

What Mission Implies

The development of the missionary spirit and activity is certainly one of the most hopeful signs of our new maturity as an Orthodox Church whose goal is to bring Christ's Kingdom to contemporary Americans. Our Church is beginning to realize that mission is the task for *the whole Church*, not only for some individually zealous preachers, or specialized agencies.

This is the reason why we should meditate upon the implications and ask ourselves the following questions:

- Is our own individual parish really willing to participate not only by making a collection for the establishment of some new mission far away, but also by becoming concerned with its own neighborhood? Why haven't the Orthodox begun any missions in the inner city as yet?

- Is our liturgical life meaningful enough to be shared with newcomers? Or is it functioning only in terms of providing comfort and satisfaction to our present membership (a fully legitimate, but insufficient concern)?

- Have we ever noticed that our Divine Liturgy contains petitions for the "catechumens" i.e., the new converts who attend services without yet enjoying full membership in the Church? And if there are no catechumens in our parish, this may mean that we do not really care for the mission of the Church.

- Is our own behavior, as Orthodox Christians, really different from the behavior of those who make no such claim, and are we frankly accepting the patterns of an increasingly secular civilization (which we verbally condemn as Godless)?

But some questions are to be asked from those who speak of mission and are actively involved in implementing it:

- Do you always remember Christ's warning to the Pharisees who "traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, make him twice as much a child of hell as themselves?" (Mathew 23:15), or St. Seraphim appeal: "Save yourselves and thousands will be saved around you"?

- Are you aware of the basic difference which exists between various Protestant evangelists and preachers of instant "born-again" Christianity and Orthodox missionaries concerned with building up the Church catholic, integrating people into the rich flow of Orthodox tradition, while also recognizing – as the Church always should – the positive, the beautiful and the authentic in all those who invoke the name of Christ, even if they are not yet formal members of the Orthodox Church?

It appears to us that the above questions point out some essential implications of the Church's missionary task and should never be forgotten.

Fr. John Meyendorff. "Witness to the World", S. Vladimir Seminary Press. Crestwood, N.Y. 1987. Pages 190-191.

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