



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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May His Memory Be Eternal!:
Gregory Sanders: Reader George (1937-2012)
December 31, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

It was a bittersweet day – frigid with the cold of early winter but warm with the grace of the Spirit. We laid our brother, Reader George, to rest with the wondrous rites of the Orthodox Church that he loved so very much. After we prayed the full Orthodox Funeral Service and commended to the Lord's care at the gravesite, we gathered together at the church social hall for a mercy meal with members of our Church family at the Entrance Mission and with a number of Reader George's relatives to remember and share. Below, are some thoughts that I wrote down in honor and respect of his life that shown forth with the presence of our Lord:

How can we ever sufficiently express the value of a human life – created in the ineffable beauty of God's own divine image with the infinite capacity to grow unto the likeness of the One True God?

Normally we begin with the dull facts and figures of chronology, the things that an undertaker is required to report dutifully to the newspaper: birth, events, family, accomplishments, earthly things that have

little value in the Kingdom of God. Those things are all available for us to read; some of them are interesting, but none of them are vital.

What is vital is our experience of the presence of God in this man that all of us loved. Gregory Sanders – Reader George – Brother George – a Benedictine Oblate, a true brother in Christ, a man who stood and prayed with us, who chanted for us, and who participated in our fellowship with such joy during these past years of turmoil and blessing.

While others wagged their heads and pointed their fingers, Gregory would simply say, “Coming to this parish, Father, is like living the Book of Acts.” How much it meant to me to hear him say it! He understood the spiritual life as a dynamic adventure – and knew what and who we are as a Traditional Orthodox community in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. He recognized the presence of the Master and discerned the power of the Holy Spirit in our midst. He was honest and straightforward and true; he was faithful to the end; he was loyal to the Lord, and not ashamed of Him one little bit; and of Reader George, the Lord will not be ashamed either when He comes in His glory at the end and beginning of time.

And while I licked my wounds and entered life in our new Traditional Orthodox Church with timidity, Reader George was rearin’ and ready for it. “Oh boy!” he said; “Oh boy, Father! How could we ever have found a Bishop like Metropolitan JOHN? I didn’t think there were any like that anymore!” By that he meant a Bishop who was spiritual, a Bishop who looked to the needs of his community selflessly, himself living in poverty. This Gregory understood and appreciated. He lived in poverty too. There was no pretense or self-service about him. His love for the Lord was genuine. His self-giving was also genuine; and even his offering to the church was the true widow’s mite – he could not afford much, but he gave it without flinching and with meticulous regularity, and every time I received it I could not help but make the sign of the cross in recognition of his love for the Lord.

On December 24 I came to the church to celebrate the Divine Liturgy on the day that all of us without exception had been reared to observe as Christmas Eve. It seemed to so many of us impious to stay away from the Temple on that day, when we had been accustomed for so many years before to be there in church. The Divine Liturgy in commemoration of St. Herman of Alaska was therefore scheduled and many of you set out for the Services; one of you made it but had to return home; the snow was too heavy and the roads just too treacherous. I continued with the Services by myself, following Kairon with Vesting, Prokomeia, the Ninth Hour, Compline and finally the Typika, unable to celebrate the Divine Liturgy because of the fact that I was alone. But as I prayed the Typika, I realized I was not alone. Three times, as I sang the Antiphons, read the lessons, sang the ektenias, and then partook of the Precious Body and Blood of our Lord from the Tabernacle, I had to actually turn around and peer out the Royal Doors to see who had come into the Temple. I felt a definite presence there that evening – not one that was frightening, but a presence nevertheless. I understand now that our beloved Reader’s spirit was indeed with me at the Divine Services, as he was always with me at the Services when he was in the flesh. There is a brief time after the soul separates from the body, you see, that the spirit of a man may hover around those places he knew and loved; it is a short time, perhaps no longer than three days or so; but the holy fathers speak of it in their writings. Then, the soul is borne by the angels to the Lord. I know that our

Reader was there with me on the evening of the 24th, even as he would have been there in the flesh if it had been possible for him.

I could say many more things about Reader George – how he loved and spoke of his funny little cat Tyro – how he loved the old comic Lil Abner, the original Star Trek series, the old movies, the history of the Byzantine and Holy Russian Empires, and so on. These are things that I will cherish in my memory.

But the most important thing for us to remember is his example. Reader George was steadfast in prayer. He prayed the Hours every day, Compline and an Akathist to the Mother of God, naming every one of us in his prayers, and naming every one of our loved ones who had departed this life as well. These things he did in love for Jesus Christ, for you see he understood very well indeed that Jesus Christ is the only hope, the only sure foundation, the only security that we can have. He knew that when the soul separates from the body, aged and diseased as it was, that the Lord would take it and preserve it until that day when the Creator of all refashions the body and reunites it with the soul preserved by the Lord. As such, he understood that the place of our encounter with God, through the Mystery of His Self-Giving to each of us, is the Church. Reader George understood this with every ounce of his being. He respected the Church and was with us all in a fellowship of charity and joy, because he loved the Lord and accepted the call of Him in a faith that was simple and pure. The Reader accepted above all things the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and knew that because He lives, we shall all live with Him forever.

This is the example he leaves us. Faithful – steadfast – loyal – committed to the Lord in all things. Now, his soul is in the hands of the Lord who created Him, Who loves him, Who forgives him of any and all of sins, and Whom Reader George loves in return. This is our faith, and the example of his life among us is the path that each of us should follow ourselves if we wish to honor his memory and grow in the spiritual life ourselves; let us learn, Brothers and Sisters, from his example, and let us pray for him with gratitude to the Lord of all.

May his memory be eternal. May he inherit the Kingdom of Heaven!

Remember what the LORD has done for you! Give Him thanks and praise! *Glory to His NAME for all things!* Pray for me, His most unworthy of priests.

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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