

## **The Attributes of a Wise Shepherd**

### **(8) Nor Decide by the Hearing of His Ears**

When Isaiah, the prophet, saw Jesus Christ in a prophetic vision, he described Him saying, “*His delight is in the fear of the Lord, and he shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears*” (Isaiah 11:3). If a priest gets a model of pastoring from the Good Shepherd, the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, then he is required to be also described as “*Nor decide by the hearing of his ears*”

**Let us imagine together what would happen if:**

- 1) What would happen if Jesus Christ decided by the hearing of His ears, considered the evil report of the woman in the city who was sinner and did not allow her to approach Him?
- 2) What would happen if Nathanael decided by the hearing of his ears and became biased by his assumption, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46)?
- 3) What would happen if Ananias decided by the hearing of his ears and rejected Saul of Tarsus because of what he have heard from many about how much harm he has done to the saints in Jerusalem? (Acts 9:13)
- 4) What would happen if St. Isidore decided by the hearing of his ears and was influenced by the bad reputation that preceded St. Moses the strong refusing to accept him among monks?

I think that the answer to these questions is very clear. If all these people would decide by the hearing of their ears, sinners would lose hope in Jesus Christ, Nathanael would not become a disciple, Saul of Tarsus would not become Paul and the church would not enjoy along generations his deep epistles that contains treasures of salvation mysteries, and St. Moses the strong would not become the great saint of repentance inspiring hope to the vilest sinners.

**There are many examples of situations in which a priest can decide by the hearing of his ears, among them are the following:**

- 1) Two arguing parties can come to the priest to present their problem. These two parties may be a couple, two servants, or two deacons...etc. It may happen that after the priest listens to the complainer he rushes out, proceeds in analyzing the problem and ends up in judging the second party without waiting till he listens to him. This rush may come out in the form of a frank declaration of the priest’s opinion in and diagnosis of the absent party, or it may come out in the form of being influenced by what the first party said, taking his side in advance and losing objectivity and neutrality in judgment. This leads the second party to feel that he already lost his credit with Abouna even before he knows and talks to him. In such case, it applies the saying of Solomon, “*The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him*” (Proverbs 18:17); and the saying of

Nicodemus, “*Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?*” (John 7:51)

- 2) A priest may be ordained in a church unknown to him, or he may initiate a new service in a new place. A lot of people then volunteer to warn him about some trouble makers in the place. He therefore becomes charged with anger against these people and while dealing with them cannot get rid of the preformed assumption about them. Whatever these people do, they fail to modify their image in Abouna’s eyes and to get out of the frame he locked them in.
- 3) Abouna may listen carefully to all the parties of an argument but he deals with the problem in a superficial way restricted to what he heard from both parties without going deep to identify the roots of the problem and deal with them, “*For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*” (1 Samuel 16:7). This looks like a physician who feels that the patient’s complaints are enough and doesn’t use his medical experience and knowledge to ask about any further possible symptoms. He therefore, gives a symptomatic treatment without diagnosing the illness and treating its causes.

### **How can a priest avoid falling in the snare of deciding by the hearing of the ears?**

- 1) A priest who is filled with and guided by the Holy Spirit asks counsel of the Lord (Joshua 9:14) and the Holy Spirit talks within his heart regarding all people and all things, “*But he who is spiritual judges all things*” (1 Corinthians 2:15); “*But as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things*” (1 John 2:27).
- 2) A priest who obtains the Father’s heart which accommodates all people, and the tender mercy of God never forgets during dealing with any conflict that he is a father to all people and that taking the side of one son on the expense of the other is never a characteristic of a good father.
- 3) Jesus commandment, “*Do not judge according to appearance*” (John 7:24) is very clear. Therefore, a priest must resist the normal human tendency to form impressions and must postpone developing hypotheses and assumptions until he listens to all parties. If the worldly laws state that a suspect is innocent until he is proved guilty then how much a priest of God must be objective and neutral?
- 4) A priest must examine well what he hears. Most of the time, people lack objectivity in telling the problem. They color their narration with their interpretations and add their subjective impressions to it, “*Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?*” (Proverbs 20:6). Some other times, a person lies and hide the truth intentionally. This is what the inhabitants of Gibeon did with Joshua by working craftily, and what Ananias and Sapphira his wife did with St. Peter by lying at him.
- 5) A priest must know about what is called “confirmation bias”. This means that a person while examining a certain matter tends to interpret any new emerging information in a way that supports his preformed hypothesis and assumption. For example, a husband may come to Abouna complaining of his wife’s trials to control him. Abouna then gets an impression about this wife that she has a controlling personality even before he meets her. Later on, when he meets her, he unconsciously starts asking her questions, guiding the conversation

and interpreting her answers in a way that supports his hypothesis about her that she has a controlling personality. A priest must be aware of this snare that deprives him of objectivity and must avoid falling in it.

### **The Service of Encouraging Others**

#### **Have you tried the service of encouraging others?**

Everyday people meet either with or without a purpose for specific or no specific reasons on or out of occasions. The first verbal interaction is usually the mechanical inquiry "how are you?" followed by a similarly void reply capsulated in "fine thank you". However, have you ever taken up the opportunity to look closely at someone's eyes or examine their facial expressions or limping posture to be concerned enough to inquire further with care-charged words such as "what is wrong" or "I see you are not feeling well". They might very well be waiting for such small attention in order to share their pain with you.

#### **Tips of Encouragement**

Your question and manner of concern and patience can be a cause for a great blessing to whoever you may encounter or an opportunity for throwing in a much needed encouraging word. Here are some suggestions for encouragement:

- It is important to realize that your need of encouragement is someone else's very same need.
- There is a love language the vocabulary of which is different from the common clichés. With this love language you can touch people's hearts and share with them what God has granted you. *"but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"* (Hebrews 3:13).
- When introducing someone, there is no harm in adding a few words concerning your good relationship with them or some words of praise and comments on their abilities and good performance. You can also relate incidences of help offered to you by that person. Such positive words go a long way in encouraging people. Whenever you hear of someone who has been discouraged or hurt for one reason or the other offer practical assistance by asking "how can I help you?" If he finds it difficult to answer you; you can rephrase your question by "would it be helpful if I did (such and such)?" or "I would love and I am ready to do (such and such)". When with some believers, remind them of God's faithful promises. We could very well be ready to help but there might be someone who needs God to work within them. As St. Peter says *"For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth"* (2 Peter 1:12).
- When someone asks for prayers; it is wrong to refrain and refuse the demand out of so called humility pretending that you are the one in need of prayers. This is only a wrong habit that has crept in our Christian society. Such a negative reply might bring about more discouragement to the person requesting prayers. Praying for others is a duty and right since we are all in a commune of love. Let your response for the prayer request be a

proof of your heart felt love. St. Paul addressing the believers in Romans says, *"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"* (Romans 15:13).

- Participate in the others' success and joyful events whether big or small; and let that be a regular routine in your relationship either by means of a message or a telephone call or a visit. Sad events require a bigger effort and stronger portion of love, participation and words of encouragement and consolation seasoned with the Holy Spirit's grace and comfort for the bereaved. Personal presence during such occasions is very important because its power grants special encouragement and greater effect than that conducted through a letter or a telephone call.

St. Paul concludes his message to the Colossians with the promise of sending Tychicus *"a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts"* (Colossians 4:7-8).

- If you are a member in a meeting or a servant or priest in a church, your presence in the midst of the members is encouraging to them and will enhance their understanding of fellowship and participation in the same faith and same one body and that they are not alone. That truth caused St. Paul to say, *"not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching"* (Hebrews 10:25).

A Christian is the only person who is able to offer encouragement. Those who need encouragement the most are those of low self-esteem who are of meager gifts, small power, little knowledge, hardly any patience and quick to fall in blunders. St. Paul calls such people 'fainthearted' and tells the church in Thessalonica, *"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all."* (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

- When you notice positive improvement in someone's life, follow it up with such encouraging statements as "I see you have made a considerable improvement in ....." or "I noticed you have become ....." or " have you not noticed that ....?"

As mentioned earlier, just as you have felt the need and effect of the others' encouragement to you, offer the same resultant satisfying effect to them by telling them how much you have been blessed by their encouragement.

Finally, dear reader, walk every day in the power of the Holy Spirit, asking Him to give you what is required for encouraging and comforting others. For, He is the Paraclete that is the Counselor, Comforter and Supporter.

Just as it is impossible to live a Christian life depending totally on oneself, it is also impossible to liberally and generously bestow encouragement on others without the help of the Divine comforter 'the Holy Spirit' Who is the one and only one true helper and comforter.

## **Articles on the Christian History - The Fourth Century The Fifteenth Article**

### **Healing of the foreign king's daughter (one of St. Anthony's miracles)**

The story has it that the king had a mentally afflicted son who would undergo fits of epilepsy. All the medical experts in the country failed to cure him. Getting to know about St. Anthony in the Eastern Egyptian desert, he sent messengers with gifts and provisions for the monks. St. Anthony refused to accept the gifts. With the help of an interpreter, the messengers asked St. Anthony to go with them. St. Anthony asked the advice of his disciple whether to go or not. To this, the disciple replied, "if you stay you are Anthony and if you go you are Anthona (a matter of name change)." St. Anthony replied 'I want to be Anthona.'

That night, St. Anthony completed his prayers at the monastery, and the following day carried by a cloud to the foreign country St. Anthony sat at the governor's door as a foreign monk. At night time, the king's minister passed by and seeing him, he order St. Anthony to come in the house. There, a mother pig had a blind and another lame piglet among her piglets. The mother pig brought her two babies and put them into St. Anthony's hands. St. Anthony addressed the host "it is not only the king who wants to have his daughter healed." Then, he drew the sign of the cross on the piglets and spit on the eyes of the blind one and both were restored. Those present were very surprised. News reached the king, so St. Anthony was taken to the king where he healed his son from his epilepsy and madness. In his humbleness, he said, "you have painstakingly sent fetching Anthonah, the Egyptian. For that reason, God has sent me to you." Then he bid the king farewell and left the king's palace carried by a cloud back to his monastery.

The following day the king's messengers met him and wanted him to heal the king's son. To this he replied, "go before me and I will follow you." So, they returned trusting St. Anthony's words. There they heard about the king's son having been healed by a different person. Thus was St. Anthony's desire to keep his gift of healing hidden. However, our Lord Jesus Christ did not chose to hide St. Anthony's virtues. Later on it became known that St. Anthony was the one through whom the king's son was healed. The messengers were greatly amazed how within one night he reached their country and returned back also in one night and that he spoke in their tongue. So, they praised God greatly.

### **The meeting of the two great leaders the father of monasticism and the father of asceticism**

Thinking of himself as being the first to reside in the wilderness, St. Anthony was guided by an angel to think otherwise. The angel took him to the place of a man whom the world does not deserve his footsteps. That man is St. Paul the Hermit whose prayers bring forth rain and stop droughts (his biography is found in the Synaxarum, the second day of the month of Meshir). The two saints met and talked about the greatness of God. In the evening, the owl assigned by God brought a complete loaf of bread instead of the usual half loaf. So, St. Paul commented, "now I am assured that you are a man of God. For, it has been over eighty years that the owl has been providing me with half a loaf. Now it brought a complete one, your food included in it as well."

At the end of the conversation, St. Paul asked St. Anthony to bring his priestly garment that belonged to St. Athanasius because his departure time was approaching. St. Anthony quickly returned to his cave to bring the tunic. On his way back he saw angels carrying St. Paul's spirit towards heaven with hymns and praises to God. St. Anthony reached St. Paul's cave, only to find him on his knees. He waited for St. Paul for a long time to finish what he thought was praying. In fact, St. Paul was not praying but had already departed to heaven. This was on the second of Meshir the year 341 AD.

Sad at the departure of his friend the saint, St. Anthony wondered how to bury him. Suddenly he saw two lions beside him. He pointed to the place where he would want a hole to be dug in order to bury St. Paul. To this they complied; and after digging a hole befitting the size of the body they departed. St. Anthony buried the body and kept the garb made from tree bark which he later presented to St. Athanasius who used to wear it on the special occasions such as the Nativity, the Epiphany, and the Resurrection.