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Gratitude

by Fr Deacon John-Mark Titterington*

Nowadays, when a Lancashire man says "Ta~ much!" he is often thought to be going over the top in gratitude. One of the many casualties of our modern "free" society is that any expression of thanks is considered to be an act of subservience and, therefore, not "politically correct."

This raises problems for Christians, the context of whose worship is simply "thanksgiving" or "Eucharist" in Greek. But how *thankful* can we be in our worship if we neglect the discipline in our daily life?

Recently, I came across some words of St. Mark the Hermit, who was a disciple of St. John Chrysostom. He said:-

"Here, my son, is the way to gain merit and make progress in the sight of God. You must make a list in your memory and in your meditation of all the providential benefits which have been allotted to you by God, the lover of men, for the salvation of your soul. You must never forget them. Do not permit negligence and wickedness to cover these memories with the veil of forgetfulness so that you lose all remembrance of the great and numerous graces you have received. If that were to happen you would spend the rest of your life in ingratitude, without any merit at all."

This, as we know is clean contrary to the accepted canons of life in the 1990's, but for Christians, it is vital. How can we carry out what St. Mark the Hermit suggests?

Obviously, there are many ways of approaching this, but I will outline my own which is essentially simple. Saint Mark says:- *"make a list,"* so on the left hand side of a blank sheet of paper, write down underneath each other, the numbers 1 through to 31. Then, starting with number 1, put down the names or initials of the people who have helped you in your life. You will probably start with fond parents; some teachers; a priest maybe, and go on to the present time using one number for each person, or maybe, each group of people; eg. teachers. Go on down the list and put down, not all the people you have known, met, loved, not the ones *you* may have helped; but stick to the ones who have helped you in any sort of way ... materially, spiritually or mentally.

If you get to 31 and are still not finished, start another list at number 1 because, once complete, the numbers can refer to the days of a (any) month and by using this list in your daily prayers you can then say "thank you" in an ordered and meaningful way to God for all those who have helped you on your earthly pilgrimage.

"Count your many blessings" the old mission hymn used to say. *"You must never forget them,"* St. Mark the Hermit says, or *"you will spend the rest of your life in ingratitude, without any merit at all."* God forbid; Lord have mercy, Amen

Ta~: Lancashire dialect for "thank you"

Abortion - Let's get physical!

By Fr Gregory

The holocaust which is abortion on demand continues to eat away at our sense of human dignity and worth and condemns the silent, innocent ones to an agonising death. I see that in America, Bill Clinton, continues to veto a bill which would outlaw the barbaric practice of sucking out the baby's brains to facilitate dismemberment. In the UK, (where over 5 million babies have been killed during 30 years of legislation), Tony Blair's much vaunted Christianity seems pretty thin if he can't stand up to certain elements in his own party whose undisguised contempt for Christianity is plain for all to see.

Even worse is the silence of Orthodox in this country. We still suffer from "don't upset the 'host'" diaspora syndrome. When are we going to see Orthodox take to the streets, the hustings, the media and the lobbies alongside Catholics, Evangelicals and Muslims in exerting relentless pressure where it counts? Soon, I hope, or else Orthodox witness against abortion in the UK will be seen for what it is; just words. (And no, I am not impressed by the "we like to do things quietly" defence. As the abolition of slavery showed, change in the law and attitudes does not come without some conflict. Undue deference is the enemy of truth). We also need to encourage ordinary decent women who are now showing some signs of rejecting the lies of feminism and self-interested males by favouring a tightening of law. In addition to this prophetic witness the Orthodox Church must play its part in offering non-Orthodox women realistic alternatives to abortion.

All this is needful, but it doesn't address the deeper and more intractable issues of how we have got ourselves into this mess and how to put things right spiritually in our society. Barely into this question and I am hit by own incomprehension. This is a useful place to start as it may identify, by way of contrast, the evil in our midst.

So much has been written on this issue and yet I am still staggered that this genocide is not seen for what it is:- "killing babies." How can we just stand by and see this massacre continue? Some, evidently are content to stand by and do nothing. Many look at the dismembered remains of an aborted baby as it is cast into the incinerator and feel nothing. How can this be? Are we turning into society of unfeeling zombies? Why does this social psychopathy grow monstrously year by year?

I think we have developed a "culture of death." Hidden cameras in hospitals recently have recorded appalling occurrences of child abuse by parents who clearly regard their children as nuisances or inconveniences to be punished for existing, and yes, even killed. There has been a worrying increase in mothers who have even confessed to suffocating their babies and then claimed cot death to cover their crime. This culture of death is a selfish blindness to the "other" apart from me. The same culture of death which abuses children, kills them whilst still in the womb. So, what is the cause of this blindness to suffering, this dehumanisation of the human soul in the West?

There are of course many complex factors involved in the emergence of this culture of death but one often neglected is the developing contempt for the physical, or at least the divorce of the physical and material realms from the spiritual.

Consider the key factor of "choice," the platform of the abortionists. "Choice" is an interior thing, a non-physical thing, an interior disposition, a movement of the will towards a desired goal or action. We have made "choice" into a god in the West as if freedom were simply the right to choose between different options, in themselves ethically neutral. So for sin, (objective), read "alternative life style" (subjective); for murder, (physical), read "reproductive rights," (abstract). If "something" cannot exercise choice, then it does not exist. It is mere matter, whether an aborted "foetus" (non-human) or a genetically engineered headless animal bred for spare body parts, (headless laboratory frogs recently in the news). The "physical" has no intrinsic rights because it is the animating, (often mental), interiority of choice which makes us human, or so they say! But, why not do away with the physical altogether? In 50 years time, when you're past it and on the verge of death, why not download your mind into a

renewable piece of mechanical hardware and live for ever? The body is disposable. Euthanasia is next. (Who chooses here?!)

But the culture of death is not just emerging with the idolatry of choice. It has deeper roots in Protestant Puritan culture, now heavily secularised but even stronger in its effects. Puritanism doesn't like the body very much. Its worship is disembodied. Its theology is intellectualised beyond the physical realm. Its anti-sacramentalism leaves the body out in the cold. Protestantism has always had a very weak grasp of the Incarnation. That God should take human flesh above all things. How disgusting!

The secular reaction was to continue to divorce the physical from the spiritual even more radically.. No longer a temple of the Holy Spirit, (to be affirmed and celebrated in a godly manner rather than repressed); the body in, secular thought, became merely a machine, a piece of equipment, a hunk of flesh, "wet ware." As soon as the spiritual and the material had been divided in this way, permissive hedonistic indifferentism lay just around the corner. Pornography, drug abuse, abortion, sexual perversion are all legitimised when physicality is demystified, stripped of its spiritual radiance and significance. Abortion, euthanasia and eugenics are just three more items on the list.

How are Orthodox Christians to reverse this trend; to begin the long arduous climb back towards a truly Christian social mores? In a phrase, "let's get physical." Let's affirm that the material realm is a vehicle of the spiritual, the body and its destiny does matter. Orthodox worship above all is physical, tangeable; but it must not just remain so in the temple. This veneration of the deified image of our humanity must be carried into every arena where it is defaced; the abortion clinic; the sites of pollution - chemical and psychological; the rapacious powers - political, economic and sexual. We must force our society, kicking and screaming if necessary, to get back in touch with the body *as holy*.

The Full Stature of Christ

A Meditation for the Nativity by Fr Gregory



The Creator assumes the sacred mantle of flesh

entire and whole

the perfection of our longings

and yet not without its frailty

entering wholly into dark abyss

from which inextinguishable Light will burn.

Such a moment is caught in the adoration of Love

yet not contained

for, lying always just beyond our grasp

to urge our embrace onward

towards the Infinite, the Eternal

where within He shall be all in all

in Love.

And dare we approach to worship this Child-Creator

this burning Love of trembling height and depth?

A body and soul cleansed is fit to bear this Light, this Heat

and in Love shall all that there is be made whole

if we would but come

now.