

“What Kind of Cities Are These Which You Have Given Me, My Brother?”

When St. Basil the Great ordained his brother, St. Gregory, as a Bishop of Nyssa, which was a small unknown city, St. Usebius, Bishop of Samosata, sent him a letter rebuking him about this ordination saying that by such ordination “he was burying a well-known person in an unknown diocese”. St. Basilios replied to him in his 98th letter saying, “*I, too, was anxious that our brother Gregory should have the government of a Church commensurate with his abilities; and that would have been the whole Church under the sun gathered into one place. But, as this is impossible, let him be a bishop, not deriving dignity from his see, but conferring dignity on his see by himself. For it is the part of a really great man not only to be sufficient for great things, but by his own influence to make small things great*”.

The above story reminds us of a similar situation in the Holy Bible when, “*Hiram went from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him, but they did not please him. So, he said, “What kind of cities are these which you have given me, my brother?” And he called them the land of Cabul, as they are to this day*” (1 Kings 9:12-13). Scholars explained that the land of Cabul means the land of dirt or the displeasing land. Not that it was a barren soil, as some imagine; for they who describe those parts commend them as fruitful; nor would Solomon have made him so unworthy a return: but because it was not pleasant, nor agreeable to his nor to his people’s humor; because, though the land was very good, yet being a thick and stiff clay, and therefore requiring great pains to manure and improve it, it was very unsuitable to the disposition of the Tyrians, who were delicate, and lazy, and luxurious, and wholly given to merchandise.

This attitude of Hiram resembles the attitude of many servants in general, and many priests in particular, towards the service assigned to them. They say, like Hiram, “*What kind of cities are these which you have given me, my brother?*” Their service is unpleasant to them and they think that heavens made wrong calculations when they were given such a service!! It may happen that a priest is ordained to serve in a small church, poor congregation, or difficult people. He then feels that the church he is supposed to serve in or the congregation he is required to care of are not commensurate to his personal abilities and skills. This may lead the priest to feel frustration, boredom, and amotivation. He may even reach a point where he treats the congregation with a haughty demeaning manner.

In truth, the divine economy never does miscalculations. God’s intentions and statutes are good to all His works:

1) Many times, God means to expand the energies and capabilities of His priests and servants. He does this by exposing them to some challenges in their ministry which push them to get out of their comfort zone and acquire new skills and abilities. This is God’s good economy for the sake of the personal growth of His priests and servants.

2) God told Gideon that He would filter the people going out for war at the river. Likewise, God means to take away from the priest his dependence on his personal understanding, abilities, and powers to give space to the Holy Spirit to work in him and through him freely without any

hinderance, *“And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

3) God wants to teach the priest to acquire not his dignity and honor from the honor of the church or city he serves in according to St. Basil’s words to Eusebius. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who accepted to be called *of Nazareth*, bestowed a specific honor on this belittled city, Nazareth. God honors His servant’s place and make it abundant and prospering because of his faithfulness and humility. A spiritually and psychologically immature priest may feel insecure. He then seeks to acquire his identity as a priest and as a man from his service. On the other side, a priest who is full of the Holy Spirit becomes a blessing to every place he goes to, and is considered among those who *“shall build the old waste places”* (Isaiah 58:12)

The Extra Mile

The incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ marked the beginning of God's new covenant with mankind prophesied by Jeremiah *"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people"* (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

So, in His teachings, Jesus Christ offered His new covenant; and in the new birth He paved the way to the reception, acceptance, and practice of that covenant in order for humanity to live by His commandments willingly and wholeheartedly embracing goodness and sanctification while rejecting evil. Such a style of living requires walking what our Lord Jesus Christ called "the extra mile".

Our Lord Jesus Christ presented the commandment of the 'extra mile', in the sermon on the mountain *"‘You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,”* (Matthew 5:38-44).

In the same stream of thought, St. Paul continues to say *"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:21).

Be not overcome of evil means not to allow evil to overtake you and thus have victory over you by making you meet evil with evil; but ***overcome evil with good*** means not to give in to the common worldly desire of retaliating; but take refuge in grace and through a flow of love and benevolence go against the torrent of evil.

The Natural Law Against the Law of Jesus Christ

1. At the onset of history, before the institution of the Ten Commandments, God deposited a natural law, the conscience, within man. However, Cain hated his brother and killed him. Even Moses committed a totally vindictive act of murder killing the Egyptian “*So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, ‘Why are you striking your companion?’*” (Exodus 2:12-13).
2. Then came the Old Testament, the essence of which was justice not revenge. This meant to love your neighbor but avenge is required. For, the rule is: eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Although such a canon accomplishes justice and deter future insults, yet it establishes hatred captivating people in the feeling of contempt and desire for retaliation, putting both victim and attacker on the same ground.
3. Three hundred years later, sprang forth the light of the new covenant pronounced and accentuated with grace transferring mankind into the new creation in Jesus Christ “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Consequently, humanity would enjoy a law the core of which is love and which transcends the fleshly desires of retaliation. This covenant is inclusive turning every human into ‘my brother’ making the desire of the heart to subject everyone, even enemies and attackers, to the obedience of the truth.

The Drives to Live According to the Law of Jesus Christ

1. “*that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*” (Matthew 5:45). As children of the new covenant, we must be distinguished from the natural man not born from above.

“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20).

“For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?” (Matthew 5:46-47).

“And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil” (Luke 6:33-35).

2. As Children of God we must imitate our father “*But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons*

of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:35-36).

3. As children of the perfect God, we must strive perfectly. *“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).*

Walk the “Extra Mile”

When asked to walk a mile, be ready to walk an extra mile. This command, on its surface meaning, seems to address believers. However, in its essence, it describes Jesus Christ's performance with and in the believers; and shows Him a rewarder *“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil” (Luke 6:35).*

Jesus Christ wants to put Himself first and foremost in this command. He gave you a cross to carry. Consider it Jesus Christ's cross that He wants you to carry, while He walks beside you. Visualize Simon of Qayrawan ordered by the Jews to assist the Lord in carrying the cross. He obeyed and the Lord walked beside him. Such a meditation will transfer the burden of any cross to Jesus Christ thus changing the heavy nature of load to a light one; the lightness of obedience to the law and the joy therein and thereof. Such a behavior turns you from an obeying slave to a volunteering commander performing exactly like your Master *“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).*

The ‘extra mile’ has become a common concept expressing the need to exert effort and carry out more than is asked of us tolerating negative attitudes and behavior and not repaying evil for evil. This ‘extra mile’ concept generated the idea of volunteer work in different areas of social and even medical services.

The ‘Extra Mile’ in Service

Walking the ‘extra mile’ is a distinctive feature of the true Christians, especially servants serving in any field. Such behavior reveals the richness and perfection of Christianity exhibiting readiness to give from the generosity of our Savior. The spirit of the ‘extra mile’, in its essence, is going overboard, jumping over natural barricades to reach the supernatural that is concealed and wrapped in long suffering, perseverance, initiation and readiness to reach the excellence in performance without being watched over or expecting a reward. The spirit of the ‘extra mile’ is contrary to all the satanic spirits of laziness, reluctance, negligence and many other demonic spirits.

Practical Applications

1. Perpetual readiness to carry out any service and the initiative to help others following the footsteps of the Master who paid the price of our salvation long before we had believed.
2. Willingness to joyfully do what is asked of us without complaining about others or comparing with others. Although Martha was a good example of doing what she offered to do, but she was not the best example in not comparing herself with her sister and thus

complaining about her sitting at the Lord's feet. The 'extra mile' requires one to watch his own path not that of others.

3. True service does not favor rest; and a faithful servant does not cease following those whom he serves suffering pain for their sake driven by love for God and for them.
4. Forbearance towards family, friends, coworkers indiscriminately disregarding offenses and shortcomings *"bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do"* (Colossians 3:13).
5. Seeking to serve the poor generously according to the lord's words *"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you"* (Luke 6:38).
6. Caring for the weak, the sick, the crippled, the orphan, the stranger outside the family circle where caring for parents, and elders, comes first in the form of visitations, supervision, teaching, nursing, reconciliation and peacemaking. Outside the family circle in the area of various professions and jobs, caring as: teacher with his students, doctor with his patients, engineer with his co-workers, an accountant, a lawyer, an employer. In all these areas, the 'extra mile' spirit of responsibility and perfectiveness should prevail. It is the state of the art of modern societies.
7. The spirit of the 'extra mile' should color the life of Christians living in societies in need of evangelism. The 'extra mile' becomes the gate through which to enter and reach out with Jesus Christ; presenting Him as the Savior and loving servant. Nothing is more effective on the hearts of unbelievers than treatment according to the law of Jesus Christ which is the law of walking the 'extra mile' with them and for them.

It is important to know that all the commandments of Jesus Christ including that of the 'extra mile' require the assistance of grace and the Holy Spirit in order to be successfully and easily carried out. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome"* (1 John 5:3).

While the natural man considers such commandment as imaginative, impossible to be practically carried out, St. James urges us saying, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him"* (James 1:5). After that, the grace of God will take over the job of training our souls to obey the instructions of the Holy Spirit and to choose repentance as a guideline for our life. This benchmark will uproot all self love and indulgence, and will quicken our hearts to put our life in the hands of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Instructor and Counselor who will empower us to accept the law and seek implementation.

Articles on the Christian History

The Fifth Century

The heresy of Eutyches - the road to the first dissension within the one church

News about the appearance of a new heresy reached Alexandria through the abbot of a monastery near Constantinople. The heresy came from Eutyches, a former pious monk and head

of a big group of anchorites. Unfortunately he did not have enough knowledge concerning theological terms.

At first, Eutyches and his monks strongly supported Pope Cyril, the Pillar of Faith, in his fight against Nestorianism and endorsed the twelve anathemas. However, scarce knowledge, the agnostic heresy of the first century as well as the old philosophy concerning the sinful human body influenced Eutyches and led him to declare that the incarnate body of Jesus Christ was not taken from the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, a human flesh, but a heavenly, visionary, imaginary body.

Eutyches went further saying that the incarnate body has dissipated in the Godhead similar to the dissolution of a drop of water in an ocean. This is because the two natures have mixed together in one nature, the Godhead. From this exposition sprang the term “monophysitism” which is a big theological error. That is why during the Divine Liturgy, the church prays, “He made It one with His divinity without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration” (St. Basil Divine Liturgy, The Confession). In other words, in the process of unifying the divinity and the humanity in incarnation, the Divinity did not change His nature nor did any nature change the other nature; for, both have formed a new nature out of two natures while retaining the characteristics of each nature. Thus, the humanity remained a physical body and the divinity as He is in His deity. ‘Mono’ means one consisting of single while ‘mia’ means one united together.

Eusebius, bishop of Dorylaeun, (northwest of present-day Turkey) tried in a humble, logical, loving manner to clarify to Eutyches the extent of his faulty thinking. However, Eutyches, under the influence of his followers, refused to listen. Flavian, bishop of Constantinople (his director) tried to explain to Eutyches how his thoughts were more grievous than those of Nestorius, but to no avail. Two things resulted: firstly, Bishop Eusebius, fearing that Eutyches might sway the bishop of Rome to his side, tried corresponding with Leo, bishop of Rome to explain the theological discrepancies taking place in Constantinople. Secondly, Eutyches sent to Leo a message asking for support against Flavian of Constantinople who was about to convene a local convention to discuss that heresy.

The Constantinople Local Synod - A Prelude to the Second Synod at Ephesus

Seeing the quick increase and spread of evil menacing the church, Flavian hastened and convened a synod composed of his bishops to discuss that new heresy. During that time, a letter written in the Latin language (later, this letter and its interpretation became known as "Tome of Leo", was sent from Bishop Leo to Eutyches. The Greek translation of this letter was more in favor and support of the Nestorian heresy (as well as the views of Eutyches concerning the imaginary body of Jesus Christ and the concept of monophysitism) than in supporting the Orthodox dogma contained in the writings of Pope Cyril.

Chrysaphius, the chief minister of the Empire and friend of Eutyches attended the Constantinople local synod as representative of the emperor. The document accusing Eutyches was read and the fathers asked the attendees to call Eutyches to defend his beliefs. They repeated the calling three times, but he finally showed up at the seventh session. Even then, falsely claiming support from Leo's faith expressed in the letter, Eutyches offered lousy evasive answers; and in general, undefined expressions, he wrote down his faith that "Christ is the Word of God with one

Godhead nature". Seeing the unclear borders of Eutyches' faith, the Synod excommunicated him stripping off his priesthood because he proved to be heretic and because Leo's letter was not endorsed by the synod as a statement of faith like all the writings by Pope Cyril.

Taking advantage of the uproar of the population in Constantinople, the presence of Chrysaphius, his friend, and the support of Leo's letter, Eutyches tried to prove his innocence and pleaded for justification. So, aided by his eloquence and capacity of playing with the meaning of words in the Latin language, he wrote a letter composed of vague, undefined statements of broad meanings in which he opposed the Orthodox faith without referring to the two natures of Jesus Christ. Then, wanting to have his trial repeated before another synod, he sent that letter to many sees, among them was the See of Alexandria.