

The Priest, According to Metropolitan Georges (Khodr)

By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

His Eminence Metropolitan Saba Isper once presented a three-part lecture based on the teachings of one of his spiritual fathers. "The Priest, According to Metropolitan Georges Khodr" delves into the mindset of one of the giants of the Church of Antioch. Metropolitan Saba surveys the essays (listed in the footnotes) of Metropolitan Georges about the priesthood. The second part is presented here.

Metropolitan Georges Khodr emphasizes two prerequisites for the priest to be able to give: love and knowledge.

The love of the priest towards his people holds significant weight because parishioners may not recognize themselves as beloved of God if their priest or bishop do not love them. "Simply love. Consider all believers as God's children. Treat them with equal attention and care."¹ According to Metropolitan Georges, love is not merely an emotion; it's an act rooted in the Gospel. "We priests are nothing more than foot-washers... and we suffice with the proper glorification of a foot-washer."²

The salvation of believers depends on seeing the image of the Good Shepherd reflected in the priest's path, a shepherd who knows each sheep by name. This means the priest should personally love and serve them. "We provide no service, unless we feed them with the Word."³

Acknowledging that parish life can distract priests with daily matters, Metropolitan Georges warns that "we are not civil clerks officiating marriages. We are keepers of the word, and keepers of its exegesis. We aim to be people of understanding, so that others can grasp why we love Jesus Christ."⁴ "We are not distributors of rations; that's not our calling, although governmental neglect has pushed us into this role."⁵

So, what is our true role? It is "to become a living Gospel that can get along without the Gospel; to awaken souls while they slumber; to refresh people, if we can boldly

¹ Love Only

² We Priests are Only but Washers of Feet

³ Perfection is Pursuing Perfection

⁴ If You Desire Authority for Yourself, O Master, it shall be the Authority of Death

⁵ The World is Your Parish; Feed on Your Bible Daily, So that You Become the Book of God; Episcopacy is Vainglory to Him Who Desires it; Embrace Them All; You are Crucified to Their Love; No Virtue Elevates the Priest Like Meekness

meet them where they stand; to remind them of the truth; to save people from death; to raise them every day for their sanctification; to make them divine.”⁶

Metropolitan Georges’ vision aligns with the prophet Jeremiah’s words, “to uproot and tear down, to destroy and rebuild” (1:10), ensuring that God’s decree on earth remains for both God and His Messiah.⁷ Consequently, our venerable Metropolitan refuses to placate people “as fools are appeased.”⁸ We aim to treat, not appease. The aim is to treat, bandage the wound, and to confront it, not to appease, “because the aspiration is for them to look at you so that they can see Christ.”⁹

According to Metropolitan Georges, there is no room for passionate emotions. The priest’s sole sentiment is one of God’s tenderness residing in the heart, motivating his service to people. Based on this, he views the priest as someone who seeks what is genuine and steadfast, even though “people may be drawn to what is changeable, ornamental, and shiny.”¹⁰

So, what is the priest’s authority, other it than being an often-potential pitfall? In line with his teacher’s perspective, Metropolitan Georges perceives authority as service. Priests are not rulers over people, but they are foot-washers, foot-wipers. Their authority is an authority of love, requiring giving and offering until the last breath. The temptation for priests to become rulers over Christ’s sheep is tremendous. Thus, His Eminence emphasizes that “we are not presidents.”¹¹

He cautions priests against playing the “game of power.”¹² He does not want them to be “foolish”¹³ in their pursuit of power to gain authority over others. He admits that this is not an easy request. The temptation of power and authority among clergy arises “when they are devoid of dignity and esteem,”¹⁴ believing they can “impose themselves through authority,”¹⁵ forgetting that their Lord never imposed Himself except with love.

⁶ The Vigilant Rod

⁷ Be a Space for Divine Authority

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Be in the Community of the Saints

¹⁰ Episcopacy is Vainglory to Him Who Desires it

¹¹ Don’t Play the Game of Power; Serve the Deprived; Dwell Throughout Your Life in the Divine Condescension; Do not Expect Anything from Anyone

¹² Don’t Play the Game of Power

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Dwell Throughout Your Life in the Divine Condescension

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Only the Holy Trinity stands above the priest, Which requires the priest to bow before the feet of Orthodox Christians.¹⁶

Those who are qualified to lead in the Church of Christ must “taste death daily.”¹⁷ Therefore, Metropolitan Georges highlights the priest’s hardship, noting that “anyone who loves Jesus deeply, with a love that never wanes, is crucified through fatigue and alienation.”¹⁸ If the priest’s mission is nothing less than changing the world, he should not seek power and glory, but rather exhaustion until death. “We have not prepared you for comfort, rulership, or wealth; leave those matters to others. You were prepared for death after taking up the reproach of Christ.”¹⁹

Hence, Metropolitan Georges calls for people to be awakened, to recognize the talent and beauty within them, and to awaken them to that beauty and talent.²⁰ Addressing their hearts is the only language, and it is God’s dialogue with humanity.²¹ However, he does not seek an emotional dialogue, but rather a conscious one rooted in profound knowledge.

If the priest must be firm, then he has the right to hold accountable but not to scold. “Don’t strike anyone with the shepherd’s staff; use it to guide your lambs.”²² The priest is a priest according to hope.²³ He sows the seeds and leaves the harvest to the Lord.²⁴ The priest should not expect to see the fruits of his labor; that is God’s affair, not his. He must content himself with planting, which often means living in alienation and sometimes in isolation. The priest will need consolation, but he will not attain it except by bowing at the Master’s feet. “Thus, anyone who embraces the priesthood will grow weak unless he recognizes his own poverty. He should not seek anything from anyone, neither those above nor beside him.”²⁵ The priesthood is “a vocation without condolences, a complete offering.”²⁶

¹⁶ If You Love God, You Become God

¹⁷ Perfection is Pursuing Perfection

¹⁸ Do not Bow Your Head Except for Christ

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Humility is the Spirit of Ministry

²¹ To Metropolitan Ephraim (Kyriakos)

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Humility is the Spirit of Ministry

²⁴ Go and Sow

²⁵ Do not Expect Anything from Anyone

²⁶ Go and Sow

The priest's journey is "a journey through a desert, and his true oasis lies in the kingdom that God has prepared for His beloved."²⁷ The priest's desert, or sense of alienation, comes from the understanding that "the Church is not the Kingdom; rather, it merely contains elements that can make her a threshold to it,"²⁸ though only "if she so desires."²⁹

Metropolitan Georges, with a long and proficient history of serving the Church, admits that he has "borne many disappointments with only a few in this world to console him." Thus, he advises to "work for the believers as if they were to change tomorrow."³⁰

Originally published in 2009.

²⁷ Counseling Women as a Priest; The Man of the Desert

²⁸ To Father Saba Isper

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*