



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States**

**The Monthly Message
to the Fathers, the Priests**

November 2021
Virtues and Priesthood
Communication

Introduction

Communication in its simplest definition is the act of transferring information. Every communication involves a sender (or senders), a message (or messages) and a recipient (or recipients). Communication was created by God as a fundamentally important means to the existence and survival of His creation, sharing with them His ideas, information, views, facts, feelings and they alternatively with each other. The Old Testament is full of incidents of God's communication with humans starting from Adam to Abraham, Moses, and all the prophets just for the purpose of sending messages and sharing His mind and purpose.

Therefore, it is necessary not to think of communication as a modern innovation limited to and enhanced by the modern technological means.

Communication and Service

Since God Himself had sensed the importance of communication, therefore, we His servants must follow His footsteps and communicate with those whom we serve. Communicating here does not mean learning how to use the modern means of social media but communicating in the sense God has meant it to be as for example, when He sent Moses saying to him:

“Then Moses said to the Lord, 'O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' So the Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? 12 Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.' But he said, 'O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.’” (Exodus 4:10-13).

Another example is Jeremiah:

“But the Lord said to me: 'Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you,' says the Lord. Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant.’” (Jeremiah 1:7-10).

Three Important Cornerstones of Communication

1. Communicating with God

Communicating with God, in its rudimentary meaning is standing before God and continually remaining in His presence.

“This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet you to speak with you” (Exodus 29:42).

“But the priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer to Me the fat and the blood,” says the Lord God” (Exodus 44:15).

Those two incidents prove that God stresses the importance of standing before Him and communicating with him our hearts' desires conveying through prayers and supplications our needs and the ones of those whom we serve.

For a priest, communicating with God means:

- asking His opinion in matters concerning his life and that of those whom he serves
- relaying his burden, pain and suffering
- exposing his anxiety and lack of faith
- hearkening to God's voice during liturgical rites and prayers, readings in the holy word and practicing the church mystery of confession.

A priest who excels in communication with God will earn wisdom, discernment and immeasurable peace.

2. Communicating with Co-servants

A priest may be highly qualified and skilled; but if he does not possess good communication skills, all his ability becomes irrelevant. A priest must realize the importance of effective communication with the other priest(s) serving with him in the

same church or the subordinate servants and deacons in order to reap good fruit from their service.

Unfortunately, ignoring this aspect of communication, either intentionally or unintentionally, becomes detrimental leading gradually to big problems, opening the door wide to Satan to plant the seeds of strife and dissension that will ultimately lead to loss of love and compassion.

Communication can be conducted in various ways: verbally, non-verbally, visually or through writing. If any of these means are misused or abused through authoritarianism, disrespect, domineering, ignoring of others' opinions, belittling the service of others; then the result will ultimately be bad communication or the complete lack of it.

On the other hand, transparency and openness are the best tools of successful communication. St Paul practiced and taught good communication as it is obvious in his words to the Ephesian elders, *“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: ‘You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.’” (Acts 20:17-21).*

Effective communication brings about:

- depth in relationships
- reciprocation of value i.e. value to each other in each other

- an increase in the reservoir of new ideas and innovations
- victory over egoism and demolition of self-centeredness

3. Communicating with the Congregation

Communication with the congregation, the backbone of service, has totally different facets because a priest is ordained not for the purpose of implementing his own agendas and opinions. Rather a priest is primarily God's servant of God's children and their shepherd after Christ the Shepherd of all Shepherds. Christ has given the specifications of the good shepherd *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”* (John 10:11-16).

In that sense, the presence of a priest in his congregation's life through proper communication channels, is of maximum importance and the opposite is bad shepherding. A lot of priests became skilled in communicating with people on social media through sermons, beneficial conferencing etc.

However, there are still complaints among people concerning lack of care by priests. The answer comes from the fact that satisfying communication does not reside in a long sermon, eloquent talks or elegant comments; but it dwells in heartfelt association and

genuine, empathetic reaching out as described by St. Paul to the Romans, *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion”* (Romans 12:15-16).

A priest is said to have accomplished successful service when:

- he appreciates the essence of priesthood as being more than just a job for which he has been chosen and with which he has been entrusted
- he plants the seeds of love and compassion among his congregation
- he makes his congregation feel that he cares and are satisfied through this care

Conclusion

The essence of true love is defined by St John, *“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him”* (1 John 3:18-19).

The meaning of unreserved devotion to service is expressed by St. Paul, *“What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?”* (Galatians 4:15-16).

Both St. John and St. Paul have lived in an era wherein none of the present means of fast communication had existed; yet their messages have spread throughout the whole world in the most powerfully effective, concise, emphatic friendly, appreciative, polite emotion-controlled ways. How much more successful could service ever be! That achievement is described as success beyond success.