



PASTORS TO PASTORS

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If it is true that the Holy Spirit is peace of soul, and if anger is disturbance of the heart, then there is no greater obstacle to the presence of the Holy Spirit in us than anger.

-- St. John Climacus

There is a story in the collection of the *Patericon of the Kieven Caves Monastery* about the Priest Titus and the Deacon Evagrius. The two were good friends and people marveled at their "harmony and mutual affection." But the "hater of good," the demon of enmity, came between them and their affection turned into hatred for each other. Their anger was so intense that they could not look at each other. Although the other monks begged them to be reconciled, they would not. Then Titus fell seriously ill and overcome by contrition he sent for Evagrius saying, "Forgive me, brother, for God's sake for being angry with you." But the hardhearted Evagrius refused and responded, "I will never be reconciled, neither in this world nor in the next!" Immediately he was struck down and died, but Titus soon recovered as though he had never been ill. The point of the tale, the *Patericon* warns, is to "take care, brothers, not to give any room to the demon of anger, for whoever is subject to him becomes his slave."

Both animals and humans are prone to anger. Understood as a form of aggression, anger seems to be embedded deep within the human condition. Psychologists assert that aggression is a component of human life, related to sexuality and self-preservation. Not only does human survival depend on aggression-anger, qualities like leadership and creativity are also shaped by this mysterious passion. We see from Holy Scripture that anger has existed from the beginning and from the beginning, as when Cain's anger resulted in the murder of Abel, anger has produced humanity's most horrible events. Throughout history angry tyrants and madmen have caused wars, holocausts, persecutions, tortures, etc. Christianity has not been spared the tremendous damage caused by anger. Schisms, sects, heresies, and controversies may originate as theological delusions, but they are spurred and spread by anger. Parish life is also subject to various manifestations of this

destructive vice. Priests are often the victims of overbearing or latent anger, but our angry reactions have also caused damage in parishes. Uncontrolled anger is a frightening preview of hell. In the middle of his "Inferno" Dante has placed those whose anger resulted in violence and at one point the poet regards the suffering of one of those condemned: "No torment save your own rage is adequate to your fury." The consequences of anger are such that the perpetrators eventually suffer as much as their victims.

one time, frustrated with man's attachment to evil, "He looked around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart" (Mk. 3.5). Perhaps the most striking instance of the Lord's emotional indignation is the cleansing of the Temple, where "zeal for God's house" consumes Jesus Christ. This pivotal event is described by all four evangelists and is full of theological significance.

What does it mean to be "angry but not to sin"? Our spiritual life must make us aware of how anger works around us and within us. To begin with we need to understand the theological shift that occurs between the Old and New Testaments. Whatever can be said about the anger expressed in the Old Testament, the Incarnation of Our Lord brings to humanity a new vision and new commandments: "Every one who is angry with his brother is liable to judgment"

(Mt. 5.22). Not only in words but in deeds also Jesus Christ proclaims the message and way of peace. The followers of Christ are those who "put away anger, wrath, malice, slander and foul talk" (Col. 3.8). If we are to get angry, we must follow the Lord's example: Jesus' anger never negates His compassion, He does not encourage others to be angry, He does not hold on to anger, He does not hold a grudge, He does not act out anger in a way of revenge or retaliation. Righteous anger can be directed against forces which deny the goodness of God and the rights of man, that is against sacrilege and inhumanity, but the motive can never be to cause harm or destruction. Significantly Our Lord never gets angry with those who insulted Him. This is precisely the area where most of us do get angry, yet here even the Old Testament is instructive: "Good sense makes a man slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense" (Pr. 19.11).

Anger is not a modern phenomenon, but it seems that our time and materialistic culture have spawned various forms of this insidious passion. These occur with increasing frequency and include family and spousal abuse, sexual abuse, road rage and acts of vengeful violence that result in death. Conveying the attitudes prevalent in our culture, modern art and music portray humanity as caught up in throes of anger. "Anger management" has come to have both comic and tragic overtones.

The Tragedy of Deacon Evagrius

by Father Alexander Garklavs



Anger cannot simply be "avoided." It is somehow fundamental and necessary. This is not just the view of modern psychologists. No less a spiritual authority than St. John Chrysostom said that "this passion is even useful, if we know how to use it at the suitable time." The Bible tells us: "Be angry but do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph. 4.26). Indeed God Himself is subject to this emotion and in the Old Testament we frequently read how "the Lord's anger was kindled." Even if the Lord is also "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love," the prevalent anger and wrath of the God is notable in the Old Testament. Although the word "anger" is never applied to God in the New Testament, Jesus Christ expressed anger on rare but significant occasions. At

Enterprising counselors and therapists offer classes and sessions for businesses and individuals who desire to help themselves control anger.

How does anger affect the parish priest? In many undesirable and debilitating ways! As pastors we deal with anger on several levels, but of course mostly at the local parish. All pastors have heard and many have experienced the rage generated at out-of-control parish meetings. We all have war stories to share, and some even have scars to show for it. Parish life is meant to be the preview of the Kingdom of God, but by definition the parish exists in the fallen world and the ways of the world will affect the life of the religious community. As pastors we always need to prayerfully discern just how anger can affect us, so that whether we are the victims of anger or if we ourselves are caught up in it we may know what can and what cannot be done. As a given the pastor must accept that he will be the object of some peoples' anger and hatred. **"If the world hates you know that it has hated me before it hated you"** (Jn. 15.18). People, even long-standing parishioners, can hurl vitriolic insults at priests without any provocation. This can happen out of envy or scorn, but there is also the matter of psychological transference. Because of his role as spiritual father and as an authority figure the pastor can elicit hateful feelings from those who had problems with their fathers or with authority figures. The priest's own character and personality may have nothing to do with this. Pastors are also the objects of anger of people who have come to feel that the Church has hurt or abused them. Here too the pastor's

actual character may have nothing to do with the emotions generated. The spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church teaches us to patiently endure insults. "If someone regards you with resentment, be pleasant to him, be humble and agreeable in his company, and you will deliver him from his passion" (St. Maximus the Confessor). Pastors do well to heed these words.

The pastor will get angry and, at least some of the time, his anger will lead him to sin. The young pastor is especially susceptible to this danger. Anger can be the spontaneous reaction of a wounded ego when an unjust comment is made, but it can take other subtle forms. A false remedy for controlling anger is expressed in the well-known cliché: "I don't get mad, I get even." One thinks that he has self-control by not getting worked up at some affront, but he hangs on to remembrance of the offense. Thus revenge is aroused and anger becomes channeled into some kind of "passive aggression" such as casual indifference, coldness, affected diffidence, the lack of kindness, or a humorous insult. A cold, controlled exhibition of callousness is just as sinful as the hot burst of spontaneous rage. Many of us pastors have been tempted to get even with an offensive person by imposing some kind of harshness during Confession or by withholding sacraments. A very careful examination of the pastor's conscience should precede any such action, and "praying for the enemy" should become a matter of routine for us when we react with anger at the presence or thought of certain people.

The tale of Titus and Evagrius calls anger the "demon of enmity." Anger is not just a momentary madness, it can lead to lasting and permanent consequences. Anger can set off a destructive chain-reaction: anger leads to confusion, confrontation, animosity, disruption, and the shattering of unity which is the very essence of Christian community. How many countless examples of such cases are there? We all know of communities where anger has taken root and bears poisonous fruit, where in turn the pastor becomes an angry man and either takes it out on the parishioners, on himself, or leaves and reinforces the parish's shameful reputation. But things do not always have to end badly. Uncovering the roots of anger and applying the spiritual medicine of Christ's peace and love can heal a "troubled" or a "priest-eating" parish. The "demon of enmity" may be strong, but it cannot resist the **"sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"** (Eph. 6.17).

As men who become priests we are "set apart" to be different. We are both shepherds and soldiers, willing to lay down our lives for the flock and ever ready to confront the evil forces that can destroy our communities. In addition to our liturgical,

homiletic, and counseling duties, we are also the ones who must function to confront and neutralize anger. **"The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness"** (2 Tm. 2.24). The pastor is the Christ-like agent of peace, concord and good will. Of course, it is easier said than done! And we all fail from time to time. At times our anger simply gets away with us; within the family, with our parishioners, with our fellow clergy, or even with the institutional church. In the process our mental and spiritual energies are drained. We may think that we are controlling our angry thoughts and feeling, but it is quite the opposite: as the *Patericon* warned, anger makes us its slave. To counter this we have the promise of Our Lord, to be with us in our adversity. **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you"** (Jn. 14.27). Prayer, fasting, reading the Bible, faithfulness and diligence in liturgical life, active involvement in the life our parishioners, all of these provide us with the strong antidote to anger.

We would like to conclude with a selection from St. Gregory the Theologian, from his oration on the death of his father, also Gregory, who was Bishop of Nazianzus:

"What was most excellent and most characteristic about my father, though least generally recognized, was his simplicity, and freedom from guile and resentment. As with St. Stephen, the distinguishing mark of my father was the absence of malice. For not even when in peril did Stephen hate his assailants, but was stoned while praying for those who were stoning him as a disciple of Christ, on whose behalf he was allowed to suffer, and so, in his longsuffering, bearing for God a nobler fruit than his death, my father allowed no interval between assault and forgiveness, so that he was almost robbed of pain itself by the speed of pardon. My father kept no grudge against those who provoked him, indeed he was absolutely uninfluenced by anger, except when he had been prepared and armed against that which was advancing to injure him. So that this sweet disposition of his would not, as the saying goes, have been stirred by tens of thousands. The result of this was most unusual, not that he was the only one to give rebuke, but the only one to be both loved and admired by those whom he reproved, from the victory which his goodness gained over warmth of feeling. Indeed, a forgiving spirit often has great saving power, checking the wrongdoer by the sense of shame, and bringing him back from fear to love." □

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"Thoughts and Recollections"

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

Fr Daniel Geeza

Rector, St Stephen's Orthodox Catholic Cathedral
Philadelphia PA

Q. Your pastoral formation included two separate terms of study at St. Tikhon's Seminary. Could you describe your experiences and the differences over the years?

A. I first entered the seminary in 1955 after being discharged from the Army. Before admittance I was asked if I knew any Slavonic or Russian. I did not know any Russian, but fortunately I knew all my prayers in Slavonic, which I was taught as a child. I started my first year with apprehension because all the courses were in Russian. During the first year emphasis was on the Russian language, three or four hours a day, five days a week. Only Russian was spoken on campus. All of the courses, theology, history, philosophy, etc., were taught in Russian. Many hours were spent deep into the night with a Russian-English dictionary. But we learned Russian! And today I am grateful for that experience. Every Sunday I have a certain amount of people who come to Liturgy and Confession, who confess in Russian, or request services in Slavonic.

We were taught well and learned well. Professors were from Russia and all had academic degrees. They were strict and precise. All exams were oral! We were each assigned church duty, singing responses for the Vigil and Liturgy every day for one week. Thanks to the monks we learned the divine services and how to serve. It was a special and unique time and I will never forget it. My most precious memory is being taught by Bishop Nicolai Velimirovich, who is now St. Nicolai of Zhitsa.

Many years later I returned to St. Tikhon's for the Master of Divinity and I am glad that I was offered the opportunity to do so. Much had changed and the main difference was obvious. Everything was in English! The professors were younger, highly educated and dedicated. Living conditions were better and the food

was tastier. Another difference was in the number of students. When I started Seminary in the 1950's there were seven in my class and total enrollment was between twenty-five and thirty. Only one student was married, single students waited until their junior or senior year to get married. Now there are approximately eighty students and many of them are married. Most of the changes are for the better, but some things should have been left from the old days. I think that one thing that has not changed is the desire to learn and serve the Church.

Q. You have been a priest for forty-five years and a pastor in several parishes. Have you noticed any major changes in the relationship between the priest and the parishioners?

A. What changes can be termed "major" is a matter of opinion and will differ from priest to priest, depending on years in the priesthood. If I were a young priest today it would probably be easier, but not necessarily better, because I have learned from past mistakes, of which I have made many. When I began my pastorate in 1959 there were still many faithful from the "old country." They loved the Church and their parish, they were very devout and, for the most part, respected the priest. If you had a good voice and gave an occasional sermon "po nashemu" they were elated. If you preserved their customs from the old country they were satisfied. Many of them were not well-educated, but they were not ignorant or illiterate. They were faithful and their hearts and souls were in the Church. For the most part the relationship between the priest and parishioner was good; not perfect, but good.

As I moved from one parish to another I could see differences, but there was also a change in me as well. Along the way I tried not to make the same mistakes, and I sought and

received good advice from older priests. They were always eager to help a younger priest. I will always be grateful to those priests because, as they helped me, they "molded" me into what I believe is a good pastor. So, as there were changes in the younger generation of parishioners, there were also changes in me. I learned that if people recognize in their priest someone who is interested in their spiritual well-being, to whom they can turn in times of personal distress, who they know is truly praying for them, who is really a spiritual father, then their whole attitude and feeling for the priest changes. Their love and respect becomes obvious in many ways.

Today the people in the pews are more highly educated than fifty years ago. There are professional people with university degrees. They come to hear sermons about how the Gospel or the teachings of the Holy Fathers affect their life, not about the priest's opinion on politics or whatever. This and other things related to the priesthood are what has helped develop a healthy and respectful relationship between the priest and parishioners. As to being "liked" by parishioners, I remember what one of our older priests once said. He asked me how I liked my new parish, and I replied that I liked it and hoped the parishioners liked me. He said, "*Fr. Daniel, no matter what parish you go to, 10% of the people will like you and 10% will not like you, and 80% could care less. Just do what the Lord expects you to do and don't worry about how many people like you.*" This was from a priest who retired when he was eighty years old.

Q. You are currently pastor of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Philadelphia, PA. What are some of the challenges of being an Orthodox pastor in a large American city?

A. The challenge of bringing people to Christ is the same in a small town

(over)

Fr Geeza, continued

as it is in a large American metropolis. Is it easier in a small town? I guess it all depends on the people. If people are affected by the pressures and fast life of a large city, there is a greater difficulty in trying to get people to fulfill their religious/spiritual responsibilities. In the Philadelphia area, the Church competes with the shore in the summer and baseball and football games, and so many other activities that take place on Sunday.

Philadelphia is a major Roman Catholic city, where probably three-fourths of the city are of that faith. We have had Roman Catholic people coming into Orthodoxy and many are at our Cathedral parish. Philadelphia is ripe for the harvest in working among the Hispanic and Afro-American people. That is a challenge and we hope someone will take it up. Otherwise I do not think that the challenges of a big city are much different than those in a small town.

Q. What are some of the most memorable moments of your pastoral ministry?

A. I have had many memorable moments: my first Liturgy, my first parish, my first Great Lent and first Pascha, my first baptism, wedding and funeral. I was totally absorbed in what I was doing. I will never forget the time when I was on my first parish and went at night to anoint and administer Holy Communion to an old woman parishioner who was dying. I stayed with the family until they told me to go home and sleep, and they would call me in the morning. They called in the morning to tell me that their mother was doing well. She lived for a few

more years and even came to church on Sunday. I thought to myself, "Wow!"

There are memorable moments from every parish and I only remember the good ones. I remember the parishioners at every parish, who were kind to my Matushka and my children, bringing something to the rectory from their gardens, homemade soup, goodies over the holidays, etc. I remember when Matushka was critically ill and in the hospital for twenty days, and I was alone with two little boys; it was moving to see how

parishioners responded and made me realize that I was not alone.

Yes, there are many, many good memories and, before I leave this life, I am sure that there will be many more. Basically speaking, our people are good. When I look back on the day that I was ordained, which was a very memorable day, I have never regretted that I took that first step to enter the priesthood. We can say that we have been chosen, but we never know why, do we? I suppose someday we will know. Until that time I will continue to serve God as best I can. □

Affliction

George Herbert (1593-1633)

Broken in pieces all asunder,
Lord hunt me not,
A thing forgot,
Once a poor creature, now a
wonder,
A wonder tortured in the space
Between this world and that of
grace.
My thoughts are all a case of
knives,
Wounding my heart,
With scattered smart,
As watering pots give flowers their
lives,
Nothing their fury can control,
While they do wound and prick
my soul.
All my attendants are at strife,
Cutting their place
Unto my face:

Nothing performs the task of life:
The elements are let loose to
fight,
And while I live, try out their
right.
Oh help, my God! let not their plot
Kill them and me,
And also thee,
Who art my life: dissolve the knot,
As the sun scatters by his light,
All the rebellions of the night.
Then shall those powers, which
work for grief,
Enter thy pay,
And day by day,
Labor thy praise, and my relief;
With care and courage building
me,
Till I reach heaven and much
more, thee.

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