

2025-07-13: 3rd Sunday of Abib - Characteristics of Successful Ministry

Visual Aid

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Background

Today is the 3rd Sunday of the Blessed Month of Abib. The Church arranges for us the readings of the Coptic Month of Abib to be about our fathers the apostles and their ministry. At the beginning of the month, we are fasting the Fast of the Apostles and on the 5th day the Feast of the martyrdom of St Peter and St Paul. So the focus of the readings for the whole month, takes from this and we see how the Lord supports the Apostles in their ministry.

- In the 1st Sunday, we read the gospel of the commission of the 70 Apostles when the Lord Jesus sent them and gave them instructions about the ministry.
- In the 2nd Sunday, we read the gospel of the Lord warning the Apostles against becoming a stumbling block and the message was about the offenses of the ministry.
- Today, in the 3rd Sunday, we read the gospel of the feeding of the multitude and we see the administration of the ministry.
- Next week, in the 4th Sunday, we will read about the raising of Lazarus, and God willing, we will see the gifts of the ministry.

Introduction

The Gospel reading today is from Luke 9:10-17 - it is the same Gospel Reading that we pray in the 9th hour of the Agpeya. And there are many messages that we can take from it related to ministry and service. Before we look at today's Gospel, let's ask ourselves the question of "who are the ministers?" Lest anyone think "well I'm not a servant so this message is not relevant to me"

Does service only apply to those who are serving in an official capacity? What if I am not serving in Sunday School or Youth Meetings or Bible Studies or Hymns Classes? What if I am not a deacon? What if I don't serve in the kitchen service or the cleaning service or the orban service? Does that mean these gospel readings are not relevant to me?

Definitely not. As Christians, we are ALL called to be servants.

Minister to One Another

"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." (Galatians 5:13).

- Liberty means freedom; free from the bondage of the sin - don't use your freedom as an opportunity to serve yourself, to entertain yourself, to give in to your passions, to satisfy the lusts of the flesh... but use your freedom to serve one another through love. True Christian freedom is to make myself a servant and to give to others

"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Peter 4:10)

- When I use my talents to serve others, I am acting as a good steward of God's grace

We are all called to serve one another, and to be ministers to one another. To use our talents to support our brothers and sisters. And to be good stewards of God's grace. To love one another.

Minister in My Responsibilities

In addition to that, I may have other roles or responsibility that require me to minister to others.

- A husband is responsible for serving his wife.
- A wife is responsible for serving her husband
- A mother and father are responsible for serving their children
- A son or daughter is responsible for serving his or her parents - especially as they get older
- In my workplace, I can serve my co-workers
- In my classroom, I can serve my peers

Minister to My Own Soul

On top of that, I need to minister to my own soul - as St Paul writes to the Philippians:

"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12)

So we will look at several characteristics of the Lord's Ministry that I can apply to myself as ministering to others, as ministering in my responsibility as a parent, spouse, son, daughter, etc. and ministering to my own soul.

The Impartial Ministry

The first important lesson from the Lord's Ministry in this chapter is that it is an **Impartial Ministry**. The Lord did not turn the people away.

First of all, the people followed Him without invitation in the first place - we read that the Lord took the disciples and "went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida"

- He is going to take private retreat with His disciples in a deserted place. "But when the multitudes knew it, they followed Him."

How did the Lord react to this? We read in the Gospel "and He received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing."

He received them, and gave them sermons, and did good works for them. And then when the disciples wanted to turn them away to go and find food, the Lord again accepted them and said "you give them to eat."

The Impartial Ministry or the Welcoming Ministry.

- Sometimes, I don't want to serve others because it is inconvenient for me. The time is not convenient. I don't feel like it.
- Sometimes, I only serve those who can serve me back - who can repay me, or who did something for me in the past
- Sometimes, I only serve those who are nice to me and love me and do good for me and make me happy
- Sometimes, I only serve those who have good reputations or are popular
- Sometimes, I only serve those who I know them very well and I spent a lot of time with them and I know their family

The Gospel in Vespers last night had this message for us. The Lord was invited to the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees and said to him: "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just." (Luke 14:12-14)

St Paul in the Pauline Epistle today, writes to St Timothy "Now godliness with contentment is great gain." - Serve without expecting a reward. Serve with contentment. Content with the food on your plate and the clothes on your back - "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

The Lord did not turn them away. He didn't say "well you aren't from My 70 Apostles." He didn't say "the time is not convenient, I am here in a private gathering." He didn't say sorry, the time is inconvenient. But instead He accepted them, welcomed them, and ministered to them.

Let me do the same when I minister to others.

- When I ask about someone - how is he doing, how is his health, how is his family, how is his work, where has he been
- When I give a smile
- When I encourage someone
- When I show appreciation
- When I comfort someone who is mourning
- When I visit someone who is lonely or someone who is sick

- When I give a compliment
- When I honor or respect someone
- When I helping someone with their needs financially or with clothes or furniture or medicine
- When I am offering up my talents - maybe I am good with computers, or I am able to cook, or I know how to sew and to tailor clothes, or I am good with plumbing or electricity or HVAC, or I can help diagnose an issue with the car, or help with a medical issue, or I can tutor someone in a specific subject, or accompany someone to an appointment.

Whether it's someone I know, or my friends, or a stranger, or even my enemy - the Lord says: "Do good to those who hate you" (Matthew 5:44)

So our first characteristic of successful ministry is Impartial Ministry.

The Holistic Ministry

The Lord did not turn anyone away, and He gave them the spiritual food, and even healed them from their sicknesses. But why did the Lord feed the multitude? The disciples recommended sending them away to find supplies elsewhere. Isn't it enough that the Lord gave them the spiritual food, and even healed them from their infirmities and sicknesses?

The second lesson we can take from the Lord's Ministry is that it is a **Holistic Ministry**

- Everyone of us has a body, has a spirit, has an intellect, has emotions, has relationships.
 - St Paul writes at the end of 1 Thessalonians: "May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." - spirit soul and body
 - The Lord didn't just minister to the spirit, but also to the intellect, to the emotions, to the body
 - For example when He healed a leper, He didn't just heal his physical infirmity, but He touched him. A man that had not been touched by another person in so long, the Lord touches him to show him that he is loved, that he is human, that he is not alone. And then he told him to show himself to the priest and offer a sacrifice and to do the spiritual part. The Lord in His Ministry was always holistic, looking at the whole individual.
- The Church also serves Her congregation holistically as well.
 - For example in Sunday School, our children enjoy a lesson and activities which is an intellectual and spiritual meal
 - Then, they are given time to play sports and play outside and breathe fresh air - physical activity and physical health
 - They are encouraged to play together and to build and strengthen godly friendships

I also need to minister holistically to those whom I am called to serve

- For example, as a parent, I am responsible for the well-being of my children in all aspects of their lives...

- I need to provide for them physically - to give them good and healthy food, to encourage them to breathe the fresh air outside, to play sports or exercise, to bathe and brush their teeth and take care of their hygiene
 - I need to provide them with adequate schooling and education; I need to encourage them to study, help them with their homework, follow-up with their grades and their exams, give them opportunities for learning especially during the breaks like summer vacation
 - I need to encourage them to build relationships with others, to cultivate healthy friendships, to love and respect the stranger
 - And the foundation for all of these things is that I teach them the way of the spiritual life - I follow-up with their prayers, with their Bible Readings, I encourage them in the sacramental life - repentance & confession and the Eucharist, I ensure they are attending Vespers and Praises and Liturgy on a weekly basis, I make food that will encourage them to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays and the fasts of the Church. Of course, the Church will support me in the spiritual upbringing of my children, but the Church is not a replacement for my role. I cannot depend on the 2 hours a week of Sunday School, but rather I have to work WITH the Church.
 - Yesterday night, Abouna Reweis told us the story of St Julitta and her son St Kyriakos, and how she taught him from a young age to say "I am Christian" and when it came to his martyrdom, at three years old he proclaimed his faith in the Lord Christ. This is the result of his spiritual upbringing by his mother.
 - Many parents focus so much on the intellectual and education and studying and obtaining degrees and having a good career, but what's the point of a career if he loses his salvation? What's the point of degrees if she doesn't know how to socialize with others or form relationships with others?
 - I have to minister to my child holistically, I am responsible for his or her well being in ALL aspects of their lives
- Even as an individual, I need to see myself holistically and to examine myself in all aspects of my life
 - Let me strive to glorify God in my intellect - education, career
 - Let me strive to glorify God in my body - to keep good hygiene, to stay in shape, to eat healthy, to exercise
 - Let me strive to glorify God in my relationships - to turn away from evil relations, to distance from friends that bring me down, and to get closer to those who raise me up
 - And let me strive in my Spiritual Life - in my fasting, prayers, prostrations, readings, in repentance and confession, in the liturgical life

"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37)

The Organized Ministry

We might say - it's difficult to do all of that. How can I, as a parent, focus on all of these things and also I have to work 40 hours a week. It's impossible!

We can take another lesson from the Lord's Ministry here - It is very **organized**. Our God is a God of order and not of chaos.

We start by reading that the Apostles returned from their mission and told Him all that they had done. They reported to them the details of the service He had sent them to do. And then, after the Lord had taught the multitude and healed many, the disciples reported to Him - the people don't have food. Send them away to go and rest and get food. But the Lord said to them "You give them to eat." And He told them to organize them into groups of 50 - and that's how we know the multitude was 5000 men, because they were separated into groups and organized. Then He told them to distribute among them the fish and the loaves. Then He told them to collect the remainder in baskets. The Lord is always organized in His Ministry.

That's why, also we see that the Church services are organized. There are services and people responsible for those services. And there are schedules and timetables. And there are group chats and announcements and emails and systems and websites pickup and drop-off lines. When we are organized in our ministry, taking the example of the Lord, then the ministry can be successful.

Organization is not something that is just administrative or social, but it is something that is spiritual.

The Spiritual Person will be organized in his life. When my time is organized, I will find that I have time for prayer, time for work, time for rest, time for my family, time for myself, time for social life, etc. But if my time is not organized, I will find that I am not successful in my spiritual life. If I am waking up in the morning and it takes me 10 or 15min just to figure out what I'm going to wear - so when will I pray?

I need to be organized, to minister to my soul:

- I wake up at this time, I stand in my room for prayer, I take care of my hygiene, I go to school or work, I have a time for eating, I have a time for rest, I have time for my spiritual canon, I have time for sleeping. If I am organized, I will find time for all of those things - but if I am not, then the first thing that will suffer will be my spiritual life. We have all experienced it, and we have all said it: "I didn't have time" - "I was too busy" - "I was too tired."
- Same thing if I am a parent - I should model the organized life for my children. I should help them to have a daily routine. Wake them up at a certain time, stand and pray WITH them, eat with them, give them chores and things to help around the house.
- Same thing if I am a spouse - I need to be organized so I'm able to spend time with my spouse

"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." (Ephesians 5:15-16)

The Cooperative Ministry

The fourth lesson that we can take from the Lord's Ministry here is that it is a **Cooperative Ministry**. The successful ministry is the one that is Cooperative between God and Man. There is a human element and a Divine element.

- The human element is what I need to do - what I CAN do.
- The Divine element is what I CANNOT do, and God will do it.

The disciples brought the five loaves and the two fish - this was all they could do. But the Lord took what they had and blessed it and multiplied it and fed a multitude with it. In the reading next week, the disciples will move the stone of Lazarus' tomb, and the Lord will raise him from the dead. The disciples cast the net, and the Lord multiplies the fish.

The same in my own life and ministry:

- I visit someone who is in need - maybe in the visit, I don't do anything or I don't say anything. But the Lord will give them comfort by my presence.
- I encourage someone with my words - the Lord energizes him to keep going
- I teach my children - the Lord will remind them of those lessons at the time when they need it the most
- I set aside time for my spiritual canon - the Lord will multiply my time throughout the day.
- Small gestures of appreciation for my husband or wife - the Lord will multiply peace in my marriage

St Paul says to the Corinthians: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" - we do the easy part, and God does the hard part.

The Lord said to St Paul: "My strength is made perfect in weakness." - we do the weak part, and God does the strong part.

God will never do our part - that would encourage and enable laziness. No! I need to do the parts that I CAN do and the Lord will take care of the rest. I give the 5 loaves and 2 fish, He feeds 5000 men + women and children.

The Abounding Ministry

Finally, what is the result of this ministry? This Ministry that is Impartial, that is Holistic, that is Organized and that is Cooperative with God - the result is an Abounding Ministry. A Ministry that is abundant.

The Gospel ends with the words: "So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them"

At the beginning of the day, they were hungry and had only 5 loaves and 2 fish. At the end of the day, they are filled and have 12 baskets of remaining fragments. This is abundance.

The result of a successful ministry is abundance:

- When I minister to others, I find myself in an abundance of joy, kindness, goodness, and the other fruit of the Spirit.
- When I minister to the spouse and my children, I will find that my family is abounding in love; my home is abounding in peace
- When I minister to my own soul, I will find that I am abounding in God's grace. That I am growing in virtue. That I am acquiring and living the fruit of the Spirit
- And of course, the abundance is not only here on earth but the Lord promised us treasures in heaven.

King David writes in Psalm 23: "My cup runs over" - abundance. More than I can hold.

Conclusion

May the Lord grant us to examine ourselves and learn from His example in Ministry, to Minister to one another in love, to Minister to our spouse, children, parents, and to Minister to our own soul that He may take our small offering, our weak offering, our easy part - and multiply it for His glory, for the salvation of all.

Glory be to our God. Amen.

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