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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Follow the Leader by Fr. Eric G. Tosi	1
Personal Mentorship by Fr. Luke Veronis	2
Rediscovering Our Identity by Archbishop Anastasios	2
From the Fathers – St. John Cassian	3
Great Vision Precedes Great Achievements	4

FOLLOW THE LEADER by Archpriest Eric G. Tosi

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

(Philippians 4:8-9)

When I was new to the priesthood, I had the beautiful gift of having seasoned mentors to whom I could turn for advice, encouragement, and correction. It was through their wise counsel that I was able to grow as a priest and as a person. Sometimes it was difficult to hear their corrections; but in the end, after much reflection, I was able to understand their wisdom and their guidance. I clearly remember one time when Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko gave me some sage advice as I was



navigating a particularly difficult institutional challenge. His advice was quite simple, “Trust God, trust the Church and pray for everyone involved.” That advice can easily be applied and can be a remedy for a host of issues we all face in our lives.

What I discovered, and what I wish to impart to others as my priesthood matures, is to always seek out the advice of seasoned clergy and lay people and then follow their advice. They have “been there and done that”. Very often, they

can point to solutions before we ourselves can see them. Seasoned Christian mentors and role models are a gift to the Church and we must utilize their wisdom and experience.

How true this is in mission work. We often want to make ourselves masters of the situation. This will often lead us down the wrong path because we are not heeding the wise advice of Fr. Thomas. A true leader also knows how to follow. The Church is full of examples of a leader learning how to follow (think Paul and Barnabas, for example). But more importantly, their wisdom and guidance are worthy of imitation, so that we, in turn, can lead others. *“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”* (Hebrews 13:7) A true leader has the humility to follow and to imitate. A true leader finds comfort in knowing that by placing your trust in God, in the Church and in prayer, then all obstacles can be overcome.

Personal Mentorship

“Of course, within the overall ministry of a missionary, there will be need for programs, buildings, and projects, but the most important issue, the heart and soul of the work, is the people themselves. As we build up programs, are we building up the leaders?”

In [the] training of individual leaders, missionaries need to spend quality time on personal relationships, mentoring, and spiritual guidance. To build up leaders takes time, not just through spoken lessons on the faith, but especially through allowing them to stay close to us and learn from our daily life. The examples we give through our lives offer the greatest lesson from which they can learn.

Sometimes this aspect of personal mentorship is difficult, especially for Americans. We have been taught to focus on numbers, the bigger the better. If we spend the majority of our time with only a handful of people, instead of the masses, then some of us think we

err. And yet, how much more effective our ministry can be if we focus our time on a limited number of leaders, and allow them to reach out to the masses. Remember the words of St. Paul. *“What you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well”* (2 Tim 2:2). Timothy, Silas, Luke, Sosthenes, Titus – these were the young men who always travelled with Paul and learned first-hand from him...

Of course, within the overall ministry of a missionary, there will be need for programs, buildings, and projects, but the most important issue, the heart and soul of the work, is the people themselves. As we

build up programs, are we building up the leaders who can run the programs? As we build many churches, do we have the faithful leaders who will transform these concrete buildings into houses of God on fire for the Gospel? The goal of Orthodox mission is not to build physical buildings, but to create living Eucharistic communities which act as evangelistic centers for the whole surrounding area. The indigenous people are the ones who know the language, customs, and life of their own people much better than any foreigner, thus they can more effectively serve as leaders and preachers.

Fr. Luke Veronis, “Traditional Methods of Evangelism”, Greek Orthodox Theological Review, Vol. 42, Nos. 3-4 (1997).

Traditional Methods of Evangelism

“[The Church] is unshakably erected on the unbroken apostolic succession of bishops and clergy they themselves have consecrated.”

Dear friends, we belong to a Church which we believe to be “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” When we summarize the views about the Church’s apostolicity we discern these main features: our Church is apostolic because a) it was established by the One sent by God, His Son, Jesus Christ, and its foundations were laid by the apostles; b) it understands itself as directly identified with the

apostolic community as it was described in the New Testament and in Holy Tradition, the womb from which was born also the canon of the New Testament; c) it preserves intact and unchanged the teaching of the apostles with an unswerving consciousness of its uninterrupted continuation throughout history and its faithfulness to the word of God, as it was understood in the apostolic age and was

preserved across the course of time, guided by the Holy Spirit; d) it is rooted in the celebration of the Mysteries, as Christ ordained and as was passed down by the apostles; it is unshakably erected on the unbroken apostolic succession of bishops and the clergy they themselves have consecrated.

Excerpt from Archbishop Anastasios, “Rediscovering Our Apostolic Identity”, Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2004).

From the Fathers: On Discrimination by St. John Cassian

From what Abba Serapion said, we can learn that we shall be granted the gift of true discrimination when we trust, no longer in the judgments of our own mind, but in the teaching and rule of our fathers. The devil brings the monk to the brink of destruction more effectively through persuading him to disregard the admonitions of the fathers and follow his own judgment and desire, than he does through any other fault. We should learn from the examples provided by human arts and sciences. If we cannot accomplish anything in them by ourselves – in spite of the fact that they deal with things we can touch with our hands, see with our eyes and hear with our ears – but still need someone who will instruct us well and guide us, how can it be anything but foolish to think that the spiritual art, the most difficult of all the arts, has no need of a teacher? It is an invisible, hidden art which is understood only through purity of heart, and failure in it brings,



not temporary loss, but the soul's destruction and eternal death.

Gennanos then said: "Certain fathers who have listened to the thoughts of the brethren have often not only failed to heal them, but have even condemned them and driven them to despair. This has provided us with an excuse for shameful and harmful caution: for we ourselves know of cases of this kind in the region of Syria..."

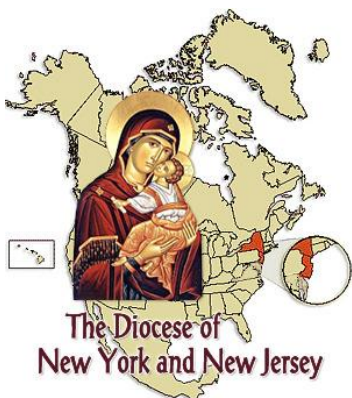
Abba Moses said: "It is a good thing, as I said, not to hide your

thoughts from the fathers. But you should not tell them to just anyone, you should confess them to spiritual masters who have discrimination, not simply to those whose hair has grown white with age. Many who have looked to age as a guide, and then revealed their thoughts, have not only remained unhealed but have been driven to despair because of the inexperience of those to whom they confessed..."

Standing outside, Abba Apollos implored God with tears and said: "O Lord, who puts us to the test for our own benefit, let this elder be given the brother's battle, so that in old age he may learn through experience what he has not been taught over these many years: how to feel sympathy with those who are under attack."

*Excerpt from Saint John Cassian, "On the Holy Fathers of Sketis and Discrimination." Translation found at **John Cassian: On the Holy Fathers of Sketis and Discrimination** (orthodox-churchfathers.com)*

"How can it be anything but foolish to think that the spiritual art, the most difficult of all the arts, has no need of a teacher?"



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Great Vision Precedes Great Achievements by Archpriest Timothy Holowatch

Great vision precedes great achievement. At Saint Innocent of Alaska Mission in Oneonta, NY, we are following a compelling vision to give the mission direction, helping us to be focused, energized, and confident. We know where we are headed and how we are going to get there.

St. Innocent's Mission has been concentrating on the following elements:

Divine Worship is our first priority. We are making a conscious effort to create and encourage a friendly, welcoming and prayerful atmosphere in the church. This will result in better and growing attendance. An ongoing effort by our choir to sing beautiful responses at all services will inspire us all to come to church and to be an integral part of a worshipping community.

Stewardship is at the heart of our mission. It will allow the initiation and growth of our Christian outreach and ministries to our own people and to the Oneonta area at large. Stewardship is becoming very important for every member of the mission. God gives us 168 hours of life each week! Do we "steward" that time wisely, returning each week to



the Lord's house for worship and godly works?

Education: At our parish, religious education will always be evolving, because a person cannot love what or who he doesn't know. Christ said that we must love our God with all our hearts, with all our minds, with all our souls, and with all our strength. To know Him better, we are instituting educational programs and opportunities.

Fellowship is an area we continue to develop within the mission. This is how the earliest Apostolic Church lived and grew: after our Lord Jesus Christ's Ascension, the Holy Apostles gathered in Jerusalem continually remained in the temple, breaking bread, in prayer, and in fellowship.

Charity. We are developing a Charity and Outreach ministry, because Christ taught us: "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matt 25:40) It is our obligation, together as a Christian mission parish family, to reach out and to do good works in the name of Christ.

Evangelization: The Mission continues working on sharing the Gospel, as Christ commands: "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-20), making us His witnesses and evangelists.

May the Lord bless our humble efforts to live out His Great Commission!