

November 22, 2009
Second Sunday of Advent

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

Last week we reflected how the vice of a murmurer is multiplied---not simply added---when combined with the murmuring of others. We considered, by way of example, the joint rebellions of the Kohathites and Reubenites in Numbers 16. That instance, we recall, depended on the physical proximity of the Kohathites and Reubenites as these two groups were situated in the desert camp of Israel.

Let me suggest that physical proximity was necessary because neither group had very good internet access. If decent web connections had been available in the Sinai Desert, the Kohathites and Reubenites would doubtless have shared their complaints by means of blogging.

Fancy, for instance, that the Reubenites were nursing a complaint about something on Ancient Faith Radio. Let us suppose, for the sake of illustration, that Dathan (let's call him, one of the Reubenites) took issue with a sidebar notice, posted from an AFR listener, which said, "How may we pray without ceasing? By listening to Ancient Faith Radio!"

Reading that notice, Dathan might sensibly have reflected, "Well, I suppose the listener meant to say, 'I find AFR a big help in maintaining a spiritual, prayerful atmosphere in my home.'" Had Dathan rendered such an assessment of the listener's remark, I suspect he would have had a better than 99% chance of being correct.

Let us conjecture, nonetheless, that Dathan, feeling grouchy that day, determined to pursue the alternative option, the option with the 1% chance of probability. Perhaps he would post the following comment on his blog site: "That someone would say such a thing is one thing, but to endorse it, especially in a format that is associated with so many clergy in our Church, is rotten."

Now, let us further speculate that some other blogger (we leave him anonymous, perhaps because he is afraid of crowds) posted the whole business on his own blog page, later remarking, "The gushing is near constant on AFR. This comment was perfectly in keeping with other promotional comments made their [sic]."

Aha, self-promotion, the real message of Ancient Faith Radio.

You know, it would not surprise me if such a blog posting would receive more

than fifty responses over the next few days.

What sorts of things would they say? Well, it would be amazing, actually, to those of us who had imagined Ancient Faith Radio to be a good ministry on behalf of the Orthodox Church. In our blindness, we now realize, we enthusiasts had been unduly impressed by the scores---and perhaps hundreds--of testimonies from those who largely credit AFR with their personal conversions to the Orthodox Faith. Alas, we had no idea what a "rotten" ministry AFR really is.

Reading those blog comments, we would learn the error of our ways. One of the bloggers, for instance, would have instructed us: "I don't know why anyone is seriously surprised that something like this would appear on AFR. Heck, from a marketing standpoint-the only standpoint which one can judge AFR without violating its self-understanding-it's a shame they didn't put that out there earlier." (This individual might blog several times, at one point mentioning his other pet peeve: the Touchstone editors.)

Within hours, another blogger would remark: "I try to listen to AFR to convince myself that my instinctual panic at finding something Orthodox so glossily packaged is not necessarily a good thing but the honey-voiced female saying 'Saint John Chrysostom on Ancient Faith Radio' makes me feel as if I've trailed mud in the parlour." Goodness, things at AFR are evidently far worse than we thought.

The tone of the readings on AFR would be a special target for critical barbs. Thus, we would be informed, "I deplore the manner of intonation and reading often done on AFR, in which the intoner or reader uses an affected, emotive vocal aesthetic. . . . I believe it does violence to the scriptures and the writings of the fathers for them to be read in such a manner."

See how these things can evolve? Ancient Faith Radio was, at first, simply "gushing." Now, AFR is "doing violence to the scriptures and the writings of the fathers." But things would get even worse, I'm afraid. One blogger would complain, "the main thing that bothers me is the classical guitar behind and around the affected readings."

Oh heavens, not just self-promotion, not just muddy floors, not just violence to the Scriptures, but---think of it---classical guitar!

Good thing they didn't have the internet at Sinai. Might have led to murmuring.

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