

18a: Prayer: Liturgical and Personal**Liturgical and Personal Prayer is One**

Prayer is the very lifeblood of a Christian. It is at once both personal and communal, the prayer of the mind in the heart and the common prayer of the liturgical services and the saints. Neither of these forms are to be divided or set against one another without injury to both. Let us be clear: there is no division between personal prayer and liturgical prayer, between family prayer and monastic prayer. In the Holy Spirit, the praises and prayers of the believers rise to heaven, whether in the temple, the icon corner at home, the monastic cell or in any place where an altar in the heart has been built. The majestic and glorious harmony of prayer has been beautifully captured poetically in the English language in this piece, entitled simply "Prayer," by George Herbert (1593-1633):

Prayer the church's banquet, angel's age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth
Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tow'r,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-days world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;
Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
The Milky Way, the bird of Paradise,
Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,
The land of spices; something understood.

Just as C. S. Lewis was in many ways a precursor before his time indicating how Western Christians might learn to embrace Orthodox faith, theology and life, so George Herbert was a mystical poet of Orthodoxy well before his time.

Personal, Liturgical Prayer with the Saints

First, we need to understand that both personal and liturgical prayer is exemplified in the lives of the saints. Notwithstanding the unity and harmony of all prayer, differing forms of the same require varying treatments for prayer to be both God centred and, therefore, effective. We know that the Publican prayed but his prayer was not acceptable to God; indeed, the

scriptures record that he prayed *to himself*!¹ Clearly, since it was the prayer of the abject sinner, the tax collector, that justified him before God, humility must be the first keynote of any truly Christian prayer. The Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian, offered at any time but especially during Great Lent, perfectly encapsulates this frame of mind and heart:

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Thy servant.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou, unto ages of ages. Amen.

After humility, another important attribute of effective prayer is faith—that is, a radical trust in God and acceptance of His will. Now, our model for both humility and faith is the Theotokos whose simple prayer at the Annunciation brought salvation to the world: “Let it be unto me according to Thy Word.”² Finally, personal prayer must be in the Holy Spirit if it is to be anything other than merely human words, however well-intentioned and sincerely uttered. This is why all Orthodox Christian prayer, whether in Church or at home, at school, at work or in rest, starts with an invocation of the Holy Spirit.

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere and fillest all things; Treasury of Blessings, and Giver of Life. Come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

Everything else concerning prayer is built on these four qualities: humility, trust in God, obedience and the Holy Spirit. The forms of prayer and how they are offered must always be subordinate to these controlling principles. Nonetheless the form and manner of personal prayer also matters.

The basic structure of personal prayer is in no way different in form to that offered in the temple of God throughout the day, that is, the Hours of Prayer, otherwise known as the Horologion or as it is known in the West, the Office. The unabbreviated Horologion is usually only used in full by a monastic but selections from the same constitute the liturgical basis of personal prayer and is the common prayer for many parishes. Thus, the believer is enabled to pray with greater ease in the church itself when the assembly gathers to pray in common. These selections for personal prayer may be assembled privately from books of manageable scope, designed to facilitate prayer throughout the week for all types and conditions of people in daily life.

There is no single standard format since a rule of prayer should be blessed by a person’s spiritual father, mother or priest to be appropriate for each person’s spiritual condition and

¹ Luke 18:11

² Luke 1:38

circumstance. This blessing also extends to the length and frequency of such prayers in order to avoid the twin dangers of both sloth and pride.

Many assume, incorrectly, that extempore personal prayer—that is prayer from the heart in one's own words—is foreign to the Orthodox way of life. However, to pour one's heart out before God in thanksgiving, praise and supplication in one's own words is endorsed by the whole Christian Tradition in all places and times. This is not a substitute for liturgical prayer, as some Protestant Christians suppose, but rather a complement to liturgical prayer. Ideally, personal prayer should be offered at the conclusion of the more formally set out prayers of the Church and the Saints.

Mention should also be made of the Jesus Prayer, the classic Prayer of the Heart, uttered of course by the tax collector in the aforementioned parable: "God be merciful to me a sinner!"³ The more usual form now is: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." This prayer is to be offered consciously and intelligently by way of repetition in the heart of the believer wherewithal beforehand the mind has consciously descended to commune with God and implore his mercy—from the heart, from the centre of one's being. It is not, therefore, some sort of Orthodox 'mantra' but rather a prayer of transformation in the gospel truth of God's forgiveness for which the prayer itself is such a rich and eloquent summary, focusing on Christ and His Lordship. Again, for the sake of salvation, the manner and frequency of recitation should be a matter for guidance and blessing from one's spiritual father or mother.

Finally, all personal prayer is made in the company of the Theotokos, the saints and the angels of God. The holy icons have their own special role here. Every time we withdraw to our icon corner or enter an Orthodox church, they remind us that the saints are with us, drawing us deeper into either personal prayer or common worship by their intercession, friendship and protection.⁴ Christian prayer is never, therefore, a lonely thing even when one is alone. It is to be part of an orchestra of the Holy Spirit amidst many souls, past and present. These are our fellow pilgrims who urge us on to a deeper prayer and a more sacrificial service to God, the 'Philanthropos' the Lover of Mankind. It is fitting therefore that we should link ourselves to action. Never forget that the word "liturgy" is derived from the Greek word *leitourgia* meaning "public service," or "the work of the people."

From Prayer to Action

It is then through personal prayer that each of us link ourselves to the Holy Spirit, the Church and its saints in the midst of our struggle to link our lives to the will of God. Alice Meynell

³ Luke 18:13

⁴ In *Praying with Icons* (Maryknoll, NY: 1997). Jim Forest offers a comprehensive, but readily understood, guide to iconography and praying with icons. Each icon speaks uniquely to each person; however, an impressive guide to understanding the composition and symbolism of individual icons is Alfredo Tradigo, *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church* (Los Angeles, CA: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006).

(1847-1922) captured both the challenge and the rewards of personal prayer in the opening verses of her poem, “To the Mother of Christ, the Son of Man:”

We too (one cried), we too,/ We the unready, the perplexed, the cold,/Must shape the Eternal in our thoughts anew,/Cherish, possess, enfold./ Thou sweetly, we in strife,/It is our passion to conceive Him thus/ In mind, in sense, within our house of life;/That seed is locked in us.

What Alice Meynell is saying is that Christ is formed in us, as He was in the Theotokos. Each of our houses of life is unique; yet each of us has “locked in us” that seed of personal prayer. All we need to do is irrigate that seed with the tears of repentance and the waters of baptismal grace in the Holy Spirit. Fruitfulness is the goal for this germinating seed - a life transformed to serve God. That germinating seed will not achieve its goal until the plant give solace to all nations.

Communal, Liturgical Prayer with the Church

Communal prayer in the Church has from the start been exclusively liturgical for many different and wholesome reasons. Among these we might mention:

1. Communal prayer in the Church was deeply influenced by the legacy of the People of God before the Incarnation. Synagogue and Temple worship was thoroughly liturgical—one might say, exclusively liturgical. We know this from the Scriptures themselves.
2. St. Paul had occasion to deal with what I call “pneumatic excess” in some aspects of the Church’s worship at Corinth, particularly glossolalia (ie. preaching in tongues) or ecstatic (i.e. non-liturgical) utterance; hence his injunction that “all things [should] be done decently and in order.”⁵
3. The liturgical character of the Church’s worship reflects her accumulation of spiritual wisdom from all the saints across the ages, thereby avoiding the idiosyncrasies of those who might (and indeed do in some places) distort Christian believing and practice by their self-authenticating and allegedly prophetic utterances, thereby placing an excessive focus on the preacher or speaker.

Communal prayer is not only liturgical but also holistic—that is, it involves the whole community, the whole person (body, mind and spirit) and all the senses and the whole faith of the Church in the prayers and the hymns. It is rich with Scripture as the following compilation in relation to the Eucharist alone shows (page 5):

⁵ 1 Corinthians 14:40 and 1 Corinthians 14 more generally.

The Scripture in the Divine Liturgy

Opening Doxology ["Blessed in the Kingdom..."]
Mark: 11:10; Luke: 22:29-30, Matthew: 28:19;
Revelation: 7:12.

The Great Litany - Philippians: 4:6-7; Psalm 51:1
Luke: 18:13; John: 14:27; 1 Timothy: 2:1-2;
1 Hebrews: 13:7; Psalm 109:26; Luke: 1:42.

The First Antiphon - ["Bless the Lord, O my
soul"]. Selected verses from Psalm 103.

The Second Antiphon - ["Praise the Lord, O
my soul"]. Psalm 103.

The Hymn to Christ Incarnate - ["Only-
begotten Son...,"]. John: 1:1, 3:16, 17:5, 19:18;
Luke: 1:35; Hebrews: 2:14; Matthew: 8:25.

The Third Antiphon - [The Beatitudes].
Matthew: 5:3-12.

The Little Entrance - ["Come let us worship..."]
Psalm 95:1-6; Revelation: 7:11-12.

The Trisagion - ["Holy God, Holy Mighty...,"]
Isaiah: 6:1-5; Revelation: 8:8.

The Responsorial Psalms - Psalms 12:7,1;
28:9,1; 29:11,1; 33:22,1; 47:6,1; 76:11,1; 104:24,1;
118:14,18.

The Epistle - readings change daily, from the
Epistles or Acts of the Apostles.

The Allelularion - Psalms 113:1; 135:1; 146:1;
Revelation: 19: 1-6.

The Gospel - readings change daily.

The Sermon - 1 Timothy: 4:13.

The Cherubic Hymn - ["Let us who mystically..."]
Colossians: 3:12; Psalm 24; Revelations: 19:1-6.

The Eucharist - 1 Corinthians: 11:27-29; Matthew:
16:16; 1 Timothy: 1:15; Mark: 14:45; Luke: 23:42-
43; Isaiah: 6:7; 1 Timothy: 1:14; James: 4:8; Psalm
118: 26-27; Psalm: 34:8; 1 Peter: 1:19; John: 6:
32-35, 48-58; Psalm 116:13; Psalm 28:0.

Hymns after Holy Communion - ["We have
received the true Light..."]. John: 1:9; Rev.: 3-14;
Psalm 71:8; Chronicles: 16:9; Ephesians: 3:9.

Litany after Communion - Judges 18:6;
Colossians: 3:17; Mark: 11:9.

The Great Entrance - Psalm 43:4; Matthew: 5:
23-24; Hebrews: 5:1.

The Peace - ["Peace be unto all..."]. John: 20:
9,21,26. 1 John 4:7; 1 Peter: 3:8; Philippians:2-2.

The Kiss of Peace - ["Christ is in our midst...,"].
Luke: 7:45; 1 Corinthians: 16:20; 2 Corinthians:
13:12; 1 Thessalonians: 5:26; 1 Peter: 5:14.

The Eucharistic Canon - ["Let us stand aright"]
Leviticus: 3:1; Hebrews: 13:14-15; Hosea: 6:6;
Psalm 49:19; Matthew: 9:13; Corinthians: 13:14;
2 Timothy: 4:22; Lamentations: 3:41.

The Eucharistic Prayer - ["Holy, Holy, Holy..."
through the Consecration]. Isaiah: 6:3; Mark:
11:10; Matthew: 21:9; Corinthians: 11:23-24;
Matthew: 26:26-28; John: 6:51; Luke: 22:20;
Mark: 14: 23-24; Corinthians: 29: 14, 16;
Romans: 21:1.

The Hymn to the Mother of God - ["It is truly
right..."]. Luke: 1:28, 42, 48.

The Concluding Eucharistic Prayers - 2
Maccabees: 12:44-45; 1 Timothy: 2:2; 2 Timothy:
2:15; Romans: 15:6; Titus: 2:13; Revelations:22:21

The Litany before the Lord's Prayer-Ephesians:
5:2; Philippians: 4:18; 1 Peter: 3:15; Corinthians:
5:10; Ephesians: 4:13; Philippians: 2:1.

The Lord's Prayer - Matthew: 6:9-13; Corinthians
29:11.

The Elevation of the Holy Gifts - ["Holy things
are for the Holy."] Leviticus: 11:44; Philippians:
2:10-11.

The Communion Hymn - ["Praise the Lord..."]
Psalm 148:1.

Prayer behind the Ambo - ["O Lord, who
blesses those who..."]. Genesis 12:3; Psalm
28:9, Psalm 26:8; Psalm 138:8,1; 1 Timothy:
2:2; James: 1:17.

"Blessed be the name of the Lord, from
this time forth and for evermore!" Psalm
113:2.

"The blessing of the Lord...". Psalm 129:8;
2 Corinthians 13:14.

The Dismissal - 1 Timothy: 1:1.

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How to Pray the Liturgy

In the light of this incredibly rich content, the enquirer might ask: “how, practically speaking, do the believers pray in the Liturgy?” This is an excellent question but involves concepts and practices now somewhat unfamiliar to a heterodox, particularly Protestant frame of mind. This is how Father Thomas Hopko describes the process and experience of liturgical prayer that is, as he suggests, “praying *with* the Church.”

Practically this means that one who participates in liturgical prayer should put his whole being, his whole mind and heart, into each prayer and petition and liturgical action, making it come alive in himself. If each person does this, then the liturgical exclamations become genuine and true, and the whole assembly as one body will glorify God with ‘one mouth, one mind and one heart.’⁶

What Father Thomas Hopko is raising here is the very practical necessity of teaching neophytes the words that other people are praying; however, all of us can be deeply influenced by the challenge to put our whole minds and hearts into every prayer, petition and liturgical action, to make it come alive within ourselves.

There is not, therefore, a time in Orthodox services when the people ‘begin to pray’ as it were. Everything uttered and every silence should be incorporated into each person’s prayer. By such continual immersion in the worship of the Church, verbal and non-verbal, with its deep Scriptural foundations, a Christian maximises his or her opportunities to be more closely conformed to Christ who is the New Creation of a renewed humanity in each person by the Holy Spirit. Worship then becomes truly transformative. The ebb and flow between these personal and communal aspects of Orthodox Christian prayer irrigates and brings to newness of life even the driest and hardest of souls but only *IF* there is an openness to the Holy Spirit working in the body of Christ, which is the Church. Furthermore, this understanding of Orthodox prayer presupposes that every Orthodox Christian in every Orthodox Church understands every word of every prayer. This is Orthodox Christian prayer, as Herbert proclaimed:

... Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,/ Exalted manna, gladness of the best,/ Heaven in ordinary, man well drest ...

To participate in both personal and liturgical prayer is challenging, but prayer is a necessity in all of our lives, as Alice Meynell confirms in closing her poem, “To the Mother of Christ, the Son of Man”:

⁶ Fr. Thomas Hopko, *The Orthodox Faith: Spirituality, Liturgical Prayer* (New York: OCA Dep’t of Religious Education, Vol. IV, 1976), p.139.

We must affirm our Son/ From the ambiguous Nature's difficult speech,/ Gather in darkness that resplendent One,/ Close as our grasp can reach./ Nor shall we ever rest/ From this out task. An hour sufficed for thee,/ Thou innocent! He lingers in the breast/ Of our humanity.

An excellent resource for exploring Orthodox Christian prayer in more depth may be found [here](#)⁷. Concerning the Jesus Prayer, we refer you to an excellent lecture by His Eminence Metropolitan Kallistos Ware based on his book "The Power of the Name" - [here](#).⁸

Homiletics

18b: The Art and Science of Communication

Communication has been succinctly defined as "the imparting of information, ideas, etc." (Chambers 21st Century Dictionary). However, it is helpful to add a further challenge: "Communication requires a sender, a message and an intended recipient ... Furthermore, "the communication process is [only] complete once the receiver has understood the sender." (Source: "Communication"⁹).

Reflecting on the communication process leads to a key insight—if you wish to understand a message you must learn how to listen to the one who sends the message. Otherwise, instead of a communication, you will hear only noisy confusion. Unfortunately, like the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), much of today's preaching and teaching collapses because we have lost the ability to communicate. Gerard M. Bray of the Department of Electrical Engineering at the University of Edinburgh is right to remind us that to avoid such a collapse, we need to: (1) establish and clarify an aim; (2) plan how to achieve that aim; and (3) check afterwards that we have achieved that aim. (Source: "Conversation as Communication" p.8¹⁰).

Uniting the Capacity to Love and the Capacity to Communicate

Lecture 2 of this series of talks on preaching and teaching set an explicit aim for the teacher, the preacher and the listener—to become one with God. In planning how to achieve that aim we seek to unite two attributes of God—"the capacity to love and the capacity to

⁷ <http://www.orthodoxprayer.org/>

⁸ <https://youtu.be/d1-lBqTodZ0>

⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication>

¹⁰ www.see.ed.ac.uk/~gerard/Management/art7.html

communicate.”¹¹ How can we each increase our capacity to love God, to love others, to love the whole of creation? A tough question. Perhaps part of the answer is simply learn to communicate better, learn to reach out to the other person, the new situation, the unexpected challenge, without putting ourselves at the centre, but by genuinely focusing on the other person, the new challenge.

Improved communication often begins in our own silence, with waiting for the other person or for God to communicate, rather than assuming that we alone possess the pearl of wisdom that will bring love and hope into a situation. If we are always projecting our lives and ideas onto others, they will not experience the space to think, to feel and to grow for themselves. Therefore, in preparing our preaching and teaching we need to listen to God.¹² In evaluating our preaching and teaching, we need to become conscious of how we are talking and relating to others, as well as how we are relating to God.

The Art of Communication

An art has been defined as “a skill, especially one gained through practice.” But precisely what does one need to practice? It is helpful to know that the process of communication can be divided into three components: (1) the written (or spoken) word—17%; (2) the tone of voice—34%; and (3) body language—49% (Source: Sean Rasmussen, “Mastering the Art of Communication”¹³). When we preach and teach, all three of these components are operational. Much of our preparation for both teaching and preaching focuses on the written word; however, we also need to learn how to improve our tone of voice and our body language.

A useful exercise is the Alexander Technique, developed by the Australian actor, F. Matthias Alexander (1869-1955) who taught that “the majority of us need to re-learn—very consciously—how to use our bodies in a more efficient way during the activities of daily living.”¹⁴ In the midst of a painful experience of losing his voice, Alexander realised that he needed to change his head/neck coordination (“let the neck be free”), and then “the misuse of the rest of his body was much reduced” (p. 21). This conscious awareness of body movement and position (known as kinaesthesia) is not merely a form of exercise but an attempt to use common sense and experimentation to regain control of one’s body through a five-step process: (1) Pause—Stop where you are and just wait; (2) Notice—Become

¹¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, “Writing as a Means of Grace,” pp. 123-124, William Zinsser [ed.], *Going on Faith: Writing as a Spiritual Quest* [New York: Marlowe, 1999] pp. 121-136

¹² Gary Noesner's comments about the art of conversation are equally relevant to the art of communication: "To listen closely and reply well is the highest perfection we are able to obtain in the art of conversation" (*Stalling for Time: My life as an FBI Hostage Negotiator* [New York: Random House, 2010], p. 63.

¹³ www.seanrasmussen.com/attitude/mastering-the-art-of-communication

¹⁴ Jonathan Drake, *Body Know-How: A Practical Guide to the Use of the Alexander Technique in Everyday Life* [London: Thorsons/HarperCollins, 1991], p. 10

aware, without making changes; (3) Inhibit—Say ‘No.’ Stop yourself from engaging in a pattern that habitually kicks in with a thought/action. (4) Direct—Formulate a clear thought of what you want. It is a thought, not a doing; and (5) Allow—Let your body respond as designed, without imposing your habits, misconceptions, or preconditions.”¹⁵

It is important to note that the Alexander Technique is simply a means of becoming conscious of how one is using one’s body and has nothing to do with New Age philosophies or pseudo-scientific perspectives. However, to engage in the art of communication effectively one is concerned not only with the body and the mind but with the spirit—with the aim of being a calm and loving person who is praying and worshiping God and not projecting fear or confusion onto others. For that reason, in order to improve one’s skills in communication, it might be useful to review Lecture 72, Healing and Deliverance, because the art of communication is concerned with the whole person.¹⁶

The Science of Communication

The modern science of communication began with Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver’s work for Bell Laboratories, set out in their book, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1949). This attempt to quantify information has grown into information theory that analyses the efficiency of communication channels, as a branch of applied mathematics and electrical engineering (see “Information Theory”)¹⁷. Moreover, such precise description of information is increasingly of interest to non-scientists, especially in analysing the world not only in terms of matter and energy, but also of information.¹⁸

In the context of preaching and teaching two kinds of communication are relevant:-

- (1) explanatory writing and speaking that transmits existing information or ideas; a
- (2) exploratory writing and speaking in which the road to be taken “will reveal itself” in the midst of “a voyage of discovery.”¹⁹

Explanatory writing and speaking “begins with one word:

¹⁵ Nancy Heisel Dawley, *Guided Lessons: For Students of the Alexander Technique*, “Definition of Terms,” *Cincinnati, OH: FourWinds Academy Press, 2001

¹⁶ In a study of the integration of medicine and spirituality, John T. Chirban (Ed.), *Holistic Healing in Byzantium* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), Jaroslav Pelikan and Maria Evangeliatou have set out how healing relates to the entire person, both body and soul, pp. xiii, 173-242.

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_theory

¹⁸ This theme has been clearly summarized by William Zinsser on pp. 58-61 of *Writing to Learn* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), citing Jeremy Campbell, *Grammatical Man: Information, Entropy, Language, and Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982). In *Information and the Nature of Reality: From Physics to Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Paul Davies and Niels Henrik Gregerson (Eds.) have expounded information theory in an historical narrative of “wrestling with the theme of God as the ultimate informational and structuring theory of the universe.” See also James Gleick, *The Information: A History, A Theory, A Flood* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011).

¹⁹ William Zinsser, *Writing to Learn* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 56.

Think! Ask yourself: ‘What do I want to say?’ Then try to say it. Then ask yourself, ‘Have I said it?’ and continue to question yourself: “What do I need to say next? ... Will it lead logically out of what I’ve just said or written? Will it also lead logically toward where I want to go? ... If you force yourself to think clearly you will speak and write clearly. It’s as simple as that. (Zinsser, p. 56)

Exploratory writing and speaking “requires no such cognition, no prior decisions about which road to take,” because one does not set out with a specific goal, but rather with a determination to explore, heading for an unknown destination (Zinsser, p. 57).²⁰ One prays and asks for the Holy Spirit to be the guide toward the idea and destination that is best for this particular audience at this particular time. Often it helps to “take a running jump”—that is, to read and reflect about what one has just formulated in search of the next relevant idea. The resulting ideas and stories and reflections can take “a multitude of forms” and often lead to “places where you least expect them to be” (Zinsser, p. 10). The aim is for the teacher, the preacher and the listeners “to gain wisdom” (Zinsser, p. 26); however, it is a wisdom that emerges from prayer and reflection that will often be as surprising to the teacher or preacher as to the students. In the midst of this “voyage of discovery” it is essential “to impose narrative shape on an unwieldy mass of material” (Zinsser, p. 30); in other words, even if sometimes the final destination is initially unknown, the voyage to that destination needs to be a story—a narrative, that makes sense.

Is Your Teaching and Preaching Effective? How Can You Know?

Led by an angel into the desert along the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, the apostle Philip overtook the chariot of a distinguished Ethiopian administrator, probably a proselyte (that is, a convert) to Judaism, who was reading the book of the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked this “eunuch of great authority” the question that confronts every teacher and preacher: “Do you understand what you are reading?” (Acts 8:26-40). The Ethiopian replied with a question: “How can I understand unless someone instructs me?” Therefore, Philip begins to expound and interpret the Scriptural passage until the Ethiopian seeks the transformative experience of being baptised, to which Philip assents, because Philip is convinced that his teaching and preaching has indeed been effective in bringing belief that “Jesus Christ is the Son of God” into the heart of the Ethiopian.

This is hermeneutics “rooted in lived experience,” linked to the authority of Scripture and the necessity of posing and answering questions.²¹ While St. Philip instructed the prominent Jewish proselyte Ethiopian, St. Luke instructed the prominent Gentile Theophilus; and both these apostles recognised the need to follow up the initial instruction in order that their listeners “may know the truth concerning the things of which

²⁰ It should be noted that Zinsser was reflecting solely on writing; however, his ideas have been applied here to speaking as well, especially in a spiritual context.

²¹ See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts* (London: SCM Press, 2006), pp.114-116; and Pierre Bühler, “hermeneutics” in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 295-297.

[they had] been informed” (Luke 1:4; Pelikan, p. 118). For both the teacher and the student, whatever the culture or historical setting, learning is a gradual process of achieving greater understanding. Any search to achieve accountability in the evaluation and improvement of the learning process must begin with an awareness that learning is a dynamic and personal process that proceeds at different speeds and in different ways with different individuals with different intellectual and emotional capabilities.

As Jane Vella reflects in *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*, accountability is mutual, involving both the teacher and the learners: What was proposed to be taught has to be taught; what was meant to be learned has to be learned. The achievement of accountability will only be possible with *praxis*, a Greek word meaning “action with reflection.” Vella’s description of *praxis* offers a framework for both teachers and learners to improve their understanding:

There is little doubt among educators that doing is the way adults learn anything: concepts, skills, or attitudes. Praxis is doing with built-in reflection. It is a beautiful dance of inductive and deductive forms of learning. . . . Inductive learning proceeds from the particular to the general, whereas deductive learning moves from a general principle to the particular situation. Praxis can be used in teaching knowledge, skills, and attitudes as learners do something with the new knowledge, practice the new skills and attitudes, and then reflect on what they have just done.²²

Vella is right to emphasise that “our awareness of the importance of accountability affects [that is, increases] our own energy in the learning-teaching relationship. We listen to learners with more finely attuned ears” (p. 35).

On the one hand, the stress upon seeking understanding and accountability through *praxis* appears to be quite different from the earlier emphasis upon rote learning, especially in a catechetical context. However, St. Cyril of Jerusalem told his catechumens in the fifth century:

This summary [of the Christian confession] I wish you both to commit to memory when I recite it, and to rehearse it with all diligence among ourselves, not writing it out on paper, but engraving it by the memory upon your heart”²³

St. Cyril’s striving for using the memory to engrave a newly taught idea “upon your heart” has a strong sense of *praxis*, as well as mutual accountability for teachers and learners.

Conclusion: Preach and Teach Because You Have Been Called by God

William Zinsser’s reflections on the agonies of being a writing teacher also apply to being a preacher and teacher: Why would anyone in their right mind want to be a preacher or teacher? The answer is that preachers and teachers

²² Vella (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), pp. 172, 14-15, 213-223.

²³ Quoted by Pelikan, *Acts*, p. 117.

aren't altogether in their right mind. They are in one of the caring professions, no saner in the allotment of their time and energy than the social worker or the day care worker or the nurse. Whenever I hear them talk about their work, I feel that few forms of teaching are so sacramental; [the preacher or teacher's] ministry is not just to the words but to the person who wrote the words (p. 48).

Christian preachers and teachers share a commitment to the Word Himself, Jesus Christ.

As Orthodox Christians, our commission is given to us by Christ in the final chapter of the Gospel of Mark: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature *King James Translation; or NIV: "to all creation" (Mark 16:15). And when St Paul raised the question of how people could "hear without a preacher" and precisely who should preach, the answer he gave in Romans was unequivocal—because you "are sent" and you have understood that "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:14-17). As to precisely what we preach, St Paul was equally unequivocal: "we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). As St Paul recognised in his letters to St. Timothy, the act of preaching is a challenge—"to preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2). However, it is a challenge that we can, with God's help, meet.

In preaching, we teach. But before we teach others, we first ask: "Lord, teach us to pray ..." (Luke 11:1); and only then is it possible to "not worry about how or what you are to speak ... for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (Luke 12:11-12). This is not a promise only if we are on trial for our lives, but at all times, because Christ tells us that "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name ... will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). Then, and only then, when we are preaching and teaching in the Holy Spirit, when we are not relying on our faulty memories or our hesitant scholarship, will we be able to teach as Jesus did, as "one having authority"; and those who hear us might at times be "amazed" not by us, but by the teaching of Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:28-29).

It can happen to each of us. We can learn to preach and teach, as we pray and help each other. A Chinese proverb is a good start: "Those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it."