

So You Think You Want to Quit?



Thoughts on Survival in the Priesthood

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Psalm 54 (LXX)

Hearken, O God, to my prayer; and disregard not my supplication.

Attend to me, and hearken to me: I was grieved in my meditation, and troubled; because of the voice of the enemy, and because of the oppression of the sinner: for they brought iniquity against me, and were wrathfully angry with me.

My heart was troubled within me; and the fear of death fell upon me.

Fear and trembling came upon me, and darkness covered me.

And I said, 'O that I had wings like a dove, then I would fly away and be at rest.'

Lo! I have fled afar off, and lodged in the wilderness.



Purposes of this Presentation

- Call attention to difficulties arising from **ecclesiastical leadership**
- Present strategies for finding motivation and strength to remain in priestly service
- Offer reflections on changes to improve priestly conditions



Case Studies Introduction

The problems are not just theoretical

Three examples from the OCA



Case Study 1: Closed for Business

- The Story
- The Issues



Case Study 2: Exit in an Orderly Fashion

- The Story
- The Issues



Case Study 3: Hostile Work Environment

- The Story
- The Issues



The Essential Priesthood

- Your priesthood is valuable.
- In your ordination, YOU:
 - **Are granted “the grace divine that heals that which is infirm and supplies that which is lacking”**
 - **Are made WHOLLY a servant of God**
 - **Are made worthy to offer gifts and sacrifices, to feed and wash Christ’s flock, and to preach the Gospel**



Romans 10:14-15

But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!'



Luke 9:61-62

Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.’

Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’



Quitting Isn't an Option

- Priests have a specific purpose and a specific charism.
 - **Your *ordo***
- We serve in obedience to the bishop, and we are ordained at his hand. But the priestly gifts are **from Christ**.
- Dare we neglect what is given to us?



Spiritual Survival Tip 1: Forgive

- The parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:23-35) is key.
 - **We receive *no* forgiveness if we refuse to *give* forgiveness**
- Continually remember the need to forgive.
 - **“Forgive and forget” is stupid. If you could forget, it wouldn’t be forgiveness.**
- Avoid developing resentments.
 - **Reflect honestly; speak truthfully; avoid malice**
- Repent of our own sins and contributions



Spiritual Survival Tip 2: Family

- But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Matthew 18:6
 - **Guard our family's spiritual health; they're your first priesthood**
 - **Guard your (former) flock, whom you cared for**
- Don't speak evil of those who have hurt you
 - **Don't allow your wife or children to speak maliciously or to slander**
 - **Avoid gossip and innuendo**
 - **This is the hardest part**



Spiritual Survival Tip 3: Church

- Care for your soul
 - **If you're allowed, go to ORTHODOX church**
 - If you can't, serve as much as you can from the service books at home
 - **Priests suffer when absent from the Holy Table**
- Reinforce by your actions that church is important
- Try to keep church life as normal as you can for yourself and your family both



Practical Survival Tip 1: Get a Job

- Have a Marketable Skill
 - **At all times**
 - **Keep old certifications and licenses current**
 - **Trade vocations and other skills are solid bets, but play to your strengths**
- Events are unexpected. Be prepared.
- Gainful employment is strong psychological medicine.



Practical Survival Tip 2: Get Help

- Mental health support for you and your family is NOT weakness.
- The OCA has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
 - <https://www.oca.org/about/benefit-programs>
 - 1-800-523-5668 or visit magellanascend.com
 - Typically 6 sessions for the covered people, initiated with a phone call
 - Many secular employers offer this benefit, too
- Confidentiality of mental health care is guaranteed by law
 - YOU control the release of information

Don't forget to exercise.
Sunlight is good for you, too.

Practical Survival Tip 3: Fight

- Your priesthood is valuable. Fight for it. Many saints did.
- History is written by the victors
 - **If you offer no response, the record becomes the truth of the matter, with continuing consequences for you**
- Insist upon:
 - **Specific statements of what you did wrong, with canonical references**
 - **Confirmation and clarification of your understanding of events**
- Find canonical expertise



Practical Survival Tip 4: Don't Drink

- Substance abuse is a temptation
- BUT
 - **It is sinful**
 - **It hurts you physically and spiritually**
 - **It hurts your family**
- Substance abuse blinds spiritual sight
- An addiction will only benefit your detractors



Practical Survival Tip 5: Document

- Document EVERYTHING
 - **Not “document wrongs against you” – that’s destructive**
- Safeguard against faulty and competing memories
 - **Save emails and written communications**
 - **Write up summaries of meetings and interactions VERY SOON afterward**
 - **Write up your recollection of events**
- It is a helpful antidote to “spinning” events endlessly in your head
- Can be helpful in therapeutic situations



The Upside

- Perseverance produces strength
- Suffering builds up pastoral sensitivity and insight + boldness and determination
- Suffering brings us to greater dependence on Christ
 - **“Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”**
2 Cor 12:8-10



How Do We Make Things Better?

1. Preserve the investment in clergy. Is this what we are recruiting clergy to?
2. Need better communication, relationships, and direction between hierarchs, deans, and priests.
3. Need better process for handling difficulties. Ombudsman?
4. Eliminate familiarity bias and strengthen due process.
5. Stop the culture of hazing.



Conclusion

