

Biblical-Theological Reflection

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

(Acts of the Apostles 2:41-47)

The preceding text describes the first fruit of the preaching of the apostles following the descent of the Holy Spirit: about three thousand souls were baptized and daily new followers were joined to those who were saved. The Missionary Character of the early Church is so obvious, that it seems hardly necessary to point it out. We see it in as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, how quickly the preaching of the Gospel spread throughout the civilized world. We read in the writings of St. Paul and the other apostles how the newly founded Christian communities are instructed and reprimanded. The missionary character of the Church is also depicted in such figures as St. Andrew the first-called, and how he brought his brother Simon to Jesus, or in Philip who called Nathaniel (John 1: 40-41, 45-46). Similarly, the weak or sick go and proclaim how Jesus cured them: the leper (Mark 1: 45), dead-mute (7:36), the paralytic (John 5: 15). The Missionary character of Christianity even influenced the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (literally: “Good News”). When something good happens, that person feels the need to share it with others.

Mission in our Church

In the past, for some reason, it was thought that our Church was called to live in its own Ukrainian or even Halych ghetto, and that any mission to foreigners, to the non-baptized, to those yet to be enlightened by the Word of God was not for us, rather, this was the work for the more mature ecclesial communities, and especially for the Roman Catholic Church. However, the very nature of the Church means that it must bear witness to Christ and so share the good news with others. The fact that we continue to preserve the spiritual riches of the Kyivan-Byzantine tradition should not be an obstacle, on the contrary, when our tradition manifests itself in authentic Christian teaching and beautiful liturgical celebration, it provides a living testimony to the spiritual value of our tradition in contrast to the emptiness of today's materialistic culture.

Today on the territory of existing parish communities, whether in Ukraine or outside her borders, there are a multitude of people, who thirst for the Word of God. Not all of them are Ukrainians, nor of Ukrainian descent. However, if we are convinced that Christ is the Savior of humanity, and the Only Way to the Father, then it would indeed be strange if we did not feel the obligation to share with them the treasure of our faith, which we have received by the grace of God. The Lord reminds us: “freely you received, freely give.” (Matthew 10: 8)

In addition to this, it is important to establish new parish communities especially among migrants, who over the last ten years have emigrated from Ukraine in large numbers seeking work, whether in the East or in the West. Pastoral ministry under such conditions has its own requirements and challenges; however it can be a great blessing for the people and wonderful opportunity for pastors. In foreign countries, our parishes become a new spiritual home for these people, an opportunity to provide mutual assistance, and a center for spiritual and social life.

Missionary Spirit in Parish Life

If my parish is also called to live in a missionary spirit, what do we need to focus our attention on? To be a missionary parish does not necessarily mean that its members go out to the city center and begin to preach (although this would not be a bad thing!). A missionary parish is a welcoming and hospitable community both for its faithful and for strangers. Its members shine with the light of the Gospel, have a good word for everyone, are people of prayer, give example of an honest, upright life, and shine with good works - they are a light for the world, and the salt of the earth (see Matthew 5: 13-16). These characteristics are first manifested towards those who are closest: to family-related and non-related children, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, to fellow parishioners, to those who hold office in the community. Then these same characteristics find expression outside the parish,

towards members of other religious communities and congregations, to the civil authorities, and even to total strangers, whom they may meet for the first time. As a community, the vibrant parish follows the missionary activity of our Church in other parts of the world, and is able to respond favorably when assistance is needed, and support missionary activity wherever it may be required.

Within one's own environment to be a missionary today means not being afraid to openly witness your faith. A vibrant parish educates its children and youth in a missionary spirit, so that they may know the foundations of their faith and not be afraid to speak of them before others. The simplest sermon, to which we can encourage all our faithful, is to make the sign of the cross, reminding ourselves and others of God's presence: when we go past a church, when we begin a journey (eg. in a bus, train or airplane), before meals, etc. In many villages in Western Ukraine peasants customarily greet one another with the Christian greeting "*Slava Isusu Khrystu!*", and not only when there is someone present from the clergy. In general, we should ask ourselves a very simple question: can someone tell that I am a Christian simply based on my behavior, or not. We should remember that in our midst there are many, who have left the Church for a variety of reasons, or they don't attend simply because no one has ever said to them: "Come and see!" (John 1:46).

Most importantly, we need to live in our community, and the pastor must lead his congregation in such a way, that it is resplendent with evangelical joy and a godly life. In the end, a missionary spirit should be evident in all a parish does, because when it is a sign of God's presence in the world, in itself that proclaims the Good News. When the Church speaks today of evangelization, it is usually in such a broad sense, encompassing the fullness of Christian life.

The pastor of a vibrant parish lives with a missionary spirit - the Gospel of Christ shines forth from him.

PERSONAL EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

1. Do I personally promote a missionary spirit in my life?
2. Is it evident from my behavior that I am a Christian?
3. Am I willing to begin a conversation with strangers about God, my faith or the Christian perspective on various social questions?

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE FOR THE PARISH COMMUNITY

1. Does our parish community actually promote a missionary spirit? How?
2. What could be done in our parish for the strengthening its witness to Christ in the world?
3. Does our parish promote accessibility, openness, and readiness to share its spiritual treasures with all, who thirst to encounter Christ?