

In reflecting upon the 10th anniversary of the repose of our blessed Fr. Alexander (Dennis), I realised there are so many things I could write about. I could talk about the fact that my father (+Igumen John (Scratch)) once remarked that he learned what priesthood was about from him (despite serving as a priest for over 20 years). I could convey how he unified a fractured parish that had been floundering. I could write about how he witnessed the sublime theology of our faith in the most rudimentary and applicable way, regardless of whether one was serving at a small prairie Church, in Ukrainian or at a Cathedral in English. Yet for as beautiful and profound as these reflections are (and there are many many more) the one memory that I hold on to as being as precious as gold, was one that was captured on film.

There is a very beautiful photo (taken by our dearly departed Protodeacon Taras Papish) of an Fr. Alexander and myself talking before the banquet at the 2010 Archdiocesan Assembly. As far as photos go, it isn't that remarkable, yet it in many ways sums up who Fr. Alexander was. As such I hold that photo close to my heart.



We are sitting on a bench surrounded by beautiful flowers, and Fr. Alexander is animated as I watch very attentively.

Although it might look as if we were in a conversation about how to best serve the Church through a transitional time (conversations we often did have), or that Fr. Alexander was in the middle of illustrating a larger than life story (which he was prone to do). Yet the reality was that we were having a somewhat heated discussion. The actual details aren't that important to relate (especially some 16 years later) but to make a long story short(er) I was quite upset at him, and was letting him know it!

I realise that this isn't quite the stuff that makes for a precious memory - so some might be wondering why this photo is so important to me, and how does it sum up the kind of friend, pastor, rector, chancellor, priest and monk he was? Well it isn't because this photo is a record of an argument with him or me having the gumption to tell him off. Rather I think it has more to do with the fact that Fr. Alexander was someone that one could have difficult conversations with, and someone who had the humility to try and understand what the issue was, and reconcile it - as opposed to just dismissing it.

This might be a strange notion for some, given that on the surface, he could come across as gruff, abrasive and anything but humble. Indeed Fr. Alexander was not a person who minced his words. If there was something critical to say, he would say it without sugar coating it, or watering it down. To be sure, we all know people who are like this (to one degree or another). Those whose straightforward and blunt assessment and observations often leave one feeling sour. Sadly many of those assessments and observations are nothing more than the bitter fruits of pride, coming from those who are inconsiderate and indifferent. More often than not those kinds of people can certainly "give it" feeling they are absolutely right (about everything) but rarely can "take it" and be correctable. Fr. Alexander was certainly not one of those people.

When Fr. Dennis took the monastic vow, it wasn't as if he became "humble" the moment he took the name of Alexander. Rather I would say that his whole life was a struggle to embrace the life of our Lord who came to *"serve and not be served"* (Mt. 20:28). When I was interviewed by him before my ordination he quoted the words of the Lord *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."* (Mt. 11:28-30) and then said (in the kind of straightforward manner that I had come to expect) "the priesthood can be nothing more than what the Lord humbly offers. If you make it more than this, it will be no more relevant than a pile of ashes - so don't do that!"

I don't think I realized how personal this guidance was - an offering for me to understand the necessity of humility - that which he had to learn the hard way. Admittedly it was hard to recognise that foundation of humility when caught up in life, yet in the same way no one denies the love of a spouse, when veiled in an argument, Fr. Alexander's humility - even in difficult conversations - had the same kind of sure foundation that was unshakeable. If anything is expressed in this blessed photo, it is that. I know that part of my ministry and life has been

formed by what he offered - in the same way that many other people's ministries (liturgical or not) and lives have been formed across this Archdiocese and Church.

I have a particular (and maybe unique) practice, that when serving the Liturgy on high feast days, I commemorate at the great entrance, those founders and benefactors of our Church. Those men and women, whose contributions (however big or small) have given us a legacy that continues to bless the Church we now have (a kind of unofficial "diptics").

On this list are people like the late Metropolitans Leonty (Turkevich) and Vladimir (Nagosky); the Archbishop Arseny (of thrice blessed memory), as well as priests like Frs. Alexander Schmemmann, Thomas Hopko, Robert (Stephen) Kennaugh etc. Also among these names is our own Archamandrite (Fr.) Alexander, as his contributions to both the faithful, the Archdiocese and Church, can not be overstated.

Although one might not see the sums of these contributions in this photo of our conversation there is nonetheless on the one hand, a glimpse of his humility that was the foundation of so much that he offered, regardless of whether it was liturgical, personal, pastoral or administratively. On the other hand, it is an assertion that Fr. Alexander was truly a friend, pastor, rector, chancellor, priest and monk that one could have difficult conversations with. Yet more importantly he was someone who had the humility to try and understand what the issue was, and reconcile it - as opposed to just dismissing it.

What better example is there in which to be inspired by as we continue in his work of bearing witness to the saving love of the Lord throughout our blessed Archdiocese.

May his memory be eternal! Вічна пам'ять!