

# COUNSELS TO PRIESTS

*(Compiled by Bishop Basil of Wichita)*

The Priesthood is a dignity formidable even to angels, since one must touch the inaccessible God: “There, indeed, where the bread is placed and wine is poured in the name of Thy Body and of Thy Blood, O Word, Thou art there Thyself, O Word, my God, and they truly become Thy Body and Thy Blood through the advent of Thy Spirit and the power of the Most High. We touch with audacity, the inaccessible God, or rather the One who dwells in light inaccessible not only to humanity but also to the exalted angelic hosts. This then is the inexpressible and supernatural that I have been instructed to perform. It impels me always to keep death before my eyes. Thus, leaving behind all satisfaction, I have been seized with fright, knowing that it is impossible for me – as for everyone, I think – to celebrate this service worthily and to lead an angelic life in the body; or rather, a life higher than the angels, so as to become in dignity even closer to Him than They, since with my hands I touch, and with my mouth I eat the One before whom they stand in fear and trembling.”

*St Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), Hymn XIV*

The one thing the celebrants must have, the one particular that is required of them, is orthodoxy. It is not the one who does not introduce new teachings into God’s Church who is orthodox, but one whose life is in accordance with the true Word.

*St Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), Epistle I*

O Master, how shall I express Thy strange marvels, how to relate with word the depths of Thy judgments which Thou dost accomplish each day in us, Thy (ordained) servants? How dost Thou not cast Thine eyes on the infinite number of my sins and not take into account the actions of my malice, O Master? But Thou hast mercy, Thou dost protect me, enlightenest and nourishest me as if I carried out all Thy commands, O my Saviour. Not only dost Thou take pity on me, but, still more, Thou grantest me leave to remain in the presence of Thy glory, of Thy power, of Thy majesty ... How dost Thou condescend to see me and to let me see Thee, to let me hold Thee in my hands, O thou who holdest all things ... Who now, having become god by the grace of the Trinity and favored with the glory from above, from the prime glory, would think that there is still something more glorious than to celebrate the Liturgy and to contemplate the Most High Nature ... The divine (priestly) ministry is great and awesome and transcends all glory, enlightenment, command and authority, wealth and power and every kingdom when one celebrates the Divine Liturgy with the consciousness of a pure heart, in honor of the pure, holy and immaculate Trinity ... Not all people have the right to officiate; but, even if someone has completely received the grace of the Spirit and if he were free from sin from his mother’s womb, unless by His command and by His choice God give him, by divinely enlightening his soul, the assurance and enkindle him with the desire of divine love, it does not seem to me reasonable that he offer the Divine Oblation and that he touch the untouchable and awesome Mysteries to which is due all glory, honor and worship, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

*St Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), Hymn XIX*

For me, I am completely unworthy to be a priest, when I think of the awesome sacerdotal dignity. But in my lowliness, I know well what a priest ought to be. He ought firstly to be pure, not only in his body, but also moreso in his soul. This is not enough. He ought even to be without any shadow of sin, humble exteriorly, contrite within. When he is at the holy table, his intelligence ought to see the divinity, while his senses see the offered gifts and he ought to possess in his heart Him, the very One who is invisibly present in the Gifts in order to be able to present his prayers with confidence, to converse as friend with his Friend, with God, his Father, and say irreproachably, “Our Father, who art in the heavens ...” as possessing Him through the Holy Spirit who dwells in him the true God, the Son of God by nature.

*From Nicetas’ Vita of St Symeon the New Theologian*

What an all-holy thing spiritual counsel is; the union of thought, the fruit of love, proof of humility. Spiritual fathers, be full of love and acceptance, forbearance and the spirit of peace, so that no matter what time one of the faithful may come you will welcome him with a smile and acceptance.

*Elder Avvakum the Barefoot (1894-1978)*

If we make concession and change the canons in order to attract people we would be doing the same as the Pharisees who traveled the sea and land to make one proselyte and when they won him they made him “twice a son of Gehenna” as themselves. In other words we would destroy those people.

*Elder Avvakum the Barefoot (1894-1978)*

It is important for you the spiritual father to direct young people with as much love as you can. “Welcome, my child!” you must say, “How are you? How is the struggle going?” so that he leaves contented and so that Christ is glorified. I say these things to you, because I am told you are a good man.

*Elder Avvakum the Barefoot (1894-1978)*

To priests who do not celebrate Divine Liturgy often because they fear it becoming routine, the Elder said, “That is not right. A priest should not be making such statements. It is like saying, ‘I don’t visit my relatives often, because I want them to miss me, and give me a warmer welcome when I visit.’ However, appropriate preparation is needed before celebrating the Divine Liturgy.”

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

Unfortunately, in our days, there are many people who upset the mother Church. Of these, those that are educated have understood dogma with their minds and not with the spirit of the Holy Fathers. At the same time, those who are unlettered have grabbed hold of dogma with their teeth, which is why they grind their teeth when they speak about ecclesiastical matters. In this way, greater harm is caused by those in the Church than by those who battle against Her from without.

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

Answering the question “If something happens during the Divine Liturgy, can it be interrupted?” Elder Paisios responded, “No, it cannot. When the Divine Liturgy is in progress, the priest cannot interrupt it, no matter what happens. Even if war is declared, he

must go on until it is over. Even if the enemy is surrounding the church temple, the most he can do is hurry up and finish. With God's help, he will be able to do that. But he must trust in God and not be afraid."

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

Priests who celebrate the Mysteries of the Lord should be most watchful, pure and exacting. For priests are more exalted than the angels. The holy angels will cover their face during the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, while the priest, with face uncovered, will be celebrating it. Unfortunately, in our days, there are many people who upset the mother Church. Of these, those that are educated have understood dogma with their minds and not with the spirit of the Holy Fathers. At the same time, those who are unlettered have grabbed hold of dogma with their teeth, which is why they grind their teeth when they speak about ecclesiastical matters. In this way, greater harm is caused by those in the Church than by those who battle against Her from without.

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

The Divine Liturgy sustains the world! And we are so unworthy of it! There are priests who live this awesome Mystery at every Divine Liturgy. A priest once told me something that a very simple and good priest had once confessed to him, "I have such a hard time during the consuming of the Holy Gifts at the end of the Divine Liturgy. My filthy tears fall into the chalice; I cannot contain them, and this makes me so upset." And as he was speaking these words he was crying! So the other priest told him, "Please, Father, ask Christ to give some of those 'filthy' tears to me too."

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

The lists of names that people give you should be commemorated during several Divine Liturgies, some in three, some in five, and then more. Why should some names be commemorated at all times, and others, who may be in more need, not commemorated at all? That is difficult for me to understand. Although names of non-Orthodox Christians should not be commemorated at the Prothesis with particles for them placed upon the *diskarion*, we can still pray for their health and enlightenment, and even say a Paraklesis Service for them.

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

Keep in mind that people can discern whether a man became a priest out of love of God and a desire to serve His Church; they have this criterion that never errs. There are those who want the priesthood in order to glorify themselves. They will be overcome with difficulties, because Christ will not help them, unless they first humble themselves and repent. But those who have sought the priesthood for spiritual reasons will have Christ on their side, in difficult times. Those in the clergy who planned all along to become priests and did so according to their own plan, are few and far between. I do not take them into account. Most priests have the right intention in the beginning, but then the devil gets involved, vainglory and an obsession with high office take charge of the person, and whatever good intentions he might have had are soon forgotten. We have no reached the point where some priests who want to lead a parish or become bishops and so on, will go as far as asking their connections to intervene on their behalf. You see, when they started they were running for Christ; now they are running for gold. They crave for golden crosses,

golden mitres, diamonds, and anything you can imagine except the essentials. It is so easy for the devil to deceive us when we are not watchful!

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

In the old days, the priests lived an ascetic life, they were virtuous and holy, and naturally people felt a reverence for them. Today people want two things from a priest: to be disinterested in money and to have love. When they find a priest who has both, they consider him a saint, and then they will run to church. By finding their way to church they also find their salvation. Then God will condescend and the priest will also be saved. It is so important for the priest to be a man of great purity.

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

When priests and those who have pastoral duties ask me how they can help their parishioners, the thing I stress the most is this: they should labor spiritually in order to cleanse themselves by performing their spiritual duties and by going beyond duty so that they build a spiritual reserve for times of need. Spiritual work on ourselves is actually a silent work on our fellow human beings; it is work that instructs by example and causes others to imitate the good behavior they see in us and correct their faults.

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

A priest can never shut his door to people; his is a grave responsibility. Some people are desperate, others sick and in need, some are dying; he must accept everybody, go wherever he is needed. A priest cannot deny his help. Souls are in danger and he must be there to help them. For if he leaves them helpless and God takes them unprepared, will he not be held responsible?

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

A priest must lead the way, and the faithful will follow. In a flock, the ram will always lead the way and the sheep will follow. When its horns are turned right, the entire flock goes in that direction. Sheep follow the ram, their leader. You will not see them apart, but always one following closely behind the other. The ram gives the direction and they follow.

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

Pastors, whether they are priests or bishops, would do well to think of Moses and the troubles he went through caring for the great multitude of his complaining people. Imagine how much he must have prayed for them out of love and what he himself suffered wandering for years in the desert, waiting for God to lead them to the Promised Land. All they need to do is think of Moses, and this will give them loads of courage to suffer through their troubles without complaint, thinking all along that they pale in comparison to the troubles that Moses faced.

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

Unfortunately, in our days, there are many people who upset the mother Church. Of these, those that are educated have understood dogma with their minds and not with the spirit of the Holy Fathers. At the same time, those who are unlettered have grabbed hold of dogma with their teeth, which is why they grind their teeth when they speak about ecclesiastical matters. In this way, greater harm is caused by those in the Church than by those who battle against Her from without.

*Elder Paisios Eznepidis of Mount Athos (1924-1994)*

The priest's cassock is the flag of the Church of our Christ: for this reason we must try hard to honor it, we who wear it, with a holy life, so that those who do not wear it will honor and respect it.

*Elder Amphilochios Makris of Patmos (1889-1970)*

My child, the father confessor must cry, he must grieve, even more than the person who comes for confession, in order to relieve him. Your grief must be sincere, because the soul understands.

*Elder Amphilochios of Makris Patmos (1889-1970)*

Married and celibate priests, let us not forget that we are representatives of the gentle and humble-hearted Jesus. We were called to progress in humility and not to quarrel in the holy altar for priority of honor.

*Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos of Athens (1930-1989)*

Clerics and, in particular, celibate clerics must be chosen from those of mature age, with excellent education, extreme piety, shining ethos, sterling character and complete spiritual formation: all those things that are acquired with labors and struggles, prayer and study, fasting and vigils, with voluntary poverty and hardships, and through various deprivations. For asceticism is not the privilege or responsibility of monastics alone, but of all the faithful and particularly of clerics, and especially of celibate clerics. The Orthodox Church is deeply ascetic and those who do not love asceticism and who are friends of luxury and comfort do not have a place within Her.

*Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos of Athens (1930-1989)*

The priest is the incarnation of the absolute, the expression of the constant, stable and unshakeable, the trumpet of Heaven, the image of incorruption, the mile-marker of eternity. May he remain forever unchanged, even in his external appearance, as a reminder and symbol of the ages and of the unchanging truths that he represents.

*Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos of Athens (1930-1989)*

The priesthood is a very great gift of God toward mankind. It is the conduit of the grace of God.

*Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos of Athens (1930-1989)*

It seems a blasphemy to me (and archimandrite's sadness at not having being elected bishop). If you consider that your shell of a body can take bread and wine and, with the Holy Spirit's consecration, transform it into the Body and Blood of Christ; that you have been given the power to make the children of Adam partakers of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ through baptism, and how you have been given the power to place your hands and your epitachelion over the head of the greatest sinner and to bring him out of confession with a pure and whitened soul, how can you then consider yourself unsuccessful? Because you have not put on a mitre? May God have mercy on us!

*Elder Epiphanius Theodoropoulos of Athens (1930-1989)*

When we put on the cassock, we begin with the goal of sanctifying our soul. Care is necessary, however. For love of the world's honor and glory, our egotism can make us lose our soul, rather than sanctify it.

*Elder Iakovos Tsalikis of Evia (1920-1991)*

Priests' wives must live a holy, nearly monastic life, with great reverence toward the priest, and must dress very modestly.

*Elder Iakovos Tsalikis of Evia (1920-1991)*

People are blind and do not see what takes place in church during the Divine Liturgy. Once I was serving and I could not make the Great Entrance because of what I saw. I suddenly felt someone pushing me by my shoulder and guiding me toward the holy prothesis. I thought it was the chanter. I turned around and saw a huge wing that the Archangel had laid on my shoulder, and that he was guiding me to make the Great Entrance. What amazing things take place in the altar during the Divine Liturgy! ... Sometimes I cannot handle it, and so I pass out in a chair, and thus some concelebrants conclude that I have got something wrong with my health, but they do not realize what I see and hear.

*Elder Iakovos Tsalikis of Evia (1920-1991)*

When the priest cuts of the particles from the prosphora and commemorates the names of the faithful during the prothesis, and angel of the Lord descends and takes this commemoration and places it before the throne of Christ as a prayer for those commemorated.

*Elder Iakovos Tsalikis of Evia (1920-1991)*

In this present evil generation, the spiritual father must use *oeconomy*, for, if he implements exactness (*akrivia*), none, or only a few, of those coming to confession would be found worthy of receiving Holy Communion. The greatest care and discernment is necessary, however, and the spiritual father must pray fervently to the heavenly God and Father to enlighten him as to how to implement *oeconomy*.

*Elder Philotheos Zervakos of Longovarda (1884-1980)*

I am proud of the cassock I wear and consider it more valuable and seemly than every other kind of garment, even than the royal purple robes of kings. I consider myself unworthy to dress in such a modest, honorable and holy garb, which was honored by numberless monastic saints, hieromartyrs, confessors and holy ones. I am saddened by and pity those clerics who reject the cassock and who shave their beards.

*Elder Philotheos Zervakos of Longovarda (1884-1980)*

Do you know what a great gift it is that God gave us the right to speak to Him every hour and moment, wherever we are? He always listens to us. This is the greatest honor we have. For this reason we must love God.

*Elder Porphyrios (1906-1991)*

We you pray, make prostrations; even if this tires you. Prayer that is accompanied by voluntary sacrifice becomes more pleasing to God and is more effective.

*Elder Porphyrios (1906-1991)*

Orthodox asceticism is not just for the monasteries, but also for the world.

*Elder Porphyrios (1906-1991)*

Strive to intensify your faith, and during the Divine Liturgy be undistracted and attached to the celebration of the service so that you might be granted to behold the majesties of God.

*Elder George Karssidis of Drama (1901-1959)*

The work of the priesthood is done on earth, but is ranked among heavenly ordinances. And this is only right, for no man, no angel, no archangel, no other created power, but the Comforter Himself ordained this succession, and persuaded men, while still remaining in the flesh, to represent the ministry of angels.

*St John Chrysostom*

The priest's cassock is superior to trousers. A cassock has double grace!

*Blessed Papa-Dimitri Gagastathis (1902-1975)*

Elder Sophrony (Sakharov) once said, to me 'When a priest comes to you for confession, do not instruct him. Simply hear his confession and read the prayer over him. Then remove your epitrachelion, place it around his neck, kneel before him, and ask him to read the prayer over you. That is how we did it on the Holy Mountain.'

*Archimandrite Zacharias (Zacharou) of Essex at the 2001 Clergy Brotherhood Retreat in Wichita*

In the beginning of 1989, the Elder Iakovos became very distressed by afflictions that befell persons he knew and loved. He received a phone call from the village of Prokopi. Father John, the priest in charge of the shrine of Saint John the Russian, had just come back from America where he had undergone heart surgery. In spite of all odds, the difficult by-pass operation was successful. Saint John the Russian had also been present and directed the effort! The doctor in charge acknowledged, in fact, that some power was guiding his hand. Despite his own bad health and the bad weather – it was winter – Father Elder Iakovos visited with Father John in his house. Not only that, but upon arrival, he also asked forgiveness: "Excuse me for troubling you, but I had to come and visit the servant of the divine John the Russian!" The people in the house thought that some bodiless, weightless angel had entered the home, for his figure emitted a serene light. Seeing the incision in Father John's leg where the veins had been removed for the by-pass, Elder Iakovos stooped – rather, fell down – and embraced Father John's legs. Blessed Elder Iakovos, now in his latter years, had great respect for priests and thought that priests were somehow angelic.

*From The Garden of the Holy Spirit: Elder Iakovos of Evia (1920-1991)*

Love towards God-Christ is part and parcel of love towards one's fellows-man ... Priests burdened with pastoral cares are often torn (between these two loves). On the one hand they know that there is no profit in gaining the whole world, and losing one's own soul (*cf.* Mark 8:36). On the other hand, there is the Lord's injunction, 'Go ye [therefore], and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19), 'Freely ye have received, freely give' (Matthew 10:8). Parallel with this goes the idea that the vital need for mankind is to KNOW THE TRUE GOD (*cf.* John 17:3). But how are we to find Him? So then, if KNOWLEDGE of God is to continue on earth, it is imperative that people should not go astray like sheep without a shepherd. This knowledge is so important that St Isaac of Syria makes a fearful statement, difficult to understand and

painful to grasp: 'Do not liken them that work signs and wonders and powerful deeds in the world with them that elect to fast and pray in the desert. Prefer inner stillness (*hesychia*) rather than feeding the hungry in the world, and the conversion of many peoples to the worship of God.'

*Elder Sophrony (Sakharov) of Essex (1896-1993)*

God lights the priest up as lamp and places him upon the lampstand of His light-bearing throne.

*Saint Isidore of Pelusium (+449)*

To a woman whose son was to be ordained a priest, Elder Amphilokhios wrote, 'Your greatest joy is to have a son who sanctifies the Precious Gifts, whose honor it is to forgive sins, and who intercedes constantly for your family. Had he become a king, he would not have obtained the glory of a priest. During the Divine Liturgy the priest is higher than the angels because even the angels at that hour tremble as they serve at the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist.'

*From Our Geronda: The Life & Miracles of Elder Amphilokhios of Patmos (1889-1970)*

On the eve of Pascha in the year 1919, Georgian and Russian clergymen imprisoned by the communists asked permission to go to church, but they were not allowed to go. Then they all together fervently prayed to the Resurrected Christ to strengthen them. When they chanted the 'Christ is Risen' the jail shook and the gates opened on their own. From the noise which was created all the inhabitants of the city ran to see what was happening. They saw three sacred figures holding the Precious Cross, processing in a circle above the jail, chanting 'Lord, have mercy.' This divine sign lasted all night long, so that all of the gathered people of the city saw it. As soon as the dawn came this heavenly vision ceased. The following day all the captive priests along with the Elder were ready for martyrdom.

*From Blessed Elder George Karslidis (1901-1959)*

When one bishop asked Hieromonk Callistratus, the saintly abbot of the Monastery of Mileseva, 'What is the most important thing for a priest?', he answered, 'The most important thing for a priest is to communicate – first with the Master, afterwards with the lords of the Master's servants, and finally with the Master's servants. The Master is He who is called the Christ, the lords of the Master's servants are the Saints, and the Master's servants are the people of this world. For it has been said, he who communicates only with the Master's servants does not care about the Master, and provokes the wrath of the Master.'

*St Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956) in Kassiana: Lessons in Divine & Christian Love*

Jesus the Good Shepherd, I thank Thee because Thou hast given to me, the small and weak one, the same command that Thou gavest to Thine Apostle, when Thou didst tell him, 'Feed my lambs, feed my sheep.' (John 21:17). Never would I dare, O Lord, to accept such a heavy mission if I did not believe that Thy grace 'healeth that which is infirm and completeth that which is wanting.' Therefore, in this moment in which I feel my shortcomings so intensely, I, Thy priest, Thy sacrificer, the small shepherd of Thy flock, implore Thee: Uphold me, O Lord; keep my heart pure, whole, free from money and attached to Thy commandments. Take away from Thy servant selfishness, ostentation and worldliness. Keep him from anger, rancor, envy and jealousy. Make me a man of prayer so that not only with my lips, but also with my heart, I may praise and glorify Thy Holy Name. Help me not forget the holy



feelings of my first Divine Liturgy, and by them to chase away the germ of habit which every so often comes into me. Help Thy priest, O Lord, be always an angel of comfort for the afflicted, a source of spiritual invigoration for the disheartened, a guide towards Thy peace, and a source of joy for the wounded. Help me, my Saviour, combine in my life and work tenderness with firmness, tact with strength, sensitivity with strictness. Reduce my faults so that no one may fall because of my weakness. Teach me, O Lord, how to instruct the children, inspire the youth, advise the adults, turn back the sinners, encourage those who are about to die. Teach me, O Lord who knowest the hearts of men, how to perform the Mysteries of Thy Church, and especially the Mystery of Holy Confession. During that time, make me a perfect physician of souls and an affectionate father. Help me be in my parish an inspiration of good works and a leader in God-pleasing endeavors, so that all may be won over for their own happiness and for the glory of Thy Name. Amen.

*Prayer of a Priest by Blessed Papa-Dimitri Gagastathis (1902-1975)*

Priesthood is given as a manifestation of God's love for mankind. God loves us and made us His priests. A priestly celebrant loans his voice and hands to God to perform His Holy Mysteries. A priest is cleanser by God's grace when clothed in his vestments, unless there is a moral shortcoming, vindictiveness, or greed for money. Those who labor for God's word should first be ascetically prepared.

*Hieromonk Athanasios of the Sacred Monastery of Iviron on the Holy Mountain*

The life of a priest, a real priest, was always difficult, and now it is even more so. Some people think that it means only serving in Church, but no; it is an extremely difficult and all-encompassing way of life. You have to forget yourself completely and give yourself to others. You must take upon yourself the souls of hundreds of people and lead them. Not everyone is strong enough to undertake this way of life. Many people think being a priest is an easy profession. Yes, it is easy if you do not give yourself to others, but it is extremely difficult if you do.

*Father Arseny (1893-1973)*

The priests of the Jews had authority to cure leprosy of the body, or rather, not to cure it, but only to certify the cure. And you know what rivalry there used to be for the priesthood then. But our priests have received authority not over leprosy of the body, but over uncleanness of the soul, and not just to certify its cure, but actually to cure it!

*St John Chrysostom*

What was he seeing when the Liturgy began? He saw fire coming down from heaven and covering the altar and the celebrant, without the latter realizing it. Later, when the Trisagion hymn was being chanted, four angels descended and chanted along with them. When the Epistle was read, blessed Paul appeared and guided the reader. And during the Gospel, each one of the words came out of the mouth of the priest like a flame. Then the mystical alleluia started. All the voices intertwined in a rope of fire which reached up to heaven. A little before the Great Entrance, when the Holy Gifts were about to come out, suddenly he saw the heavens open and an ineffable fragrance pour out. Angels were descending chanting hymns and doxologies to the Lamb and Christ and Son of God. Immediately, an Infant with the purest and sweetest face appeared. The Cherubim brought Him in their palms and placed Him on the holy paten where the Holy Gifts were. Around Him gathered a large number of white-dressed men reflecting His bright beauty. The priest approached to take the Holy Gifts for the Great Entrance. He then raised them and placed them above his head.

Two Cherubim and two Seraphim preceded, and an infinite number of other angels followed chanting ineffable melodies. As soon as the celebrant placed the Holy Gifts on the holy table, they covered them with their wings. The two Cherubim were standing on the right of the priest and the two Seraphim on his left.

*From "The Vision of St Niphon"*

Without a doubt the rank of the priest has always been revered by the monks. Thus in the past and the present day, whenever anyone went to the Holy Mountain he would have seen, and still can see, the oldest monk bowing low to kiss the hand of some youthful, and near beardless priest. The priesthood is truly precious! It is not the Father's awareness of its great value that led them to forbid the monks to become priests. Rather, this was for reasons of foresight, for the edification of the monastery, for pastoral reasons we might say today. This is so because longing for the priesthood is very deep in men's souls, and that longing is capable of scattering the brotherhood like ashes.

*Archimandrite Aemilianos, hegumen of Simonos Petras Monastery on the Holy Mountain*

The power of the Word makes the priest reverend and honorable, as he is set apart by the newness of the blessing from fellowship with the multitude. And this the priest does without being in any way changed in body or form. But while to outward appearance he is all the time what he was, yet his invisible soul is favorably transformed by an unseen power and grace.

*St Gregory of Nyssa*

What does the priesthood mean? It means to be an enduring witness to human suffering and to take it upon your own shoulders. To be the one who warms the leper at his own breast, the one who gives life to the miserable through the breath from his own mouth. To be a strong comfort to every unfortunate one, even when you yourself are overwhelmed with weakness. To be a ray of shining light to unhappy hearts when your own eyes long ago ceased to see any light. To carry mountains of others' sufferings on your shoulders, while your own being screams out with the weight of its own suffering. Your flesh will rebel and say, 'This heroism is absurd, impossible! Where is such a man, where is the priest you describe so that I may put my own suffering on his shoulders?' Yes, nevertheless, he does exist! From time to time there awakens within us the priest of Christ who, like the Good Samaritan, will kneel down by the side of the man fallen among thieves and, putting him upon his own donkey, will bring him to the Church of Christ for healing. And he will forget himself and comfort you, O man of suffering.

*Father George Calciu*

Believe that the prayer even of one friend of God, especially a priest of God, who lives a holy life, can work wonders upon a considerable part of nature, as the prayers of the prophets Moses, Elias and others. Therefore, live in a manner pleasing to God, especially you who are priests of God; be holy, pure, meek, humble, merciful, temperate, laborious, patient, and your prayer shall always penetrate the heavens, and shall be heard and fulfilled. Always, pray with your whole heart, and, above all, with a pure heart. 'There was given unto the angel much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayer of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand' (Rev. 8:3,4). And to you also, O Priest, this incense is given. The censer with the incense ought always to remind

you of this – that is, of how easily your prayer for yourself, and ‘for the errors of the people’ (Heb. 9:7) and their iniquities, ascends to God and is accepted by Him.

*St John of Kronstadt (+1908)*

We must never forget that we are all one body, and that we should stimulate each other to love and good works. We priests should especially remember and do this. Yes, we should remember that if our own souls are serene, if we stand firm in faith and piety ourselves, then our flocks, too, will be firmer, more serene, and of pure life ... But if our souls are darkened by manifold passions, the darker, too, will become the body of the Church, our flock, because there is a close connection between the head and the members, between the priest and his flock ... Therefore, do not think that your flock does not feel the effects of your gluttony, your love of money; for they do ... If you stand firm in spiritual virtues, they are also firm; if you are fervent in prayer and pray fervently for them, they feel this too; if you are spiritually strengthened yourself, they too are strengthened; if you grow weak, they too become weak. Lord, have mercy upon us!

*St John of Kronstadt (+1908)*

How important clothes are! A whole complex of feelings, ideas, movements of the soul, is linked to clothes, to uniforms. In particular, I feel that the priest must not wear civilian clothes. When he removes his priestly garb, he inevitably acquires an ‘unpriestly’ feeling, and in some measure betrays his priesthood.

*Father Alexander Elchaninov in The Diary of a Russian Priest*

Never break the fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. This fast is ordained by the Church and is well attested. If, at any time, you break this fast, pray for forgiveness and do not sin again. Devout people do not regard themselves as dispensed from his fast either when traveling or in sickness. St Pachomios once met some people who were carrying a corpse, and saw two angels in the funeral procession. He asked God to reveal to him the mystery of the presence of the two angels at the burial of this man. What especial good had he done that two angels should escort him to the grave? Then, by the providence of God, the two angels came across to St Pachomios and explained to him, ‘One of us is the angel of Wednesday, and the other angel of Friday. As this man fasted every Wednesday and Friday right up to his death, we are giving his corpse a solemn escort. As he kept up to his death, so we are here to glorify him.

*St Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956)*

Let us not tire, brothers, of helping those we love who are departed for the other life. Let us not tire of praying for them, particularly at the Divine Liturgy. For at that time ‘the common purification of the world is at hand.’ For this reason, then, let us pray with courage for the whole world, and let us commemorate our, departed together with the Martyrs, the Confessors and the Priests. For we – all the faithful – are one spiritual body, even though some members are ‘brighter’ than others. Let us commemorate them; let us ask forgiveness for them from everywhere – from the petitions, from the gifts offered for them, and from the Saints who are commemorated with them at the time of the Divine Liturgy.

*St John Chrysostom - On 1 Corinthians #41 and On Not Mourning Bitterly, #45*

The much-revered 20<sup>th</sup> century *staretz* Schema-hieromonk Michael, who was popularly known as “the Recluse of New Valaam,” related this incident for our edification and encouragement concerning the celebration of divine service. “In 1804 Abbot Nazarius of

Sarov and Father Hilarion, finding themselves away from their monastery on a Saturday, came upon a certain village. Finding the church temple and rectory, they knocked on the door of the house and were warmly received by the parish priest. Realizing that the priest made no preparations to celebrate the evening service, the Abbot inquired for the reason. The village priest replied that he did not intend to serve, and added that he served rarely, even the Divine Liturgy. 'My parish, Father Abbot, is large, but people are indifferent. They rarely come to church. I do not see any reason to serve in an empty church.' 'Father,' the distressed Abbot answered, 'if your parishioners neglect their most important duties, you, their pastor, must not neglect yours. The temple of God is never empty. Since it was consecrated it has its own guardian angel. If your people neglect their duties, know that their guardian angels do not. They fill the temple, and when you serve, the angels serve with you. You must serve regularly, and pray to God to convert your people to prayer and penitence.'" Staretz Michael ended his account of this incident, saying, "Every priest who complains about poor churchgoing in his parish might follow with benefit the advice of Abbot Nazarius."

*From Father Michael: Recluse of Uusi Valamo (1959)*

Once a man criticized Father Epiphanius, saying, "Father, you absolutize the sacred Canons!" In response the Elder said, "Can I, my child, not make them absolute, since they are fruits of the Holy Spirit? In the first Canon of the Seventh Oecumenical Council it is stated very clearly that the Holy Fathers who instituted the sacred Canons, as well as the Holy Apostles, 'all being illumined by one and the same Spirit,' ordained these beneficial things. So who am I to make them relative?" "But, Father," said the man, "it is known that you are strictly attached to the faithful keeping of the sacred Canons for the solving of all ecclesiastical problems. Haven't you ever once regretted a position which you thus took?" Father Epiphanius smiled and said, "No, my good child. Not even in thought. Never in my life did I need to repent because I took a position which the sacred Canons dictate. For all other things, we repent bitterly. But for the keeping of the Canons, no."

*From The Life & Teachings of Archimandrite Epiphanius Theodoropoulos (+1989)*

The Church cannot be understood without divine preaching. It has great value. As a recent teacher of the Church, speaking about preaching, said, 'The rabbit is not as afraid of lightning as much as the devil is afraid of preaching.' But for sacred preaching to have results, the Gospel's preacher must be the right person; that is, the Gospel's preacher must have unshaken faith, and an ardent love of both God and sinful man. Next, he must live an unblemished life; for, if the preacher of the Gospel does not live by God's commandments, but acts contrary to the Gospel, the people who hear him will be scandalized and say: 'Teacher, you teach but do not keep the Law yourself.' Thirdly, the preacher of the Gospel must have knowledge of Holy Scripture, the sacred Canons and the Traditions of the Orthodox Church. Therefore, he must continuously study the sacred texts and other religious books. Preaching the word of God has to be as perfect as possible, and for this God's grace is especially to be sought by the preacher.

*Bishop Argoustinos (Kantiotes) of Florina*

The Magi adore this Body lying in the manger ... It is not now lying in a crib that I see Thee, but upon the altar. There is no difference between this (the Eucharist) and that. This is the same Body that was covered in blood, pierced by the spear, pouring forth the saving streams of blood and water, for the whole world. Christ soared up from the depths of the abyss in

dazzling light and, leaving His rays there, ascended to His throne in the heavens. It is that same Body that He now gives us hold and to eat!

*St John Chrysostom*

Since God has made you worthy to become a priest, take care to participate in the Divine Liturgy with your whole soul. During the time a priest is celebrating Liturgy, he should feel as if a lampada were burning within him. He should keep that lamp unextinguished until the next Liturgy. From his first till his last Liturgy the priest must keep that lamp kindled.

*Elder Athanasios of the Sacred Monastery of Gregorion on the Holy Mountain (+1953)*

My sweetest Saviour! Having come down from heaven for the service of mankind, Thou didst not only preach the Word of heavenly truth in the temple, but Thou wentest through the towns and villages; Thou didst not shun anyone; Thou visitedst the houses of all, especially of those whose fervent repentance Thou didst foresee with Thy divine gaze. Thus Thou didst not remain sitting at home, but wert in loving intercourse with all. Grant to us, Thy priests, to be also in such loving intercourse with Thy people, so that we pastors should not shut ourselves up in our houses away from Thy sheep as if in castles or prisons, only coming out of them for services in the church or to officiate in the houses of others, only out of duty, only with prayers learned by heart. May our lips be freely open to discourse with our parishioners in the spirit of faith and love. May our Christian love for our spiritual children be opened and strengthened by animated, free and fatherly conversation with them. O what sweetness, what bliss Thou hast concealed, O Lord, our boundless Love, in the spiritual converse warmed by love of a spiritual father with his spiritual children! And how is it possible not to strive upon earth with all our might after such bliss? Yet it is only a faint beginning, only a faint likeness of the heavenly bliss of love!

*St John of Kronstadt (+1908)*

God has given greater power to priests than to natural parents, not only for punishment, but also for help. The difference between the two is as great as between the present and the future life. Parents bring us into this life; priests into the life to come. Parents cannot avert bodily death nor drive away the onset of disease; priests have often saved the soul that is sick and at the point of death, by making the punishment milder for some, and preventing others from ever incurring it, not only through instruction and warning, but also through helping them by prayer. They have authority to remit sins, not only when they make us regenerate, but afterwards too. 'Is any among you sick? Let him call for the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.' Again, natural parents cannot help their sons if they fall foul of the prominent and powerful, but priests have often appeased the anger of God Himself, to say nothing of rulers and kings.

*St John Chrysostom*

Holy brothers and fathers: In our days, the faithful are being tried in many ways. The world, the world-ruler and his agents oppose the truth of the Gospel, provoke the faithful, and rage against those who keep the faith. The triumphs of the adversary are legion, and we, the priests of God, full of sorrow, spot His children at the 'wide gate' and on the 'easy way that leads to destruction.' The devil's greatest victory today is that he creates spiritual confusion in the hearts and minds of the believers. The hater of good has succeeded in changing the

thinking of many teachers and pastors, so that in the sacred ministry of the word, both from the pulpit and in the confessional, they no longer teach the truths of the Gospel, but their own personal views and opinions. Thus, on one and the same issue, the believer is taught differing positions, one day these and the next day the exact opposite, from one priest this and from another that. The words ‘thus saith the Lord’ of the Prophets and the God-bearing Fathers of the Church have been replaced by the words ‘I think.’ These pastors have changed their role from being a preacher of the counsels and statutes of God to being a lawmaker, thereby usurping divine prerogatives. Behold why we said that this policy is the devil’s greatest victory. This spiritual Babel aims at altering the very conscience of the faithful, who are better informed of the will of God by listening to their conscience (which is the voice of God) rather than to such pastors. But, if we clergy come to our senses and confess that ‘we have sinned, we have transgressed, we have committed unrighteousness,’ and resolve from now on to ‘rightly divide the word of truth’ in our teaching and in the ministry of the sacred Mystery of Confession, then, and only then, will we see our people faithfully coming to Holy Communion with a longing for salvation and theosis, and living in true spiritual resurrection and elation.

*Archimandrite Nikodemos Aerakis of the Metropolitan See of Hydra, Spetsae and Aegina*

O Lord, where do I find the grace of hearing Thee say, ‘Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much?’ (*Luke 7:47*). I have to confess, my debts were greater, the sins that have been forgiven me more numerous, because I have come to the priesthood from the uproar and responsibilities of a worldly life. Therefore I am afraid of being ungrateful. My sins have been more numerous – and I have loved less. Guard Thy work, O Lord, and preserve in me the grace which Thou hast granted me. Since Thou hast granted me to work for Thy Church, guard the fruits of my labor. Thou didst call me to the priesthood when I was a lost child. Let me not lose myself now that I am a priest. Above all, give me the grace of compassion. Grant me to be able to have compassion on sinners from the depth of my heart, for that is the supreme virtue. Grant me to have compassion every time that I witness a fall of a sinner. Let me not arrogantly reprove him, but let me weep for myself with him. Do Thou cause me when I weep for my neighbor to weep for myself as well, and to apply to myself the words: ‘the harlot is more righteous than you.’

*St Ambrose of Milan (334—397) in On Penance, II, 8, 67 & 83*

Lord, accept my tearful prayer for my spiritual children, and for all Orthodox Christians who seek to please Thee, and receive it as my care for their salvation, as my pastoral care! Be to them Thyself, in accordance with my prayer, both the Voice and the Trumpet, awakening them from their sinful sleep, the Eye watching over their hearts, the Hand guiding them on their journey to the heavenly country, and raising up those who fall through incredulity, faint-heartedness, and despondency; be to them the motherly Love – in which I myself am so deficient – tenderly caring for their true welfare; ‘be all things to all, that some may be saved.’ For Thou art, in truth, the one Pastor, invisibly and secretly pasturing the souls of men. Thou art the one, true, and most wise Teacher, speaking in the very hearts of Thy people. Thou art the one true Lover of Thy creatures and children by grace; Thou art an Abyss of wisdom and omnipotence; Thou aloe art ever-vigilant and unwearying, and teachest us Thy ways, even during our sleep. Be then Thyself, O Lord, instead of me, the Pastor and Teacher of Thy sheep, which Thou hast entrusted to me; lead them Thyself to grassy pasture lands; guard them Thyself from spiritual and carnal wolves; guide Thou their feet into the way of truth, righteousness, and peace. Be unto them, instead of me, Light,

Eyes, Mouth, Hands, and Wisdom; but, above all, be unto them the Love in which I, a sinner, am so wanting!

*St John of Kronstadt (+1908)*

Priest of God! Believe with your whole heart; believe always in the grace given to you from God, to pray for God's people. Let not this gift of God be in vain in you, for by it you can save many souls. The Lord speedily hears your heartfelt prayer for His people, and is easily inclined to have mercy upon them, as He had at the prayers of Moses, Aaron, Samuel and the Apostles. Avail yourself of every opportunity for prayer – in church, when you celebrate the divine service or a sacrament, in private homes, at the ministering of sacraments, during prayers and thanksgivings; everywhere and at all times think of the salvation of God's people, and you shall also obtain great grace of God for yourself.

*St John of Kronstadt (+1908)*

Once, when Abbot Ioanichie was serving, after the sanctification of the Gifts, a drop of the Holy Blood jumped out of the Holy Chalice and onto the Holy Antimension. This drop began to shine and then to spread beams of light. Abbot Ioanichie then called out to me, 'Brother Constantine, come here!' When I came he said to me, 'What do you see here on the Holy Antimension?' 'I see a drop of the Holy Blood shining so strongly that I can hardly look.' 'Do you see Whom it is we serve? That is why we must stand with great fear and piety in the Holy Altar.'

*Elder Cleopa Ilie the Shepherd of Souls (1912-1998)*

The Church, which is catholic and one, is not split asunder nor divided, but is truly bound and joined together by the cement of its priests, who hold fast to one another.

*Saint Cyprian of Carthage (+ 258)*

For this grace we pray night and day to the King of Ages, to preserve the people in the integrity of the faith, and to preserve you, the clergy, for them as a sound head placed at the top and itself supplying foresight for the members of the body subject to it. For, when the eyes perform their functions, then the labor of the hands is skillful, and the movement of the feet without stumbling, and no part of the body is deprived of its care. Therefore, we urge you, as you are doing and intend to do, to cling to one another, and you to whom has been entrusted the care of souls to hold together each and every one and to cherish them as your beloved children. And the people we urge to preserve toward you the reverence and honor owed to fathers, in order that in the proper maintenance of the Church your strength as well as the foundation of the faith in Christ may be preserved, and that the name of God may be glorified, and that the blessing of charity may abound and be multiplied.

*St Basil the Great (+379), Letter #222, "To the Chalcedians"*

(At the conclusion of the Kairon) the priest prostrated in the middle of the church before the holy icons, entered the holy place to don the sacred vestments and wash his hands. Then, as he drew near to the prothesis, the emperor saw the priest's face begin to brighten! It became brighter than the sun! It was like the face of an angel! Know ye that this is the appearance of all Christ's priests when they perform the divine services. Then the emperor saw a great multitude of angels arrayed in white robes, also with bright faces, descending from above. And in their midst was a Wonderful Child, whose beauty was beyond all heavenly and earthly beauties, and the radiance of His face brightened even more the faces

of the angels surrounding Him ... The emperor could not believe his eyes, for he now saw that a great multitude of people had filled the church. They were so numerous that they even filled the holy place, surrounding the priest! The people reverently looked at the priest and they all began to pray. What the emperor was seeing was the countless number of people for whom the priest was praying, saints and sinner, living and departed. The emperor saw the All-holy Virgin clothed in a robe of gold, adorned in varied colors, come and stand at the right hand of her Wonderful Child. He saw St John the Forerunner, severe and thin, clothed in a robe of camel's hair and girded about with a leather belt. He saw the glorious prophets, the holy apostles of Jesus Christ the Wonderful Child, and all the wonder-working saints, the right-victorious martyrs and the venerable and righteous men and women. Their faces were luminous and shining brightly, though some of them had wounds and mangled bodies, while others were very thin and gaunt because of their ascetic labors. All of them had joyfully offered their lives to Christ, the Wonderful Child whom they now surrounded to worship and adore.

*From "The Revelation of the Holy Liturgy to the Unbelieving Emperor"*

My son, my blessed priest: May mercy, enlightenment, strength, peace, love and the abundant grace of the Lord be upon your noble soul. May the Lord our God send you a good angel to direct your steps in the way of peace, according to His holy will. My truly beloved son who won my love with your noble feelings, may your fiery soul be graced with brilliant splendor. May the Holy Protection of our sweetest Queen, the pure Virgin and Theotokos, cover you like Moses, along with all of your spiritual children, as the divine Andrew the Fool-for-Christ saw in Constantinople. May our sweet Jesus make your nous and heart shine with His holy seal, as well as every God-pleasing work of yours, so that the enemy will not find anything at all to plunder. At His Second Coming may He reward and bless and crown every single one of your good deeds done with love. May He enrich all your spiritual children through His rich endowment and heavenly grace, and may they become fragrant flowers of paradise, so that you will see them in that day and rejoice. I, too, rejoice, seeing all of you as flowers with the sweet smell of good works ~ I who am empty of every good. You are my happiness and joy and wealth in my poverty, my great boast. Through your spiritual works the Father is glorified, the Son rejoices, and the Holy Spirit exults!

*"For a Spiritual Son," by Elder Joseph the Hesychast (1898-1959)*

When the Lord would have mercy on a man, He inspires others with the desire to pray for him, and helps them in their prayer. Therefore we must know that when we feel a wish to pray for someone, it means that the Lord Himself wants to show mercy on that soul and will graciously hear our prayers. I realized that when the Lord gives us to grieve over someone, and the desire to pray for him, it means that the Lord would be gracious unto that man. Therefore, if it befalls you to sorrow over anyone, you must pray for that person, because the Lord for your sake would be gracious unto him. So do you pray then. The Lord will hear you.

*St Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938)*

By means of the priesthood God accomplishes great and redeeming works among mankind: He purifies and sanctifies people, animals, and elements; He delivers people from the villainous works of the devil; He renews and strengthens; He converts bread and wine into the purest Body and Blood of the God-Man Himself; He marries people and makes marriage honorable and the nuptial bed pure; He absolves sins, heals illness, converts earth into



heaven, unites heaven with earth, the human being with Himself; He joins angels and men in one gathering. What do they not lack, the people who have no priesthood? They are deprived of salvation. It is not in vain that the Lord, the Accomplisher of our salvation, is called the Chief Priest.

*St John of Kronstadt (+1908)*

Upon being presented a jeweled pectoral cross as a gift from his people by St Tikhon (Bellavin) in 1902 in recognition of his many sacrifices for his flock, the newly-glorified St Raphael (Hawaweeny) responded, “‘Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name be the glory’ (Ps 115:1) ... ‘I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth’ (1 Cor 3: 6 & 7). It is true that I worked a lot and endured even more grief, but no matter how much I worked and how much grief I endured, I consider myself only to have done my duty as a priest and servant of God. Can we servants of God and spiritual pastors expect anything in this life except labor and grief? Is this not to what we have dedicated our life: to work without recompense, for the good and the salvation of our neighbors? ‘So you also, when you have done all that is commanded of you, say, We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’ (Lk 17:10)”

*St Raphael of Brooklyn, the Good Shepherd of the Lost Sheep in America (+1915)*

If you have been found worthy of the divine and venerable priesthood, you have committed yourself sacrificially to die to the passions and to sensual pleasure. Only then dare you approach the awesome, living sacrifice; otherwise you will be consumed by the divine fire like dry tinder. If the seraphim did not dare to touch the divine coal without tongs (cf. Isaiah 6 : 6), how can you do so unless you have attained dispassion? You must through dispassion have a consecrated tongue, purified lips, and a chaste soul and body; and your very hands, as ministers of the fiery, supraessential sacrifice, must be more burnished than any gold.

*St Theognostos the Presbyter (13<sup>th</sup> century)*

Shortly before his repose Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov (1896-1993), the founder of the Holy Monastery of St. John the Baptist in Tolleshunt Knights-by-Malden in Essex, England, and spiritual son and disciple of St. Silouan the Athonite (1866-1938), shared an insight into the awesomeness of the sacred priesthood which was granted him. “When I was invoking the Name of Jesus Christ (while practicing the Jesus Prayer), I was once obliged to stop pronouncing His Name: the effect was too much for me ~ my soul, wordlessly, without thought, trembled at the nearness of God. Then it was that the mystery of the priestly office was revealed to me. The following day I celebrated the Liturgy, and Christ God was in me, and with me, and outside me, and in the holy sacraments of His Body and Blood. And the Divine Name and the words of the liturgical texts issued from my mouth like a flame. I continued in this state for three days, after which the intensity of the experience diminished. But the Lord etched the memory of it on my mind and heart with a sharp tool. And I pray Him, ‘Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.’

*On Prayer by Elder Sophrony, p. 47*

Remember, O Priest, that you look daily on the salvation of God which, when he saw it but once, so terrified and amazed Righteous Simeon the Elder that he prayed for his deliverance. If you have not been assured by the Holy Spirit that you are equal to the angels and so an acceptable intermediary between God and man, do not presumptuously dare to celebrate the

awesome and most holy mysteries, which even angels venerate and from whose purity many of the saints themselves have in reverent fear drawn back. Otherwise, like Zan, you will be destroyed because of your pretense to holiness.

*St Theognostos the Presbyter (c. 1300)*

Ponder deeply, O Priest, on the angelic honor of which you have been found worthy, and, whatever rank to which you have been called, strive through virtue and purity to keep yourself unsullied. For you know from what height Lucifer fell on account of his pride. Do not dream up great ideas about yourself and suffer the same fate. Regard yourself as dust and ashes, for it is only on account of God's inexpressible compassion and kindness that you are permitted to handle the holy things at the celebration of the dread mysteries, and so are called to communion and kinship with Him.

*St Theognostos the Presbyter (c. 1300)*

I know a priest who loves God with great intensity, and yet grieves because he does not love Him as much as he would wish. His soul is ceaselessly filled with burning desire that God should be glorified in him and that he himself should be as nothing. This man does not think of what he is, even when others praise him. In his great desire for humility, he does not think of his priestly rank, but performs his ministry as the rule enjoins. In his extreme love for God, he strips himself of any thought of his own dignity; and with a spirit of humility he buries in the depths of divine love any pride to which his high position as a Priest of the Most High might give rise. Thus, out of desire to humble himself, he always sees himself in his own mind as a useless servant, extraneous to the priestly rank he holds. We too should do the same, fleeing all honor and glory in the overflowing richness of our love for the Lord who loves us so greatly.

*St Diadochos of Photiki (c. 400-486)*

The proof of authenticity of the spiritual condition of a father confessor is, that while he is very strict with himself, he is very lenient with others and does not use the canons of the Church like cannons against them.

*Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain (+July 12, 1994)*

The work of the clergyman in and of itself is not social work, but to create real Christians. The social work will come out subsequently through the Christians themselves.

*Archimandrite Epiphanius Theodoropoulos (+November 10, 1989)*

An old ascetic told a group of priests who visited him, "To allow time for prayer, one should not spend time on anything that can be looked after by someone else. For example, a doctor does not deal with gauzes and bandages, because the nurse can do that. The doctor takes care of more serious matters, such as examining a patient or performing an operation. If he spends time on minor things, he will not have time for the important ones, and no one will benefit from his medical expertise. The same applies to you. Pray for your parishioners, and underline the names of those who are in greater need than others. It helps to know what each particular person's problem is so that you can pray better for each case."

*From An Athonite Gerontikon by Archimandrite Ioannikios (Kotsonis)*

During the time of one's confession not only the person who makes his confession is judged, but the confessor as well. In the past, confessors were practical. They did not judge

on the basis of the seriousness of a transgression, but rather on the intent. They did not concentrate so much on the sins being confessed as on thinking of how to treat the repentant person's soul.

*From An Athonite Gerontikon by Archimandrite Ioannikios (Kotsonis)*

St John the Merciful, patriarch of Alexandria, learned that the poor who needed his help in receiving justice from the courts were denied access to him by his patriarchal retinue. So the thrice-blessed one devised the following plan which was pleasing to God. Each Wednesday and Friday he had a seat and two stools placed in the open in front of the cathedral and there he sat with the gospel in his hands, and thus gave ready and open access to all who wished to consult him, and on their behalf he caused justice to be done immediately. On one such day no one came to seek his aid, and he lamented saying, "Today for the first time humble John did not get any 'wages' from anyone, and this was the first time that he could not offer anything to Christ on behalf of his countless sins." A man consoled him, saying, "Today you ought rather rejoice and be delighted, for you are truly blessed if you have brought such peace to the flock entrusted to you." St John recognized the truth of this and lifted his eyes to heaven and said, "I thank Thee, O God, Who hast allowed me, unworthy as I am, to be called Thy priest and, though the least of men and a sinner, to be a shepherd of Thy rational flock."

*From The Life of St John the Merciful by Leontios of Cyprus*

One day Abba Matoës went to Rhaïthou, in the region of Magdolos. A brother went with him, and the bishop seized the old man and made him a priest. While they were eating, the bishop said, 'Forgive me, Abba; I know you did not want it but it was in order that I might be blessed by you that I dared to do it.' The old man said humbly to him, 'I did not wish it, to be sure; but what really troubles me is that I must now be separated from the brother who is with me and I am not able to keep on saying the prayers quite alone.' The bishop said to him, 'If you know that he is worthy, I will ordain him too.' Abba Matoës said, 'I do not know if he is worthy of it; I know only one thing, that he is better than I.' So the bishop ordained him also. Both died without having approached the sanctuary to make the offering. The old man used to say, 'I have confidence in God that I shall not suffer great condemnation through the laying on of hands since I do not make the offering. For the laying on of hands is for those who are without reproach.'

*From Apophthegmata Patrum (the Alphabetical Collection)*

How can one explain how a priest can stand thirty-odd years before the throne of God — he should have become a wonder-worker or a clairvoyant long ago. However, not only is he unable to see what goes on within another's soul, but he does not even understand his own. Perhaps we shall accuse God of favoritism. No. The fact of the matter is that God bestows these gifts not for sheer labor of such a one, but for humility. The latter quality is acquired only through pure prayer, and pure prayer only through humility.

*Blessed Bishop Barnabas, New Confessor of Russia*

Our fellow men, who have passed away, long for our prayers, just as prisoners long for the visits of their relatives.

*Elder Païsius of the Holy Mountain (+ July 12, 1994)*

The priest is the incarnation of the absolute, the expression of the constant, stable and unshakeable, the trumpet of Heaven, the image of incorruption, the mile-marker of eternity. May he remain forever unchanged, even in his external appearance, as a reminder and symbol of the ages and of the unchanging truths which he represents.

*Archimandrite Epiphanius Theodoropoulos (+November 10, 1989)*

The priest's cassock is the flag of the Church of our Christ: for this reason we must try hard to honor it, we who wear it, with a holy life, so that those who don't wear it will honor and respect it.

*Blessed Elder Amphilokhios of Patmos (1889-1970)*

I am proud of the cassock I wear and consider it more valuable and seemly than every other kind of garment, even than the royal purple robes of kings. I consider myself unworthy to dress in such a modest, honorable and holy garb, which was honoured by numberless monastic Saints, monk martyrs, confessors and Saints. I am saddened by and pity those clerics who reject the cassock and who shave their beards.

*Blessed Elder Philotheos of Paros*

When women asked to interview him, or just to pay their respects, they might never come into his room unless there were other clergy there as witnesses. He would never talk to them alone even if the matter were strictly private.

*From The Life of St Augustine by St Possidius of Calama*

The spiritual director should be the first in service so that by his way of life he might show the laity how to live, and so that the flock (which follows the voice and behavior of its shepherd) may advance all the better by his example than by his words alone. For indeed, the one who is compelled by his position to speak of the highest things is also compelled, by necessity, to show the highest things by his example. For his voice penetrates more easily his listeners' hearts when his way of life commends what he says. Thus, what he enjoins by speaking he helps by showing how it is to be done.

*From The Book of Pastoral Rule, Part Two, Section 3 by St Gregory the Dialogist*