

## Exhortation to a New Priest

by His Grace Bishop Tikhon of the Aleutian Islands and North America  
(Our Father among the Saints, Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and Enlightener of North America)

---

I greet you, beloved brother, on receiving the grace of the priesthood. When our souls come in contact with Divine Grace, our usual hardness is softened, as wax before a flame. Since, I believe, your soul is also experiencing the same at this sacred and unique moment in your life, I shall take advantage of this opportunity to exhort you concerning your new ministry.

...Your flock is composed of Arabs, Greeks and Slavs. For many years they managed without a priest. Having come here in search of a living, of their daily bread, perhaps they ponder little over the Bread of Heaven, the one thing needful (Lk. 10:42). Because of this their hearts have inevitably become hardened. And when they were given spiritual comfort in the person of a priest, their hearts were perhaps not sufficiently touched by the sacred flame and did not burn with love for the Divine. They know that Divine Wisdom has built itself a house amongst them, too, and sacrificed itself and prepared a feast, but we must call them by the way and at the gates and from the tops of the high places (Prov. 8:2-3); call them to forsake the foolish (Prov. 9:6) and to prefer the knowledge of the divine to pure gold (Prov. 8:19). Well, shall we be burdened by this? After all, we are but servants of Wisdom Which sends us out for this purpose. For this It is sending you now. Therefore, preach not only to those who thirst but try to find those who are not seeking you, reveal yourself to those who do not ask for it, and stretch your arms to the rebellious and disobedient (Is. 65:1-2). Others have compassed sea and land to make one proselyte (Mt. 23:15). Hurry to help, and try to persuade all those who are cold towards their Mother, the Holy Orthodox Church.

The other part of your flock consists of Uniates who have reunited and are living in Wilkinson. They have manifested their love for the Orthodox Faith with good deeds, as you well know. See that they do not cool in their first love, but abound in it Make this community, which is still small, grow like the mustard seed in the Gospel, into a shady tree (Mt. 13:31-32) under which those who are still outside our pasture might find shelter too. The community will draw people most if divine services are performed there reverently and devoutly; if church life is distinguished by its piety; if the members of the community live in peace, love and brotherhood.

What I have said so far refers to your future external work, But do not think that you can limit yourself to this. The external may be sufficient in other vocations, but never in the priesthood, although there are some pastors who devote themselves wholly to external works. Beloved brother, did you ever take note of the Savior's words: *Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name and in Thy name have cast out devils? and...done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity* (Matt. 7:22-23). Is it possible to be a pastor, preach Christ, work wonders in his Name, and yet not be recognized by the Lord? Yes, it is! Fear this, lest it be your lot! Remember that the success of ministry depends not so much upon external works as upon spiritual exploits [podvig] and the life of grace of the pastor

himself. A priest can be a builder of souls and their guide to Christ only if he builds himself up spiritually and conscientiously follows the path of Christian self-perfection. Indeed, it cannot be otherwise, for such is the law of spiritual life. It is necessary, says St. Gregory Nazianzus, first of all to purify oneself, and only then purify others; to gain wisdom and then instill wisdom; to become the light and then illumine. An elder experienced in spiritual life once said: one cannot do more good to another than there is in oneself.

Therefore in order to make your ministry successful, you must above all see to your own enlightenment and purification. The Most Holy Chief Shepherd, Christ Himself, spent forty days in the desert fasting and praying before beginning His ministry to mankind. Thus, looking upon the Chief Shepherd, all true Christian pastors began their ministry with the act of inner self-perfection. And you must begin like wise...

Now, through the laying on of my unworthy hands, Divine grace has descended upon you. May it not be in vain (I Cor. 15:10)! Quench not the Spirit which you have received (I Thess. 5:19), but kindle it in every way (II Tim. 1:6). I shall tell you in brief some means to this end. First of all, prayer. As our bodies cannot live without air, so our souls cannot live without the breath of the Almighty, without Divine Grace; and grace is best drawn to man through fervent prayer to God. St. John Climacus, whom we commemorate today, calls prayer the intercession for the gifts of grace. Prayer is the food, power, and strength of the soul; the air, the light, the life-giving warmth and heavenly rain which freshens and fertilizes our souls. In a word, without prayer there cannot be real spiritual life, and if prayer is necessary for every believer, how much more so is it for a priest who is there to offer prayers to God for himself and for the people (Heb. 5:3) That is why you must pray constantly. Do not limit yourself to public services, but in the cell of your home, in quiet and solitude, warm and cleanse your soul with prayer to God.

In order to kindle in yourself Divine Grace make it a practice to read the Holy Scripture. For the Word of God is a hammer that breaks up and softens our stony hearts; it is fire that burns out sinful impulses and warms our cold hearts (Jer. 23:29). *It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof; for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto; all good works* (II Tim. 3:6-17). Therefore study the law of the Lord... day and night (Ps. 1:2). Make it your rule to read the Word of God daily, and read it with reverent attention. Then what seemed to you long ago evident what earlier did not impress you greatly, will acquire suddenly a new and great meaning and significance; it will seem to you that you are hearing it for the first time; your soul will be stirred and your heart will be filled with peace, happiness and compunction.

There is much else I could tell you, but perhaps you are now too weary, to absorb it all. Instead, take the *Hierarchical Instructions to a Newly-ordained Priest*, and by reading it, edify and affirm yourself in salvation! And I shall pray to the Lord to make you a good pastor, "rightly dividing the word of truth."

(Translated from *Pribavlenie k Tserkovnomu Vedomostyam*, 1900; adapted from the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate," No. 5, 1985.)