

SUNDAY OF THE OINTMENT-BEARING WOMEN



Icon of the Myrrh-Bearing Women

ALMOND JOY ORTHODOXY

by Father John Moses

<http://silouanthompson.net/2014/05/almond-joy-orthodoxy/>

**Sometimes you feel like a nut, sometimes you don't!
"He is mad..." John 10.20 "We are fools..." I Corinthians 4:10**

People tell me that they have a hard time crossing themselves in public or even praying over a meal. Strangers will stare and sometimes shake their heads or even laugh while making comments to their friends. It is difficult because it seems that our society is bent on removing all references to God from the public realm. Being Orthodox today can make you feel like a "fish out of water."

You should be with me on a Friday night when I walk into Wal-mart. Being a Russian priest, I am dressed in my black prodrasnik, ryassa and skufia (long robes with big sleeves and a black hat). With my long white hair and white beard, I am quite a sight. People have never seen anything like me. The reaction can go something like this: "Hey, Bubba, take a look at that! Is that a woman?" Of course, if I have a chance to talk to them, I try to make them feel more at ease with humor. Lifting up my cross, I tell them that I am a "cross dresser." That usually breaks the ice.

We might as well face that fact that if we try to live the Orthodox life, people will think we are foolish or crazy. Yet, what is better – to be a fool or to be crazy?

In his book, *Hesychia and Theology*, His Grace, Hierotheos, Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, writes: "According to the

patristic meaning of the word, everyone is a psychopath, that is to say, his soul is sick....For the psychiatrist, the psychopath means...he is suffering from a psychosis: a schizophrenic. From the Orthodox standpoint, however, it is someone who has not undergone purification of the passions or attained illumination..." (pg.26) You see, we are all "crazy."

Given the dreams and ambitions of this life, what would you think of a person who would describe his life in this way and says that he is committed to it: "I am hungry and thirsty and I have bad clothes. I have no home to live in and people assault me. I do manual labor all the time, but people call me names. I try to be nice to people, but they curse at me. People think I am trash, and they treat me like crap." Anyone in his right mind would never intentionally embrace such a life. He must be mad, indeed. Maybe with some career training or crisis intervention, he could take on a different career path. The world is full of possibilities for a man with ambition and intelligence. Why should anyone intentionally live such a life unless they are mad or foolish?

The man who said this is St. Paul. I'm glad that he didn't take on a new career path. His job description was "fool for

Christ”, and he took it on gladly because he knew it was better to be a fool than to be a psychopath, for only a fool can reach those who are sick in soul.

One of my favorite movies is “Quo Vadis.” Towards the end, they take St. Peter to Vatican Hill to crucify him. He demands that they crucify him upside down because he is not worthy to be crucified as the Lord was crucified. After he has been nailed to the cross, they put the crucifix in the ground upside down. St. Peter remarks that now he can see the world as it really is. It might do most of us a lot of good to go out on the porch and stand on our heads. Then maybe we could see the world as it truly is and understand the depth of its madness.

If we practice piety in public, we feel foolish. Wanting to be respectable and fit in, we are loathe to practice piety where others will see us and criticize us. I once heard Fr. Daniel Byantoro, an Orthodox priest from Indonesia, say that the conversation between Muslims might go something like this: “Muhammad, do Christians pray?” “I don’t know, Kareem, I’ve never seen them pray. Have you?” “Mohammad, do Christians fast?” “I don’t know, Kareem, I’ve never seen them fast. Have you?” “I wonder, Mohammad, if they believe in God at all.” “Kareem, there is no way to tell.”

Now, it is against the law to try to convert Muslims to Christianity, but Fr. Daniel says that they are beginning to have greater success. How is this possible? Well, each day Fr. Daniel goes into the bell tower and calls the Christians to come and pray the

Hours. The Muslims are amazed. Then when they come to visit, they are shocked. “You prostrate! Allah be praised. Your women cover their heads and are modest. Allah be praised. You fast...what....180 days of the year? Impossible! That is more than we do.” By the practice of piety, the power of the Faith is made real to them.

Why do I wear my robe in public? Well, of course, I am required to do so, but I’ve actually made converts that way. Sitting in a MacDonald’s or walking in a Home Depot, people will ask me who I am and why do I dress this way. Entering into a conversation, I always invite them to Church. Sometimes, they end up becoming members. I’ll be honest -sometimes I feel foolish out in the world in my priestly ensemble. Yet, I know that there is no way to live the faith in this culture and not be considered foolish by family, friends, and co-workers. Soon, we will approach Nativity and the world will “prepare” by throwing parties. They will think we are fools for not joining in and we will feel foolish for not doing so.

Its Almond Joy Orthodoxy: sometimes you feel like a nut, sometimes you don’t. I know that it is a balance because the Lord told us to pray in our closets and do our good work in secret. Yet, He also said that we should let our lights shine before men so that they could see our good works, and glorify God. Somewhere, between those two commands, we can find our Orthodox lifestyle, a life of piety.

Still, when it’s all said and done, it’s better to be fool than a psychopath!

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRIESTHOOD

<http://priestofthechurch.wordpress.com/2014/05/02/the-privilege-of-priesthood/>

This morning I did what I always do before going down to breakfast. Just before doing up the final button on my shirt, I took my pectoral cross in my hands, blessed myself, kissed the cross, and placed it around my neck. I then donned the black gilet I tend to wear when I am not in cassock, and just about made my way downstairs. I say 'just about', because on this occasion, I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror and was suddenly struck with the idea of just what sort of honour it is to be a priest. Here I was, a slightly overweight, middle-aged man in need of a haircut, allowed to hold in his hands a cross inscribed on the back with ancient text, and on the front depicting a reality upon which the whole universe turns. Here I was, with the chance to recollect in a tangible way the most sacred truths, before even making the morning coffee. Here I was, a steward of ancient mysteries of which the likes of St John Chrysostom, St Basil the Great, and St Gregory Nazianzen had themselves been stewards. As a priest, I walk in the steps of the godly and I am utterly, unspeakably privileged.



That said, I am also aware that the priesthood carries with it immense responsibility. There is, of course, the pastoral care of souls for which every priest will be judged. But connected to this is also the all-important but oft-neglected responsibility for the Church's rites: from Baptism to the Eucharist to the blessing of waters to exorcism. In this respect,

I think of Gandalf the Grey, accompanying the fellowship on their quest through the perils of Middle Earth, guiding, teaching, sharing in their troubles and triumphs, but always there as a wizard, always there to do the one thing that only he could do to advance their cause. To extend the analogy, there is the fantastic scene in the Mines of Moria when the nine fellows are fleeing from the advancing Balrog. There is nothing any

one of them can do, save to run for their lives. No one, that is, except Gandalf. The wizard turns back to face the demon from the middle of Durin's Bridge, and proclaims what only he could proclaim: 'You cannot pass,' he said. The orcs stood still, and a dead silence fell. 'I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udûn. Go back to the Shadow! You cannot pass.'

What are these, except the Church's words of exorcism? What is Gandalf, except a priest? What is a priest, except one who has been given great responsibility to bear, and great words to proclaim?

It seems to me that, when the wellbeing of so many souls rides on their shoulders, it is incumbent on priests to be as faithful as they can be to the traditions they have received. The modern priest may laugh at the suggestion, but if to priests is given the authority to keep at bay the devil himself, should he not at least know the formulae? Should he not at least be clothed for the occasion? I cannot imagine Gandalf standing before the Balrog in Birkenstocks, a bad polyester cassock-alb and rainbow stole, pleading with him in conciliatory, extemporaneous, tones to leave his friends alone. No. His power is not his to extemporise; what he represented is not his to emasculate in array not fit for purpose. The privilege to call upon God, however joyful a privilege it may be, is not one to be taken lightly or treated frivolously. It demands, rather, that the priest blow off the dusty books and read them, vest himself in a manner appropriate to the spiritual warfare, and realise that he stands as but one in a line extending back thousands of years, with the task of confecting heaven on earth; as opposed to standing by himself and hoping desperately to turn earth into heaven.

The reason any of this is relevant, I think, is that at a time when priests and people of a certain generation are feeling emboldened by the 'style' of the current Pope, the incoming generation of priests can stand to be reminded of, and encouraged in, the lessons they learnt from Pope Benedict. As a scholar and priest who understood both the cultural inheritance and the power of aesthetic to show forth profound spiritual truths, Pope Benedict's legacy is one that must continue to inform those who minister in the Church. Pope Francis undoubtedly has much to teach the world, but for a whole number of reasons, he is no liturgical or historical theologian; Pope Benedict, by contrast, was. And if any of us forgets the lessons of history and the real purpose of liturgical theology, then the Church becomes a good deal less than she is meant to be. As priests, we must never set aside our pastoral purpose; but pastoralia alone can easily become social work. On the other hand, there is nothing about the specific, liturgical, work of a priest that can be undertaken by anyone else. If priests, then, are to undertake their work well – celebrating the Liturgy, confecting the Holy Sacraments, pronouncing God's blessing, combatting sin – it is necessary for them to be continually reminded of the power, the responsibility, and the privilege of priesthood, and lay bold claim to what it is they can do for the fellowship.



Sunday offering for April 20

Amount	Number
\$5.00	1
\$10.00	1
\$20.00	2
\$25.00	3
\$30.00	1
\$40.00	3
\$50.00	6
\$75.00	4
\$80.00	1
\$100.00	4
\$130.00	1 (loose)
\$150.00	1
\$175.00	1
\$300.00	2
\$500.00	1
<hr/>	
\$2915.00	

Parishioner Total: \$2280.00
 Visitor: \$635.00

Average / parish household (42): \$55.61
 Weekly Stewardship Goal: \$2125.00
 Positive: \$155.00



Sunday offering for April 27

Amount	Number
\$5.00	1
\$10.00	3
\$15.00	1 (loose)
\$20.00	4
\$25.00	2
\$40.00	3
\$50.00	4
\$100.00	1
\$300.00	1
<hr/>	
\$900.00	

Parishioner Total: \$890.00
 Visitor: \$10.00

Average / parish household (42): \$21.71
 Weekly Stewardship Goal: \$2125.00
 Deficit: (\$1235.00)

Goal:
\$120000

Pledges:
\$39116

2014

Stewardship Pledges

Pledges received: 18

It is impossible to plan any sort of budget until all pledge forms are turned in. If you haven't returned your pledge, please do so.

Share 2014

We do not doubt the Resurrection of Christ, His gift of salvation to us all. How are we prepared to reciprocate for this most wondrous of gifts? Let us help our eparchy bring Christ's salvation to others by making a contribution to **Share 2014 – Annual Eparchial Appeal.**

Ми не сумніваємося у Воскреснні Христа і Його дару для нашого спасіння. Як ми готові віддячити Йому за цей найчудовіший із всіх дарів? То ж допоможемо нашій єпархії принести Христове спасіння до інших внесок в **Share 2014 – Єпархіальний Заклик.**

Pastor:

Fr. James Bankston: (619) 905-5278

Pastoral Council:

Frank Avant: (760) 805-1667
 Vladimir Bachynsky: (619) 865-1279
 Mark Hartman: (619) 446-6357
 Luke Miller: (858) 354-2008
 Jeanine Soucie: (718) 674-4529

Social Committee Chairpersons:

Olga & Michael Miller:
 (858) 483-3294

Finance Committee:

Bohdan Knianicky: (619) 303-9698
 Frank Avant: (760) 805-1667



**Українська Греко-Католицька Церква
Святого Йоана Хрестителя
St. John the Baptizer
Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church**

4400 Palm Avenue
La Mesa, CA 91941
Parish Office: (619) 697-5085

Website: stjohnthebaptizer.org

Pastor: Fr. James Bankston
frjames@mac.com

Fr. James' cell phone: (619) 905-5278

I Am the Christ

In the cross He showed us how we are
to bear suffering, in His resurrection He
showed us what we are to hope for.

St. Augustine of Hippo

But He rose from the dead
and mounted up the heights of heaven
when the Lord had clothed Himself with
humanity
and had suffered for the sake of the suf-
ferer
and had been bound for the sake of the
imprisoned
and had been judged for the sake of the
condemned
and buried for the sake of the one who
was buried

He rose up from the dead
and cried with a loud voice:
Who is he that contends with me?
Let him stand in opposition to me.
I set the condemned man free
I gave the dead man life
I raised up the one who had been en-
tomed
who is my opponent?
I, He says, am the Christ
I am the one who has destroyed death
and triumphed over the enemy
and trampled Hades underfoot
and bound the strong one
and carried off man to the heights of
heaven.
I, He says, am the Christ.

St. Melito of Sardis