

Ministry and Unity in the Church

The following is a presentation delivered by Fr. Timothy Chrapko to the Clergy at the Western Eparchy Clergy Conference held on October 23, 2008 at St. Michael's Ukrainian Orthodox Parish, Edmonton Alberta.

Today, my dear Brothers in Christ, I have been asked to give a talk; I have chosen the topics of Ministry and Ordination. I have decided to divide my presentation into two main sections. I will begin with a more academic section, where I will discuss the theological meaning of ministry and ordination, drawing support for my ideas from the thoughts of some theologians, including Zizioulas, Lossky, Staniloae, and Schmemmann. Then I will share with you some of my own reflections, and personal opinions regarding this topic and how we might apply it to help us move our pastorship into the future. It is not my hope in this presentation to teach you anything; to be honest, you probably know more than me about this subject. It is my hope to perhaps refresh a memory, spark an idea, or begin a discussion that will be valuable to us at this point in our gathering. I encourage you at the end of my presentation to ask questions, and together we will strive to gain a greater understanding of how enhancing our ministry can bring a sense of spiritual renewal to our parishes and perhaps to ourselves as well.

In most modern discussions regarding Ministry and Ordination, we are able to notice that these two aspects appear to be inseparable. It must be stated; however, that this type of mindset is ultimately borrowed from the realm of scholastic theology, and is not present in the most traditional Orthodox approach to these subjects. We are able to state that some of the characteristics used in this sort of approach are useful to us in that they provide us with the ability to view ordination within the narrowed scope of the context within which we find ministry taking place. In the first place, ministry and ordination are ultimately approached as autonomous subjects, as they are examined apart from other theological concepts such as Christology and Trinitarian Theology. Furthermore, we are able to state that in the scholastic approach, which unfortunately has even begun to influence Orthodox Theologians in this day in age, Christology is separated from the rest of systematic theology, and treated as its own autonomous subject, and therefore not a part of Trinitarian theology, and ecclesiology. This way of thinking ultimately gives momentum to Christomonistic tendencies in the understanding of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. This approach causes a great deal of difficulty, for through this approach it becomes nearly impossible to relate the ministry of the Church to that of Christ. It is for this reason that we must state that the subjects of Ordination and ministry are to be approached and examined in the context of the entire concrete ecclesial community, rather than in regards to the individual person, his ontology or function within ministry itself.

In order to truly understand the depth of the Orthodox Christian perspective on this discussion of Ordination and Ministry, we must look no further than the Fathers of the Church. Through this observation we are able to see that ultimately there is no room for this notion of autonomy between Ordination and ministry. This is apparent in that the Fathers of the Church place a great deal of emphasis on the relation of the Church's ministry to that of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

To summarize the central underlying themes of Patristic thought in regards to ministry, we are able to state that there is no ministry in the Church outside of the ministry of Jesus Christ:

“A priest is nothing without the priesthood of Jesus Christ. He is a priest only to the degree that he has united to the person and work of the saviour” (Gillet). This notion is so engrained in patristic thought that there does not appear to be a separation of the earthly ministry of the Church from that of Christ’s ministry. This continuity which is rooted in the New Testament itself appears as an organic progression in the life of the Church. It is important for us to note how truly natural this progression appeared to the Fathers of the Church. In the words of John Zizioulas:

The identification of the Church’s ministry with that of Christ has gone beyond the Theology of the Fathers, and entered into the liturgical life of the ancient Church in a decisive way: in the Eucharist, [for] Christ is not only the one who is offered and receives, but also the one who offers.

We are able to see that this is indeed the case, in the worshiping life of the Church, in that among the earliest texts of Eucharistic prayer, (i.e. The Liturgy of St. James) does not appear to contain this notion of Christ as the offered and the offerer. This thought in regards to Christ is found in the liturgies of the Patristic age, among Fathers such as St. John Chrysostom, and St. Basil the Great. Enrico Mazza states that such thought regarding Christ as offerer and offered ultimately belongs to the realm of Patristic Mystagogy.

Lossky continues on this line of thought as he says:

“A new reality came into the world, a body more perfect than the world – the Church, founded on a two-fold divine economy, the work of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit, the two persons of the Holy Trinity sent into the world”.

This identification between the ministry of Christ and the ministry of the Church, which the Fathers so greatly emphasize, is only possible if we allow our Christological perceptions to be tempered in and through the Holy Spirit. This is solely possible if we are able to see that that ministry of Christ is ultimately initiated by the Father who is in action to send the Son to fulfill His dispensation for us. Through coming into the world, Christ is thus able to draw all people into participation into the life of the structure of supreme love, the Holy Trinity (Staniloae). We are able to see that with this understanding in mind, there is no possible way that Christ can be disassociated from the Holy Spirit, as in the case in the scholastic approach, for it is in and through the Holy Spirit that Christ is born unto the world, and also through this same Holy Spirit that Christ became able to initiate His ministry on earth, and ultimately, through whom this ministry continues unbroken to this day. Through this we are able to see that the pre-eternal mission of the Logos has its continuity, alive and well in the ministry of the Church. We are able to say that the Holy Spirit completes and continues the ministry engaged by the entire Triune God, which is ultimately the ministry of salvation.

In expressing the fullness of the ministry continued through the Holy Spirit in the Church, it is essential for us to understand that in no way does the ministry of the Church find herself engaged in, or represent a period of transition, or interim status in the overall history of salvation, but rather it exists as an expression of the total economy of the salvific work of the Triune God (Staniloae). It is for this very reason that we are not able to speak of ministry in general terms that are dependent upon *chronos* or created time, such as the division of ministry past (i.e. Christ in the Holy Land) and Present (i.e. the Church in the 21st century), but we must

also look at it in the sense of future as well, namely in that it preserves eschatological hope, of sharing in the very life of God, by offering a foretaste of that life to all people here and now (Zizioulas). This hope is spoken of in the future sense in that its cause and source is found in the eschata. In light of this, we are able to state that the relation between the ministry of the Church and that of Christ is to ultimately be viewed in terms of soteriology, which without a doubt has a deep and lasting impact on human beings, and through mankind, the entire cosmos. For, "Man's primary calling is to be the priest of all creation, to bring the entire cosmos into communion with God," says Fr. Alexander Schmemmann. We must be clear, however, that this soteriological view of ministry must remain intact as the patristic fathers would maintain, meaning that we do not speak so much of an act of justice done by Christ in order to obtain forgiveness for the disobedience of mankind, but; rather, it is intended to mean the realization of Theosis, as communion of man-and through him all creation- with the life of the Trinity. Therefore, we are able to state that the Ministry of the Church must realize in the here and now, the salvific work of Christ, which involves a personal encounter (communion we may say), and experience of the presence of the one who saves. For "He who has chosen to live in Christ should cling to the Heart and that Head, for we obtain life from No other source" (Cabasilas).

We must say that in establishing the approach that states that the interrelation of the ministry of Christ with the ministry of the Church, we have ultimately affected our understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in ministry. It is thusly that we begin to understand the ministry of Christ, and then ultimately as an extension of the ministry of Christ, the ministry of the Church, as being a movement and action of the Holy Trinity, for this ministry is instigated or inaugurated by the will of the Father, who sends the Son, whose work is completed by the Holy Spirit. It is also this same Holy Spirit that serves as the connection between the mission of Christ and the ministry of the Church. There exists an interdependence between ministry and the venue in which ministry is most often experienced, this being the Christian community, as both are produced by the working and participation of the Holy Spirit. By this example, we are able to state that we ultimately do not possess that ability of knowing what the nature of ministry is apart from that Christian Community; however, it must also be said that we cannot first establish our idea of what this community is, and then look back at the notion of ministry through these parameters. Thus we are able to see the true interdependence of Ministry and the Christian Community, and that this ministry can only find its source in a community in which the Holy Spirit is active.

With this in mind, it is then possible for us to better understand the theological, liturgical as well as practical aspects of Ordination. According to practices that date back to the patristic age, and beyond, Ordinations are linked to a specific altar, meaning that the ordained are not ordained at large, but are ordained for a specific altar, and ultimately linked to a concrete Christian community, who has a say in their Ordination, in that it is an election. Additionally, ordinations must take place within the context of the Eucharistic gathering. Both of these requirements point us towards the realization of a link between ministry and community. The Fathers of the Church make it exceptionally clear that there is to be a solid link between Ordination and the Eucharist. This is because in the greatest sense of the word, the Eucharist IS community. It is in and through the Eucharist that the Church becomes what it ought to be, for the Eucharist is the community rather than an action or a "thing" undertaken by the community. In the Eucharist Christ is present in the here and now as the realization of God's communication and desire for communion with mankind. Soteriologically speaking, it is in the Eucharist that we

see the natural birthplace and extension of the ministry of the Church. This is because, “the Eucharist is the backbone of each particular component of Christ’s body spread thorough out the world” (Metropolitan Emilianos). The Eucharist is the true foundation of every parish, and what makes each of them joined to the next, spanning all space and time. The Eucharist is where faithful from all over the world, as well as members of the Church militant and triumphant meet together. These faithful gather together not only to see each other, but also the respond with all of their heart and soul to Christ, the host of this mystical banquet. We do not partake of anything other than the Logos who became incarnate, suffered for us, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. We as a community of believers receive Christ within ourselves, both in His divinity and His humanity. “It is thusly that we live in Christ and Christ lives in us” (Cabasilas).

In discussing the subject of ministry, we often encounter questions that address the subject of the origin of ministry, and how it is transmitted in the Church. It is implied that ordination is ultimately a transmission of this ministry, through the transmission of Grace, and thus linking the candidate with the succession of those who have come before him. We must ultimately state that in order for the ministry of the Church to be effective in the world in which it is intended to function, Ministry must be at its very core, relational in nature. The ministry of the Church must be and remain what it is revealed to be in the Eucharist, the fullness of the Holy Spirits action in a true Christian Community. It is in this way that the Church begins her ministry in the most concrete way, for the ministry of the Church has then become incarnational. The Church relates to the world through and in her ministry by being involved in the world. It is through this action that the Church goes about the process of sanctifying the world and consecrating that which is fallen to God once again. The nature of this ministry is not found in the Church addressing and dealing with the world and its brokenness, but rather from the Church acting with compassion for the fallen world and its people.

It is ministry that ultimately makes the concrete Christian community and the ordained person relational, not only to each other, and to the world at large, but also to other communities that exist in the world. This is because the sin of prideful individualism is overcome by the working and inner involvement of the Holy Spirit. It is essential that in her ministry, the Church reflect the here and now, as well as the everywhere and always catholicity of the Church, thus unifying ministry both in time and in space. This notion strongly suggests a Eucharistic element, for it is through the Eucharist that a community becomes open in this way, and thus overcomes the divisions caused by time and space. Thus the Eucharist is offered not just on earth but before the very throne of God and with the company of all the saints, living and departed, as well as in the name of the militant church in the world” (Zizioulas). It is for this reason that we are able to state that the Eucharist is truly offered in “behalf of all and for all.”

Having now discussed something of the nature of the ministry of the Church, I feel that it is now important to discuss, to a degree, the practical side of this ministry, in its most relatable form, that being pastorship. The mission of the Church is, as we have discussed previously, something that is executed by the entire church, the people of God as well as its clergy. The priest is not some sort of super-Christian, who bears with him an ontological change that makes him above all other believers. Instead, the priest is first and foremost a Baptized Christian, who has been entrusted with the special responsibility of leading the carrying out of the Church’s ministry, through the Grace imparted at his ordination. We are made well aware through the

letters of St. Paul, in the New Testament, that there are many forms of ministry in the Church, that fulfill a variety of needs at a given time or place.

To further our discussion regarding the ministry of Christ, we are able to state with confidence, that not only is Christ our High Priest, as we hear in the Epistle to the Hebrews, but we also state that in the truest sense of the word, the Ministry of Christ is fundamentally Diaconal. This statement can be made due to the fact that the Ministry of Christ is first and foremost one of Service, for Christ himself serves the whole body of the Church, including the priests on whom he has bestowed His special responsibility, and thus called them to have a share in His life and ministry. As we have already stated, the continuation of Christ's ministry happens through the power and operation of the Holy Spirit. It is this same Holy Spirit that each member of the Church receives through Chrismation, which ultimately is ordination into the Royal Priesthood, or the Priesthood of all believers. It is the Spirit that is able to steer the life of all of the faithful toward God. The mission of the λαος του τηεον - is accomplished in that worshipful movement toward God, and even more so in the movement of the Christian witness and presence into the world. It is the role of the clergy to adequately equip the royal priesthood for this mission of attempting to convert the world into a sacramental expression to God. In its worship, the Church stands as a representative of the world before God, giving thanks and being enriched through its liturgical life. It is in this way that the Church begins to live eucharistically, in giving thanks on behalf of the Cosmos. It must also be stated that essential to the mission of the Royal Priesthood is the active building up of the worshiping community of believers.

It may be stated that in the current practice of the Orthodox Church, there appears to be a tendency to isolate the components of the organism of ministry, in which we see the separation of the Baptized from those that are of the world, and even the Clergy being separated from the parish. This separation of the baptized from the rest of the world in which they live calls to mind the words of a dear friend of mine, Fr. Silas who once said to me: "Far too many Orthodox Priests are curators of aquariums and not fishers of men", and how true that statement is in this day in age, where it appears that many of us are worried about keeping those baptized fish that we have in the pews, and not so concerned about casting out nets out into the water of the world around us, to extend the ministry of the Church to those in the world who are in need of it. This practice of segregation and Clericalization is ultimately counterproductive to the mission and ministry of the Church, for religion has become something exclusively reserved for the sanctuary, and thus is in danger of losing its ability to shape the world view of the faithful, and thus transforming the world and sanctifying it. In this task of the sanctification of the world, both the clergy as well as the laity share a responsibility. For if the ministry of the Church to be affective in this day in age, it is essential that a rediscovery of the ministry of the Church, in its true sense, be undertaken. By this I mean to state that the ministry of the Church can no longer be strictly the duty of the clergy, but rather it must be stated that the ministry of the Church, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, must flow forth from the Chalice through the hearts of both clergy and laity into the world around us.

In a world that appears to be becoming more and more morally corrupt by the hour, the ministry of the Church appears to be facing some insurmountable odds standing in the way of the Church fulfilling her mission, and effectively carrying out her ministry in this decaying world. Orthodox Christian spirituality goes great lengths to answer the questions that exist among people, especially on the North American continent. However, the question remains as to how

the Church is to maintain proclaiming God's love in a world filled with suffering. The classical approach to this question in this case is to state that the Love of God is visible in the world through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. However, this analogy is only beneficial for one who already has faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity sent into the world for the sake of mankind. However, if one does not know Jesus Christ, has not had an experience of His Grace and Love, this statement is essentially putting the cart before the horse, and they are only able to associate the love, peace and presence of Christ, with the supposed hypocrisy that they see from Christians around them. It is because of these perceptions that exist in the world that statements regarding the love of God present in the world through the incarnation are devoid of meaning, and empty. The only answer that exists to these perceptions is faith, but not faith on its own, but also conviction. The faith we possess must ultimately alter our life and forever change us, the way we act, the way we speak, the way we live. It was once said: "Go throughout the nations of the world and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and if you must, use words" This statement is also true for us in this day in age, for we must rediscover that conviction that made the martyrs willing to: "go to their graves like beds" (Shakespeare), and from this faith, we attempt to sanctify the totality of our life and our time. Sanctify not only Sunday but every day of the week, trying in all ways possible to imitate Christ. In order for this to take place, it is essential that the ministry of the Church be fully realized in the context of the Eucharistic community, for it is only through this community that ministry will flow forth and be effective in this desperate and hungry world. It is my hope that my talk today has sparked some ideas and questions in your minds that we may now discuss, because I am excited by the prospect of us all growing together, that we may learn from each other, be guided by the Holy Spirit, and together lead our parishes into the future which will be full of hope, not doubt. Thank you.