

Metropolitan Leonty: A Personal View

Translated from Russian and appearing for the first time in English the following personal recollection about Metropolitan Leonty is from Zhizn i Trudy Mitropolita Leontiya (The Life and Work of Metropolitan Leonty), New York, 1969, pages 246-248. The author was his personal aide who accompanied the aged metropolitan during many of his archpastoral visits in the 1950s and early 1960s.

"Were You 'thanked,' Father Archdeacon?"

This was the question Metropolitan Leonty asked the late and kindly Father Archdeacon Vsevolod. He and I were accompanying the Metropolitan to Washington for the solemn groundbreaking at the site where the magnificent St. Nicholas Cathedral, a wonderful copy of the 12th-century St. Demetrius Cathedral in Vladimir, now stands. The three of us were returning to New York on the night train following Church celebrations, a grand banquet and a two-day stay in the best hotel in Washington, where our neighbor was General MacArthur, and from where Father Vsevolod had simply fled because he couldn't tolerate, as he later explained, the hotel's opulence.

In response to the question asked by the Metropolitan regarding "thanks," Fr. Vsevolod, clearly understanding what the Metropolitan had meant by this word [*transl. note* "a monetary gift"], sighed and with some bitterness in his voice, sorrowfully replied: "Not at all, Your Eminence, I wasn't thanked at all and I am quite surprised by this." Vladyka did not respond to these bitter thoughts, as he likely considered the matter closed, but some time later he addressed the same question to me. Having received a similar negative response, Vladyka either fell asleep or was deep in meditation. When it seemed that we were all finally asleep, Vladyka, addressing Fr. Vsevolod in a consoling tone, said: "But you



Metropolitan Leonty with members of St. Nicholas Cathedral at Union Station, Washington, DC, May 1958.

know, Fr. Archdeacon, I was not thanked at all either." This statement was so full of humor and subtlety that we could not contain ourselves and burst out laughing. It seems that, of all of us, Vladyka was the most amazed by this. Sleepiness had passed. We were approaching New York. In a few days, official letters were received with expressions of..."thanks."

That the late Metropolitan Leonty was unmercenary is known by everyone who had the joy of contact with him. If funds accumulated in his bank account, Vladyka would immediately carefully consider to whom he should send a check to assist them. All those who lived near him knew that, at night, Metropolitan Leonty would invite passing street persons to his quarters and would serve them tea. Ultimately, Vladyka was "forbidden" to have these "nocturnal teas." The Primate of the Church had to be protected, of course, from any misfortune.



Metropolitan Leonty distributing icons during an archpastoral visit to St. Mary's Cathedral, Minneapolis, MN.

The Extraordinary Forbearance of Vladyka Leonty

At a festal meal in one of the parishes of the Metropolia on the occasion of its patronal feast, the rector, while greeting Vladyka Metropolitan, recalled the founding of the parish: the children had to be familiarized with the Church and the services, taught catechism, and that, therefore, now the whole life of the parish is marked by numerous children and their presence in church for services...

"Children, children," the priest continued to expound his thoughts. Vladyka Leonty responded to the rector's greeting with a subtle remark: "Children are children, but it must be remembered that children are first of all a reflection of their parents, who should also be acknowledged." It was a sight to behold how heartwarming this remark was to the numerous parents in attendance at the dinner. Vladyka was exceptionally attentive to others, amiable and genteel, in an old-fashioned way.

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Following a church celebration in a Canadian city, the rector of the local parish drove Vladyka

Metropolitan and me, his escort, to the airport. This priest had apparently decided that his mission was thus concluded, and wasting no time, asked for Vladyka's blessing, and quickly left without waiting for our flight departure.

"He's very businesslike," said the Metropolitan, with a good-hearted laugh, in commenting on the priest's quick disappearance. "He obviously had thought: 'you're the Metropolitan and that's your personal business, but I, as rector, also have things to do...'"

"What Shall We Start with, Holy Master. . .?"

About a month before his repose, Vladyka Metropolitan Leonty, on the advice of the doctors treating him, was admitted to a local hospital for a series of routine tests. I began to go there to visit our great Primate, as the tests would last a week, if not longer. In the hospital setting, Vladyka Metropolitan became visibly even weaker. It was difficult for him to get up, and it was not easy for him to take even two or three steps. He became very thin, and weighed only about 80 pounds. He looked more and more transparent. His hands would not always obey him and he often needed assistance, especially when eating. Vladyka said little; he withdrew more and more into himself.

As I went to the hospital often, I tried, of course, to be as useful as possible, especially when his kind attendant, Fr. Sergei, would leave for a time to go somewhere. Once at lunchtime, I helped Vladyka to sit up in his bed and I moved the special eating table towards him. Having arranged everything so that Vladyka could choose the food which he wanted, I asked him in a cheerful voice: "What shall we start with, Holy Master?", having in mind one or another dish. In response, there was a firm, almost unexpectedly so, and truly holy answer: "With the Our Father." One had to be in that hospital room that day to see this barely moving elder, when it seemed that everything should somehow



Metropolitan Leonty celebrating a memorial service for his predecessor, Metropolitan Theophilus, immediately following his enthronement as primate Holy Protection Cathedral, New York, December 1950.

be different rather than normal, to understand how this perplexed me. I then immediately said the Lord's Prayer, and, as is customary, concluded with "Master bless," but Vladyka could only raise his hand over the food, as he no longer had the strength to make the sign of the cross. Nevertheless, everything was done in order, as it should be, as always in the life in Christ. I was filled with even greater respect for our Metropolitan, who, to the very end of his earthly life, remained, by the mercy of God, a hierarch, saying only one thing about his own infirmities: "There was a horse who wore himself out." In this humble simplicity there was much wisdom, no complaints, no dissatisfaction with life. Truly a lofty example for many of us....

"Where Will You Rest, Vladyka?"

I once asked Vladyka Metropolitan Leonty this question during a lunch break, when the member hierarchs of the Great Council of Bishops were going to the various rooms provided to them for a short rest. In my duties as the assistant secretary to this hierarch for 12 years, I, in various ways, often took care of the Metropolitan's personal needs and was, therefore, prepared to escort him to his quarters on the upper level of Holy Virgin Protection Cathedral on Second Street in New York City. In response to my question, there was a request: "Take me to the sanctuary, I will rest

there..." I was naturally curious: "But why, Vladyka, don't you want to lie down in your quarters upstairs?" Vladyka, bending towards me in his characteristic manner, whispered to me with a secretive glance: "There is already a bishop resting there. He has traveled a long distance and is very tired..."

After kissing the altar table, Vladyka sat down in one of the armchairs in the sanctuary, assuring me that he was quite comfortable. I was somewhat concerned when I left him there, as he was already then a frail elder. The thought had crossed my mind that Vladyka could pass on to another life right there in the sanctuary. This is one of many examples of his humility, simplicity, and, of course, holiness.

—A.I.

English translation by Alexis Liberovsky