

CANADIAN ORTHODOX MESSENGER MESSAGER ORTHODOXE CANADIEN

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ... Mt 28:19
New Series 32:1 Summer 2012

Allez, faites de toutes les nations des disciples ... Mt 28:19
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Founded by the blessed Archbishop Arseny (Chahavtsov), 1866–1945
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Conversation with a Monk: Quebec to Athos and Back

Fr Pierre (Vachon) was born and raised in a practicing Roman Catholic family in Québec City. Family visits to the Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Benedictine monastery near Magog, QC spurred his interest in monasticism, and ultimately led him to enter the novitiate there at the age of 21. While there, he received a firm foundation in the monastic life, but his responsibilities of translating writings of early Greek and Latin Church Fathers into French helped him recognize that there was Christianity of depth beyond the Catholic Church. This quest for greater depth saw him leave Québec and visit a number of European monasteries and hermitages. While his intent was to make a pilgrim to the Holy Land, his journey brought him to Mt Athos, where he was received into the Orthodox Church and where he spent fourteen years, primarily in a small Romanian Kelli—hermitage comprised of a few monks—before returning to Canada in 1992.

Candian Orthodox Messenger (COM): Why did you return to Canada from Mt Athos?

Père Pierre (PP): Bon, pendant que j'étais au Mt Athos, je pensais déjà des fois que ça serait intéressant d'apporter la tradition monastique du Mt Athos au Canada, qui est un pays vide à tous points de vue.

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"Take Up and Read:" The Importance of Reading the Scriptures

Perhaps the most important words Augustine of Hippo ever heard came from the mouth of a little kid playing a game. The child kept repeating in childish imitation of a teacher, "Tolle, lege! Tolle, lege!" "Take up, and read!" On impulse, Augustine took up the nearest book and began to read the words of St. Paul from Romans 13: "Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no

provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." It was all over for him. These words of Scripture provided the internal shove necessary for him to commit his life to Christ. Even in the days before Gideon Bibles, Augustine owed his conversion to reading the Scriptures.

We who are converted, who strive daily to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, also need to take

up and read. Why? For at least two reasons.

First, all of our Orthodox worship presupposes our familiarity with the Bible, its stories and images. When the Bishop visits, the choir takes up the song as he enters, "The prophets proclaimed you from on high, O Virgin: the Jar, the Staff, the Candlestick, the Table, the Uncut Mountain, the Golden Censer, the Tabernacle, the Gate Impassible, the Palace, the Ladder and the Throne of kings".

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Messenger Orthodoxe Canadien



The first cell built at the Hermitage of St. Anthony located just outside Westport, ON.

Vide spirituellement, vide matériellement aussi. C'était une idée vague, sans précision. C'est plus tard que j'ai, en rencontrant le Père Luc et d'autres moines, qu'on a pensé au projet, on a fait murir l'idée de repartir au Canada, pour fonder un petit monastère.

COM: Vous venez du Canada, alors vous avez pensé que...

PP: No, it was not out of nostalgia, I never had one thought about my country...

COM: I didn't mean it like that, I just sort of meant that you understood that maybe there was a calling for you here.



Fr. Pierre and Fr. Luke of St. Anthony's Hermitage preparing to build the chapel.

PP: Yeah, I did not even see it as a calling. It would be fun to export there, a flower which I had grown with on the Holy Mountain. Because there it is full. For two thousand years they have been living this, but in Canada it is unknown, and the country allows a lot of freedom and space and silence, but that's all. It doesn't afford any tradition. When I came back here, I realized that it was fine to be in the middle of nowhere, but if I did not have the formation that I had on the Holy Mountain, I would have survived only a few months, because there is nothing here to learn. And you can't learn this sort of tradition from books. You have to learn from an elder from people, so my fourteen years on the Holy Mountain were absolutely, um...

COM: Critical.

PP: Critical, yes, and then here I am just doing what I did over there. You have to have this discipline which you learn at the monastery, which I learned partially when I was a Catholic monk, and even more when I was an Orthodox monk. So, altogether, all these years were critical, as you say.

COM: You've just spoken of Mt Athos, Canada,

Catholicism, Orthodoxy; how do you manage these multiple identities?

PP: Yeah. As a monk, I think it is easier to have multiple identities, because I live in the forest. The forest could be anywhere. It happens to be in Ontario now, but I don't share much of the life, the civil life of this country, because I mostly live here. I do read books, sometimes I go even to movies. I travel, but there is this distance which monks have to have and which I created when I left my family. A convert living in Ottawa or Montreal or Québec or Toronto who every day has to be a part of his cultural milieu may have a bigger difficulty because he meets people at work who are not Orthodox. In his family, they may be they may not be, it depends who he married. So it's different. Here we are a bit in a vacuum here, at the hermitage.

COM: If I may say so, you are obviously very Québécois and yet at the same time you transcend this in your life and you are not attached to these things.

PP: I don't feel Québécois so much when I go now; I don't have much to do with the new generation somehow. I like the province because I was born there. I see it with retrospective, I like the history of this country. I like even what the Catholic Church had done, going to an old church—because we have a



New chapel completed in fall of 2012.

few old churches—and I am not particularly in touch with today's movement, but the same would be true for Ontario or for any province, I mean, because of my age. And I don't feel like I have to stay in touch with absolutely everything that happens now, I don't have to do that. Life is short, so I concentrate on what is essential for me.

COM: A monk doesn't have to do that anyway,

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The hymn-writer who wrote this verse thought his hearers would recognize these images from the Old Testament. He assumed that all Christians knew of the jar which contained the manna, which was kept in the Holy Place and mentioned in Exodus 16. He assumed that all Christians knew of the uncut mountain prophesied in Daniel. He expected the hearers of the hymn to recognize these images as types and foreshadowings of the Mother of God. It is safe to say, however, that many Orthodox today do not remember these stories with enough familiarity to instantly understand their significance when they hear the episcopal hymn. And that is a shame, because it means that much of our Church's catechetical richness is lost to us. We are the poorer for it. There is a chasm fixed between our liturgical texts and our understanding of them, between the Fathers teaching and our capacity to receive that teaching. But the chasm is not unbridgeable. We can easily cross it by studying the Scriptures.

There is another even more important reason for studying the Scriptures than enhancing our appreciation of our liturgical hymnody. St. John Chrysostom once said, "Ignorance of the Scriptures is a great abyss." By this he meant that if one does not know the Scriptures, it is easy to fall into the abyss of worldliness. If this was true in the days of St. John Chrysostom, when the secular world had a distinctly Christian tinge to it and when most of the population of Antioch and Constantinople went to church on Sunday, how much more true is it today, when most of our Canadian population does not go to church, and when our culture is correspondingly hostile to the Christian Faith. In the days of Chrysostom, if you followed the crowd, you would most likely find yourself in church. If you follow the Canadian crowd today, you will likely find yourself in more dangerous places.

St. Paul urged us to "not be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our mind" (Rom. 12:2). Phillips translates this as "don't let the world squeeze you into its own mould". As you may have noticed, the world is very good at squeezing, and it exerts its pressure on us every time we turn on the television, listen to the radio, or open a book or magazine—even (or perhaps especially) if the television, radio or book is about "spirituality". The proper response to this squeeze is not to externally cut oneself off from the world, entering a monastery, or living in a self-constructed fantasy world of fundamentalism, or refusing any contact with the culture around us. The answer is internal.

The Lord promised His disciples that if they drank any deadly thing, it would not hurt them (Mk. 16:18). Similarly, we can ingest our culture and live in our world and not be hurt if we have first swallowed the antidote to the world's lies—namely, the truths of Scripture, as interpreted by the rest of apostolic Tradition. As the Psalmist, says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to Your Word. Your Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against You." (Ps. 119:9,11) Ingesting the Scriptures can keep us safe.

This means, of course, that we approach our reading of the Scriptures for the purpose of transforming our lives, not just gaining intellectual or academic knowledge. Academic knowledge is wonderful, but that knowledge needs to not stay in our heads. It needs to sink down the further saving twelve inches, from our heads into our hearts. St. Paul said that the Scriptures were given "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim.3:16). If we read only to gain head knowledge, we read amiss, and our reading is dangerous, for then we might suppose ourselves to be holy when we are only learned. Being learned is great, but on the Last Day, our Lord will not inquire about how learned we were. He will inquire about how holy we were, about whether or not we let the world squeeze us into its own mould. If we reply to Him that, well, yes, we did let the world squeeze us into its mould, but we wrote some great treatises on the Maccabean dating of the Book of Daniel, we will find that this reply does not impress.

Here then is why we should read take up and read: to enrich our experience of worship in this age, and to be safe in the age to come.

-Archpriest Lawrence Farley, St. Herman's, Langley, BC

Never cease studying the Gospel till the end of your life. Do not think that you know it enough, even if you know it by heart. The Lord's commandments are exceedingly broad (Ps 119:96), even though they are expressed in few words. The Lord's commandment is infinite, just as the Lord who uttered it is infinite. The practice of the commandments and progress in them is unlimited. The most perfect Christians, brought to a state of perfection by divine grace, remain imperfect in regard to the commandments of the Gospel.

- From *"The Arena"* by St Ignatius Brianchaninov



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N° 019

February 09, 2012

Martyr Nicephorus

To all the Reverend Clergy, Faithful, and Friends of the Archdiocese of Canada:

I am very pleased to share with you the exciting plans for a new location for the Archdiocesan Offices and Archives, as well as for residence facilities for our Bishop(s). Through your Deans and others on the Archdiocesan Council, you may already have heard that a house adjoining the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Ottawa has been purchased for the purpose of housing the Archdiocesan Offices and Archives (31 LeBreton St. N., Ottawa ON K1R 7H1). The new house also provides private residence facilities for our Bishop(s) and possibly for visitors, as may be necessary. The house was purchased for a very reasonable price of \$350,000, plus the usual expenses associated with real estate acquisition. The down-payment was \$50,000, and \$39,000 in mutual funds were cashed in to contribute in part. Generous contributions from individuals and from the general account permitted us to finalize the purchase. The keys were transferred to the Archdiocese on February 2, 2012. The house is currently undergoing some renovations on the inside with a fresh coat of paint and new floor tiles. Parishioners from the Cathedral are providing assistance. The Archdiocesan Offices are expected to move out of their present location in the Cathedral by the middle of March.

Those of us that have seen the newly-purchased house are very pleased with the idea of separate Archdiocesan Offices adjoining the Cathedral. The house is not large (three bedrooms on the second floor), but it is more than adequate for the present purposes of the Archdiocese. Each room is bright with light streaming in. It has bathrooms on each floor and a very large amount of built-in shelf space, both on the main floor and in the basement. All in all, the house is in very good shape because the previous owner was quite a handyman and maintained the house very well.



The remaining \$300,000 is financed by a reasonable Scotiabank mortgage of \$220,000 and a bridging loan of \$80,000. The challenge we are now facing is that this bridging loan of \$80,000 needs to be liquidated one year from now.

The Archdiocesan Council has the obligation to pay off the \$80,000 loan within the coming year and is therefore turning to you for help. We ask you to undertake fund-raising activities within your community. For example, you might wish to raise funds through direct appeals to your membership, hold bake sales, perogy evenings, or other fund-raising events with the proceeds going towards the reduction of this debt.

This present fund-raising effort is Phase Two of the Metamorphosis Project established in the past by friends and members of the Archdiocese in order to renovate and beautify the Residence of the Bishop(s), and the Archdiocesan Office headquarters. With God's help and your generous response to this appeal, the presence of the Episcopal seat of the Archdiocese of Canada in the nation's capital, Ottawa, will become stronger and help the growth of Orthodoxy in Canada to flourish.

We thank you for your every fund-raising effort and financial contribution in the past and at the present time. Be assured that they are being used as efficiently as possible now as we renovate the newly-acquired Archdiocesan Office headquarters and residence in Ottawa. For further information, suggestions, or donations, please contact the Episcopal Secretary, Protodeacon Nazari Polataiko, by email or telephone or send your contribution to Archdiocese of Canada, The Orthodox Church in America 15 LeBreton Street North OTTAWA, ON K1R 7H1 "Metamorphosis Project phase two".

May the Lord Jesus Christ grant you the blessing of His countenance and illumine us all with the light of His teaching. I remain with love in Christ, yours,



+ IRÉNÉE Évêque de Québec/Bishop of Québec
Administrateur de l'Archidiocèse du Canada (ÉOA)
Administrator of the Archdiocese of Canada (OCA)

keepin touch with everything that is going on.

PP: No, but I like to understand what happens, so I read for this. I read good articles, I read good books, but I don't have to be a part of the flow. I am supposed to be outside of the flow, I wouldn't say above or under, or beside. A monk is somebody who is an onlooker of society. He tries not to be involved in it. And I think monasticism also has to keep this attitude. Very often in the old countries, he had a very hard time to stay outside the cultural demands and he gets too much involved in things. This raises other questions about what the monk should be: completely integrated in society or completely away from it. That has always been a dispute among monks themselves, how much do they have to be involved, how much do they have to be withdrawn from that.

COM: There is a constant tension in that sense.

PP: A constant tension, yeah. And I think nowadays, because of the attitude of people toward the church, I think it is probably good for the monks to have a low profile, uninvolved, keep a real



Offering prayers in the newly built chapel.

poverty—material poverty—to live simply and not show up too much, and just, not try to blend, not to be nice, you know, just do your thing and if people want to see us, they come and see us here.

COM: Can you describe for us some of this simple life of poverty of which you speak?

PP: The rhythm itself is the rhythm of every monk. You have a number of prayers to do. You do them on your own. You choose your rule, but you stick to your rule. As I say for myself, I kind of replicate here what I was taught on the Holy Mountain. It worked very well there, it works very well here. I modify as little as possible. I do my midnight prayer at the time I am used to. I read the same thing. I do more Bible

reading, maybe, because us monks don't read much Bible. We have to work manually, it is important to work manually. So I try to live from what I do. But, as you may know, I don't get my income from what I do on the monastery, but from what I do for people in the parish, normally, between Pascha and July. This is how I get my income, so I can live from that.

So here I have plenty of free time for reading and for meditating, praying, working, maintaining the buildings, and I am the first to move here so I have to take care of the buildings. I have to start something, which, God-willing, somebody else better than me will pursue in a more spiritual way. But I am mostly the one who builds cabins here, so you have to start somewhere, so you need some buildings. The chapel is nearly done, so maybe this will bring some people, serious people. Serious people, though.

Sometimes people ask me about the physical hardship of not having all of these, how do you say, material commodities. They were easy for me. Interestingly speaking, when I used to be on the Holy Mountain, all of the western monks, all who came from very developed countries were very happy with the simple life of the Holy Mountain. Those who were coming from Eastern Europe were very upset by this simple life of the Holy Mountain. They expected Greece to be a rich country. They are the ones who wanted the cars, the jeeps, this and that. For us, who have kind of created all of this machinery, we can live without it.

Maintenant la sainte montagne est couverte de camions, de cellulaires, d'ordinateurs, et il y a beaucoup de bruit. Bon, alors, j'ai plus de silence ici maintenant que j'en aurais si je vivais au Mt Athos. Maintenant je suis mieux ici. J'ai eu mes meilleures années à une époque remarquable. J'y vais pour voir des amis des fois, puis j'y vais assez rarement.

COM: Interesting. In all of this, then, what do you see as the role of monks?

PP: Monasteries do a good thing at monasteries, because people go there, people go to monasteries and spend a week there—even if it is a rich monastery—it will enlighten their mind. They will learn something, they will speak to the monks, they will be, they will see. So they have a good influence on people. As long as the monks don't try to overdo it, don't see themselves as those who have to teach everybody everything. If they just do their thing, then by accident, they will have this good influence as an unsought consequence on people.

There is a passage, I think, from John the Ladder,

who lived at Sinai. I think he said somewhere that the angel is the light of the monk and the monk is the light of the Christian in the world. Now, he did not say the path, he said the light. So, the path, you can take the path you want. The light just gives you the point where you have to reach. So monks don't try to be like angels, we do have a body, we are different, but the angels give us to at least know where we are heading.

In the same way, the monks can also be the same lighthouse, the light, for the man in the world. Not telling him what to do, but telling him the direction. Sometimes the monks confuse this and they think they have to teach even the way. Not the way, it is up to the people in the world to decide the way, but it is good to know where you are heading. And there is obviously more distraction in the life of the world than in the monastery. So every Christian has an asceticism there to do. What to take, what not to take, being involved as the shepherd...

COM: Ascetic effort, every Christian has an ascetic effort to make.

PP: The Christian lives in the world and yet isn't of the world, he lives in the city and yet isn't in the city. This is a Christian theme which will never be solved in a theory, it's just every Christian has to do it for himself. How to be in and not to be in. How to have your eyes on the other world while doing what you have to do.

COM: Eschatological tension.

PP: Yeah. You can't withdraw entirely from it if you live as a citizen. You have to vote, you have to take care of your city, you have to improve, you have to help the poor around you, you have to live within your community. And yet your aim is beyond that. And so, this is a gymnastic. This is a spiritual gymnastic which is not easy, not easy.

COM: And a monastic calling and the Christian calling in the world both have their difficulties in this regard. You could say that each one has its easier aspects and each one has its harder aspects.

PP: Yeah, yeah. As long as there is tension, it is a good sign. If there would be no tension then there would be a real problem. If we are installed here and we reduce our faith to something pious, like we do on Sunday—just as something to give us some meaning to our lives—then there is less tension. If we try to overdo the tension and live in the world while living like a monk it would be also artificial. We have to maintain both. The monk doesn't have this tension, he has to keep his own tension, so the gymnastic is easier in a way.

COM: How so?

PP: Because all your surrounding is monastic, is made of people who have chosen this way of life. The man in the world he has many things to look for. I mean, he has his family to feed, he has his job to perform well, if he is in a democracy, he has a citizen's role to play, which is important in a democracy. So, many, many things. And all of these things take time, but the day only has twenty-four hours. So, something will have to be put aside. Distraction is a big problem, probably. Even for us monks, it is a big problem, what to do, what not to do, it needs some courage.

To be continued.

- Interview conducted by Robert Dale..

Western Canadian Women's Retreat a Success

On September 16-18, 2011, seventy three Orthodox women gathered at Entheos Retreat Centre in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains for a weekend of spiritual renewal, growth, and fellowship. The majority of the participants were from Alberta, but there were representatives from communities in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, as well as two guests from California. The theme of the eleventh annual Orthodox Women's Retreat was "Healing Wounds, Strengthening Relationships." The main speaker was Matushka Yvonne Lysack from Christ the Saviour Orthodox Sobor in Ottawa. Matushka Yvonne holds a B.A. Honours, a Certificate of Theology, and an M.A. (Pastoral Studies-Individual Counselling). Recently retired from a private counselling practice, working from an Orthodox Christian perspective, she is currently enjoying full-time parish work. Clergy from the Orthodox parishes in Calgary served the various services throughout the weekend and were available for hearing confessions.

Session one dealt with the first and most important relationship, that of the Holy Trinity, and what can be learned from it. The Three Persons of the Holy Trinity are co-eternal and reciprocally contain one another; they are in an eternal relationship and are eternal love. God is perfect unity while maintaining distinctness. This teaches us that we can be distinct and have different roles, yet at the same time be equal. Equality is not achieved

by having the same function. Creation was an act of love of all Three Persons of the Trinity.

The theology of love was the focus of session two. God is the source of love; we love because He first loved us. God loves us and does not turn away from us, despite our sins and fallen nature. Love has no bounds. It is humble and extends to our enemies, which is a complete reversal of the standards of the world. Love extends to all creation. We love because we see in a person one who is made in the image and likeness of God. Love is not based on someone fulfilling our wishes and expectations. In this way, love is a reflection, an attitude, a commandment, rather than an emotion. The foundation of all our efforts must be love.

The third session gave practical suggestions for strengthening relationships with the parish priest. These included praying for the priest and his family and for their protection daily, respecting the priest's personal space, and helping to reduce stress and prevent burnout by assisting with lay ministries. The priest is the icon of Christ in the parish, and, as such, he should be esteemed because of his work. Each priest has his own strengths, ministry, and style. We must thank God for our clergy.

Session four explored Orthodox marriage. Marriage is a path to union with God; a couple loves God by loving each other. Marriage is a sacrament and a sign of the relationship between Christ (the bridegroom) and the Church (the bride). It is an eternal bond, not just "till death do us part." Marriage is not a legal sanction, nor is it an agreement to live together. In marriage, the couple establishes a domestic church and are co-workers with God in creation through the raising of children. A more mature love develops after the romantic phase. Conflict will occur, but it must be resolved with open and honest communication and listening to each other. Your spouse is the person with whom you are travelling on the road to salvation, the person through whom God manifests His love.

Spiritual Fatherhood/Motherhood was the topic of the final session. Most often, elders are monastics who guide us along The Way. They teach

as much by their silence as by their words, and they have the power to transform the environment through healing and the casting out of demons. Being an elder requires a deep love. The relationship between a spiritual child and a spiritual father is one of trust and obedience. This was most interesting, as we do not yet have a very well developed tradition of elders in North America.

The sessions were interspersed with free time, during which participants were able to enjoy the beautiful grounds of the retreat centre or spend

time in prayer and reflection. Each attendee was presented with a specially designed embroidered bookmark made in Constantinople, a beautiful memento of a wonderful weekend.

Many thanks to retreat organizers Joan Popowich, Myra Reinheimer, and Ghada Ziadeh for their

dedication and the countless hours spent in coordinating another successful and spiritually uplifting gathering of Orthodox women. Theirs is truly a labour of Christian love! May God bless you with His bountiful riches as you continue this special ministry! We look forward to the 2012 retreat, which will take place September 14-16 at Entheos, where we will again renew old friendships, make new ones, and celebrate the faith that unites us. For further information, please contact: Pres Myra Reinheimer reinhm@hotmail.com



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