



Transit umbra, lux permanet

An Encyclical on the Value of Service

Addressed By The Patriarch
Mar IOHANNES IV
to the whole of the Apostolic Johannite Church
And All People Of Good Will

Peace, Health, and Apostolic Blessing

1. *“It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life, that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson*
2. How often have we heard platitudes on the nobility of service? How often have we turned an eye, a hand, and an opportunity away from the trajectory of conditionless love? We have all espoused the former, we have all readily acquiesced to the latter. Our condition is none other than this.
3. Far more terrifying than a closed fist or even a closed mind - is the blind force of a closed heart.
4. An open hand, and an open mind are both hard pressed to counter the spiritual holding pattern created when one distances themselves from, as the popular author Paulo Coelho has aptly described it, 'the love that consumes'- Agape.

Service as Obligation

1. Each of us, as we live and move in the world and in society, has different, and myriad roles that we lead and enact- fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, friends, neighbors, strangers. Each of these roles seems to mandate for us a different set of means and modes by which we interact with others. Likewise the apparent contrast of these roles is made greater still by the fact that everyone else is equally subject to these forces as well.
2. After a fashion, these roles and distinctions can have a beneficial purpose and result when it is considered and understood exactly what these are. Yet without understanding, they can also be one of the greatest obstacles to compassion and service.
3. Scriptures on both sides of the ecclesiastical coin attest to the teaching:

“ Jesus said, “Whoever does not hate his father and his mother cannot become a disciple to Me. And whoever does not hate his brothers and sisters and take up his cross in My way will not be worthy of Me.” - Logion 55 - The Gospel of Thomas

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. “ - Luke 14:26
4. As it was said of another teaching in the Gospel of John - “This is a hard saying, who is able to take in such a teaching”. I have often seen the above teaching stumbled, glossed, and passed over, and for good reason- it is indeed a hard saying.
5. As with all hard sayings, it is all too easy *to light a candle and go in search of fire*, and find the answers everywhere but where they are. It is by the light of the Sacred Flame, and all the meaning to which that most noble of symbols speaks, that we can see clearly that which is before us. It is no different here.
6. Shed your distinctions, cut through the labels, conceptualizations and divisions that make one person more worthy of your compassion than another. As the Rev. Msgr. Ken Madden, STL, has noted, it is not that everything is possessed of the Divine, but rather there is nothing *but the Divine*.
7. At it's basic level, this of course is the plain teaching that- beyond all cultural considerations, class distinctions, orientations and creeds- we are human beings- equal parts hope and fear, edged on by fleeting contentment, 'a hundred billion castaways looking for a home'.

8. Whether apprehended by *pistis (faith)*, *dianoia (reasoning)* or *noesis (direct experience)* - our obligation is laid bare before our eyes. The inherent commonality of our existence as human beings, of our experiences in life, obligates us.. *nay calls us* towards the greatest vocation we can ever possibly know - *love*.

Service as Initiation

1. As Gnostics we prize direct experience above all else. It is only through direct apprehension that the rich tapestry of myth and symbol with which we find our tradition blessed with, becomes clear and visible in its full scope.
2. Invariably, many Gnostics are first drawn to the path of Gnosticism by participation in various esoteric groups, practices and contemplative communities. More than of few of these Gnostics find themselves nonplussed when they engage the Gnostic Ecclesia in its various forms- little in the way of the apparent 'secret knowledge' spoken of in the polemics of the Church Fathers, little in the way of barbarous names of yesteryear, little in the way of initiatory-style ritual, outside of the Sacramental actions of Baptism and Confirmation, regardless of what name they are called by.
3. What then does the Church supply to assist its members in achieving those things to which the liturgies, lectionaries and scriptures speak of?
4. To be sure, we are not without our tools and methods, but these are to assist seekers in realizing those signposts, rather than bestowing them on the same.
5. It is, as we are human and exist in a realm of illusory conditions and appearance, all too easy to confuse these signposts, plateaus and crossroads for the transforming and transcending experience itself. All too easy to mistake these waypoints for the destination, or worse- the most important portions of our paths.
6. Yet, in truth, it is the distance in between which generates the experiences and opens us up to the transforming action of the Divine Beloved. Understanding does not take place at these signposts and plateaus, but rather it is illuminated there.
7. It is the very act of engagement of the world in those in between times which loosens the fetters and illusory manifestations of separation and distinction between us and mankind. Those things which invariably push us to make one person more worthy of our compassion than another.
8. In true service to our brothers and sisters, the spaces between us, and the lines that so divide us, are evaporated to leave behind that which has never been anywhere but right here, the Sacred Flame.

9. Experience is the greatest of Initiators, and Gnosis is not something achieved apart from the world, in ritual chambers, sanctuaries or far-removed sanctum sanctorum. As my predecessor has noted and I have related in other times - “[Gnosis is not truly transcendent to the mundane] If you look for it elsewhere, you are surely lost. Your father the King sent you just here to search for the pearl... no where else. Where else do you expect to find it? “
10. The path of service is a path of Gnosis, and in the context of the Sacred Ecclesia, at the same time, our highest calling.

Conclusion

1. As the Gnostic Ecclesia moves into an era of greater visibility, and greater interaction with the world it finds itself in, we sometimes feel ourselves to be ill-equipped to address and redress the sorrows of the world, and the questions that dog our every turn, even when equipped with myth, symbol and allegory.
2. For our part, the Apostolic Johannite Church seeks not to be Church of Initiates (though it can be said there is value in such a thing), but rather a Church ever in the midst of Initiation, of context, of community. Let us be careful not to be content to rest at any plateaus of experience and realization which we may be fortunate enough to achieve.
3. Mindful then of the context to which the ministry of the laity and the clergy alike find themselves, it would be a grave error on my part to limit that context and not provide a proper forum and agency through which this vital aspect of ministry can be explored, acted upon, and organized in consultation with the Apostolic Council and the Office of the Patriarch. Thus, in spirit and service to the principles to which this letter speaks- the greater context of *humanity as community*- to which the Church functions as but an illustrated and imperfect microcosm, in which we all share and participate, the Apostolic Johannite Church announces the formation of the

Congregation for Pastoral Mission

to work in concert with the laity and clergy of the Apostolic Johannite Church towards addressing issues of service to and pastoral care of the dying, the sick and the distressed in specific, as well as local community well-being in general.

To this end the Apostolic Johannite Church names The Rev. Ms. Juliana Carnes as the Congregation's executive chair, with oversight and liaison with the Apostolic Council to be provided by The Very Rev. Msgr. Jordan Stratford, STL, OSE

Given in Calgary, at the Oratory of St. John the Beloved,
on May 27th, the Feast of Pentecost, in the Two-Thousandth and Seventh year of Our Lord,
the third of my Patriarchate.

Amen.

 *Mar Johannes IV*

Patriarch and Primate

The Apostolic Johannite Church