



HOLY RESURRECTION ORTHODOX MISSION NEWSLETTER

The power of Words

Written by the Very Rev. John Breck

A few weeks ago my wife and I pulled into a gas station, and I got out of the car and began filling up. A pickup truck stopped about twenty yards in front of us, and the driver started waving and shouting. He was miffed because he couldn't pull up to the air pump; somebody had parked another pickup too close to it. The driver of the first truck kept waving and yelling something, I thought to one of the other customers, somebody he knew. Finally I saw him glaring straight at me. I called out, "Who are you talking to?" His aggressive response, coupled with a look of combined rage and disdain, was "You!" Then he pointed to the other pickup and yelled, "Is anybody in that truck?" I peered behind the pump I was using, then replied to the guy, "Nobody's in the truck." He uttered an expletive I'd do better not to repeat here, then he made a gesture toward me that was one of hostile dismissal, an intentional put-down both for the driver of the other vehicle and for me. He was mad and wanted me to know it.

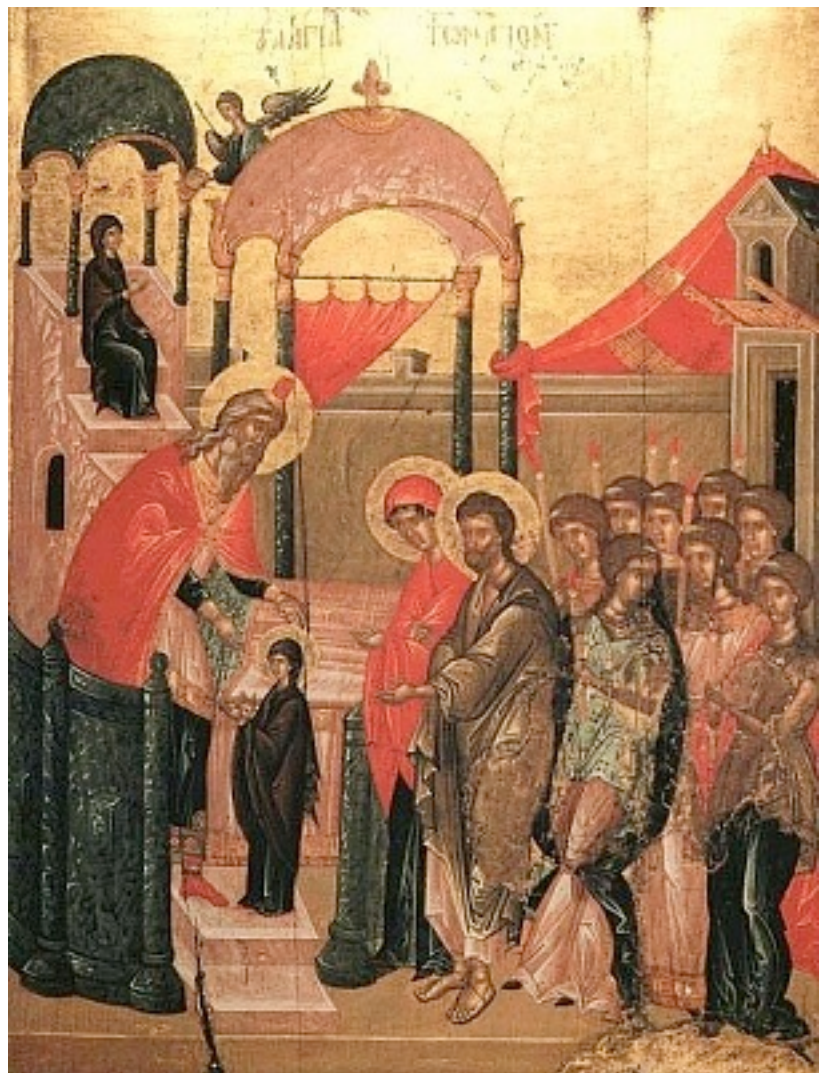
I finished filling up and was feeling pretty miffed myself. By this time the other truck's driver had returned, he pulled away, and this guy I immediately labeled as a Carolina redneck was busy putting air in his back tire. Rather than get into our car and reasonably, rationally drive off, I walked around the front of his truck and stood a few feet away from him. He looked up and snarled, "What do you want?" My reply, in a normal but none too friendly voice, was "You'd get a more decent answer to a question like that if you'd ask in a civil voice and not just sit in your truck shouting and waving your arms."

It wasn't a very bright thing to say, but I was mad and shaking a little. He stood up and said something ~ I forget what. I glared at him for a second or two, then turned my back to him and started walking toward my car. The guy yelled out one last time: "Hey, I waved at you! That's the way we do it in South Carolina!" By the grace of God I kept my mouth shut, which seemed to make him all the more outraged. He was mumbling something as we drove

away. Later on I found out that my wife, overhearing all of this, was sure I was going to get a bullet between the shoulder blades. This guy, after all, was hostile, aggressive, maybe a little drunk, and obviously of the redneck species, the kind that carries a loaded shotgun in the rack behind the driver's seat and a .38 in the glove compartment.

A week later I recalled the incident while I was reading Steven Pinker's marvelous book, *The Stuff of Thought*. That book, which explores the interrelationship between language and human behavior, got me to thinking about the really fascinating dynamic of that exchange at the gas station. The "guy" started off with an aggressive demand for some information: was there a driver in the truck blocking his path? The arm waving was his attempt not so much to attract my attention as to assert his authority: his right to be mad at the offending truck and to exact information from any available bystander. When I told him the truck was empty, he transferred his aggression to me, the messenger with the bad news. Once I confronted him, the aggression mounted in both of us. I called him on his lack of civility; he reposted with an attempted putdown. When I turned my back on him, I was dismissing his complaint as of no worth. He felt shamed, so he fired back with a self-justification ("Hey, I waved at you!"). When in the following second or two that had no effect ~ I kept on walking away from him ~ he called on a collectivity to back him up: "That's the way we do it in SC!"

If I'd answered what I wanted to, "That's the way rednecks do it in SC!" I may well have gotten that bullet in the back. There's a poorly enforced concealed gun law in this state, and most of its citizens, it seems, are armed to the teeth. "Don't tread on me, buddy!" no matter how uncivil I may get. My own combination of anger, shame and aggression did nothing but compound the situation, to the point that my poor wife was seriously afraid for my life. The guy is probably a very good father and husband, no more of a redneck than me or my neighbors. But whatever, the exchange was fascinating because of what it revealed about the dynamics of a meeting between strangers that's based on hostility and self-justification, both his and mine.



Just maybe, again by the grace of God, I'll learn from this how much language ~ meaning attitude as well as words ~ can make or break a relationship, between strangers or between friends and lovers. Words have power, as the ancient Hebrews so well knew. It's no accident that the Person of the Holy Trinity who deigned to become incarnate,

to take upon himself this very fallen human nature of ours, was the Word of God. With words we can bless or curse, heal or wound. We can reflect the mercy and love of Christ, even in potentially hostile situations, or we can let our nervous system ~ our passions ~ get the better of us, as I did, and make a bad situation worse.

What that brief little encounter at the gas station accomplished, on the positive side of the ledger, was to remind me of and reinforce for me once again a truth so often spoken by a departed friend, colleague and mentor at the St Sergius Institute in Paris, Olivier Clément. A theme that recurred throughout his writing and teaching career is one I, and I suppose most of us, need very much to keep in mind. That is the truth that every human person without exception ~ from the holiest monk to the most aggressive gun-toting redneck ~ is created in the image of God and is therefore worthy of infinite compassion.

MISSION NEWS:

Glory be to God! Fr. Robert and The parish council met with Fr. Marcus Burch, Dean of the Carolinas, on Thursday evening, October 29, to discuss the mission's recent decision to build. Fr. Marcus was very supportive of the mission's decision to grow, expand and build. He will be speaking with Diocesan treasurer Milos Konjevich in the near future regarding diocesan support for moving forward.

It is imperative that as we move forward we remember our enthusiasm, vision, concentration on the gospel, patience and above all: christian charity towards each other. The coming months will bring challenges, difficulties, joys and new opportunities to step out on faith. Let us proceed with prayer, boldness and thankfulness to God the Father in Christ Jesus.

The new parish web site is now operational. Please visit and take it for a spin.

Prayer Requests:

Abbie: 30 year old mother of Newborn. Diagnosed with inoperable terminal brain tumor. She has been given less than one year to live. Please remember Abbie's husband Joshua and young daughter, as well as extended family, in your prayers.

John C. and Dee

Issues relating to the building of the parish hall. Selection of an acceptable design, layout and associated cost issues. Consensus and charity on behalf of all and for all members and opinions.

Please send the names and brief details (if you desire to give any) of persons whom you would like remembered in prayer to Fr. Robert.

Important Dates:

November 1, Daylight Savings

November 20, No Great Vespers-Fr. Robert at Deanery Meeting in Charleston with Metropolitan

November 21 Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

November 26, Thanksgiving Day

NOVEMBER 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Daylight Savings	2	3	4	5	6	7 9:00am Divine Liturgy Monastery
8 9:40am 3 rd & 6 th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy	9	10	11 Veterans Day 6:30pm Book Study and Little Compline	12	13	14 6:30pm Great Vespers
15 9:40am 3 rd & 6 th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy	16	17	18 6:30pm Book Study and Little Compline	19	20 6:30pm Great Vespers for Feast	21 10:00am Divine Liturgy for Feast of Entrance into the Temple No Great Vespers
22 9:40am 3 rd & 6 th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy	23	24	25 No Book Study or Little Compline	26 Thanksgiving	27	28 No Great Vespers
29 9:40am 3 rd & 6 th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy	30	31				

October 2009

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18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

December 2009

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6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
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27	28	29	30	31		

Notes:
Set clock back on Sunday Morning November 1.
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