

August 2, 2009

The Sunday Before the Transfiguration

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

In response to a popular wish for more information on the subject, it will be useful, I believe, to share my impressions of the recent Archdiocesan Convention. By way of organizing these reflections, I want to consider the varying expectations of those who attended the Convention. After all, those sundry expectations necessarily established the individual criteria for judging whether or not the Convention was a success.

I begin with Metropolitan Philip, who has presided over several such conventions during his long service as our Archbishop. As a steady listener and reader of everything he has to say, I was able to identify only one personal expectation mentioned by the Metropolitan---to wit, that everything at the Convention be public and transparent. He several times spoke of "the light of the sun" to describe what he wanted to prevail at that gathering.

By that criterion, Metropolitan Philip must be pleased by what transpired. He not only insisted on total openness of information at the Convention; he also took direct and effective steps to insure that such a policy would prevail. Chief among these was his provision that each part of the Convention would be broadcast over Ancient Faith Radio.

Metropolitan Philip should receive proper recognition and credit on this point, because the provision for radio coverage required a measure of resolve on his part. I violate no confidences by mentioning there were influential individuals at the Convention who endeavored to undermine the Metropolitan's policy.

I am very glad he resisted those efforts, because scores of Antiochian Christians all over the country are already listening to those radio recordings and drawing their own conclusions about the Convention. Indeed, I encourage everyone to do so.

At the other end of the spectrum, some of those in attendance were disappointed at the outcome. I have in mind those who had made no secret they wanted the Metropolitan to be censured at the Convention. On various blog sites, indeed, calls for his resignation have appeared quite frequently for several months.

I hope I am not peremptory in remarking that such an expectation was unreasonable, and its fulfillment would probably have been disastrous.

The case of those calling for the Metropolitan's censure or resignation was burdened by two disadvantages. First, the grievances against him---those recorded on the blog sites---were usually general, vague, and without adequate supporting evidence. One could not really get a handle on them.

Second, the complaints against the Metropolitan were mostly anonymous. Let me put this question to every priest in the Archdiocese: How many of us could endure being thus accused? Who among us would not consider it a great miscarriage of justice if we were removed from the ministry, or forced to resign, because of vague and general accusations, based on hearsay evidence, reported by anonymous individuals writing on blog sites?

Finally, let me speak of my own expectations at the Convention.

First, I expected the Metropolitan to say explicitly and without reservation that the bishops in our "local synod" are full diocesan ordinaries. He did so. Indeed, just prior to the Convention he anticipated this expectation by restoring our bishops' names to the diptychs.

Second, I had somewhat hoped we would receive ironclad, irrevocable assurances that a certain disgraced and retired bishop would never---under any circumstances---be restored to ministry in this Archdiocese. I regret that no motion to that effect was placed for consideration on the floor of Convention. I would have made such a motion, but there were no appropriate place for it in the Convention's schedule. I blame no one, obviously, as this expectation on my part was probably unreasonable.

Third, I expected a true debate on the finance committee's proposal for an audit of the Archdiocesan budget. Although I had no strong feelings about an audit, I was disappointed in expecting the matter would be studied on its merits. Almost as soon as the proposal was made, however, various delegates interpreted the recommendation as a sort of referendum on the Metropolitan's own ministry. This interpretation was unfortunate, and I regret to say that reason did not prevail. An Archdiocesan audit should have been debated with respect to its probable advantages, not as a kind of "quality control" imposed on Metropolitan Philip. The question will certainly come up again, no matter who our metropolitan is.

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