people we serve, for our souls to be saved.



Fr. Thomas Hopko
Dean Emeritus
St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary
Ellwood City, PA

THE NEED FOR PRIESTS (written in the first year of Seminary, 1975)

I

*A white marble table.
Black striations pulsing through the stone.
A goblet of still wine.
Wine so deep in the hollow,
so darkly blooded, it is almost black.
When we lean to the cup, our eyes stare back.
We are the dark angels.
Shadows at a christening.*

II

*Knowing only our wooden chairs at work,
the same roads home and the predictable food on our plates,
the placement of our shoes at the bedside
and the heaviness of blankets melting
us into the forms of our bodies,
we have a terrible need for priests.
We need those black others to go beyond themselves
and bring back the stories, take the effort away.
We want admonishing priests, to expose them for what we really are.
Always we are attacking the better parts of ourselves.
Contemptuous of the kind, we secretly envy the guiltless evil.
Purity frightens, as much as we desire it.
Because of this, we have priests to love and despise.
We need priests to kill them.
We are a black tapestry who want our clergy
to wear black forever, to be lost in muslin robes,
to be as apart from us as we are
separate from ourselves.
We have prayers said for us, but we are mute in sleep.
We adore the bones of saints--soft with centuries, yellow and assiduous.
We need priests to revere.
We kill them to venerate their deaths,
believe we grow pious by this,
waft beeswax candles in the air
while saints ashen underground.
Because we must always be burying or uncovering,
we need the voices of priests, to have
something to bury. To spend our lives on this.
At best, we insist on being dragged to salvation.
Distrustful of proximity, we are content
to look out windows,
to feel the panes on our fingertips.
Our ears strain for faraway music,
a chant across borders, and the muscles in our backs twinge
but there will always be a country we can't get to.
True savoring is in the denial.
This is why we have the need for priests,
why we remain with one hand pressed to our throats,
faces turned like flowers to the warmth of light,
peering off, settled on an icy edge of Paradise.*



—Fr. Nicholas Samaras
Ss. Constantine & Helen
West Nyack, NY

Recipient of the
Yale Prize for poetry



the Priesthood

Contemporary and Classic Excerpts

On Hierarchy

Now the temptation for the Church, as for every other human organization, is to structure itself according to worldly principles, principles of hierarchy, of power – as a hierarchy of submission, a hierarchy of enslavement, of humiliation, of irrelevance. We must become more Christian than we are, must be more in Christ and in the Spirit. And we must also recapture a theology of hierarchy which is true, because one cannot, on false premises, build a vision of the true Church.

We must realize that our vocation, and the vocation of the Church, is to be an icon of the Holy Trinity. The only real structure, the only real way in which the Church can be formed so as to fulfill its vocation is by expressing in all its being all the relationships within the Holy Trinity: relationships of love, relationships of freedom, relationships of holiness and so forth. In the Holy Trinity we find what the Greek Fathers call the “monarchy” of the Father. He is the source, the heart of the divinity. But the Son and the Spirit are equal to Him; they are not by-products, they are not secondary gods, they are what He is.

How can we be on earth an icon of this reality? The Lord Jesus Christ is our Lord, our God, our Savior and it is from Him that all structure begins, a structure pervaded by the Holy Spirit. If we speak of hierarchy, we must remember Christ’s words, “I am in your midst as one who serves,” and those of us who wish to be in Christ must learn to be servants and nothing else.

However, historically a hierarchy of power has developed; a hierarchy that can command not because what is said is convincing, but because what is said can be enforced. The structure of the Church has resulted from copying the structures of the imperial state, which is strictly hierarchical. But, according to

Father Sophrony, the State is a pyramid standing on its base whereas the Church is a pyramid standing on its point. And the point is not a man, not a hierarchy, not a council of bishops. This point is the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can be the head, the supreme point of the Church, and then, layer after layer, of the people who exercise Christ’s own diakonia.

If in the Church we are simply a hierarchy of power because we have different titles and ranks, that is a negation of the very life and substance of the Church. We know how often saints “of no account” were guides for people who were far above them hierarchically or socially. In the Church, power must be replaced by service, by diakonia, and as long as we continue to believe in the power of the hierarchy and not in the diakonia of the hierarchy, we are not a Church according to the Gospel.

Hierarchy consists in service. The higher the servant allegedly is in rank, in titles, the lower he should be in terms of service. He should be the one who does the humblest service. The greatest hierarch is the lowest servant. This is something which we must recapture.

And so when we speak of hierarchy we need to realize that we must recapture a true approach to hierarchy: a hierarchy of service, a hierarchy of humility, a hierarchy in which there is no dominion, no power. God chose to be powerless when He gave us freedom, the right to say “no” to whatever He says. But God in Christ, God in the Spirit, has another quality. Not power, which is the ability to coerce, but authority, which is the ability to convince. And that is a very different thing. In a sense authority has no power; it is the persuasiveness of truth that is authority.

Authority is the quality which a human being – and God – possesses of being able to convince, not force us to do something. And if our hierarchy learns, gradually, that the vocation of the hierarchy is to have authority and not power, we will become nearer to what the Church is called to be: a living Body, an “organism of love” – but not of sentimentality. For love is described by Christ in the Gospel when He says no one has greater love than he or she who gives their life for that of their neighbor.

And so when we speak of the structures of the Church – yes, they are a necessity. There is in us imperfection and frailty. And therefore there must be structures that are like a scaffolding, or like the banks of a river, or like a walking stick one uses if one is lame, to prevent us from collapsing. These are structures that are of necessity because of our frailty, because of our sinfulness, because of the temptations which the devil puts before us, because of our immaturity. But the attitude of the people who are “in command” must be that of a servant.

–Metropolitan Anthony Bloom (1914 – 2003)
from his book, *The Living Body of Christ*





The Archdiocesan Presbyters Council
met with His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios
at Holy Trinity Church in New Rochelle, NY
October 20th – 22nd, 2008

(Left to Right) Fathers John Hondros, Christopher Foustoukos, Louis Noplos, Tom Zaferes, Dean Panagos, James Rousakis (ABC president), John Touloumes, James Moulketis, Steven Tschlis, Christopher Metropulos, Louis Christopulos, Sebastian Skordallos (Chief Secretary of the Holy Synod), George Livanos, Nicholas Anctil, John Kalomas, William Christ, Eugene Pappas, Paul Kaplanis, Michael Kontogiorgis (Assistant to the Chancellor) and Timothy Bakakos.

Among the topics discussed at this meeting were: the development of a national continuing education program for the clergy of the Archdiocese focused on preaching for the fall of 2009; the APC/NSP benevolent fund; the clergy pension plan and medical insurance; the summer training program for the diaconate at HC/HC; the APC HC/HC scholarship awarded to a senior GOA seminarian annually; stewardship development; *The Presbyter*; better coordination of efforts with both the NSP and the RCA; the beginnings of a national program for sharing pastoral resources among clergy of the Archdiocese and much else.

The Presbyter

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Contact the Archdiocese for updates or changes.



*Well, I haven't actually died to sin,
but I did feel kind of faint once!*