

## 10-20-19 Give Glory to God

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy spirit. Amen.

I bring you greetings today from one of the bishops of the Jerusalem Patriarchate, Metropolitan Theodosius, who I met in Jerusalem twenty years ago who visited the United States when we were first getting organized as the Jerusalem Patriarchate. He was in the country, he came here to participate in the burial of a wonderful man, Mr. Shamiya, who hosted all of us when we went to Jerusalem. When I was ordained there, I stayed at his house and another time I stayed at his house with my father. He would live six months in the United States and six months in Jerusalem and was just a wonderful man. He reposed recently and Metropolitan Theodosius came to the United States in order to be at his funeral. He's here this week.

We had a spiritual conference yesterday in Sacramento. The theme was monasticism and the Bishop visited us there at lunchtime. A very good visit, very inspiring. He's a great speaker and an inspirer, motivator of the people. Also, I bring greetings to you from Abbot Damascene of St. Herman's Monastery in Platina. He was our keynote speaker. We had a wonderful time together and the church is doing well. There are wonderful people out there sometimes hard to find, but good bishops, good monastics, good priests who are out there really taking care of the people, teaching the truth, defending the truth. Abbot Damascene yesterday reminded the people that were present that it's up to you. I loved and enjoyed this inspiration. It's up to you, the laity to defend the faith. It's up to you. That responsibility often gets turned upside down and the lay people come to church expecting that the clergy are going to defend the faith.

We're the ones that always have to deliver the bad news. When you misbehave it's on us to have to say something about it. We actually... I saw a list of things that a priest cannot do that was going around the internet recently. It was humorous but serious at the same time. There are things on there like a priest cannot read your mind, sorry to inform you, but he can't. You actually have to tell him what your needs are. He's working on clairvoyance, but he usually hasn't gotten there yet. But the very last thing on the list, which wasn't very humorous at all on this list of humorous things, was that a priest cannot ignore sin. He doesn't have that freedom.

When he sees sin, particularly active in the church, it is on him. It is his responsibility to point it out, but defending the faith ultimately, it's something that clergyman can facilitate, but it is something that the laity have to do. They have to defend the faith. Father Damascene pointed out that if you pay attention to church history, the laity are terrible at coming up with heresy. Terrible. They usually haven't studied enough. They usually haven't assumed a theoretical mastery of theology to a point where they're speculating to such a degree that they think they came up with a new idea of understanding God and they start teaching it as their own teaching and causing division in the church. The laity are terrible at doing that. It's always priests. It's always bishops. It's patriarchs who caused heresy historically in the church and yet the laity, not only do they defend the faith and the simplicity of their faith, a lack of complexity, which I know it's not popular to realize this or to accept it in our modern society, but simplicity, a lack of complexity, is divine.

When we are simple and uncomplex in our existence, we are more like God. God is not complex at all. All powerful, all knowing but not complex. Simple in His essence and simple in His existence. As Saint John says, "God is love." It's not the substance of which He is made, but when we encounter Him at

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the most intimate level of union with God, what we encounter is love. Love, it's simple, it is not complex. So, you have to realize that. You have to be inspired that it's a responsibility of yours to study the faith and to defend it. When priests or bishops or patriarchs lead the church into a heresy, it is always in the end, the people of God rising up against the false teaching, the people of God receiving the decisions of such things like local and ecumenical councils and ratifying them that gives the ultimate amen to decisions. So, remember that. I will help facilitate that activity, but you must in your hearts, have a place where you are dedicated to defending the faith.

Not coming here to be told what the faith is only, but to take the knowledge away, to study on your own, to really answer the questions that you ask and to defend the faith. Defend the faith. On the theme of things that we believe, I had a wonderful, inspiring talk with the kids this week about this question that they ask often in catechism. It's always sort of, they're trying to trick me, they're trying to come up with something that the priest can't answer because their assumption wrongly is that I know everything. They haven't figured out I'm just older than them. So, I know some things, and at catechism, sometimes during the year at some point somebody will get the smart idea to ask me when I come in, "Father Thaddeus, what is the meaning of life?" I'm horrible at short answers by the way, so they know that'll fill up the half an hour very easily and I usually don't answer the question.

I usually tell them, "Well, we're going to learn that throughout the year. It's a complex answer. There's a lot of things that we do". But this semester I am teaching an Introduction to Dogmatic theology class. It sounds terrible, but it's actually a really inspiring to get back into reading the fundamental theological dogmas of the faith. What are the things that we have to believe if we call ourselves Orthodox Christians? Because our understanding of God, our understanding of ourselves, what does it mean to be me, my person, and what does it mean to be a human being? Our understanding of what the church is, where the church is, where the church is not, what it is, where it is and where it is not. Who God is and what his relationship to men is. None of these things are up for debate. None of them are up for revision.

There's a lot of, when it comes to contextualizing the faith in every age, there's a lot of discernment that has to be used, but what we believe never changes. It's very important as lay people defending the faith that when you hear things that don't seem compatible with what you've been taught, you need to go find out the answer to that question because you're either right and you need to be defending the truth or you're wrong, and you want your own theology to be corrected so that you can truly be an Orthodox Christian, not just be hanging out here or coming here with your own theology. We come here to submit to the patristic mind of the church, and so they will ask me this question, what is the meaning of life? I'm teaching a dogmatic theology class and I came across a section- this is in Father Michael Pomazansky's Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, talking about the purpose of human life, the actual purpose.

And there are three pretty simple things, although you might not know them about what the purpose of our existence is. We struggle as a person and we struggle with trying to form our own identity. Where do I belong in this world? What is my vocation? What am I called to be? Where am I going to school? Am I going to go to school? What am I going to do for a living? Yesterday we talked about am I going to be married or monastic? That's an essential question that our single people should be asking.

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What is our purpose? When we wake up in the morning and when we can visualize ourselves even for a millisecond, not distracted by all the worries and cares of the world, what is our purpose? What is our purpose there? And the kids, I told them there's three things I want you to guess what they are, and they came up with number two pretty easily. There's a lot of things in the number two category. They'd say, "We're praying and we're going to be chasing after the grace of the Holy Spirit and acquiring grace. We're going to be going to church and saying our prayers and keeping the fast. We're going to be studying. We're going to be imitating Christ, keeping the commandments." They had this wonderful list and it's all in number two and this is a priority list one, two, three. It's all in number two. The second priority in the purpose of our existence is to be like Christ, to pursue our likeness to Him.

Why do we pray? Why do we go to church? Why do we fast? Why do we study? Why? Why do we try and keep the commandments of Christ? He says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." But we find that in doing all of these things, we slowly increase in our likeness to Him, our fulfilling His command to imitate Him, to imitate Him, to be like Him. So a lot of the activities of the church, I would say the majority of the things that we identify as a part of us being Orthodox Christians falls into that number two category. We're trying to be like Christ a little bit more every day.

The number three, which they were able to guess after a while too, was that we are called to be the Kings and Queens of creation. It is the dogma of the church that humanity, Adam, and Eve in the garden is the high point, the pinnacle of God's creation. Everything is brought into existence, the stars, time and space, the universe, the earth, the land and the sea, the heavens and the earth, the garden. All of it is a preparation, even the creation of all the animals and plants, for man created in the image of the Trinity to be put on the face of the earth. We are the pinnacle of creation and we have a responsibility. This is the teaching of the church. You must believe this.

We have the responsibility as individual human beings, individual persons, whether we are lay people or deacons or priests or bishops, it doesn't matter. A human being is called and purposed to preach and witness to all of creation who God is and who the creator is. We are called to the degree that we pursue God and are deified by God. We are called to bring creation to God and to sanctify it as well.

Father Damascene touched on this yesterday in his talk that when we really dig into the patristic theology of the church, we find that it is a dogmatic teaching of the church that as mankind rises or falls in his union with God, all of creation rises and falls with Him.

When we as the human race draw closer to God or further away from Him, the effects of the fall get better or they're more healed or they get worse. Creation is actually sanctified by our pursuing Christ ourselves. It's a very clear tradition in the church that even a space like this, here we are in this temple, this building is made out of metal and out of wood and out of concrete and there was a day when it wasn't sanctified. It was a secular space and we have come here doing the services that we do, painting the icons that are painted, decorating the church as it is decorated and pursuing God ourselves, each of us individually pursuing our union with Him through the practices of the church.

We become sanctified and we sanctify the space around us and that this building, this metal and paint and wood and sheet rock and concrete is more holy than it used to be in the past because of our activity here in relationship with God. When we visit holy places often, the holiness of the physical

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place itself is palpable. You go in and you feel the presence of God, not because somebody is there that's holy, but because the space itself has been sanctified. The opposite of this is true as well that we can desanctify space. Our home can be a place that is occupied by demons and by sin, by our activity, our distancing ourselves from God. Our surroundings become worse and in the end, we find out the entire creation becomes worse when we're doing worse. There was a part of me that thought, "Oh, that's what climate change is." I'm not sure if I believe there's climate change. I'll be honest with you about that. It's weather. I also think if it's true, it's probably still not very important because nobody is going to be saved, nobody is going to go to heaven, nobody's going to go to hell because they got it right. It's a worry and care of the world, but theologically speaking, if the world is in fact, turning away from Christ more than it has in the last 2000 years, and I think there's an argument that it has, all of Europe used to be a Christian. It's not anymore. The United States used to have a Judeo-Christian orientation towards life and morality. It doesn't anymore. Russia, thank God is doing very well and a lot of other Orthodox countries are doing well, but it is very arguable, particularly from a criticism of Catholicism and Protestantism that there's less believers in the world now than there used to be.

In the theology of the church that ought to, it ought to be manifesting itself in problems in creation, not because we are throwing plastic straws around or have plastic bottles or something. That's not the problem. The problem is that we are distancing ourselves as the Kings and Queens of creation. We are distancing ourselves from our creator. That that makes the garden sick. We see that the garden of Eden was basically destroyed by the disobedience of Adam and Eve and we see that creation itself can be weakened. The effects of the fall make it more intense. The condition of creation made worse by our relationship with God, and so maybe that's what climate change really is. It's us turning away from God and creation getting worse under the effects of the fall rather than being sanctified. I don't need you to accept that. I just think it's interesting speculation.

The most important purpose that God has given to every human being was a surprise to me. I'll admit that to you. I got excited when I read it. The kids could never guess it. It would take you a while, I think to guess too. They're like, "Giving thanks to God. Praying, no that was number two. Oh yeah, that's right. Union with God." Well, that's going to be the result, but what is the number one purpose of every human being on the face of the earth? More important than prayer, a greater priority than going to church and keeping the fast, a greater priority I would say even in the end than our personal pursuit of the acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is a bold statement.

The number one purpose dogmatically in the Orthodox church for a human being is to glorify God.

Think about that. To glorify Him, not to thank Him. We had to get into the etymology of these words in catechism. Not to thank Him, not to worship Him even, to pray to Him, not to converse with Him, although we are called to do those things, but to glorify Him, to give Him glory and praise, to call out how incredible He is.

We see in the Gospel reading this morning an interesting little facet of scripture where the widow at the city of Nain, she's in a procession, her only son is in the coffin. The people are weeping. There is a multitude of people coming out of the city because the situation is so tragic. They are mourning with her loss. There's also a great multitude that are following Christ and the apostles and these multitudes converge around this funeral procession.

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Christ has compassion on her, like he is going to have compassion on his own mother who loses her son. He brings the son back to life in front of these multitudes. If you pay attention to the scripture, nobody thanks Him. No one goes up to Him and says, "Thank you." Nobody prays to Him. Nobody says, "Let's go to church and have a service."

It says that the fear of God fell on them. That's an important word. It's more awe than being afraid. The fear of God falls on the people and they glorify Him. They start talking about how incredible Jesus is. A new prophet has been given to us. God has visited His people. That awesome God that created everything that made me one of the Kings of creation with the Queens. This incredible Lord that has visited us. They don't go into thanking God for what He has done. I think they will do that later. It doesn't produce prayer. It produces glorification of God and I had to look at myself and look at those priorities and say to myself, I think I'm doing okay in class number two. That's basically the life of a priest. I am saved by the fact that I have to come to church even when I don't want to.

Number three, illuminating for me, but still I knew that we are the Kings and Queens of creation. I knew that we had a responsibility to preach God to the creation and to save the world, to bring it towards being renewed in the glory of Christ when He comes. But when I saw that number one priority of glorifying God, not praying, not thinking, not beseeching, not talking with, just preaching to my fellow man and creation how awesome our God is, I knew that I was falling short in that area. I even felt immediately like even as a priest walking around in black all the time, still what are people going to think when I just start saying how great God is? Are they going to think I'm a weirdo more than they already do? Am I going to be embarrassed? Do I really believe it? And I started realizing that was the area of weakness for me personally.

I would exhort you today as we hear in this Gospel, in the Epistle, we heard those who sow sparingly, reap sparingly. If we don't put a lot in, we cannot expect to get a lot out. It's an investment in God that we are making. Our salvation and our own sanctification is not going to be great if we don't put a lot of effort into it. That was from the Epistle. We are also taught from the Gospel that our natural response, which we have fallen far away from when we encounter Christ in His works, in His miracles, in His creation, that our number one response should be to glorify Him, to simply proclaim to the people around us and to creation itself as a whole how incredible and awesome God is. So meditate on that in this coming week.

Think about how often you just stop and think about how incredible the Holy Trinity is and how incredible Christ is as our loving and merciful God. Don't even let it turn into prayer for a while. Don't have it turn into thanks for a while. Don't have it turn into a conviction to come to church more often immediately. Let it be for a time, a simple contemplation of how glorious God is and share that contemplation with those around you.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.