

August 19, 2019

To the members of St. Vladimir's church:

Recently someone - or someones - made malicious complaints and accusations about me to Irénée. As a result, I received a very rude letter from Irénée. I wish herein to address the situation, in which for a second time an attempt was made to force me into retirement against my will and against the will of many parishioners (as reflected in the Parish Council letter which sought to reinstate me last spring.)

I have no choice but to go along with this forced retirement and say my goodbyes this coming Sunday. I founded this parish 26 years ago with a handful of dedicated individuals. Over the past years I have attempted to guide and pastor it, sometimes through very difficult occurrences and events brought about by some would-be trouble-makers.

I shall add this: All this haste by Irénée to get rid of me was unnecessary. I would have retired eventually - probably before Pascha of next year - of my own volition. However, exchanges with Irénée over recent years have given me good reason to feel that he has a strong personal dislike of me. Now he has demonstrated his "power" in an un-Christ-like manner, - even if in doing so it would harm the parish and cause ill feelings. This unprofessional behaviour on his part was very unnecessary and demonstrates poor judgement.

As for the allegation of a "Jewish twist" in the services, that may stem in part from a sermon I wrote from Israel, a meditation on the Jewish roots of Christianity, and in part from the fact that I wear the Star of David on my person, as well as an Orthodox cross, although the Star of David was under my vestments.

Those who believe that the Star of David is only a Jewish symbol are incorrect. Many churches use his symbol, because the combined usage of the Star of David and the Cross is an affirmation of the continuation and unity between Old and New Testaments. I also wear a kippah, because Christ was a Jewish Rabbi and faithfully followed the religious traditions of His people. A kippah worn by a Christian is an expression of loyalty to Christ and to the faith which He held and handed on to His followers. Christ was and is, as stated by Simeon in the Temple, "the glory of Israel," for He continued the role of the Jewish people of being a "light to the nations". In Christ, we are brought into the fullness of the Covenant which G-d established with His "kingdom of priests," His "holy nation". If anyone rejects and scorns the Jewish people, then know for a fact that he or she rejects and even

scorns Christ Himself. As someone once asked: “How can anyone claim to love Christ, but at the same time hate His people?”

I can in all honesty make the following confession of faith:

I am a Orthodox Christian priest who places his trust in G-d and in Jesus (Yeshua) Christ, our Lord and Saviour. At the same time, like Peter, James, and Paul, I have a Jewish heritage which I will not deny. I proudly wear symbols of this heritage, and, in so doing, I honour Christ, who was Himself a Jew, and whose life, death, and resurrection was the fulfillment and completion of ancient Judaism. Many churches have wrongly taught their people to hate the Jews because the Pharisees called for the crucifixion of Christ some 2,000 years ago. But the truth is that the Jewish people are our brothers and sisters in G-d's universal and eternal Covenant. I wear these symbols in honour of the G-d of Abraham, of Moses, and of Christ Himself. Know for a certainty that I am now and will forever be a follower of Christ Jesus, and an ordained priest in his Church.

To those few who may have complained about me to Irénée, I have only this to say: No harm has been done to me, but many of the parishioners have been hurt, and damage has been done to the church itself. Why anyone would want the guilt of those actions to rest upon his or her head I cannot understand. But I can only say, in imitation of our Lord, “Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.”

I wish that I could give the parish some final guidance for its future, but at this point it would be awkward to do so. I can only suggest that, with caution, and prudence, you seek the path which is best. Do not be misled by the dangers of which Christ warns us, for those dangers are indeed very real.

Finally, I do not know who complained about me, but a clergyman must expect negative gossip as part of what happens in his church. (It can happen, and has often happened, in many different churches.) But in the present circumstance, the gossip has had serious implications because of the harm it has done to the parish, i.e. it provided a long-delayed occasion to have me removed and to hurt many of the parishioners. The situation also betrays a woeful ignorance of the Jewish connection to, and origins of, Christianity. This reflects very badly on the OCA as a whole. Also, I do wish that the complaint had been addressed to me personally, but what's done is done. And yet on the positive side, it has exposed a problem in the Orthodox church that should be brought out into the open, and which has been addressed more successfully in other Christian denominations: the problem of Chris-

tian antisemitism. After the Holocaust many churches started to deal with the problem, but the Orthodox church still needs to address it adequately. Perhaps the imprudent action which has been committed will provide the occasion for a fruitful discussion that needs to occur within the OCA. Thus at least there could be some good being served from an otherwise reprehensible decision.

I do hope to see many of you this Sunday so that I may bid you farewell on this sad occasion.

*In Christ, and with love to the faithful members of the parish,
Fr. Vladimir*