

Matthew 19:16-26 (*Gospel*)

Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He said to Him, “Which ones?” Jesus said, “‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” “The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?”

Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Advice to the Confused By Lawrence Farley

I suppose that most pastors have had the experience of a young parishioner approaching them privately and confiding in them their suspicion or decision that they were gay, bisexual, or transgender. Such confusion is in the air, has the Nihil Obstat of both secular culture and governmental sanction, and also bestows a kind of odd popularity, making the person part of a privileged minority of the nobly oppressed. Adolescence has always been a time of sexual ambiguity and confusion, as hormones go into overdrive and leave the young person with a multitude of conflicting emotions. In previous generations the Church and parents were present to help them sort it all out, and to distinguish the emotional from the physical from the sexual. These twin authorities of Church and parents have been replaced by Big

Brother, who is now is watching us carefully. These are interesting times in which to raise children.

The question arises as to what a pastor might tell a young parishioner confiding in him such perplexity, suspicion, or even a decision that they were gay, bisexual, or transgender. All pastoral relationships are unique and personal, being subject to a multitude of individual personal factors. This makes generalization impossible, and the concept of an “open pastoral letter” about such things is a contradiction in terms, for it is not the case therefore that one size can fit all, or that such responses can be reduced to a blog post. One cannot really answer the question, “What would you say to a person struggling with same-sex attraction, bi-sexuality, or gender dysphoria?” because pastors do not deal with struggling persons in the abstract, but individuals in particular. A pastor does not deal with “homosexuals”, but with Steve or Henry; he does not deal with “lesbians”, but with Jane or Sally—individuals whom he knows, and with whose personal history he is familiar. Pastoral care in such situations involves more listening than lecturing, and what a pastor says is conditioned by what he hears from the person he knows and loves.

Nonetheless, within the long, caring, non-judgmental, and far-ranging conversation with such a parishioner, a pastor may suggest that his parishioner consider a number of things that he or she might not have thought of before.

First of all, a pastor will help the person understand that in our current culture, everything has been collapsed into the sexual, so that a strong emotional attachment, to say nothing of a physical connection, is labelled as sexual, with the inevitable resultant confusion. One must distinguish between an emotional attraction to another person, a physical attraction, and a sexual attraction, and try to disentangle those three different strands. An emotional attachment and even a physical attraction to someone of the same sex does not necessarily mean that the attraction is sexual, or that the person feeling the emotional or physical attraction is therefore homosexual or bi-sexual or transgender. Such emotional and even physical attractions between people of the same sex are normal, and in previous generations were accepted as such between people who were both heterosexual. It is only with our modern and overly-sexualized society that all such attractions are labelled as sexual and as indicators of homosexuality. A pastor should expose *Con't Pg 10*

Fr. Lawrence Con't

His parishioner to the possibility that our modern society might simply be wrong in its obsession with sexuality, and that all previous generations were right.

Secondly, even if there is a genuine, early, and deep-seated sexual desire for someone of the same sex, the person should be introduced to the thought that such desires need not be definitive for a person's identity, or acted upon. That is, one should be clear that not all deep-seated sexual desires bring with them moral imperatives, or the necessity of carrying out those desires. For example, a person afflicted with a desire for paedophilia (or "minor attraction" as it currently describes itself) need not act upon those desires. And an adult heterosexual with a desire for multiple partners and casual promiscuous relationships need not act upon those desires either.

In fact an important part of holiness and even of simple maturity involves the decision and ability to not act upon such desires. After one is married, one will certainly have a desire to sleep with someone to whom one is not married, but this desire must be resisted. Successful resistance is not impossible; it is just (sometimes) difficult. It is possible therefore for one to have strong feelings of homosexual desire and still resist them. Having such a desire does not mean that one must fulfil the desire or change one's lifestyle to conform to it.

Thirdly, a pastor will expose his parishioner to the thought that the Church, with its two-millenia experience of dealing with temptation and the depths of the human heart with its desires, has more wisdom than those in our secular society who lack such experience. The combined witness of Jesus of Nazareth, His apostles (who lived and taught with a society where homosexuality was commonplace), and the saints throughout the ages should surely count for something.

This is not a matter of pounding the Bible or insisting upon conformity to the Church's Tradition as external authorities, but of pointing out that something that has been around for this long and has produced so many examples of transformed life throughout the last two

thousand years probably has more wisdom to offer than the latest pundit on the media, or teacher holding forth in a community college course on "Gender Studies". The pastor need not insist upon the authority of the Church's teaching. He need only point out the obvious fact that any sensible person will seriously consider something that has had a two-millenia track record of success. Bluntly put, he will ask the question, "How can you be sure that you are not being deceived?"

Finally, a pastor will remind the young person that at every point in the Christian life a devout disciple of Jesus will find himself or herself at odds with the world. A devout Christian will inevitably clash with the secular world about the sanctity of unborn life, the importance of money, the importance of forgiveness and prayer, the centrality of faith in Jesus, and the reality of the Last Judgment. Is it any surprise that if the world is wrong about all these things it is also wrong about sexuality and gender? Christians will never fit into the world, and will always be counter-cultural. The clash between the Church and secular society about sexuality is likely to be just one more instance of this perennial and eternal conflict. We Christians will never fit in. Refusing to fit in is how we become heroes in God's eyes, and how we win our crown. Those choosing to resist same-sex attraction, where it exists, deserve respect and admiration. Their struggle may be greater than those of others. But their final reward will be greater as well. If a young person finds himself or herself beset with such a struggle, the rewards for success in this struggle must be emphasized and placed front and center.

Truly loving a person does not necessarily involve supporting them in all their decisions or never challenging them to change their mind. As those who answer suicide hotlines know only too well, sometimes it involves trying to talk them out of their desires and decisions and pointing them in a better direction.

Love Christ and put nothing before His Love.
He is joy, He is life, He is light. Christ is
Everything. He is the ultimate desire, He is
everything. Everything beautiful is in Christ.

Saint Porphyrios

Our Youth in Camp, Our Youth in Parishes

I was at the FOCA convention in Columbus, OH this past weekend. At their assembly, Dimitrios Rentel gave a presentation of the Youth Survey he has been conducting with our parishes. So far over 1600 people have responded. He also spent the summer visiting some of our camps and attending other youth-oriented activities. He spoke with many of our youth during this time.

One of the main themes he spoke on was how so many of the kids and survey respondents emphasized how much the kids loved going to camp. The number one motivation was that camp was a place that kids could be loved with people they love to be with. The bonding that goes with making friends was so important to campers. There was great appreciation for the counselors and staff at the camps he visited. There is a connection made there that makes the kids want to go back.

The downside of his comments was that when it comes to kids in parish life, there is not this same sense of connectedness. He described that a number of kids he interviewed could not remember the name of their parish priest. I too encountered this when several kids I spoke with at camp could not remember the name of their parish. I know I have overly simplified this. It is not as if all our kids don't know their parish name or the name of their priest. But I was struck by the fact that there is a connection kids make at camp that **may** not be made among some kids in parish life. How common or prevalent this is is hard to tell.

The possible reasons for this are complicated and multifaceted. I am going to spend a couple of weeks speaking on these reasons. One important reason is that when at camp, kids are in a communal environment where all the temptations of daily living presents are not there. Kids are put in an environment that in a good way fosters closeness and making friends among each other. To foster this environment in parish life can be hard given the distances people live from their parish and the daily busyness of family lives. Parishes simply cannot be camp. But how can we work to help our children experience a greater sense of connectedness with their parish (assuming the

above is at least partially true)?

One thing that comes to mind is doing things that help kids to take ownership of a ministry or service. They can be empowered to serve. Dimitrios told the FOCA assembly that service is a big value of our kids. They want to help. They want to serve. How, even in a small way, can a parish empower kids? What can they do in the church to claim as their service and help them to connect to the parish?

The Blessing of the Lord be upon you,
The unworthy +Paul



Our elders of the Church, Ed & Irene Vangeloff & Basil Glovinsky, helping Julia Guzy celebrate her 96th Birthday.



Some parishioners help Julia Guzy's celebrate her 96th Birthday

Vestments worn by Orthodox Christian Clergy

By Fr Thomas Hopko

In the Orthodox Church the clergy vest in special clothing for the liturgical services. There are two fundamental Christian vestments, the first of which is the **baptismal robe**. This robe, which is worn by bishops and priests at the service of holy communion and which should always be white, is the "robe of salvation": the white garment in which every Christian is clothed on his day of baptism, symbolising the new humanity of Jesus and life in the Kingdom of God (Rev 7:9ff).



The second fundamental vestment for Christian clergy is the **stole or epitachelion** which goes around the neck and shoulders. It is the sign of the pastoral office and was originally made of wool to symbolize the sheep -- that is, the members of the flock of Christ -- for whom the pastors are responsible. Both bishops and priests wear this vestment when they are exercising their pastoral office, witnessing to the fact that the ministers of the Church live and act solely for the members of Christ's flock.



As the Church developed through history the vestments of the clergy grew more numerous. Special **cuffs** for deacons, priests, and bishops were added to keep the sleeves of the vestments out of the way of the celebrants during the divine services. When putting on their cuffs, the clergy read lines from the psalms reminding them that their hands belong to God.

A special **belt** was added as well to hold the vestments in place. When putting on the belt the clergy say psalms which remind them that it is God who "girds them with strength" to fulfil their service. Only the bishops and priests wear the liturgical belt.



All orders of the clergy wear a special outer garment. Deacons, sub-deacons, and readers wear a robe called a **sticharion**. It is probably the baptismal garment, decorated and made more elaborate. Deacon and sub-deacons also wear a stole called the **orarion**, probably originally a piece of material upon which were inscribed the liturgical litanies and prayers (*orare* means to pray). The deacon still holds up the *orarion* in a position of prayer when he intones his parts of the divine services. The sub-deacon's *orarion* is placed around his back in the sign of the cross.



Priests wear their white baptismal robe over which they have their pastoral stole, cuffs and belt. They also wear a large garment called a **phelonion** which covers their entire body in the back and goes below their waist in front. This vestment was probably developed from the formal garments of the early Christian era and, under the inspiration of the Bible, came to be identified with the calling of the priestly life. When putting on his *phelonion*, the priest says the lines of Psalm 132: *Thy priests, O Lord, shall clothe themselves in righteousness, and the saints shall rejoice with joy always now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.*



The bishops traditionally probably also wore the *phelonion* over which they placed the **omoforion**, the sign of their episcopal office as leading pastor of the local church. When the Christian empire was captured by the Turks in the fifteenth century, however, the Christian bishops of the East were given civil rule over all Christians under Turkish domination. At that time, since there was no longer a Christian empire, the bishops adopted the imperial insignia and began to dress as the Christian civil rulers used to dress. Thus, they began to wear the *sakkos*, the imperial robe, and the mitre, the imperial crown. They also began to stand upon the orlets (the eagle) during the divine services and to carry the staff which symbolised more their secular power than their pastoral office.

At that time as well, the word *despota* (master) -- a title for temporal rather than spiritual power -- was used in addressing the bishops, and the clergy began to grow long hair which was also a sign of earthly rule in former times.

Our own Bp. Paul on the day of his consecration.

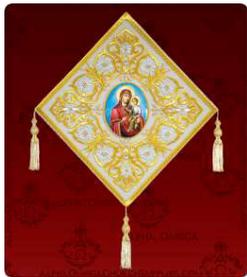


Vestments Continued

In the Church some of these new insignia were "spiritualised" and given a Biblical meaning. Thus, the **mitres** became signs of Christian victory, for the saints receive their crowns and reign with Christ (Rev 4:4). The eagle became the sign of the flight to the heavenly Jerusalem since it is the classical Biblical symbol of St. John and the fourth gospel (Rev 4:7; Ez 1:10). The staff became the symbol of Aaron's rod (Ex 4:2), and so on. It should be understood, however, that these particular insignia of the bishop's office are of later and more accidental development in the Church.



In relation to the bishop's service in the Orthodox Church, the use of two special candelabra with which the bishop blesses the faithful also developed. One of these candelabra holds three candles (**trikeri**) (at right) while the other holds two candles (**dikeri**) (at left). These candelabra stand for the two fundamental mysteries of the Orthodox faith: that the Godhead is three Divine Persons; and that Jesus Christ, the Saviour, has two natures, being both perfect God and perfect man.



Bishops and priests in the Orthodox Church also wear other special garments. There is a diamond-shaped (**epigonation**) garment worn by both priests and bishops as a sign of distinction or as a special distinction of service. Probably these cloths were originally "liturgical towels." Their symbolical meaning is that of spiritual strength: the sword of faith and the Word of God. They hang at the sides of their wearers during divine services.

There are also clerical hats which carry special meaning in some Orthodox Churches. The **kalimafhi** is normally worn by all Greek priests, but only by some clergy as a special distinction in other national Orthodox churches. The **kalimafhi** is usually black, and monks and celibate clergy wear it with a black veil called the **epanokalimafsho**. In other Orthodox churches the **mitre** (a remnant of the byzantine emperor's crown) is worn by bishops in liturgical settings to signify their civil authority of the Church.



Finally, it must be mentioned that bishops and priests wear a pectoral cross. The bishops also wear the *engolpio* (an amulet worn around their neck with an image of Mary and the Child (panagia -- the "all holy"). The pectoral cross is worn liturgically only by those priests given the special right to do so as a sign of distinction.



"Pectoral cross (orthodox)" by Testus - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pectoral_cross_\(orthodox\).jpg#mediaviewer/File:Pectoral_cross_\(orthodox\).jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pectoral_cross_(orthodox).jpg#mediaviewer/File:Pectoral_cross_(orthodox).jpg)

The Orthodox Church is quite firm in its insistence that liturgical vesting is essential to normal liturgical worship, experienced as the realization of communion with the glorious Kingdom of God, a Kingdom which is yet to come but which is also already with us in the mystery of Christ's Church.

“Loving the Sinner” by Fr. Farley

The concept of loving the sinner while hating the sin has fallen upon hard times. Fallen man finds it very difficult to hold in tension the notion that one must love the sinner along with the notion that one must hate the sin which the sinner commits. It is easy—far too easy—to equate the sinner with his sin and conclude that because the sin is an abomination the sinner must therefore be abominable, and therefore a fit subject for our hatred and the hatred of God.

This seems to be the default mode for everyone, ancient or modern, secular or religious. Thus some ancient Israelites concluded that God must have hated the Assyrians because He hated Assyrian idolatry and oppression, and some today conclude that God must have hated Hitler because He hated Nazism and Nazi atrocities. Suggestions (made at a safe distance) that God did not hate the Assyrians (see Jonah 4:11), or that He desired the salvation of Hitler (see 1 Timothy 2:4) are met with derision and hostility. For most people, hating a sin involves

hating the sinner who commits the sin, and allowing oneself the luxury of abuse and violence towards the sinner. The Biblical precept which leaves vengeance to God and in which God says, “Vengeance is Mine; I will repay” (Hebrews 10:30) is simply cast aside. We are delighted to function as God’s judges and little helpers, and mete out now the vengeance which we feel sure God will inflict on the Last Day. It makes us feel so good.

I note that this fallen principle is at work at many places in eastern Europe regarding homosexuals and homosexuality. I have never travelled to eastern Europe, but others have, and have brought back disturbing reports. These reports indicate that some people over there quickly, easily, and happily translate their rejection of the sin of homosexual activity into persecution, abuse, and violence against homosexuals. The Orthodox notion, found in the West (and in this blog) that all sinners, including homosexuals, should be treated with respect and kindness is rarely even considered. It is, I am told, very dangerous to admit to being a homosexual over there, for such an admission could result in being subjected to extreme violence.

It is otherwise in the West. In Canada (the situation I know best) the situation is almost reversed: any speaking against homosexuality is subject to hostile opposition, public vilification, and possibly legal action. No politician that aspires to election may criticize homosexual practice, and failure to participate in Gay Pride Parades is dangerous to one’s political aspirations. Big Brother is watching us, and he flies a rainbow flag. It is therefore necessary here in the West to speak the truth about homosexual practice in the Church and to embrace a counter-cultural approach if one would be faithful to the traditional apostolic faith. There is no real chance of reversing the cultural tide flowing against those who oppose homosexual practice. In Canada anyway, that battle is over, and the Christians have lost. Our experience here therefore is utterly different from those in eastern Europe. There, I am told, it is the homosexuals who are vilified and in danger.

This reality of the very real danger in which homosexuals find themselves accounts for the fury that sometimes accompanies gay activism here in the West. When a western writer (such as myself) points out the Church’s Tradition and the Scripture’s teaching that homosexual practice is unnatural and sinful, some people react with considerable anger. In one sense this anger is entirely understandable, for they are not thinking of my western exegesis so much as the eastern experience of homosexuals currently under threat. When they read the words, “the Bible condemns homosexuality”, they also read the subtext, “and therefore it is completely acceptable to

abuse, hurt, and even kill homosexuals”. It doesn’t matter that I did not say this, and emphatically reject such a conclusion. The pain felt by homosexuals under attack is too great for them to separate my exegesis from the larger picture. For them, the Church’s traditional exegesis leads inevitably to the current anti-homosexual debacle and to the attitude often found in the east.

It needs to be stated that such an attitude of hatred of homosexuals is simply sinful, wrong, damnable, and subject to the wrath of God. We are to love our neighbour, whether he or she is straight or gay, whether our neighbour fornicates or is chaste, whether our neighbour is honest or crooked. We may hate homosexual practice, fornication, and dishonesty, but we must love our neighbour and treat him or her with kindness, love, and respect, whatever their behaviour. If we do not, we disobey Christ and sin against Him, and will ourselves be liable to judgment on the Last Day.

I suspect the attraction of collapsing the sin and the sinner into one and refusing to love the sinner while hating the sin is rooted in our own insecurity. It is hard to look at our own sins. When we do, we feel insecure, frightened, and guilty. It is a relief to turn our gaze from ourselves to the sins of others, and to imagine that we are better than they are. I am not a homosexual; I am not a heretic; I am not an Assyrian idolater. And I thank God that I am not as these other men are. I am straight, Orthodox, and a true Christian. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all I possess (Luke 18:12). The disease of the Pharisee lies in wait for all who would strive to serve God. The error of the Pharisee was not in thinking that the sins he condemned (such as extortion, injustice, adultery, or tax collector gouging; v. 11) were wrong. His error consisted in looking steadfastly at those sins while ignoring his own.

It is such a relief to look away from one’s own sins and focus upon the sins of others, and this relief is, I suggest, at the root of the failure to distinguish the sin from the sinner. God loves every sinner—He loved the Assyrian idolater, the Nazi, the extortioner, the unjust, the adulterer, and the tax-collector. He loves the homosexual, and we must love them too. (Please note that I am not equating homosexual sin with idolatry, Nazism, extortion, or adultery. My point is that if God did not hate the Assyrian idolater and the Nazi, how much less does He hate the homosexual.)

I also think I understand the varied motivations of those in eastern Europe as they hate and persecute homosexuals. Part of their zeal is, I suspect, rooted in their fear that the western contagion of militant gay activism and the draconian normalization of homosexuality will spread to the east. But fear is a poor source of motivation. Submission to Christ is a better one. And that submission demands that we love all the children of men, regardless of their sins, real or imagined. Violence to anyone is unacceptable for Christians.