



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
* *Knights of Malta* *

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Chancellor's Update

The Good Shepherd

In July's Update, we discussed why bishops must Fast and do Penance. This month we quote from Metropolitan Simeon, beloved arch-pastor of the Holy Bulgarian Orthodox Church, a Prelate of our Order, and friend of His Holiness Pope Paul John II ([photo archives of our Order and pictures in the book show the two working together on ecumenical issues](#)). In his book, GOD'S GRACE in the Spiritual Life of the Church Shepherd, Metropolitan Simeon gives a profound insight on the example the Shepherd must give to the faithful ([Pages 135-139](#)).

"The holy apostles cherished dearly this commandment of their Teacher. Spreading to all the ends of the universe the Gospel teaching, they were living in complete conformity with it. With a clear conscience, sure of meeting no objection, the apostles had good reason to say to their followers: "You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe" (1 Thes 2:10), or to say, with Paul the Apostle, of themselves: "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (Phil 3:17).

"The accord or discord of a shepherd's life with the teaching he is preaching is of crucial importance for its dissemination among the people. With respect to those, among whom he is preaching, the shepherd is like a city "that is set on a hill", or like a lamp on a lamp stand (Matt 5: 14-15). Thus his way of life, with all its good and evil, cannot be concealed from the people.

"What, then, will happen if his way of life differs from what he is preaching, if he is morally imperfect? The parishioners and those he is instructing will in this case not be morally perfect either, they will resemble their depraved shepherd.

"Saint Basil the Great says: "We, entrusted to whom is the service to the word, must at any time be zealous in reforming the souls and testify before all people to the Church of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is through the word that the man of God becomes perfect. But let us allow each of our parishioners, if that is his wish, to ask us questions in private as well."

"The words quoted show clearly how earnestly should every shepherd apply himself to the spreading of the good tidings. His entire life, his acts, his conduct should be an expression of his concern for what is pleasing to God, and not for worldly matters. "Beware, you priests," warns St Gregory the Theologian, "lest your tongue, which ought to sound like a rebeck, should sound discordantly... A spring does not issue at the same time sweet and bitter water." The shepherd should not only be a virtuous man and excel in the virtues, he should be a model and teacher of virtue. He should more often ask himself the question, raised by St Gregory the Theologian: "In flesh I am virginal, but am I virginal in my heart?"

"If he preaches the Word of God, but does not live in accordance with it, the shepherd in the Church will resemble a constructor who is building with his one hand and demolishing what he

has built with the other one. By the loftiness and holiness of the truths he is preaching he draws people to himself, whereas by not following them in his life he is estranging people from his person. The layman watching the shepherd wants to see embodied in him the Christian teaching, so that he may more closely look at it and see how to put it into practice. From this point of view perfectly right is the saying: "Vita clerici - evangelium populi!", i.e. the life of the priest is a book, from which the layman should learn how to live. If the members of the flock do not have such a book before their eyes, they will not only suffer damage but will also be led to think that the Christian teaching is, despite all efforts, impossible to follow if the shepherd himself is unable to live by it. And when the shepherd displays discord between his teaching and his life, he will inevitably be subjected to reproaches and rebukes for being a hypocrite. Such a shepherd will forfeit the love and respect of the best of his parishioners, they will reject his guidance and will even go after other shepherds who are perhaps "mercenaries" or "wolves in sheep's clothing."

"On the contrary, the good life of the shepherd in accordance with the teaching he is preaching will certainly draw to him, and in his person, to the teaching he is preaching, the love and the respect of everyone. Not to mention the faithful and the pious ones, the very infidels, seeing the good way of life of Christians, and their shepherd in particular, instinctively show the respect due to their teaching and, hence, many of them turn themselves to the Church, even without any sermon, without whatever effort on the part of the shepherd. That this is so can be clearly seen in the testimonies of the writers of the ancient Church of Christ. Many were the persecutions that the Church suffered at the hands of the Israelites and the pagans. These persecutions sometimes made it impossible for the Christians and their shepherds to preach the teaching to their persecutors. In times like these, the sermon was performed by the very way of life of the persecuted and it converted many to Christ. Athenagoras of Athens writes: "But among us you will find uneducated persons, and artisans, and old women, who, while they are unable to prove in words the benefit of our doctrine, yet by their deeds exhibit the benefit arising from their persuasion of its truth."

"Therefore, the good shepherd of the souls, in his capacity of herald of the Word of God, needs to lead an austere life in accordance with the teaching of Christ."

"However, without God's help, all the shepherd's labors would be in vain."

Simeon the New Theologian

Over the past few months we have quoted extensively from Simeon the New Theologian. On Wednesday, September 16, 2009 Pope Benedict XVI in his Wednesday audience stated: "This saintly Oriental monk reminds everyone to pay great attention to spiritual life. If, in fact, we are rightly concerned with tending to our physical, human and intellectual development, it is even more important not to overlook our inner development which consists in knowledge of God and communion with Him, so as to experience His help at all times and in all circumstances."

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