



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

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

**March 2024**  
**Diseases in Spiritual Leadership**  
**A Blind Leading a Blind (1)**

**Introduction**

With God's grace, a series of topics will be launched under the broad heading of "Diseases in Spiritual Leadership". These ailments are specific to priests as church leaders. We will try to shed light on the dangers of such diseases that might afflict a priest and subsequently his role as a leader and pastor of his congregation. This month's article will deal with the first topic, a blind leading a blind.

**A Blind Leading a Blind**

Spiritual discernment helps a priest spiritually perceive important issues in his service. The absence or loss of such spiritual insight and foresight will result in a lot of hazards. Our Lord has expressed the hazards and the subsequent horrific results for both the priest and the congregation "And He spoke a parable to them: 'Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? A disciple is not above his

teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.'" (Luke 6:39-40).

**Important Areas of Spiritual Blindness**

**1. Oblivion to Needs**

"Then Peter said to Him, 'Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?'" (Luke 12:41). In response to St Peter's question concerning the parable of the faithful and evil servant, the Lord laid down the foundation of stewardship and the reward therein and thereof.

"And the Lord said, 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.'" (Luke 12:42-48).

A leader who is oblivious to the needs of his congregation is like the unfaithful steward because he is basically ignorant of the existence of such needs and the importance of dispensing them. A doctor listens carefully to his/her patients' complaints in order to understand the reasons behind the afflictions. Likewise a priest should hearken to his people's grievances. If a priest gives the cold shoulder to his people's needs, then he could be:

- neglecting the urgency of getting to know his people individually through visitations
- focusing more on his vision concerning his service and implementing this goal through his sermons
- wasting more time on meetings with committees just for the sake of administering orders; but falling short of doing individual service
- allowing himself to be under the influence of certain individuals/families/the church committee through whom he formulates his opinions and aspirations which might cover just a part and not the entire comprehension and implementation of his duties. The danger of such a situation is that the priest gets deluded into thinking that he is close to his people through the small feedback that he gets from such a small representation of his congregation.

## 2. Shortsightedness

Superficiality, akin to shortsightedness, is the cause behind not dealing with an issue wholly and circumspectly. This does

not mean nor promote complicating things or going to the extreme in investigating matters and tiring people with questions. What is necessary is acquiring wisdom and understanding of the consequences and ramifications of certain decisions taken. A reasonable leader considers the long-term effects of a resolution; so that in the long run such a decision becomes a durably effective policy for years to come. Sadly enough, many priests lose this privilege of stability because of hasty conclusions and thus unanticipated consequences. One of the beautiful incidents in the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke wherein the Lord Jesus Christ presented His opinion about the sinful woman who came in the house of Simon the Pharisee. That event provided a chance for evaluation entirely different to what is commonplace. While Simon issued his quick verdict on the woman as sinful, the Lord's assessment was totally different, going deeper than the level of sinfulness, touching an arid ground in need of cultivation and irrigation in order to be turned into a fruitful orchard. Thus, the Lord had provided a lesson to leaders not to issue permanent labels on individuals, but be ready to see in people things that were eclipsed due to personal prejudices. More often than not, we act like Simon; and unwittingly drive away individuals who when they find warm, welcoming hearts somewhere else, they become fruitful servants. The secret resides in having a heart and a vision like those of the Lord Jesus Christ Who could see the depth of the woman's love that surpassed that of all those present including Simon himself.

### 3. Oblivion to One's Own Shortcomings

The most conspicuous sign of spiritual blindness is disregard of one's own faults or shortcomings. When a priest foolishly elevates himself to the status of "...Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God..." (Hebrews 7:1); he unrealistically interprets his own decisions as coming down from God.

In the Holy Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit had depicted the sad scenario concerning Herod's arrogance and self-deceit, "Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 12:20-23).

Any priest who considers his words sacred scripture descending from heaven, must revise his understanding about priesthood. It is true that we priests teach with God's unchangeable words. However, while we are under the direction of the Holy Spirit, yet all decisions concerning administration are manmade requiring discussion and thus liable to undergo revision and subsequent changes. A tangible example is in the Holy Book of Acts, "Now when they had

gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6).

In this incident, it is noticed that although the church leaders had taken a decision, but they were forbidden to implement it. Certainly, the Holy Spirit did not prohibit evangelism in Asia; but only for a certain period of time for a specific reason.

What is to be emphasized here is the need for humbleness before God on the part of priests especially regarding organizational issues. Insistence on one's own decisions just for the sake of personal gain and profile promotion can be destructive to the ministry.

Before being a successful leader, a priest is to be a faithful, humble servant in order to become a successful leader.

### 4. Blindness to the Existence of Others

To be blind to the existence of others simply means being unilateral in one's decisions with the exclusion of everybody else's; belittling people's opinions, gifts, talents and distrusting others' various contributions. Chapter 12 in St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians ought to be studied by priests and servants to learn about diversity within unity and so appreciate the different gifts and talents granted by the Holy Spirit; and thus, the subsequent need for each other.

Blindness to the important existence of others lead to two dangerous outcomes.

- **Enforced Vision.** Meetings with committees, servants or congregation for the sake of diplomatically imposing his unilateral opinion and not for exchanging ideas reveals a priest's blindness to the necessary existence of others. He might virtually open the floor for discussions; but at the back of his mind, the floor of discussions is open to pave the ground for enforcing his own previously premeditated decision without allowing himself to be enlightened and enriched by other points of view. In the Holy Book of Acts Chapter 15 we see a glimpse of a forum convened in Jerusalem for open discussion. "And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.' Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: 'Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no

distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.'" (Acts 15:1-11).

- **Selective Vision.** Seeing some rather than all those around a priest is a type of a discriminatory way of regarding and thus evaluating the congregation. Such a vision is directed only towards those who are like him sharing and propagating the same opinions, having the same prospects in service. Such an attitude opens the door wide to fake, pretentious performances substituting hypocrisy for faithful service confining the church to a single angle. Such an attitude opens the door wide to the opinions of a narrow sect of people, primarily the friends and the beloved ones. Thus, a priest becomes deluded and deceived into thinking that he is a good listener to all while in fact he is not. The best example found in the Old Testament is Rehoboam, son of Solomon, who having foolishly listened to his unwise friends ended up splitting the kingdom.

## Conclusion

A wise priest robes himself with humbleness that allows him to listen to and benefit from the opinions of both friends and opponents. His humility, meekness and love will help him win people and stir the leadership ship into the right direction of unity in diversity implementing St. Peter's words, "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;" (1 Peter 3:8).