

Biblical-Theological Reflections

If we want to challenge ourselves to briefly describe the mission and calling of the Church, then we can rely on what the Holy Mother Church usually refers to as the three-fold vocation or ministry: to preach the Word of God (Prophetic Ministry), to live a life of community and personal prayer (Priestly Ministry), to perform acts of charity and mercy both in the church, and in the world (Royal Ministry). In these three points, we can describe our vocation as a Christian, as well as the vocation of the entire Church. This three-fold ministry is the same both for an eparchy and for the Christian family. These three points explain both the ministry of the clergy and the ministry of the laity. So obviously, the calling of a parish can also be described in these three terms: Christian teaching, community and personal prayer, works of charity and service to one's neighbor.

For every Christian the model should always be:

1. Christ - the Word of God and Divine Teacher
2. Christ - the Perfect High-priest and the Only Way to the Father
3. Christ - the Prince of Peace and Love, the Physician of our Souls and Bodies

If our personal vocation is to be an icon of the Lord, then along with the Christian community we make up the entire *iconostasis!* (icon screen).

In order to understand our prophetic and teaching ministry, we need to first ask ourselves, if briefly, who were the Old Testament prophets: for example Isaiah, or Ezekiel, or Amos. Very often we think of the prophets as foretelling the future. This is, indeed, the outlook of the New Testament. However, when we speak of their role in the community in which they lived, we find a much broader picture. Clearly the prophets profoundly felt the presence of God in their lives. The fundamental mission of the prophet was to listen to and proclaim the word of God. Very often these were words of judgment, but also words of renewal and hope. The prophets criticized the injustices in society; they stood out against those who neglected God's commandments. In this manner, it can be said that they were the conscience of the people of Israel and instructors in faithfulness to God and His commandments. Biblical Tradition acknowledged them as spokesmen or messengers of God, and that is why their words were recorded for future generations.

When we read the various teachings, parables and sermons of Jesus Christ in the Gospel, we find there examples of His Prophetic-Teaching Ministry. However, in contrast to the Old Testament prophets who were the spokesmen of God's word, in Jesus Christ, the Word of God speaks to us directly. Jesus Christ not only speaks about God, but allows us to know God himself, being the Son of God.

Jesus teaches us both by words and actions: he often speaks to God the Father in solitude, by Himself (Mark 6: 46) . He teaches us to turn to God, as to our Father (Matthew 6: 9), He reveals God's love and preaches through good works, especially through His death on the cross (John 15:13). Let us remind ourselves how on Mount Tabor the voice of God was heard from heaven: "This is My Beloved Son, listen to Him." (Mark 9: 7). That is why when his disciples call Him "Rabbi, Teacher!" (see for

example John 13:13-15), this expression has a special meaning. God himself came to this earth to teach us.

The rule of discipleship is “as the Master, so the disciple” (see Matthew 10: 24- 25a). This means that the prophetic-teaching ministry of Jesus is also our mission and calling: to hear the word of God, to allow it to transfigure our lives in order that we may pass on that word to others.

If every parish is called to be a place to encounter the living Christ, then Christ the Teacher must have a central place in parish life. The prophetic ministry of the parish includes everything which is related to the understanding of the Word of God, especially the Sacred Scriptures, but also to every learning of Divine truth, the truths of the Christian faith and the foundations of Christian life, always fostering our Eastern Christian theological, liturgical, spiritual heritage. The role of the pastor in fulfilling this teaching ministry within and by the parish community cannot be overemphasized.

Role of the Pastor

It is difficult to overestimate role of the pastor in the implementation of this ministry in the parish community. The most important work of instruction in the parish is the ability to preach a sermon which is both meaningful, and has been well prepared. While the actual communion of the Lord’s Body and Blood takes place in the second part of the Divine Liturgy (Liturgy of the Faithful) – the sermon which follows the reading of the Gospel and other texts of Scripture in the first part of the Liturgy, (Liturgy of the Word) can also be considered as a type of Communion, that is a partaking of the Word of God which is the bread of our spiritual life (Deut. 8: 3: “... not by bread alone that people live, but by all that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord.”) During the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, the preacher has the opportunity to explain how the Word of God is mystically present, “here, now, and for us”, regardless of the fact that the texts of Sacred Scripture were written long ago. The Holy Spirit Who inspired the writing of the Word of God, also inspires us to understand how the Word of God becomes incarnate in us, and lives on from generation to generation. This takes place when Christians gather together for the “breaking of the bread” (see: Lk. 24: 30-31)

Christian Education in the Parish

In addition, every parish, in accordance with its own capabilities has a broad variety of possibilities for the realization of its prophetic-teaching ministry, for example: teaching catechism to children, organizing various youth programs, programs for young parents, courses and lectures for adults (Bible studies, reading the Fathers of the Church, explaining the Liturgy and its symbolism, explanations of the symbolism of eastern icons, courses of icon painting), emphasis on pre- sacramental catechesis (before Baptism and Confirmation, First Confession and Solemn Holy Communion, Matrimony, and even Anointing of the Sick), establishment of a parish religious bookstore, parish library or reading room, etc. Some of our parishes in Ukraine have wonderful experience with parish catechetical programs. Some of our parishes in the West conduct a wonderful program entitled: “Generations of Faith”. In our parishes, of course there are many other good examples we can learn from. We especially want to bring to your attention the new Catechism of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, which has been recently published in Ukrainian, with translations being prepared in multiple languages.

In the book of Numbers Moses exclaims: "Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all!" (11: 29). This word has become a reality in the Church of Christ. It is our responsibility to ensure that it becomes a reality in our parish communities.