

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

If one reason why parishes and dioceses and local churches sometimes do not grow is because they are comfortable in simply ministering to 'their own people', another is because when they actually have the opportunity to welcome people into the Church they become nervous and worry about the risks. And it seems that there are any number of risks. There is the risk that people who express an interest in Orthodoxy will eventually lapse. There is the risk that they will bring with them experiences and ideas and customs that we don't fully understand or appreciate - that we do not even have the imagination to welcome and embrace, let alone permit and encourage. Perhaps the most fundamental risk is that we cannot control outcomes.

But all the great and wonderful things of life have a degree of risk. Love is the very best example of this. A commitment to love someone is an absolutely enormous risk. There is so much potential for pain and failure! Nonetheless, Tennyson gave voice to a deep wisdom when he wrote that: 'tis better to have loved and lost / than never to have loved at all...*(In Memoriam: 27)*.

The fact of the matter is that we cannot - we simply cannot - control outcomes. We have to do what is right - with a certain measure of prudence of course, for it too is a virtue - and do it with prayer - that is, do what is right and leave the outcome to the Lord. This is actually a win-win situation, because on the one hand, in taking the right sort of risk we are doing the right thing - and if it works, brilliant! Thank God! - and if it fails - well, thank God still, because all things actually work together for good for those who love God. Isn't that good news? That even if we seem to fail - even if we fail - and even if the outcomes of our best intentions are not great - or even make things worse - they will ultimately work for our good - for our salvation - if we love God. Yes - this is true and the experience of all the saints - if we love God! But if we are practical atheists, if we in reality only give lip service to Lord but do not in fact trust Him and do not accept this path - to take up the cross and follow Him - how truly tragic and pathetic our failures will be!

So: we may not get what we want, but we will get something that will further our salvation. Should we be friendly? Should we be kind? Should we be generous? Should we forgive? Should we show mercy? Should we forget? Should we give? Should we inconvenience ourselves? Will failure, rejection, repudiation ultimately hurt us? Is it worth the risk to suffer? Of course these things will hurt... but through the hurt, if there is hurt, will come abundant grace.

I mention all of this because we are about to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Repose of St Alexis (Toth), in many ways the founder - and certainly the facilitator - of our community as an Orthodox community. When the Russian Orthodox Church accepted the Greek Catholics in Minneapolis, freely and generously and without demands, because it was the right thing to do, the Church took a very great risk. But the Church at that time had courage, optimism, hope. It was willing to reach out, to bless particular customs and practices, to integrate and celebrate cultural diversity and traditions to the greater glory of God and His Church. It did this in Alaska, in Korea and China and Japan, in eastern Europe.... and here in America, starting in Minneapolis! This is the example that our Orthodox Church in America should cherish - a evangelical and optimistic missionary openness, a willingness to take risks, a willingness to leave outcomes to God. This should be the true legacy of St. Alexis for Orthodoxy in America!

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