



PASTORS TO PASTORS

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"Know this, my beloved brethren, let every man be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger."

(James 1.19)

Listening is an art. We do not mean the physiological reception of external sounds but the inner apprehension of such sounds and the subsequent understanding of their meaning. Communication is the transmission of concepts through the spoken or written word, but without listening there can be no meaningful exchange, no communication. Listening is an act of love through which we come to understand each other. By listening we come to know a person's inner self, their thoughts, feelings and their heart's desires. Through listening we recognize each other's souls.

Listening is indispensable for pastors, yet many of us are poor listeners. Sadly, most of us do not even realize the deficiency. Listening is one of God's qualities that is always taken for granted. God is the Great Listener. We cannot imagine Him otherwise. **"In my distress I called upon the Lord, to my God I cried for help. From His temple He heard my voice, and my cry to Him reached His ears"** (Ps. 18.6). If God could not hear us, Orthodox worship would be totally meaningless. The daily cycle of prayer services includes verses from Psalm 141, **"Lord, I call upon You, hear me!"** Indeed, all prayer is based on the fact that God *hears* us.

Jesus Christ is Himself a good listener. The story of the twelve-year-old Jesus who was left behind in the temple represents the "wisdom" of Christ, revealed in the young Jesus among the teachers. The actual gospel text tells us that Jesus was **"sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions"** (Lk. 2.46). Wisdom is not only the ability to pronounce "wise" things, it is also the ability to listen "wisely." During His active ministry Our Lord repeatedly underscored the importance of listening. God's word comes to

those who listen carefully. **"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it"** (Lk. 8.21). In the story of Martha and Mary, the latter is praised because, by listening to the Lord's teaching, she **"has chosen the good portion"** (Lk. 10.42). There is also the parable of the sower, where the good soil that produces a "hundredfold" represents those people who *hear* the word of God and **"hold it fast in an honest and good heart"** (Lk. 8.15).

THE ART OF LISTENING

by Fr. Alexander Garklavs



Listening is a holy endeavor. It requires attention and sobriety, humility and patience. It is how we discern God's will. Like Elijah we would expect God to speak to us in thunder and lightning, but more frequently His speaking to us is as **"a still small voice"** (1 Kings 19.12). Some of the most important listening occurs in silence. To listen to God's voice we must learn to be silent. **"For God alone my soul waits in silence"** (Ps. 62.1). That listening is a problem for many is due to a systemic inability to be silent. The noise around us and the self-generated interior "buzz" have

a contaminating effect. Indulging in idle talk, movies, television, magazines or insipid music, we reduce the amount of time that can be devoted to stillness and to cultivating the art of listening. What are the consequences? For pastors, they are very serious. The inability to be a good listener can contribute to our impatience with our people. When listening to parishioners becomes tedious and unpleasant we are incapable of discerning their spiritual condition. In particular, listening is fundamental in Confession. We all agree there are many problems associated with the sacrament, but perhaps we pastors do not recognize our own

handicap: our inadequacy as listeners. As great a pastor as St. John of Kronstadt admitted: **"How difficult it is to hear confessions properly! And how grievously we sin by not taking care to hear them properly and with what dire results."** Without developing a sense of listening the priest effectively negates his capacity to be a spiritual father.

Seminaries usually include a class on the art of preaching. The art of listening is not a subject of formal instruction, perhaps because it is more difficult than preaching. True, there is much in Orthodox spiritual literature about silence and awareness of God's will. But as a specific pastoral skill, listening has only recently become a topic in its own right. Much of this is connected with the advent of modern psychology. In particular, Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) deserves credit for articulating the qualities, categories and nuances that are involved in the process of listening. CPE training programs emphasize the critical role of listening in ministering to the sick. Their material on this subject is of great value, and is readily available.

Virtually all types of therapeutic practice involve listening. It is not just that people come to talk to a sympathetic and passive recipient. The honest therapist must engage in *active* listening, which enables him and the

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patient to enter into a close, dialectical relationship. In turn this relationship creates a special intimacy between the patient and therapist. To provide healing for the patient, the therapist symbolically "enters into" the patient's condition as if it were his own. The parallel with priestly ministry is noteworthy. In the manner of Jesus Christ, the pastor is the one who bears the burdens of his flock and whose spiritual integrity is transmitted to those who lack it. This can mean that parishioners' well-being come at the expense of the priest. **"We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong"** (1 Cor. 4.10). Priestly *kenosis* is expressed variously, but listening is one of the more important forms of pastoral ministry.

In addition to Confession there are other times when the pastor must listen. These include times when the priest is with sick parishioners, counseling people with marital problems or those who are sorrowing, as well as in discussion groups, during parish meetings or while the priest is making a visitation to someone's house. Very thoughtful listening is needed when a pastor first meets with a new, potential parishioner or convert. People often come to a priest to unburden their soul. Listening is actually a gift that the pastor gives; a gift of time which is also a recognition of the speaker's spiritual potential.

To be a listener means being considerate, polite and compassionate. It means temporarily putting aside one's own personal concerns. When serious listening is necessary, it is helpful to be in a quiet place, free from external noises and the telephone. Of course, not everything that we listen to is profitable. There are times when we only pretend to listen, when the

heard" (St. Nilus of Sinai). Unfortunately, gossip, slander, and various sinful things are precisely the things that we eagerly listen to. As an "art," listening is the art of knowing when to listen and when not to.

Developing the art of listening will increase the pastor's sensitivity and appreciation for people. Another benefit is the acquisition of a mystical sense. The keen listener who is spiritually attuned will hear things that are usually unheard. Elevated to the third heaven, St. Paul **"heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter"** (2 Cor. 12.4). In one of his poems, T. S. Eliot says that **"I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each."** He hears these ethereal sounds until **"human voices wake us, and we drown."** Sometimes the earthly, everyday sounds are the ones we should specifically avoid listening to. Ultimately, listening involves the same psychological processes as prayer. Like prayer, to be meaningful, listening is sacrificial and sacramental, requiring honesty and purity of heart. Our Lord, Jesus Christ prays and listens, in order that we may learn His example. He is also the Word of God whose teaching is the sowing of seeds that are divine words. The conscientious pastor who follows the Great Pastor and becomes a good listener will also become a good sower of seeds, whose words will be listened to with understanding and appreciation. □

"How difficult it is to hear confessions properly! And how grievously we sin by not taking care to hear them properly and with what dire results."

— St John of Kronstadt

conversation is banal or silly. We must endure much of this with patience, but it is important to remember that listening requires discernment, between what is worthy of being listened to and what is not. One of the Church Fathers said that **"on the day of the Last Judgement we will be required to answer for not only our evil words but for the evil things that we**

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"Our Lord Jesus Christ spent His earthly life in the greatest humility, subject to constant hardship and maltreatment, persecuted, slandered and libeled by His enemies who finally condemned Him to a shameful death with common criminals. The way of salvation which leads to eternal life is *"narrow and hard"* (Mt. 7.14). It is appointed both by our Lord's holy example and by His holy teaching. The Lord foretold to His disciples and followers that "in the world," during their earthly life, "they would have tribulation," that the "world would hate them," that "they would be persecuted and killed" (Jn. 16.33, 15.18, 16.2). From this it is clear that sorrow and suffering are appointed by the Lord Himself for His true servants during their life on earth. What is appointed by God is impossible to prevent by any human being, by any kind of wisdom, or prudence, or forethought, or care. There is joy for Christians here too, but it is spiritual. Not in gold, silver, food, drink, honor or glory, but in God our Savior, in His goodness and mercy, in the hope of eternal life."

— From *The Arena* by St Ignatius (Brianchaninov)



"Thoughts and Recollections"

"Pastors to Pastors" looks to another of the "elders" of the Church for guidance and inspiration. We are pleased herein to share our interview with...

Fr Theodore Boback

Rector, St Andrew Orthodox Church, Baltimore MD
Dean, Executive Director of Orthodox Military & Veterans Administration Chaplains

Q. Fr. Theodore, please tell us what factors contributed to your priestly vocation.

A. My journey to God's Kingdom began at my Baptism over fifty years ago. When I was six or seven I experienced a desire to serve in the church. Following the death of Archimandrite Anthony Repella, Fr. Michael Kovach was assigned Rector of St. John the Baptist Church in Edwardsville, PA. My wish to be an altar boy was realized when Fr. Michael invited those of us who desired to serve to come to the Altar.

My parents were involved in the life of the Church corporately by attending the liturgical services and personally through their daily prayer life. They volunteered at various parish events and my mother sang in the choir. This served as a spiritual foundation throughout my life. Another factor was the recovery from an illness and coma at the age of five, which was accomplished by many prayers. The street I lived on as a child had eight churches of various ethnic and faith backgrounds. In our own parish, the Church School, the youth choir, the Junior FROC Chapter, and other programs were central to the life of the community. I received encouragement from several parish priests; Frs. Stephen Kachur, John Rachko, John Kuchta and former choir director, now Fr. Vladimir Lecko. Continued involvement in the life of my parish, in the choir and as reader at various liturgical services contributed to my journey. Visits with my parents to St. Tikhon's Monastery for the Memorial Day Pilgrimage enhanced my desire to study for the priesthood. The faith, hope, love and Christian devotion of my parents, relatives, and priests continuously served as an inspiration and model. My desire to serve, and my love for, the Church led to my going to the seminary.

St. Tikhon's Seminary was pivotal in my spiritual nourishment. The Seminary enabled me to be immersed in the full community of the Church, with bishops, priests, monastics, classmates, roommates, professors and alumni. The spiritual formation was based on the cycle of liturgical services at the Monastery Church and the daily morning and evening prayers at the Seminary Chapel. It was a blessing to pray where many of the saints of the Orthodox Church in America prayed, walked, lived and taught (like St.

Tikhon, St. Raphael, St. Alexis (Toth) and St. Nicholas of Ochrid). There was also the influence and direction from such monastics as Fr. Vasily, Fr. Gamaliel and Fr. Sebastian; from professors, such as Fr. George Dimopolous; from my spiritual father, Fr. Joseph Swaiko (now Metropolitan Herman); and from liturgical masters Archbishop Kiprian and Fr. Vladimir Borichevsky. Today some of these, together with other luminaries such as Metropolitan Leonty, Metropolitan Ireney and Fr. Alexander Schmemann, are buried at the monastery cemetery, where one can feel the richness of the history of our church.

The Seminary provided ample opportunity to learn and to grow through theological discussions, seminary choir mission trips, social life with classmates, participation in the student council, in the FROC, and involvement in the Orthodox Inter-Seminary Movement (with St. Vladimir's, Holy Cross and Christ the Savior Seminaries). In all of these areas and in all things, everything was for the "Glory of God!" The fellowship, the time spent in laughter, and our common vocation developed into friendships which continue to this day. During my second year of my studies, my mother passed away. The Seminary Community provided support and comfort during that time.

Discussion and encouragement from Fr. Vladimir Borichevsky, who was the first Orthodox priest in the United States armed forces, and with my father-in-law, Fr. George Pawlush, one of the first VA Chaplains, led me to consider becoming a chaplain. With other Chaplains, such as Frs. Krenitsky, Stroyen, Kiryluk and Geeza (later Bishop Boris), I seriously began to explore serving the Lord in the military chaplaincy.

Q. You began your pastoral ministry at St. Basil Church in Simpson, PA. What do you recall from those years? How does it compare with your present assignment?

A. In both pastoral assignments, the following was and is relevant: To regularly celebrate the Divine Liturgy and other liturgical services of the Church, to perform the sacraments when necessary, to visit the sick, and to bring the love of God to others, as well as to be involved in various administrative and managerial

duties that pertain to the priest. It is vital to spiritually nourish the souls of each of the faithful and to assist everyone by ministering to their needs as they "work" towards their salvation. In addition to all of this, there is a need for prayer for one's own personal spiritual nourishment and strength, for the Hierarchs, the faithful and all who ask for prayer. Whether in a small town, large city, or in the military, the parish community is where we come to find communion with God, through prayer and learning. It can be the place and center of peace and calm for all who beckon at the doors.

There were obvious differences between the parishes. St. Basil's Church was located in a small town, where many of the parishioners could walk to church and those who drove had only to go a short distance, since they lived nearby. The current parish is in Baltimore, a large city. Except for a few who live within walking distance, all of the parishioners come from some distance to attend the church.

At St. Basil's there were two separate services on Sunday morning. Matins was celebrated at 8:00 AM, all in English, and the Divine Liturgy was at 10:00 AM, in Church Slavonic on the first Sunday of the month and in English the other Sundays. Our choir director would only be present on Sunday mornings. So, on weekday feasts and other services, including Saturday evenings, my wife Hope, the daughter of a priest, would sing, sometimes with the help of a seminarian. Since many, if not most, of the parishioners attended the Matins Service, I preached about the need to attend the Divine Liturgy and to receive the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. After twenty-nine years, I saw a former parishioner at the All American Council in Florida and she mentioned that her mother would always talk about how Fr. Ted preached at the Matins Service and how this helped her spiritual journey.

During my ministry in Simpson, I was President of the Alumni Association of St. Tikhon's Seminary. The Association initiated a radio program which dealt with the Orthodox Church which Fr. Borichevsky and I coordinated. The program was broadcast weekly within the area.

Our current parish is quite active in many ways. We have several outreach programs, such as providing food and

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clothing for the local homeless shelter. These programs also provide Orthodox witness. The parish sent 150 shoe boxes and other items to the Romanian Orphanage Program, and we are also involved in various IOCC projects. Our community supports a parishioner in his work as an intern in Project Mexico. We also provide a \$100 monthly stipend to a seminarian family. The children in the parish make visitations to the homebound and nursing homes during Christmas, Easter and other occasions. In this they are motivated by their love of God and in the hope that through them the elderly will be strengthened in their faith and love.

Q. You have been both the Deputy Director and Director of the OCA Chaplains. Can you describe some of the ministry in the life of a typical chaplain?

A. First of all, the chaplain is a priest of the Church. He does not do anything that is against the canons and teachings of the Church. Canonically, all chaplains must be certified by the Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, who also issues ecclesiastical endorsement for chaplains at Veterans Affairs medical centers.

The Orthodox chaplain will encounter soldiers of the Orthodox faith and of other faiths, whether his ministry is in peacetime or in wartime. For the Orthodox, he serves the liturgical cycle of the Orthodox Church. He administers sacraments, conducts religious education programs, as well as counseling and pastoral visitations to the hospital and home. In dealing with those of other faiths, he assists in their religious needs by making arrangements for religious services, sacraments and ordinances to be administered by their own faith chaplains. He provides routine counseling and visitation to the personnel in the hospital, correctional facilities, field and other areas of military responsibility. There is even a ministry to those of no faith, to whom the chaplain shows concern and responds to expressed needs. He is always a representative of faith, hope and love.

The Divine Liturgy and other liturgical services are celebrated in a chapel setting, which is shared, at times, with other faith groups. Hence, there is a need for setting up and taking down icons and the altar table, every time a service is conducted. The services may also be held in the field, at sea aboard an aircraft carrier, on a submarine or other location.

Often chaplains will spend considerable time away from their families. Depending on assignment, chaplains may have to do physical fitness training with the unit. They may be deployed in a field exercise for a certain period of time or deployed in support of, or in direct ministry, to a unit in a combat zone. If they have special skills or training, chaplains may lead workshops in marriage, pre-marriage counseling, family enrichment seminars, domestic violence workshops, parenting classes, youth activities, retreats, etc. On a regular basis, chaplains interface with other helping agencies, such as the Red Cross, Substance Abuse Counselors, therapists and medical teams, and they also participate in a variety of community activities.

Q. What can an Orthodox parish priest learn from the experiences that you had as a military chaplain?

A. I believe that each of us are continually learning while we are on our life's journey. We learn from our birth to our death. And death is not the end! Erich Fromm wrote that a man is not fully born until he dies.

The parish priest has many experiences from which a chaplain can learn, and the chaplain's experiences can benefit the parish priest. Some of the chaplain's experiences can be quite unusual. Once I had to provide pastoral assistance after a shooting of five civilians. Three people died and of the two who were injured, one sustained injuries that resulted in paralysis. The individual who did the shooting was also a civilian and shot himself some forty-five miles north of the incident, at a VA Medical Center. There were so many parameters involved in this situation. We had command and staff meetings. Critical

debriefings took place. I had to facilitate chaplain coverage, which was directed to the victim's family members and to the wife of the shooter. She was a teacher at the military high school, so pastoral coverage extended to the students, especially those in the class where the wife taught. This was an exceptional and challenging pastoral experience.

Military chaplains receive training in many different areas, to assist them in their ministry. These can be helpful to parish priests as well. Some of the areas that I received training in were: Alcohol and Drug Training, Resource Management, Fund Management, Curriculum Development, Task Analysis and Development, Total Quality Management, Leadership Development, Hospital Ministry, Confinement Ministry, Volunteerism, Strategic Development, Combat Developments, Stress Management, Suicide Prevention, Personal Values, Team Management and Marriage Enrichment. Not all of these would be relevant to a parish priest, but general training in many of these areas would be valuable for today's pastor.

Another part of the chaplain's life requires him to have a good working relationship with non-Orthodox people as well as with a variety of Orthodox Christians. A chaplain may have to minister to service members and their families who come from various ethnic backgrounds (Greek, Arab, Russian, etc.). International Officers are given training in military schools in order to acquaint themselves with encountering Orthodox families in foreign countries. Developing close relationships with Orthodox priests and parishioners from non-OCA parishes was a productive experience. For example, at Fort Knox, we had a good relationship with St. Michael's Antiochian Church in Louisville, KY. Although it was a Syrian and Lebanese community by origin, it is now Pan-Orthodox, which graciously invited Orthodox military to participate at major events and festivals at the church. Productive interaction between Orthodox of differing backgrounds is something all parish communities can benefit from. □

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