

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 sermons (listed in the footnotes) of Metropolitan Georges about the priesthood. The first part is presented here.

The first place remains reserved for the poor. The poor, the sick, the downtrodden, and the oppressed are the individuals whom the priest primarily serves. Didn't the Lord say in His Gospel: “The poor are given glad tidings” (Luke 4:18)? The poor are embraced first because we are within Jesus' Church. Metropolitan Georges continues in the tradition of the Church Fathers, considering the poor as the masters of the Church of Christ. According to him, they are our ultimate leaders, just as the Master, glory to Him, cared for them.¹ The gospel itself is the gospel of the poor,² hence they are the priest's foremost concern.³

Love is manifested in the priest's actions of mercy “toward his impoverished flock”.⁴ This love for the poor is not a matter of choice,⁵ “it is an integral part of Christian formation”. Therefore, “the servant of the altar is the very one who ministers to the poor, who are the living altars of the Lord Jesus”, as affirmed by St. John Chrysostom, who holds a special place in Metropolitan Georges' heart. In his teachings, Metropolitan Georges underscores the essence of the gospel: that the poor represent Christ. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:39). Metropolitan Georges equates the blood of Jesus with the blood of the poor when he declares, “There are not two bloods in the world; there is only one blood, the blood of the Lord is the blood of the poor.”⁶

Therefore, the priest stands by their side, tending to their wounds, consoling their hearts; they are “His wound”⁷ and are esteemed higher than him. His care for them

¹ You Belong to Christ

² The Priest and Money

³ Christ is Your Leader

⁴ You are an Oblation Raised to God

⁵ Serve the Deprived

⁶ Be a Serving Servant

⁷ The Priest and Money

extends beyond their material needs to encompass the dignity bestowed upon them by God. The priest must love them and remind them that “their heads must be subject to God.”⁸

Moreover, Metropolitan Georges emphasizes that the Church’s financial priorities are set as follows: “the priest, the poor, and the needy.”⁹ This aligns with the intentions of the benefactors who entrusted their property and wealth for this purpose.

Furthermore, the metropolitan’s counsel does not neglect the well-off. “The priest’s duty extends to caring for both the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate”,¹⁰ striving to save them from spiritual peril. The priest is tasked with lifting them up. However, he must be cautious not to become subservient to the wealthy, for “Jesus Christ will reject him.”¹¹ The priest is a servant of Jesus and master of all in His behalf, with a duty to remind both rich and poor that they are “but dust.”

Metropolitan Georges even pauses at “dust” to elaborate. His readers are often charmed by his emphasis on the profound dust of individuals grounded in “the ability to be baptized in light.” He consistently encourages the priest to remember his dust that has not been molded into the light, from which he shall be pulled to the front of the Lord until his dust dissipates and the light prevails.¹² Thus, he encourages priests to recognize the inherent beauty within people, reminding them of this quality.

Lastly, it is crucial to mention that Metropolitan Georges’ teachings are directed at priests who shepherd the Orthodox people. This is a field into which only a few, including Metropolitan Georges,¹³ have ventured. In his sermons to priests, he endeavors to help them understand the structure of the people they are called to serve. These people often possess limited religious knowledge, and tribal pride lingers within them. Therefore, “the priest must approach them with humility, meekness, and gentleness at all times.” The goal is to guide them “to annihilate the

⁸ You are the Bible’s Captive

⁹ The Priest and Money

¹⁰ Embrace Them All

¹¹ Save Yourself from Idols

¹² We are the Company of Priests; We are Nothing but Washers of Feet; Barter Your Comfort for Christ; You are a Priest of hope; We Did not Make You an Archbishop, but Rather, We Took Notice of You

¹³ Embrace Them All; Rule over People with Humility, Without a Title

tribe and become one soul... a church for Jesus Christ bound by love.”¹⁴ It is a challenge, as “they remain unconvinced of the need to study, as if they have severed their heads.”¹⁵ This might lead the well-educated priest to sadness, something Metropolitan Georges “had not anticipated before becoming a priest.”¹⁶ Many people do not realize that the priest is both a master and a commander, especially if they were not nurtured within the bosom of their church.

Some among them may be disrespectful and impolite to the priest.¹⁷ This can push the priest to be burnt inside, because the other knows that he has sinned and hurt himself. Metropolitan Georges frequently advises priests to position themselves at the feet of the Orthodox people. The priest’s primary method for correcting their whims and passions is through love. Love for the parish is the key.

“If the Orthodox people burden you, which they often do, when one of them burdens you, intensify your love for him, take him and carry him on your shoulders.”¹⁸

Metropolitan Georges’ insights are not whimsical or emotional but are grounded in a deep understanding of people’s complex and “hard” history, extensive experience in serving them, and profound love for them. He believes that these people are “the redeemed of Christ,”¹⁹ “the people of Christ,”²⁰ “the speaking sheep of Christ,”²¹ “Christ’s sheep,”²² and “that every member of this community is great because he belongs to the great Christ”.²³ Ultimately, only those who possess the love that leads them to declare “every soul is equivalent to the divine blood that was shed for it”²⁴ can nurture and guide them to live in the light.

Will we, as priests, rise to the level expected by our Master? We remain hopeful. Metropolitan Georges’ prophetic voice continues to inspire us, reminding us through his books of the compelling evidence that our calling is nothing less than

¹⁴ Rule over People with Humility; Without a Title

¹⁵ Remain a Monk after You Become a Priest

¹⁶ Embrace Them All

¹⁷ You are God’s Employee

¹⁸ Sanctify Yourself

¹⁹ You are Crucified on Their Love

²⁰ Without a Title

²¹ Retrieve Them for Your Master

²² You are a Carrier of the Word of God

²³ Your Job is to Die for Them All

²⁴ Every Soul is Equivalent to the Divine Blood that was Shed for it

making the Kingdom tangible and experienced on this earth until the Lord returns to claim it along with all those who dwell in it.

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