

— Faith in Action —
Fanning the Flame of Christian Witness and Service

Set our hearts on fire with love of Thee, O Christ our God, that in its flame we may love Thee with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength — and so love our neighbors as ourselves, so that thus keeping Thy commandments, we may glorify Thee, the Giver of all good gifts.

Fr. Sergei, in his wonderful and inspiring keynote address yesterday, shared this prayer with us. I asked that it be printed up and distributed today, so that we all may take it and incorporate it in our own daily Rule of Prayer — and share it with the rest of the parish community at home.

There are three individuals who I would like to mention at the outset — and ask their intercessions for this talk and for our whole conference.

The first is a saint who was commemorated just two Sundays ago (July 17): the very dearly-beloved St. Elizabeth the New-martyr. After her husband was assassinated in 1905, St. Elizabeth devoted her whole life to charitable and pious *diakonia* / service / ministry. She was of royal lineage and was blessed with financial stability. She entered the monastic life and when she was tonsured, Elizabeth told her sisters, “I am leaving the brilliant world where I have occupied a lofty position. And now, together with all of you, I am about to ascend to a much greater world, the world of the poor and afflicted.” Her stewardship of financial wealth was bestowed heavily upon the Church in that (among other things) she saw to the establishment of a *diakonia* which she and Patriarch St. Tikhon felt should be placed under the heavenly patronage of Ss. Martha and Mary. The convent had a clinic, a hospital, an orphanage, a school for illiterate women, a soup kitchen for the poor, and a place for poor women laborers to live. The nuns visited the poor in the slums and were trained in the qualities needed to prepare the terminally-ill for eternal life. Abbess Elizabeth was known to sleep very little. She spent most of each day and night in work and prayer. She instructed the nuns, nursed the wounded, fed the hungry, administered the community and visited many people in need. Reaching out to the poor, the lonely, the addicted, the sick and the destitute, St. Elizabeth and her Sisters of the Convent of Mercy became an important (and very valuable) charitable, medical and spiritual witness to the world.

The second individual is a saint who was commemorated just this past Sunday (July 25): St. Olympiada the Deaconess of Constantinople. At age 18 she was widowed — just two weeks after having married. She was ordained a deaconess soon after becoming a widow. In the 5th century a deaconess was a full-time church worker, assisting the bishop in the baptism of women, visiting Christian women in their homes, managing the charitable work of the Church, and tending to the pastoral and spiritual needs of the women in the Church. Her charity knew few bounds. St. John Chrysostom compared her charitable acts to a river that is accessible to all and whose waters flow over the earth and eventually into the ocean. The most distant towns, isles and deserts received plentiful supplies from Olympiada. She bought whole estates and gave them to destitute churches so that they would receive the revenue as income. St John Chrysostom asked her to moderate her charity — or at least be more cautious and reserved in bestowing it — so that she might be able to help many others in greater need. Olympiada had at her disposal vast amounts of wealth — inherited from her very high-ranking and powerful family. She saw to it that the poor, jobless, sick and lonely were housed in her hostels. She established clinics, bread lines and soup kitchens. She was continually on the streets seeking out those in need. Her *diakonia* was not simply a liturgical one (though it did include that), but she

was known more for her life and witness among the down and out. Not surprisingly, St. John Chrysostom (who is known for his continual concern for the poor) came to regard her with great love and respect.

The third saint is one who was only recently glorified: St. Marie Skobstova of Paris. Her martyrdom is commemorated each year on March 31. St. Marie, upon entering the monastic life — and an avant-garde monasticism it was: Metropolitan Evlogy declared that hers was a new monasticism, and that her monastery was the streets of Paris. “The way to God lies through love of people. We should not give away a single piece of bread unless the recipient means something as a person for us. The monastic life is nothing if it is not the incarnation of love for God and for the neighbor.” St. Marie’s most famous statement sums it all up: “At the last judgment I will not be asked if I was successful in my ascetic practices; if I made all the prescribed prostrations during the prayers of Great Lent. Rather, I will be asked: ‘Did you feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and prisoner?’ That is all that I shall be asked. The Savior says ‘I’ about every poor, hungry and imprisoned person. To think that the Savior puts an equal sign between Himself and anyone in need fills me with awe.” It was the *diakonia* of hospitality and relief to anybody who came to her (or who she could find) who was in need. Unlike the first two saints, just mentioned, St. Marie of Paris was not wealthy. Nonetheless, she had the gift of providing for those in need by pulling-together what resources and benefactors she could find. During the years of World War II, her hospitality extended to all Parisians: Christian, Jew or otherwise. The Nazis once came to her and asked if she were harboring any Jews in her house (which on and off was definitely the case). She took them to the chapel and pointed to the icon of the Theotokos and Child. “Here are the Jews we harbor in this house.” Marie was eventually arrested and taken to Ravensbrück and after a long period of forced labor and starvation, sent to the gas chamber — only days before the allied forces liberated the place (1945).

Each of these wonderful saints are living icons for us all this week. May we, through their example and intercessions, assist us in our own *martyria* (witness) and *diakonia* ministry and service).

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I’d like to review some of the scriptural texts we’ve been mentioning this week. I’ve printed them out and hope that you will take them home and use them for a Bible Study in your parishes — a Bible Study centered around the theme of Christian Witness and Service.

The text first comes from the very end of St. Matthew’s Gospel. We hear this at Sunday Matins every eleven weeks. We hear it proclaimed at every baptism. We hear it (and a little bit more) at the Divine Liturgy on Holy Saturday every year. It is the Church’s Mission Statement. (“Mission” comes from the Latin *missa* which means “to send off.”)

We hear of “mission statements” for various church ministries or organizations. This is the basic (and in many ways, only) mission statement of the Christian life.

Matthew 28:16-20

16: Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17: And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18: And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19: Go therefore and make

disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20: teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

Note four terms: go, make disciples, baptize, teach, observe the commandments. These are the last instructions of the Lord before His ascension. These are our own marching orders.

In order to continue the *diakonia* of Christ in the world, we are called to be fellow-workers with Him. St. Paul writes:

Colossians 4:11

...my fellow-workers for the kingdom of God...have been a comfort to me.

Galatians 3:27

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

St. Paul tells us that we are immersed into the very Person of Christ. We clothe ourselves in Christ. We become a body-part of Christ. We share in His Life. We enter into communion with Him. (Fellowship is the usual translation. But this is a weak term. The word *koinonia* in Greek means communion.)

It is said that St. Gregory the Theologian once wrote (and I can't find the reference, I'm sorry) that we are called to be *chirst* — "christ with a small 'c'" — that is, we are *anointed* to be His presence in the world. We don't become *the* Christ. We remain who we are. Peter is Peter. Paul is Paul. I am me, and you are you. But here is the mystical paradox: when I am immersed in Christ and it is Christ living in me, I am transformed and transfigured and become a completely new person. I do not lose my own God-given personhood. I am not caught up into some sort of "world soul" of the Supreme Being, losing my identity in some sort of "ONE (so-called) Christ Consciousness." But Christ "ones" me to Himself. I am "oned in Him." I am one of His body parts in the world. Recall the oft-quoted patristic maxim: "God became a human person (by nature) so that human persons could become divine (by grace)."

So, being incorporated into Christ (i.e., made into a body-part of His Body) — in cooperating with Christ as his fellow-worker (the Greek is *synergia*), we continue his *diakonia*. What is it that He would have us do? By going, making disciples, teaching and observing His commandments — and His commandments will be discussed in just a bit — the commandments found in the 25th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel.

Body of Christ. This brings to mind the awesome concept of "eucharistic ecclesiology" taught so well by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. This is sometimes called "Ignatian ecclesiology," (after the 1st / 2nd century martyr, St. Ignatius of Antioch), or even "communion ecclesiology." St. Ignatius wrote to a number of church communities while on his way to Rome for trial and eventual martyrdom. He wrote to those communities that he would soon visit or those that he had just visited *en route*. In his letters we find the description of what the Church was like. His

description shows us the bishop, surrounded by his deacons, in turn surrounded by the council of presbyters, in turn surrounded by the laity — all in concentric circles — AS they celebrated the Holy Mysteries of the Eucharist. Quite a different model from the Germanic / Frankish model we've all learned in Junior High School history: the feudalistic pyramidal system of king, noble, merchant, serf — which was superimposed upon the Western Church: pope, bishop, priest, laity. This would never work (at least in theory and in ideal) in the Christian East where our model is the Ignatian / Eucharistic ecclesiology of the local Church.

Body of Christ. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann begins his classic book, *For the Life of the World* with these words — quoting a German philosopher: “You are what you eat.” Augustine of Hippo once used this statement in relation to the Holy Mysteries of Communion: “Christ says: You will not change me into yourself as you would food of your flesh; but you will be changed into me.” At the Eucharist, we partake of the Body of Christ which empowers us (and “empowers” is OUR word, not the New-Agers) to BE the Body of Christ in the world. Fr. Alexander often said that it is at the Eucharist where the Church becomes what she is. Her very essence is revealed in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus.

Let me read you some words from the final chapter of another book by Fr. Alexander: *Liturgy and Life*.

“Communion is the sacrament of the Kingdom. Communion is given to me personally in order to transform me into a member [i.e., body part] of Christ....the Divine Liturgy is the act through which the Church fulfills her true nature. In it the visible community are changed into the Church, the Body of Christ.”

We'll come back to the verbal icon of the Body of Christ in just a bit.

Now, let's look at the First Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

4: Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5: and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6: and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. 7: To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8: To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9: to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10: to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11: All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

The list of *charismata* (i.e., charisms, grace and gifts; *diakonia*, ministries and services) from this section and sections to follow can be found at the end of this paper.

St. Paul enumerates a number of ministries here. There are more to come. But first, let's go back to the image of the Body of Christ:

1 Corinthians 12:12-21

12: For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though

many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13: For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free -- and all were made to drink of one Spirit. 14: For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15: If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16: And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17: If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18: But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19: If all were a single organ, where would the body be? 20: As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21: The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ...

1 Corinthians 12:25-26

...25: that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26: If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

We now return to the ministries. He gives us both some of the previous charisms but new ones as well:

1 Corinthians 12:27-30

27: Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28: And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers [performers of helpful acts], administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. 29: Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30: Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31: But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way....

Below, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul uses a word that, in the RSV, here, is translated "equip." Alternative translations, more precise, are "prepare," "train," "make qualified," "to set (as in a broken bone)," and "knit." Much stronger imagery than simply to outfit with equipment.

We keep running into the words "favor," "grace" and "gift," together with "service" and "ministry." We'll see them again, soon. Let's look at Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:7, 11-13

7: But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8: Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." 9: (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10: He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11: And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12: to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13: until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ...

I want now to introduce two more concepts — stewardship and talents. Stewards were put in charge of the property of the Master. Talents were originally measures of weight and later a monetary unit. This word has passed into the English language as a term for abilities or natural endowments.

Luke 12:48

48b: Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more.

Compare this with a similar statement at the end of this next passage.

Matthew 25:14-30

14: "For it will be as when a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property; 15: to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16: He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them; and he made five talents more. 17: So also, he who had the two talents made two talents more. 18: But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. 19: Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20: And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' 21: His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.' 22: And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' 23: His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.' 24: He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; 25: so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' 26: But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? 27: Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. 28: So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29: For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 30: And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.'

One translation labels the servant as a “worthless, lazy lout.” It makes more sense to us in today’s world, but it doesn’t quite sound right if chanted during Liturgy when this Gospel passage is appointed. These passages speak for themselves regarding our own place in ministry. May the Lord keep us from being barren fig tree branches that he curses and causes to wither and die. May the Lord keep us from being lukewarm like the Laodiceans, and being spewed (literally vomited) from his mouth and into the gutter or drain. May the Lord keep us from being cast into the outer darkness because we bury our talent, our vocation, our ministry, rather than “going and doing” it.

Next we come to another passage from St. Matthew. This sobering message we hear each year just before Great Lent. It is also the passage to which St. Marie of Paris referred regarding her own ministry, quoted earlier.

Matthew 25:31-46

31: "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32: Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33: and he will place the sheep

at his right hand, but the goats at the left. 34: Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35: for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36: I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37: Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? 38: And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? 39: And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' 40: And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' 41: Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42: for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43: I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44: Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' 45: Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' 46: And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Jesus identifies with the one in need. He became naked. He was thirsty. He was arrested and imprisoned. He was wounded and even became a stranger — all during His Passion — for us and for our salvation; for the life of the world. So, in fact He not only identifies “spiritually” or in solidarity with the “least,” but He becomes as they are. St. Gregory the Theologian once said (and this time I have the reference — it is his First Homily on Pascha):

Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become God's for His sake, since He for ours became Man. He assumed the worse that He might give us the better; He became poor that we through His poverty might be rich; He took upon Him the form of a servant that we might receive back our liberty; He came down that we might be exalted; He was tempted that we might conquer; He was dishonored that He might glorify us; He died that He might save us; He ascended that He might draw to Himself us, who were lying low in the Fall of sin. Let us give all, offer all, to Him Who gave Himself a Ransom and a Reconciliation for us. But one can give nothing like oneself, understanding the Mystery, and becoming for His sake all that He became for ours.

Fyodor Dostoevsky tells a story in Part 3, Book 7, Chapter 3 of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Its significance speaks for itself.

Once upon a time there was a peasant woman and a very wicked woman she was. And she died and did not leave a single good deed behind. The devils caught her and plunged her into the lake of fire. So her guardian angel stood and wondered what good deed of hers he could remember to tell to God; 'She once pulled up an onion in her garden,' said he, 'and gave it to a beggar woman.' And God answered: 'You take that onion then, hold it out to her in the lake, and let her take hold and be pulled out. And if you can pull her out of the lake, let her come to Paradise, but if the onion breaks, then the woman must stay where she is.' The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her. 'Come,' said he, 'catch hold and I'll pull you out.' he began cautiously pulling her out. He had just pulled her right out, when the other sinners in the lake, seeing how she was being drawn out, began catching hold of her so as to be pulled out with her. But she was a very wicked woman and she began kicking them. 'I'm to be pulled out, not you. It's my onion, not yours.' As soon as she said that, the onion broke. And the woman fell into the lake and she is burning there to this day. So the angel wept and went away.

Recall the command of the Savior: teach them all that I have commanded you. And His command is that we do to the least of the brethren.

Now, let's turn to a text from Acts of the Holy Apostles. (The title of this book is not insignificant, by the way — action, service, ministry.)

Acts 2:1-4

1: When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2: And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3: And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. 4: And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

And now this:

1 Peter 2:9

9: But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood [a kingdom of priests], a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The ordination rite for the royal priesthood is Chrismation. Chrismation is our personal incorporation into the Pentecost event. No less than the Apostles in the Upper Room on that 50th day after the Lord's Pascha, you and I and all who receive the holy chrism are given (and sealed with) the Holy Spirit. Maybe ours was not as dramatic as that which occurred nearly 2000 years ago, but it is no less effective and empowering.

Those words again: grace, favor, gift, carism. Fr. Sergei Glagolev, in his wonderful talk yesterday said that Chrismation ordains us "to live Christ's ministry and to be His presence on the earth."

Fr. Sergei also talked about the "ordination" of the Holy Prophet Isaiah. Here is the text in full.

Isaiah 6:1-9a

1: In the year that King Uzzi'ah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. 2: Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3: And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4: And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5: And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" 6: Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7: And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven." 8: And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." 9: And he said, "Go, and say...."

This will take a little explanation — about the descriptive makeup of the celestial temple of which the likes of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and St. John the Theologian were given visions and the

glowing coal from the altar as an image of Holy Communion — a foreshadowing and a type.

First, the Lord has revealed His archetypical celestial temple to the likes of Moses, certain of the prophets and the Beloved Disciple. Their description of what they saw gives us the plan first of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, then of the Temple in Jerusalem, and finally of the usual architectural scheme for an Orthodox church. The Outer Court of Gentiles corresponds with the narthex. Court of Women and Court of Israel corresponds with the nave. The Court of Priests, the Sanctuary (or Holy Place) and the Inner Holy of Holies corresponds with the Altar area. Here we find foreshadowing and a fulfillment — prototype and an antitype. Here we find a continuity yet a discontinuity between the Original form and the earthly example. The altar from which the seraph's coal came was the celestial altar of holocaust — the 12-foot by 12-foot by 12-foot cubical altar of burnt offering. (Though the smaller altar of incense could also be considered here.) It was on the altar's bed of red-hot coals that the sacrificial lamb (or incense) was burnt, completely consumed and reduced to an offering of sweet-smelling fragrance, rising where it could be received into the very presence of God. (It is no accident that in many of our churches, our altar tables are constructed in cubical form.)

Secondly, when at the Divine Liturgy the celebrant receives the Mysteries of Holy Communion, he is directed to quietly proclaim, “Behold, this has touched my lips, and shall take away my iniquities, and cleanse my sins.” In a prayer of preparation for Holy Communion attributed to St. John Chrysostom, we read, “Let the fiery coal of Your most pure Body and Your most precious Blood bring me sanctification, enlightenment and strengthening of my soul and body...” Recall also the image of the Burning Bush which was aflame, yet not consumed — aglow with the uncreated light and fire of God's love and presence. The imagery of fire and light could go on and on, but I suspect you get the idea. It is the act of receiving the celestial coal that purified and empowered the prophet for his *diakonia*. It is the act of receiving the Bread of Heaven that purifies and empowers us for our *diakonia*. We'll discuss the idea of the Liturgy after the Liturgy in a bit.

Now let's look at the following passage from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans where the Apostle discusses not only body parts, but charism and ministry as well.

Romans 12:4-13

4: For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, 5: so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6: Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7: if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; 8: he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. 9: Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10: love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11: Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. 12: Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13: Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality.

“Members [i.e., body parts} one of another...grace [*charisma*]... service [*diakonia*]...acts of mercy...love...aglow with the Spirit [more literally rendered, “burning in / with the Spirit].” The connection here with what has been said before is obvious and of major importance.

I would like to now show the video distributed in 1997 by the Orthodox Church in America, entitled “Our Part in God’s Plan.” It outlines the many ministries of the Church and how we can discern our own *diakonia* within the body. Though, for our purposes this video is a little heavy on the seminary and clerical side, it does highlight EVERYbody’s vocation to witness and ministry within the Royal Priesthood....

...Discerning our part in the Priestly Kingdom. In Leviticus 19:2 and 20:7 we read that we are called by God (i.e., our common vocation is) to “be holy” because God is holy. In this respect, we are all called to the priesthood that offers God’s gift to us of the cosmos back to Him. St. Maximus the Confessor and others often discuss the idea of priestly *diakonia* as the vocation of all Christians — baptism, chrismation and Holy Communion being our ordination rites. The human person is both a microcosm (a creature wherein the whole cosmos is epitomized, recapitulated or summed-up) and a mediator (the royal priest). We are called by God to continue His work of transfiguring chaos to cosmos and (by cooperating with His *charisma* / grace) transforming the fallen world into the Kingdom. That is our witness. That is our service or ministry.

We are all called by God (i.e., our common vocation is) to be holy as God is holy, but He gives us all an individual calling (a specific vocation) to a particular *diakonia*. 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; Romans 12 all help us differentiate the specific possible ministries God has assigned. The trick is discerning our particular call.

Many people believe that priestly or monastic vocation is higher or better than that of the laity. St. Anthony of the Desert is credited with the following: Upon emerging from an extended period of seclusion, prayer, mystical union with God, he was given many insights. One of them was that the eremitic (i.e., hermit) way of life was no less important and worthy as the way of life in the city. He said that there was a physician in the city of Alexandria who was doing no-less vital and vocational work among the people “in the world” than the monk does in the desert. This is a lesson that is sadly too often lost on folks who are drawn to religious clericalism as *the* way to God. For some, yes. But not for all. The lesson we learn from St. Anthony is exactly what we are about at this conference this week. Discernment is a vital role in the pastoral ministry of the ordained presbyter. He is called by God to assist in each person’s discernment process and then he is called to assist in equipping each person “to do.” We should all pray for our pastors and arch-pastors daily.

We spoke earlier of “Eucharistic ecclesiology.” It is at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist where the Church becomes what she is. It is in partaking of the Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of the Savior that the Church is actualized to become the Body of Christ in the world. The Prophet Isaiah received the coal from the altar and then *went out* and prophesied. We (after being united to the Holy Mysteries) are to *go out* and do our *diakonia*.

This is called the Liturgy after the Liturgy: the public service after the public service; the common work after the common work; the work of the people after the work of the people.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann writes that the Church as the sacrament of the Kingdom — the gift of the Kingdom; the presence of the Kingdom; the promise of the Kingdom, the reality of the Kingdom and the anticipation of the Kingdom — is the source of all Christian mission. “*It is only as we return from the Light and Joy of Christ’s presence that we recover the world as a meaningful field of Christian action — that we see the reality of the world and see what we must*

do. It is today (after receiving Holy Communion) that I am sent back into the world in Joy and Peace, having seen the true Light. A Christian is one who wherever he looks, finds Christ and rejoices in Him. And this joy transforms all human plans and programs, decisions and actions — making all his/her mission . It is the sacrament of the world's return to Him Who is the Life of the World.” (For the Life of the World, p. 113)

One last note. Very few of us are prone to *diakonia*. Ministry (i.e., Matthew 25) doesn't come easy. This is one of the effects of the Fall. For most, we do these things “kicking and screaming” because the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.

St. Maximus the Confessor described something called the “natural” will and the “gnomic” will. The natural will is the human will endowed by God within Adam and Eve. It is the *original will* created by God and bestowed on the human person that draws one to progress (in cooperation with God) in an upward direction to Union with Him (*theosis*) — aligning human will with divine will and thus having a union of wills as we see in the person of the Theotokos: “Be it unto me according to your (and thus God's) will.”

As a result of free will — that is, being given the possibility to choose rather than to simply be programmed — another will existed. This is what St. Maximus called “gnomic” will. It is characterized by hesitation, by self-willfulness, by a downward move away from God. Gnostic will is what all humanity has inherited from Adam and Eve's disobedience. It is this gnostic tendency that manifests itself in not being prone to godly *martyria* and *diakonia* (or much else that is for our salvation, for that manner). It is gnostic will that is the effect of the Fall. It is gnostic will that can be credited with the fact that most of us do God's will, but do so “kicking and screaming.”

Bishop Kallistos Ware has commented that since doing God's will does not come easy for most, we must make ourselves do it. We must force ourselves to do what we know the Lord desires. Not in some sort of self-propelled Pelagian manner, pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, but rather by cooperating with the *charisma* (i.e., grace) of God — being a fellow-worker with Him. We must forcefully pursue what the Lord wills so that eventually it will become habitual and normal behavior.

In Matthew 11:12 we read that the Kingdom suffers violence and that the violent take the kingdom by force. This is a difficult saying of the Savior. It is variously interpreted. One interpretation is that those who truly seek the Kingdom must forcefully pursue it, since it does not come easy to those of us in the fallen world, having received the wages of sin from our original ancestors. “By force.” “Forcefully pursue.” And this is what asceticism is all about. We willfully, sacrificially do things that are not “natural” in the fallen world (but which would actually be very “natural” in the original — Maximian — plan).

For you and me at this conference, this means that we must (by cooperating with the grace of God) forcefully pursue the *diakonia* spelled-out in Matthew 25 and in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Romans and in other places as well.

Through the example and intercessions of Ss. Elizabeth the new-Martyr, Olympiada the Deaconess of Constantinople, Marie of Paris, Gregory the Theologian, Ignatius of Antioch, the Holy Prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, John the Theologian, Anthony of Egypt, Maximus the Confessor, and all the saints — may we with our hearts set on fire by the Holy Spirit of God

discern our talents, go and do the *martyria* and *diakonia* that is our vocation in the priestly Kingdom. Amen.

+ + +

Here is a summary of the various charisms and ministries in the Church, as described in St. Paul and in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

1 Corinthians 12

- teachers
- healers
- workers of wonders/ signs/ miracles
- prophetic insight
- discernment/ distinguishing spirits
- speakers in tongues / languages
- interpretation
- apostolic work
- helpers
- administrators/ guidance

Ephesians 4

- (apostles)
- evangelists
- pastors
- (teachers)

Romans 12

- (prophetic insight)
- (teachers)
- exhortation/ encouraging
- givers/ contributors
- acts/ works of mercy

St. John Chrysostom (anaphora)

- ancestors
- fathers
- patriarchs
- (apostles)
- (prophets)
- (teachers)
- (evangelists)
- martyrs
- confessors
- ascetics
- ... and every spirit made perfect in faith