

The Word and Pastoral Care

Gospel: Luke 19:1-10 (AV): *And [Jesus] entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, [there was] a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that [way]. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw [it], they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore [him] fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

"I am the good shepherd,
and I lay down my life for the sheep"
(John 10:14-15).

The Church commemorates today the Three Hierarchs, saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom. There is a special

radiance that the saints carry. They are very close to the hearts of the Christians in all generations.

Many conditions work together to give these holy fathers their special high position in the Church. We must not forget that generations in the church have gotten used to living out the kingdom in their experiences in the Divine Liturgies of Chrysostom or Basil.

The Church considers the three doctors as being men of science and thought. In many countries of the Orthodox World, these are the patron saints of teachers. The feast of the Three Hierarchs is the feast of schools, education and teaching. These holy fathers have reached the highest degree of knowledge and science of their era. They made the correlation that generations were unable to make.

On one hand, they were able through their faith and Christian life to harmonize the scientific knowledge they acquired and the truth of their faith.

On the other hand, they were great examples of pastoral care and excellent illustrations of the Good Shepherd. In addition to having gained high positions in the culture of their times, they sacrificed themselves for their flock and played important roles in the church.

The example of St. Basil in pastoral care is always alive in the memory of Christians. He wrote many ascetic and moral teachings. His organization of monastic life is still used today by the Church. All what he wrote about doctrine, faith was used and relied upon in the Second Ecumenical Council. One of the early writers of Christianity commented on the place of St. Gregory in the Church, saying, " If you want of in the same mind as

the Church, you must not be in disagreement with the mind of Gregory." His title, "the theologian" suffices to know his important status. Chrysotom, living at a later period, was the picture of the shepherd and teacher who tried to incarnate doctrine in his life, and incarnate the Gospel, as the basis of his conduct. He saw knowledge as a conception. He read the Word as "living water." He lived the Church as the kingdom of God on earth. He led his flock as sheep on green pastures, having Christ the Good Shepherd leading it. The sheep heard and recognized his voice. To be brief, the offering of those Fathers was especially in their coordination between the Word and pastoral care, knowledge and life, and science and love. Thus they accomplished the goal of the Word, the purpose of knowledge and the perfection of science and the truth. The first element in man is his mind and the most important virtue is love. These fathers have meshed together this element with that virtue.

The purpose of knowledge and research is the truth or the knowledge of truth. When knowledge reaches its goal, it is inevitable that it reaches God and acknowledges His works. The theoretical sciences, such as literature and philosophy, when they reach their truth will find themselves on the doors of the Kingdom, seeing God as their final destination. As for the practical sciences, they discover God in His works, power, wisdom, and love, as well as His presence and care. Research and knowledge do not reach perfection other than in service and pastoral care.

The knowledge of God carries a special secret. When it develops, it becomes a mission. God is love. Our encounter with Him at once makes us loving. Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me? Do you love me deeply from all your heart? If you do, then shepherd my

flock. Whoever loves Jesus and does not shepherd His flock loves a different Jesus, or he may be fooled. The purpose of all sciences is to know God, and this knowledge is to care for others. Whoever knows Jesus and is not transformed does not really know Him. Whoever knows Jesus well, is sent, out of love to the world, as shepherd and apostle. The knowledge of Jesus is the only true and deep motive to serve and shepherd. Pastoral care is the sign of the existence of this knowledge. Knowledge is vain if it does not lead us to God. Sciences are deceitful if they do not help us to serve.

For this reason, the Lord called Himself "The Door," in the Gospel passage of today's Matins. Whoever enters the world of knowledge from another "door" is a thief and a robber. Jesus is the intended truth in all knowledge. He is the Word leading us to all truth and knowledge. Through this door we enter and receive all care. The Lord Jesus is our door for the parish. In the name of the Lord Jesus we learn how to serve, and in His name we learn how to shepherd. Jesus is our door to the parish and Jesus is the door of the parish to green pastures.

At the end, Jesus is the true Pastor. He is the First Shepherd, the Great Archpriest. He is the Pastor and the Pasture. The Lord did not come only as a teacher, but also as the true food and drink.

One of the most beautiful symbols of Christianity depicts the Cross next to a pelican injuring its side in order to feed its little ones from its blood. The Lord Jesus is the Giver and the Gift, He is the Priest and the Sacrifice, as we say in the hymns of the Divine Liturgy.

Each one of us is in one way or another a shepherd of some sort. The older brother cares for his younger brothers and sisters, and the father carries great responsibilities. The Christian employer sees his work as a service for others, and his employees as being his younger brothers. Every profession or work or any position in life is vain unless it contains some kind of service or care. Love ought to be the purpose and nature of every relationship in daily work. Thus care is the expected result. The feast of the Three Hierarchs is a perfect example. Chrysostom says, "The father who does not feed his children from the heavenly manna (Christ) is actually killing and not fathering."

The most important, noble and delicate mission and service is the science of theology and priesthood. The example of the three hierarchs proves to us that the sign of true theology is good care to the flock. So, the essence of pastoral care is theology. Theology as a science remains just polemics if it does not turn into giving care. Pastoral care without its theological base becomes a social law and human management. Our three fathers whose memory we celebrate today learned from their theology how to be shepherds, and from their care of others how to be theologians. We must not wonder then if some sciences are away from their true purpose, which is caring for others. If some sciences do not reach their purpose, this is excusable, even though this is not desirable. If, however, we separate theology from pastoral care, than our sin is unforgivable. If the sciences of, say Mathematics, do not lead us to love Christ, and then serving and caring for others, our loss will be great. But if the divine word does not lead us to this, our loss will be unbearable. If a father does not enter through the "door" this may create problems, but if the theologian, or

the priest, or the servant does not enter through the Door, the matter needs to be reviewed in an essential and swift way.

Everyone of us is a shepherd in his own pasture, and has a responsibility to care for it from Christ, the Good Shepherd, who bought it with His own venerable blood. The good shepherd is the one who leads his flock to green pastures and rest, to the venerable body and blood of Christ. Pastoral care in all its forms of service, mission, and education is, finally, an ecclesiological work in which Christ is the entrance Door for the shepherd and the exit for the sheep. The Lord also represents the place of pasture, for He is everywhere and fills all things.

Amen.