

PASTORS TO PASTORS

Department of Pastoral Life and Ministry
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Sorrow and Joy in the Priesthood

"Through the Cross, joy has come into all the world..."

No one can read the New Testament and fail to recognize the importance of joy in the Christian life. In his letters, St. Paul speaks about joy repeatedly. Joy is something which "constitutes" the mystery of God's kingdom in this world: "For the Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14:17) It is also significant that St. Paul lists the virtue of joy as being number two, second only to love, in his famous "hierarchy" of spiritual fruits. "But the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control..." (Galatians 5:22)

But when speaking about the priesthood, the importance of joy becomes even more evident. An Orthodox priest cannot be true to his calling without the presence of spiritual joy. In one sense, joy acts as a "validation" of everything he says and does. But to many in the priesthood, including myself, the prominence of joy in the Christian life and ministry is nothing less than a painful indictment. I find myself lacking this essential charisma of the Holy Spirit, and this manifests itself within my ministry in a variety of adverse ways. This indictment leads me to ask: "How come those apostles and saints were always rejoicing, and this despite unthinkable hardships, yet why, in comparison, am I so sorrowful, even miserable? Where have I missed the boat? What have I been doing wrong?"

These are legitimate questions. One possible reason is that there is much that occurs within the life of the Orthodox priest, especially within the "arena" of parish life, that is cause for genuine sorrow instead of joy. One aspect in the life of a priest which makes his vocation so intense and absolutely unique is that he is confronted on a daily basis with the tragic nature of human life. And if an Orthodox priest wants to be effective in his work, he does not have the luxury, as do other "professionals," to de-sensitize himself to human tragedy. He cannot ignore it, or even worse, deny it. As spiritual shepherds, we are not allowed to build walls in order to insulate ourselves against the truly tragic events which we encounter within our pastoral work. Instead, we must prove ourselves compassionate by literally sharing in the sufferings of others. St. Paul says, "...weep with those who weep." (Romans 12:15)

For example, each confession is for the priest an intense experi-

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An Issue of Responsibility

Fr. Robert Kondratick,
Chancellor

Dear Brothers,

It has occurred to me that once in a while we, as priests, would do good to take stock of who we are and the responsibility that comes with our position. We have chosen to answer what is often termed a "calling," and with that choice comes grave responsibility. I'm sure I speak for a majority of us when I say that the decision to become a priest was not taken lightly. We understood the seriousness required by the vocation, and we knew full well ahead of time what would be demanded of us. At the same time, we could not have known the toll these demands would take on us. This toll does not, however, take away from the responsibility of the office.

First and foremost, our responsibility is to those entrusted to our care. Rather than discuss the duties of parish life — we all know these too well — I would like to emphasize the need for our own preparation in caring for our people. We are of little use to our people if we are not

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ence because he meets someone who is looking to be saved from the tragedy of his or her sin. Sometimes those confessions are a cause of even more sorrow because the people who confess have not been convinced as to the reality of their sinfulness. "Father, I lead a good life...my sins are small." The same is true for funerals, hospital visits, and meetings. Meetings are especially distressing because even when they are "good," that is when there is no arguing or fighting, they usually fail to address the issues relevant to the integrity and well-being of the parish. And perhaps the most overwhelming cause of sorrow in the priesthood is the fact that, sooner or later, a priest comes to realize that what his parish actually is, and what it can and should be, are two totally different things. All these things belong to the domain of the priesthood and all are without question a legitimate source of pastoral mourning.

But here we learn also that genuine sorrow is only the precursor to the true joy which comes from Christ in the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ made it explicitly clear to His disciples that they would soon meet great sorrow. "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy." (John 16:20) Christ uses the analogy of childbirth: "When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." (John 16:21-22) This sorrow is not the sinful despondency of which the holy fathers speak so often, also mentioned by St. Paul as "world grief." (2 Corinthians 7:10) It is rather the sorrow which is the fruit of genuine love.

And it is this which provides us with the key to the quality of joy in our priesthood. Our sorrow must be the sorrow of the Cross. Perhaps it is significant that those who were present at the Cross reacted by either mocking or sorrowing. The soldiers and bystanders mocked. The Virgin, St. John the Theologian, and the few other women disciples grieved. We too have the same option of either mocking or grieving as we encounter the mystery of the Cross manifest in others. If we mock, we fail in our vocation to love. But if we grieve, than we know for sure that our grieving will soon be transformed into the joy of the Resurrection. The Cross is the "alchemy" by which our sorrow is turned into joy. "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning." (Psalm 30:5)

-Father Paul Jannakos

Let us hear from you!

Pastors to Pastors welcomes your input, your suggestions, and your writing. Send to DPLM, PO Box 675, Syosset, NY 11791.

MAIL CALL

Dear Father Michael:

You rightfully broach a serious problem facing some of our parishes—discontented, unhappy, misfit, underpaid, disrespected, frustrated and stressed-out priests. Whose fault is it—the priest's or the laity's? If I may be permitted to express my opinion after 50 years as a parish priest, I would say much of the fault lies with the priest. Either he has no vocation for the priesthood, love for his fellow man, lack of challenge or is just plain lazy. A congregation will respond positively to love, joy, gentleness, goodness, truth, meekness, patience, temperance and sincerity.

A conscientious priest will not find time to be lonely, psychologically and emotionally drained if he has a calling and is dedicated to the work of Christ. He would not be burned out physically if he got spiritual satisfaction in his ministry and that depends upon himself.

What we need is preventive medicine—to root out those elements which have no calling or qualifications for the priesthood **before** they study theology. Many would be happier in other fields and if they look upon the priesthood as a career, they should become a plumber, an accountant, a lawyer and what not.

It is a sad commentary that we do not recruit enough dedicated candidates among our own young men and have to rely so largely on converts.

I suggest that those priests who constantly cry the blues and find all kind of faults, to consider leaving the priesthood. Otherwise they will be unhappy and ruin a whole parish.

If I had to do it over again—I would still opt for the priesthood.

Fr. Vasile Hategan
Lakewood, Ohio

Dear Fr. Vasile,

Thank you for your forthright letter calling us to full responsibility in terms of dealing with our own inadequacies. A number of our dioceses are making attempts to screen candidates more carefully for the priesthood. The Albanian Archdiocese has developed a very comprehensive approach to candidate selection.

—JS

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mentally, physically and spiritually prepared to care for them. We are ineffective if our attitude becomes *laissez-faire*, if we become too complacent or even too comfortable. Unless we are "on our toes," we cannot deal *properly* with difficult situations that may arise in our parishes. We are of questionable good if we become disgruntled, and especially if we don't do whatever it takes to remedy the situation.

Second, our responsibility is to each other. Because we have a common task in this ministry, we share the same joys. We also share the same problems. It is our duty, then, to support one another. It is our duty to guide, to follow, to help one another. However, one thing we may never do is undermine the work of another priest. This not only tears away at what the other priest has built, it tears away at the entire Church. We must remember that when we joined the ranks of the clergy, we became part of a collective whole, not independent leaders with private agendas. We must never forget that we are brothers in the service of the same Lord and Master.

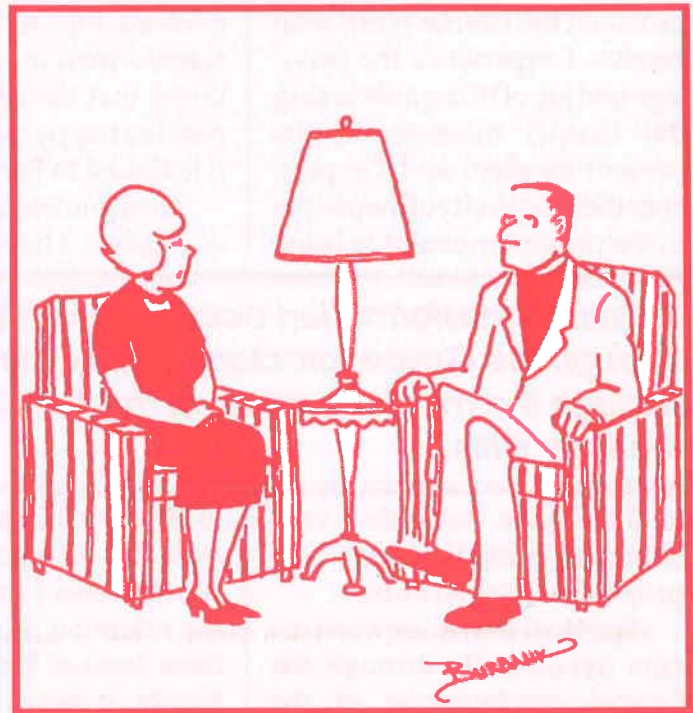
Third, our responsibility is to the integrity of the Church as a whole. This means that we uphold steadfastly the teachings of the Church, and that we do not give others the opportunity to gossip. I do not necessarily refer to personal behavior, which is, of course, an important issue; I do mean, however, that we do not, either casually or maliciously, bring to the public matters of the Church that should be held behind office doors. We must present — to Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike — a Church which steadfastly honors the Lord it serves.

Of course, there is a fourth responsibility, but I hesitate to refer to it along with priestly ones, and that is the responsibility we have to our wives and children. The reason I

hesitate is because this responsibility is the same as that of all family men. So, to look at our familial responsibilities in the context of the Priesthood is of questionable wisdom. Certainly we are role models, but the first things we should be in our homes are loving husbands and good fathers. If anything, this is our most important responsibility.

Respect for our priestly vocation — whether from our parishes, our fellow clergy, our communities, or our families — will come only when they see us give respect to the calling we chose to answer. We must be faithful. We must be serious. We must be responsible. □

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D P L M

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The Pilgrim's Way

Liturgy as Journey

Part III

Father John Scollard, D.Min., ACSW

The proclamation of the Holy Gospel at the Liturgy is for this priest a deeply enriching experience because I find myself sensing several things. I sense the historical Jesus, the eternal Divine Son of the Father conveying words of Salvation — the words of the Evangelist proclaim the Divine Word who creates. I experience the privilege and joy of being able to sing the Gospel message in the present moment and I experience the receptivity of the people in the present moment to listen

by Your Holy Spirit!"

It seems at this moment all time is deeply both very human time and yet time totally claimed by the action and dynamic of the Holy Spirit. The self-emptying of Jesus is so total that one wants to weep, and yet that self-giving is so fully evolved into resurrection (the transformation of the Holy Gifts) that the emotion of sadness is a happy sadness because it is linked to Joy.

In my nineteen year journey as a priest, I have found many

"Spiritual transformation occurs dynamically through the Gospel proclamation of the Word and through the mystical action of the Holy Spirit over the Holy Gifts."

to the Divine Story that validates our immediate lives and projects an Eternal Future.

Spiritual transformation occurs dynamically through the Gospel proclamation of the Word and through the mystical action of the Holy Spirit over the Holy Gifts. What a humbling experience it is to read and listen to the narrative of the Last Supper. "On the night in which He gave Himself up...He took bread into His holy hands...and make this bread to be the precious Body of Your Christ...and make this cup to be the precious blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, making the change

moments of pastoral joy apart from the liturgical experience, so why have I chosen to center my attention on the Liturgy? I have done so for three reasons. Firstly, it seems that since the Liturgy is the most important sacramental event that we preside over, we could utilize it as a metaphor for discussing our pastoral situation. Secondly, the Liturgy is for me a time of profound happiness and I enjoy sharing happiness with others. And finally, the Liturgy is the best way I know to strive for union with God and overcome the demonic and evil that I encounter in this life. □

Books in review

Francis H. Touchet,
Ph.D., C.S.W.

Father Melancholy's Daughter

Gail Godwin

Wm. Morrow & Co., New York

© 1991 \$21.95

This is ostensibly a work of fiction. However, it strikes so close to real life that it must be based on some very personal experiences. The daughter in the title is Margaret, a very bright child whose focused energies are in taking care of Daddy. Margaret, the narrator, takes us through parish, family and social life from age seven to womanhood. The narrative begins just before Margaret's mother flees her marriage, her daughter and the Rectory to experience her true self in the arch world of the New York creative fringes.

Margaret's father, who has suffered regular battles with depression, and daughter are thrown even closer together. In the prim and proper Anglo-Catholic world of St. Cuthbert's in a small Southern town, propriety and manners are equally important as the Prayer Book of 1929. Margaret takes up the work of her runaway mother in reflecting the melancholy priest's inner thoughts. She relieves the stress and strain of demanding parishioners through a mimicry and mockery which knows just how far to go. This helps the priest manage the pettiness of parish life and turns Margaret into an invisible member of the pastoral team.

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We see at St. Cuthbeth's the blending of Holy Tradition in two spheres; the social eliteness of fashion and propriety and the rubrics of catholic worship in a sea of Protestantism. This creates a picture of an old-fashioned English drawing room comedy with Fr. M. playing the "straight" role and Margaret that of very discreet jester.

The work is of value in its sharply focused revelations. We can readily see how people interact against a background of the security of perfect serenity in faith and social position. One can recall the Long Island of four decades ago where Anglo-Catholics referred to themselves as "the Advanced Party" holding themselves aloft from the "Brutish Masses"; from which many were themselves in flight.

At St. C's this never enters consciousness. There is no striving as people just **know** who they are. In the town of Romulous, St. C's is one of two Episcopal parishes. It is the "smoke house" of "smells and bells" in sharp contrast to the other "Black and White" parish. This refers not to race but to the plain vestments. All through this narrative we see the close loving relationship of father and daughter under the cloud of Fr. M's depression and the muted scandal of the run-away wife. Fr. M. never complains or even criticizes his wife's actions though both father and daughter are acutely affected. We meet the people of the parish through Margaret's inner thoughts and overt but restrained mockery.

While Fr. M. has his prayer and pastoral care books to guide and protect him, Margaret, like a Guardian Angel, slays depression through mirth. She has learned how to perceive and interpret without the necessity of words. This process continues through their unique journey together. This comes to a close with Fr. M's death leaving Margaret bewildered and bereft; the organizing focus of life is gone.

A very rapid move from adolescence to womanhood also reflects the change in mores. In this sophisticated scene, Margaret can ask with the greatest of equanimity of a male friend, "Well, who are you in love with now; a man or a woman?" After a brief period of alcoholism, she also reveals the new trends of Church life through a non-stipendary priest whose prime task is counseling. He has been through the now fashionable Pilgrimage to Jung in Zurich and provides not only dream interpretations and Journal work, but group encounters. In a mood of questioning he at length asks what this is all about! No answer is ever given! Through all this we see that while this Anglo-Catholic theology might be very High, the social mores and contemporary moods of the world manage to blend. What we are seeing is the actuality of Episcopalianism as "High Church Unitarianism" (the phrase is Fr. Matusiak's).

The value of this work for the Orthodox priest is the dis-

tanced revelation of how social needs can take on the garb of orthodox beliefs and turn them into a self-celebration of style and fashion. What Scripture identifies as "...a roaring lion who walkest about seeking whom he may devour" can be likened to undisciplined, formless and wounded ego's whose unconscious needs turn religion into its opposite. For some at St. Cuthbeth, the real picture of Palm Sunday is Jesus not mounted on an ass, but being driven in a chauffeured limousine. Likewise, in the secret imagery of the overly effete; the Last Supper must be a catered affaire at The Plaza. After all, how else could it be done "properly?" Am I exaggerating or being sacrilegious? No. There is a perceivable hidden dimension in ego needs which can readily pervert religion into its opposite. We don't see this so much in Fr. M or his daughter, but rather in the social fabric of which they are both separated from and yet a part of. The value of this "fiction" tale is to make visible what is normally hidden.

It would appear that a wounded psyche can use High Liturgies to lighten, to enlighten, to transcend and transform, or to provide an armoring against terrible feelings of guilt and inadequacy. All are possible.

In looking at an Anglican scene, it may help us recognize more objectively what indeed we have seen of ourselves. To discern and to discriminate

