

+St. John the Evangelist Orthodox Church

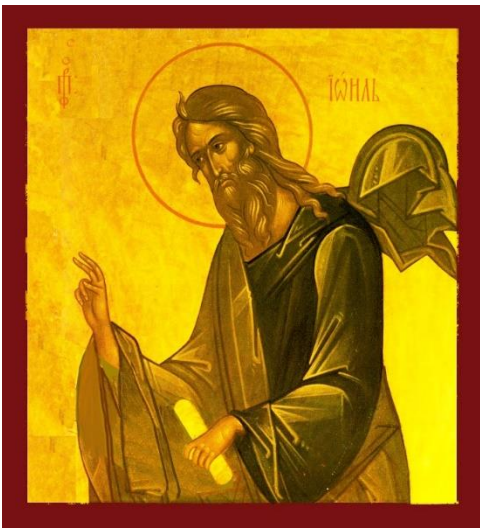
Antiochian Archdiocese of North America
Metropolitan Saba of New York and all North America
V. Rev. Fr. Nicholas Borzghol, Pastor
Dn. Nicholas Adranly

501 Moraga Way, Orinda, California 925-258-4255
www.stjohnorinda.org email: stjohn.evangelist.orinda@gmail.com

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2025

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST & THIRD SUNDAY OF LUKE

THE HOLY PROPHET JOEL; MARTYR VAROS AND SEVEN MARTYRS WITH HIM;
MOTHER CLEOPATRA OF PALESTINE; VENERABLE JOHN OF RILA



On October 19 in the Holy Orthodox Church, we commemorate the holy and glorious Prophet Joel.

Joel was the son of Phanuel of the tribe of Reuben. He lived 800 years before Christ, and foretold the misfortunes of the Israelites and their captivity in Babylon for the sins that they had committed against God. He called the people to fasting and the priests to penitent and tearful prayer that God would have mercy on them; and they heard him. Joel also prophesied the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, and the outpouring of His grace on all the faithful. He foretold and described the Dreadful Judgment of God, and also the glory of God's holy Church.

On this day, we also commemorate the Martyr Varos and seven martyrs with him; Righteous Mother Cleopatra of Palestine; and Venerable John of Rila.

THE EPISTLE

*The Lord is my strength and my song.
The Lord has chastened me severely.*

The Reading from the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians. (11:31-12:9)

Brethren, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who is blessed for evermore, knows that I do not lie. In Damascus, the governor under Arétas the king guarded the city of the Damascenes, willing to seize me, and through a window I was let down in a basket by the wall, and escaped his hands. I must boast, though it is not expedient; but I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body, I do not know, or whether out of the body, I do not know; God knows—who was caught up to the third heaven. And I know that this man—whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know; God knows—was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which no person is allowed to utter. On behalf of this one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my infirmities.

For if I would desire to boast, I shall not be foolish, for I shall speak the truth. But I refrain from it, lest anyone should think of me above that which he sees me to be, or hears from me. And to keep me from being exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations, I was given a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me, to keep me from being exalted above measure. For this thing I beseeched the Lord three times, that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore will I rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

قُوتِي وَتَسْبِيحَتِي الرَّبِّ. أَدْبَا أَدْبَنِي الرَّبِّ.

فصلٌ من رسالة القديس بولس الرسول الثانية إلى أهل كورنثوس. (9:12-31:11)

يا إِخْوَةُ، قَدْ عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَبُو رَبَّنَا يَسُوعَ الْمَسِيحِ، الْمُبَارَكُ إِلَى الْأَبَدِ أَنِّي لَا أَكْذِبُ. كَانَ بِدِمَشْقَ الْحَاكِمُ تَحْتَ إِمْرَةِ الْمَلِكِ الْحَارِثِ، يَحْرُسُ مَدِينَةَ الدِّمَشْقِيِّينَ لِيَقْبِضَ عَلَيَّ. فَذَلَّيْتُ مِنْ كُودَةٍ فِي زَنْبِيلٍ مِنَ السُّورِ، وَنَجَوْتُ مِنْ يَدَيْهِ. إِنَّهُ لَا يُوَافِقُنِي أَنْ أَفْتَخِرَ، فَاتِي إِلَى رُؤْيِ الرَّبِّ وَإِعْلَانَاتِهِ. إِنِّي أَعْرِفُ إِنْسَانًا فِي الْمَسِيحِ مُنْذُ أَرْبَعِ عَشْرَةِ سَنَةٍ (أَفِي الْجَسَدِ، لَسْتُ أَعْلَمُ، أَمْ خَارِجَ الْجَسَدِ لَسْتُ أَعْلَمُ، اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ) اخْتُطِفْتُ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ الثَّالِثَةِ. وَأَعْرِفُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْإِنْسَانَ (أَفِي الْجَسَدِ أَمْ خَارِجَ الْجَسَدِ لَسْتُ أَعْلَمُ، اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ) اخْتُطِفْتُ إِلَى الْفِرْدَوْسِ، وَسَمِعَ كَلِمَاتٍ سِرِّيَّةً لَا يَحِلُّ لِنَاسٍ أَنْ يَنْطُقَ بِهَا. فَمِنْ جِهَةٍ هَذَا أَفْتَخِرُ، وَأَمَّا مِنْ جِهَةٍ نَفْسِي فَلَا أَفْتَخِرُ إِلَّا بِأَوْهَانِي. فَإِنِّي لَوْ أَرَدْتُ الْإِفْتِخَارَ، لَمْ أَكُنْ جَاهِلًا لِأَنِّي أَقُولُ الْحَقَّ، لَكِنِّي أَتَحَاشَى لِنَّ لَا يَظُنُّ بِي أَحَدٌ فَوْقَ مَا يَرَانِي عَلَيْهِ أَوْ يَسْمَعُهُ مِنِّي. وَلِنَّ لَا أُسْتَكَبِرَ بِفَرْطِ الْإِعْلَانَاتِ، أُعْطِيتُ شَوْكَةً فِي الْجَسَدِ، مَلَكَ الشَّيْطَانِ لِيَلْطِمَنِي لِنَّ لَا أُسْتَكَبِرَ. وَلِهَذَا طَلَبْتُ إِلَى الرَّبِّ ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتٍ أَنْ تُفَارِقَنِي. فَقَالَ لِي "تَكْفِيكَ نِعْمَتِي، لِأَنَّ قُوتِي فِي الضَّعْفِ تَكْمُلُ." فَبِكُلِّ سُرُورٍ أَفْتَخِرُ بِالْحَرِيِّ بِأَوْهَانِي، لِتُسْتَقَرَّ فِي قُوَّةِ الْمَسِيحِ.

THE GOSPEL

The Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke. (7:11-16)

At that time, Jesus went to a city called Nain, and many of His disciples and a great crowd went with Him. As He drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." And He came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And Jesus said, "Young man, I say to you: arise." And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited His people!"

فصلٌ شريفٌ من بشارة القديس لوقا الإنجيلي البشير والتلميذ الطاهر. (16-11:7)

فِي ذَلِكَ الزَّمَانِ، كَانَ يَسُوعُ مُنْطَلِقًا إِلَى مَدِينَةٍ اسْمُهَا نَايْنُ، وَكَانَ كَثِيرُونَ مِنْ تَلَامِيذِهِ وَجَمْعٌ غَيْرٌ مُنْطَلِقِينَ مَعَهُ. فَلَمَّا قَرَّبَ مِنْ بَابِ الْمَدِينَةِ، إِذَا مَيِّتٌ مَحْمُولٌ، وَهُوَ ابْنٌ وَحِيدٌ لِأُمِّهِ، وَكَانَتْ أَرْمَلَةً، وَكَانَ مَعَهَا جَمْعٌ كَثِيرٌ مِنَ الْمَدِينَةِ. فَلَمَّا رَأَاهَا الرَّبُّ، تَحَنَّنَ عَلَيْهَا وَقَالَ لَهَا: "لَا تَبْكِي." وَدَنَا، وَلَمَسَ النَّعْشَ فَوَقَفَ الْحَامِلُونَ. فَقَالَ: "أَيُّهَا الشَّابُّ، لَكَ أَقُولُ قُمْ." فَاسْتَوَى الْمَيِّتُ، وَبَدَأَ يَتَكَلَّمُ، فَسَلَّمَهُ إِلَى أُمِّهِ. فَأَخَذَ الْجَمِيعُ خَوْفًا، وَمَجَّدُوا اللَّهَ قَائِلِينَ: "لَقَدْ قَامَ فِيْنَا نَبِيٌّ عَظِيمٌ، وَانْفَقَدَ اللَّهُ شَعْبَهُ."

Youth Month in our Archdiocese!!

October is here and we are about to start *Youth Month* across our Antiochian Archdiocese. During the month of October, we give our teens more opportunities to serve in Church, including: Epistle reading, taking the collections, serving as ushers, and other additional activities in serving the parish community.

October is also a time for us, clergy and parishioners, to share our love and concern for the youth of our parish. Let us take a moment to thank a teenager for being present in Church. Thank them for their good works. Let them know that they are welcome and wanted in our parish!



Upcoming Youth Readers:

<u>Date</u>	<u>English Epistle</u>	<u>Arabic Epistle</u>	<u>Sermonette</u>
Oct 19	Tania	TBD	Mason Kwar
Oct 26	Nour Khalileh	Malak Khalileh	TBD

Christmas Volunteering

The joy of the season is upon us! ✨ Our church is preparing for the grand opening/ Christmas party, and we'd love your helping hands and hearts. Every bit of help makes a difference. If you would like to be part of this committee, please contact Rania Kashou or David Hanna. Let's come together in the spirit of fellowship and make this a joyful celebration of Christ's birth! ❤️🎄

Upcoming Events

Saturday October 25th	Vespers at 5:30 pm
------------------------------	---------------------------

Coffee Hour

Oct 19th	Paula and Yasmeen Kassouf and family in memory of Samir Kassouf
Oct 26th	Siham Mitry for the 6th month memorial in honor of Donna Potter

Holy Oblations

This week, Holy Oblations are offered by:

- † St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Nick Nicola, Sandy Dudum, George Messih, Fairouz Freij, George Adranly, Fred Addas, Henriette Hilal, Souhad Halaka, George Cawog, Rocky Dudum and Norma Khalil**. Many years!
- † St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Blanche Manneh**. Many years!
- † St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Sam Nassab**. Many years!
- † St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Deacon Nicholas Adranly**. Many years!
- † St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Sue Gideon**. Many years!

Candles for the altar table and in front of the icons of Christ and the Theotokos offered by:

- † Ibrahim Fasheh in memory of Hanada Fasheh for one full year. May her memory be eternal!



- † Altar Servers:
Nathan Sweis, Clayton Morgan, Elias Freij, Angelo Freij, Andrew Freij, Mazyn Haddadin, James Dudum, John Dudum, David Evans, Evan Kwar, Mason Kwar, Jonathan Juha, Maron Juha and Zaiden Karanikola

St. John Orthodox Church
501 Moraga Way
Orinda, CA 94563

You could use this QR code for your donation



Building Update - October

At long last, all city and county inspections have been completed or are scheduled to take place this week. All interior and exterior work required for the certificate of occupancy and approval of all permits has been completed. The final steps were the paving of the driveway from Hall Drive and the installation of the custom kitchen tables - these were completed last week and look fabulous. See pictures attached.

As in any major project such as this hall, there is a punch list of non-permitted items that will need to be completed, and we will get to work on those once we have obtained all final signatures and inspections.

We are excited to open the hall very soon for all to share and enjoy! On behalf of the Building Committee, I thank you all for your love, prayers, patience and contributions to this incredible addition to our property and to the upcoming fulfillment of this dream



Festival Dancefloor Photos!



INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES

IOCC FOOD & WINE TOUR

Hosted by the IOCC Metropolitan Committee of Northern California and St George Orthodox Cathedral

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2025

VESPERS: 4:00 PM • RECEPTION: 5:00 – 8:00 PM

Come experience a tasting menu & wine pours from around the world and learn about IOCC's latest emergency programs

ST GEORGE ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

1617 Southgate Ave | Daly City, CA 94015

Tickets: \$60 through Oct. 15, includes food and unlimited wine pours
\$70 after Oct. 15, includes food and wine
\$50 includes food only
\$35 students
\$25 children 6–12 (*free 5 and under*)

Tickets and sponsorships at **iocc.org/bayarea**



SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Awareness Day

AS NAC TEEN SOYO PREPARES TO SPONSOR THE HISTORIC 45TH ANNUAL SPECIAL OLYMPICS SPORTS CAMP AT ANTIOCHIAN VILLAGE IN AUGUST 2026, WE ASK FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT TO HELP MAKE THIS BELOVED MINISTRY POSSIBLE.

EACH YEAR, APPROXIMATELY 300 SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETES AND COACHES PARTICIPATE IN THE CAMP. TEEN SOYO MEMBERS FROM ACROSS OUR ARCHDIOCESE VOLUNTEER A WEEK OF THEIR TIME AND LIVE IN SERVICE TO THE ATHLETES—FULFILLING THE SCRIPTURAL CALL TO SERVE “AS WORKING FOR THE LORD, NOT FOR MEN” *Colossians 3:23*.



Next Sunday, October 19, our teens will be collecting financial donations to help sponsor this remarkable event. Your contributions make it possible for every athlete, coach, and teen volunteer to attend the camp at no cost. They also help cover travel expenses for the SOYO members who come to serve.

As a token of appreciation, our teens will offer bookmarks featuring the icon of Christ the High Priest to all who contribute.

Thank you for prayerfully considering a gift to this ministry. Your support helps our youth grow in Christ by giving them a unique opportunity to love and care for others. Checks may be made payable to your local Teen SOYO group, with “SOAD 2025” in the memo line.

Donations can also be made online at www.teensoyo.org/special-olympics.

Venmo @NAC-SOYO



venmo



Special Olympics

DID YOU KNOW?

Each year, NAC Teen SOYO covers the cost of the camp, approximately \$75,000, through the generosity of our fellow parishioners. Through the years, we have hosted more than 8,500 athletes and coaches. Around 1,200 of our teens have had the unique experience of being a coach or volunteer at the camp.

All Night Vigil

"With fiery lips the Cherubim
sing Thy praise, O Christ God; and
with incorporeal mouths the
Choir of the Archangels never
falleth silent from glorifying
Thee. "

November
7th
Friday, 7pm



Synaxis of the Holy Archangels

4593 Central Way,
Fairfield, CA 94534

St. Timothy
Antiochian
Orthodox Church

VESPERS, LITY, ORTHROS
AND LITURGY

SUNDAY FUNDAY

DAVE & BUSTER'S

AFTER
LITURGY

NOVEMBER 9TH

2075 Diamond Blvd Ste.
H180, Concord, CA 94520



USE OUR
ST. JOHN LINK



Christmas Event

DECORATE THE TRUNK OF
YOUR CAR FOR ALL TO ENJOY

14
SUNDAY

DECEMBER

AFTER LITURGY

BRING A TREAT TO PASS TO
ALL THE KIDS
(IF IT RAINS THIS EVENT
WILL BE MOVED INSIDE)

TO PARTICIPATE PLEASE
CONTACT: RANIA KASHOU





Krispy Kreme Digital Dozens to Support St. John Church



grouprai.se/krispykreme60225o



\$15
per order



50%
donated back

A Bishop's Scribbles

By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

This title may surprise many. This article was written to convey the suffering of the bishop who seeks the face of God and the sanctification of his people. It aims to shed light on the suffering of the Church in the East—a Church that, together with her people, lives under harsh conditions, leading the faithful to look upon the Church as a lifeline of salvation. Yet, amid this suffering, they have come to demand from the Church more than she can bear. The article is, in essence, an indirect call for us to intensify our prayers for our Church.

Most believers are used to relating to their pastor in only one direction — he gives and they receive. They expect his hand to remain always extended toward them, carrying whatever they think they need or desire. To them, he exists to fulfill their requests. They often treat him like a “superhuman” or someone who must not make mistakes, get tired, or need rest! Why, they think, should he even have to worry about food or drink? They forget that he is a human being, and that he too needs to feel a living spiritual and emotional connection with his flock and with others. In fact, such connection is not a luxury, it is essential for him to continue his ministry and fruitful service.

For a pastor to endure being forgotten by his people, he would have to be an angel in a body without human limits. But if he is a man with a sensitive conscience and a tender heart, living his priestly calling in sincerity and truth, then he can only accept carrying his cross daily, fixing his eyes on the Lord and seeking from Him alone true comfort and consolation.

The needs of God's people are many and varied — spiritual, social, material, psychological. That is why the role of faithful believers, who are conscious of their responsibility, is indispensable. How can a pastor meet all these needs when so many expect only to be embraced, but few ever embrace him?

I sometimes wonder: what image do believers really have of their pastor? Many are astonished to discover that he is, in fact, human — that he needs human connection, if not also spiritual companionship. In their minds, they place him on a very high pedestal — yet they leave him there alone, excusing themselves from striving for that same holiness to which he and they are equally called.

At the same time, they show him little mercy for any action, behavior, or even word that displeases them. Their measure is not whether his ministry aligns with the Gospel. What matters to them is that he didn't fulfill their request, even if he tried his best and went beyond his strength.

Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk described this painful reality from his own experience:

“If a priest guards himself from sin, they call him rigid;
if he grieves over his sin, they call him gloomy;
if he gives alms, they call him a hypocrite;
if he prays much, they call him an extremist;
if he is insulted and forgives, they call him weak;
if he gives generously to the poor, they call him a fool.”

A Romanian metropolitan, whose diocese numbers just over a million people, once confided to me that his greatest suffering lies in how to shepherd his flock according to the demands of the Gospel, when many of them do not want that Gospel, and sometimes even ask him to do what contradicts it.

His words reminded me of the great Saint Isaac the Syrian, who in the seventh century was appointed bishop of Nineveh. Two men once came before him, quarreling over a field. He told them, “The Gospel says so-and-so.” One of them replied, “What do I have to do with the Gospel? I just want my rights.” At that, the bishop said, “Then what am I doing here? I have no work except the Gospel.” He left the episcopate for the desert, where he became one of the greatest spiritual saints.

Another deep pain for a bishop comes when his flock shows no interest in renewing their lives, purifying their hearts, or growing spiritually, and they are content to remain as they are. For what is the bishop's role, if not to sanctify the lives of his people and help them walk that path? His primary service is to nurture everything that leads them to progress in living their Christian faith.

Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk served his spiritually and materially poor diocese with selfless devotion. He tried with all the wisdom and strength God gave him to lift up his people spiritually. Yet he wrote in his notes about the preacher he had invited to teach them: “In vain does the poor preacher wear out his voice.” His illness – the reason he gave the Russian Holy Synod when asking to be relieved of his episcopal duties — was no doubt the result of deep suffering among a people unprepared to

live the ways of the Gospel and unwilling to learn. He spent the rest of his life in a monastery, devoted to prayer, contemplation, and charity.

People generally treat a bishop more as a social or political figure than as a spiritual father watching over their salvation. They want him to provide for their material needs, not their spiritual ones. In our Eastern lands, where religion and society intertwine, they often expect him to approve whatever they desire, even if it contradicts the Gospel. If he refuses, he's labeled "strict" or "fanatical."

This places him in constant inner struggle: How far can his conscience go in accommodating people? Can he look the other way when they insist on imposing their will in matters of faith, twisting or wounding its essence? Has he fulfilled his duty if he guides them according to God's will and they still refuse to follow?

Some expect him to be a businessman, building projects, launching initiatives, managing investments. Others expect him to be a politician, and by "politics," they mean securing their own interests and influence. Some want him at their social events, presiding at grand banquets, engaging in all conversations except those that concern his true spiritual mission. Then they call him "charming" or "well-mannered."

But if he is truly a man of God — pure, prayerful, devoted to visiting his people, strictly faithful to the Gospel commandments — they say, "He belongs in a monastery, not a diocese," even if he gives his very body to the poor.

Our Christian people in the East have yet to move beyond the Ottoman-era idea of the "strong bishop" — the powerful community chief who, for four hundred years, acted as both governor and representative of his people before the civil authorities.

What most deeply isolates a pastor, however, is when he finds no response within his own diocese, when his flock shows indifference to his preaching, when they abandon their responsibilities toward the Church yet still expect him to produce wonders and achievements. For some to consider the diocese and its resources as the bishop's personal property shows a complete withdrawal from their faith commitment. But to expect every service and every solution to come from the bishop or priest alone is ignorant at best and tragic at worst.

Many are quick to criticize their pastors "for every little thing," whether fair or not, whether it concerns something that displeases them or simply doesn't benefit them

personally, while at the same time excusing themselves from any responsibility. They seem to think their only duty is to complain and attack. Worse still, they scrutinize every aspect of the bishop's personal life, his home, his spending, his daily habits. They watch him and judge him on how he lives, while only a few truly care for him, support him, and connect with him at a deeper level. Those who genuinely want him to be a man of God are fewer still.

And yet, they wonder why he sometimes feels alone in their midst.

خربشات أسقف المتروبوليت سابا (اسبر)

عنوانٌ قد يستغربه الكثيرون. هذه المقال كتب لينقل معاناة الأسقف الذي يطلب وجه الله وتقديس شعبه. وهي لتسليط الضوء على معاناة الكنيسة في المشرق هذه الكنيسة التي تعيش وشعبها تحت ظروف قاسية مما جعل الشعب ينظر الكنيسة كخشبة خلاص ومع المعاناة أضحوا يتطلبون من الكنيسة ما هو أكثر من طاقتها. المقال ما هو الا دعوة غير مباشرة من أجل أن نكثف الصلاة لكنيستنا.

إذ اعتاد معظم المؤمنين على التعاطي مع الراعي باتجاه وحيد؛ هو يعطي وهم يستقبلون. يريدون ليده أن تبقى ممدودةً باتجاههم، وحاملةً ما يعتقدونه، هم، اللازمَ لهم، أو ما يرغبون، هم، به. عندهم، هو موجود لتأمين مطالبهم. يتعاملون معه كـ "سوبر إنسان": لا يجوز أن يخطيء، ويتعب، ويرتاح!! ولماذا عليه، حتى، أن يفكر بالطعام والشراب!! ينسون أنه إنسان، ومن حقه، أن يشعر بتواصل روحي وجداني مع أبناء رعيته، ومع غيرهم. لا بل إن هذا التواصل حاجة أساسية ولازمة له، من أجل تأمين استمرار خدمته ونجاحها.

يحتاج الراعي إلى أن يكون ملاكاً بجسدٍ لا جسداني، حتى يتحمل نسيان رعيته له. أمّا إن كان ممّن يتمتّعون بضمير مرهف، وقلب حنون، ويعيش رسالته الكهنوتية، بكلّ صدق، فليس له إلا أن يرتضي حمل صليبه بشكل دائم، متطلعاً، أبداً، إلى ربّه، ملتمساً منه، ومنه وحده، التعزية الحقيقية.

حاجات شعب الله كثيرة ومتنوعة؛ فيها الروحي والاجتماعي والمعيشي والنفسي ... ما يجعل دور المؤمنين، الواعين لمسؤوليتهم الإيمانية، لا غنى عنه. فكيف للراعي أن يحقق في شخصه كلّ هذه الأمور، وهو لا يرى إلا من يطالبه باحتضانه، فيما ما من أحد يحضنه هو.

أتساءل بين حين وآخر: ما هي صورة الراعي حقاً في أذهان المؤمنين؟ في الواقع، ثمة من يُدهش منهم، عندما يكتشفون أنه إنسان، وبحاجة إلى تواصل إنساني على الأقل، إن لم نقل روحياً!! فصورته في أذهانهم تصنّفه في مرتبة سامية جداً. ولكنهم يقيمونه وحده فيها، ويعفون أنفسهم منها، متناسين أنه وإياهم مدعوون إلى القداسة ذاتها.

وفي الوقت ذاته، لا يرحمونه إزاء أيّ تصرّف أو سلوك أو موقف أو حتّى كلمة لم تعجبهم. ليس المقياس، عندهم، مدى توافق رعايته مع الإنجيل! المهم، عندهم، أنّه لم يؤمّن لهم مطلبهم، حتّى لو حاول وبذل ما يفوق طاقته ولكنته عجز.

وصف القديس تيوخون الزادونسكي هذه الحالة، منطلقاً من معاناته الشخصية، فقال: "إذا حفظ نفسه من الخطيئة قالوا إنّهُ "متزمت!"؛ وإذا حزن على خطيئته قالوا إنّهُ "سوداوي!" إذا ورّع الحسنات قالوا إنّهُ: "مراء!"؛ وإذا استزاد من الصلاة، قالوا "من الغيورين،" إذا أهين وسامح، قالوا: "لا يقوى على الدفاع عن نفسه!" وإذا سخر على الفقراء، قالوا: إنّهُ "أحمق مبدّد!"

أسرّ لي مطران روماني، تعدّ أبرشيّته ما يزيد قليلاً عن مليون نسمة، بأنّ معاناته العظمى تكمن في كفيّة رعاية المؤتّمّن عليهم، بحسب متطلّبات الإنجيل، في حين لا يريد ذلك كثر منهم، بل يطلبون منه أحياناً ما يخالف الإنجيل.

ذكرني كلامه بالقديس الكبير اسحق السوري، الذي أقيم أسقفاً على مدينة نينوى (العراق)، في القرن السابع. هذا أتى إليه رجلان متخاصمان حول حقل. قال لهما يقول الإنجيل كذا. فأجابه أحدهما مالي وللإنجيل، أنا أريد حقّي. فقال الأسقف ماذا أفعل هنا إذن؟ وليس لي عمل سوى الإنجيل! فهجر المطرانيّة إلى البريّة حيث تنسك، وصار من أكبر القديسين الروحانيّين.

أمّا عدم اهتمام الرعيّة بإصلاح حالها، وتطهير نفوسها، وبرودتها الروحية، واكتفائها بما هي عليه، فميدان آلام روحيّة أخرى للراعي. ما هو عمل الأسقف إن لم يكن تقديس حياة أبنائه، ومساعدتهم على السير في هذا الطريق؟! تقوم الأولويّة في خدمته على رعاية كلّ ما من شأنه أن يؤدّي بهم إلى تقدّم في عيش إيمانهم المسيحيّ.

خدم القديس تيوخون الزادونسكي أبرشيّته الفقيرة، روحياً ومادياً، بتفانٍ، وحاول إنهاء شعبيها، روحياً، بكلّ ما منحه الله من حكمة وقوّة. لكنّه كتب في مذكّراته عن الواعظ، الذي استقدمه لكي يعلم الرعيّة: "عَبثاً يُتَعَب الواعظ الفقير صوته." ولا شكّ في أنّ مرضه، الذي احتجّ به، ليطلب من المجمع المقدّس الروسي إعفاهه من خدمة الأسقفية، إنّما كان نتاج معاناته الأليمة، مع شعب لم يتحضّر بآداب الإنجيل، ولا يريد ذلك. فأكمل بقيّة حياته في أحد الأديرة، منصرفاً إلى حياة التأمل والصلاة وعمل الصدقات.

يتعاطى الناس، عموماً، مع الأسقف، بصفته صاحب مركز اجتماعي أو سياسي، له مكانة عليا، أكثر ممّا يعاملونه أباً روحياً، مُقَاماً للسهر على خلاصهم. يريدونه أن يؤمّن احتياجاتهم الماديّة لا الروحيّة. وفي بلداننا الشرقيّة، حيث لا ينفصل الديني عن الاجتماعي، يريدونه موافقاً لهم على ما يرغبون به، ولو كان مضاداً للإنجيل. وإلا كان بنظرهم متشدداً، أو متزمتاً.

هذا يجعله في مخاض ضميريّ دائم. فإلى أيّ حدّ يمكن لضميره أن يسايرهم، ويغضّ الطرف عن بعض تصرّفاتهم، خاصّة، عندما يفرضون مشيئتهم على قضايا إيمانيّة أساسيّة، فيحرفونها ويطعنونها في الصميم؟ أيكون قد بلغ الأمانة إن وجههم بحسب مرضاة الربّ، ولم يستجيبوا؟

بينما يريده بعضهم رجل أعمال، بناءً، مُطْلَقاً لإنجازات، مستثمراً في الوقف، يراه آخرون رجل سياسة. والسياسة، في عرفهم، تثبت لوجودهم، وتحقيق لمنافعهم. بعضهم يطالبونه بتلبية ما يعتبرونه واجبات اجتماعيّة، ويرغبون بترؤسه ولائهم الفاخرة، ولو كان الحديث يطرق كلّ الميادين، إلا ما يختصّ برسائله الدينيّة أو الروحيّة. آنذاك يكون، في عرفهم، محدثاً لبقاً "يبيض الوجه".

أمّا أن يكون رجل الله، طاهراً، نقيّاً، رجل صلاة، وافتقاد، مُلْزِماً نفسه بوصايا الإنجيل، فلا يعتبرونه وافياً بالمطلوب. يقولون: مكانه الدير لا الأبرشيّة، ولو وزّع جسده على الفقراء. لم يخرج شعبنا المسيحيّ في الشرق من مفهوم المطران القبضاي، المدعوم أربعمئة سنة من النظام العثماني، الذي قام على أساس الملة، وجعل المطران بمثابة محافظ لطائفته، ومدبّر لشؤونها الزمنيّة أمام السلطات.

أمّا أكثر ما يُشعر الراعي بالغربة الداخليّة، فهو أن لا يجد تجاوباً معه، في نطاق أبرشيّته. كأن لا يلاقي اهتماماً من رعيّته، سواء وعظ أم لا؛ أو أن يتحلّلوا من مسؤولياتهم تجاه كنيستهم، ويطالبوه في الوقت ذاته، باجتراح الإنجازات والعجائب. أن يعتبر المؤمنون أنّ الأبرشيّة ومواردها مزرعة الأسقف الشخصيّة، لهو منتهى الانسحاب من التزامهم الإيماني، ولكن أن يجعلوا تأمين كلّ خدمة، على أكتاف الأسقف أو الكاهن، فهو منتهى الجهل، إن لم نقل توصيفاً واقعياً أقسى.

يكتفي الكثيرون بانتقاد رعاتهم "ع الطالع والنازل"، بما يصحّ ولا يصحّ، بما لا يعجبهم ولا يروونه نافعاً لهم، وفي الوقت ذاته يعفون أنفسهم من كلّ مسؤوليّة. وكأنّ مسؤوليّتهم تُختصر في الانتقاد والتهجّم! والأُنكى من هذا، أنّهم يتناولون حياته الشخصيّة في كلّ تفصيل، بدءاً ببيته وليس انتهاء بمصروفه. يراقبونه ويحاسبونه على أمور معيشته، وقلة منهم فقط، هي التي تهتّم به حقّاً، لترعاه وتتواصل، في العمق، معه. أمّا الذين يريدونه رجل الله بامتياز فهم أقلّ من القلّة!

ومع ذلك يستغربون أن يختبر الغربة وهو في وسطهم.