

Fr Mikhail Ibrahim on Prayer in Conflict

Fr Boules George here is describing a story that was told to him by Fr Shenouda Maher during Fr Shenouda's 40 days in the monastery after his ordination.

Fr Shenouda tells the story like this:

"When I was a young servant, I served in the church of St Anthony in Shobra, but I confessed in St Mark Shobra. The Sunday School service in St Anthony Shobra at the time took place inside the main church. It was split into sections where every set of pews was dedicated to a Sunday School class. About six classes in the church all at the same time. And it was the beginning of the year, when the day came to pass out to the kids, the calendars with saints on them, as a gift. And I took what I needed for my class, and I went to them to give the lesson.

There was another servant, who went to get some calendars and it seemed they were all taken by then. And looking over, he saw that I had many. And he was filled with anger. So he started to approach me and my class, as I'm giving the lesson, and he shouts from far "YOU CALL YOURSELF A SERVANT?" and as soon as he said that, the whole church was in silence and all the kids from all the classes jumped up on the pews to see what was happening, thinking there was going to be a fight in the church. "YOU CALL YOURSELF A SERVANT?" and he shouted about calendars and taking gifts and not leaving any for other people, but I stood in silence. I was speechless. And I was in silence until some other servants came and took him away, telling him "not in front of the kids" or "not in God's house." And when he had left, I continued my lesson.

The next week, I was going to St Mark in Shobra to confess. And I sat with my father of confession Fr Mikhail Ibrahim.

[Fr Mikhail Ibrahim is considered by many to be a great modern-day saint. Often portrayed as meek, gentle, quiet, he was also powerful and uncompromising, and demanded a high standard for his spiritual children].

And I told Fr Mikhail the story, how I was berated in the middle of church, how I was embarrassed in front of the kids, how I stood in silence and did not retaliate or talk back. Here, I was expecting him, as my Father of Confession, to tap on my back and say "it's ok, my son. Just endure, just endure." But Fr Mikhail looked at me and said: "Have you sinned, and come to me to complain?"

And I was in disbelief! Sinned? Maybe he didn't hear the story... so I told him again. And he responded "I heard it the first time, and I asked you - Have you sinned, and come to me to complain?"

I didn't know what he meant so I asked "in what way did I do something wrong?"

And he explained to me:

"Is this man not your brother?" Yes.

"And didn't the devil trick him?" Yes.

"And he fell into the sin of anger?" Yes.

And then he asked:

"When the devil has tricked your brother, how much did you pray for your brother, before you came to me?" and I had no answer.

"How much did you fast for your brother, that the Lord removes his anger, and removes any of your sins against him, before you came to me?" and I could not answer.

"How many metanoias and prostrations did you do for your brother, before you came to me?" I had done none.

"Did you do metanoias?" No

"Did you fast?" No

"Did you pray in tears for him?" No

"Didn't I tell you that you sinned, and have come to me to complain?"

And he instructed me: "Go. Pray. Fast. Do Metanoias. And after that, may God absolve you to receive the Eucharist."

And Fr Boules adds to the end of the story: "This is how Fr Mikhail raised saints from his spiritual children. Because the commandment of God was not taken lightly."

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