

Sunday, September 9, 2012

Fr. Isaac Tanios, The Wise Master Builder

In the words of our teacher St. Paul the Apostle about ministry, he pointed out that *he was like a wise master builder who builds God's building* (1 Corinthians 3). A true servant works towards building the kingdom of God. Wisdom is needed in this building process as our Lord Jesus Christ pointed out the characteristics of the successful servant: *"Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes."* (Luke 12:42-43). Likewise, our beloved Fr. Isaac was a wise master builder, vigilant for building and serving every soul that God placed in his path.

In the late 80's, the Chicago land area congregation passed through some tough times and it needed a wise shepherd to build everything anew quietly and steadfastly. This shepherd that was sent by the divine care was Fr. Isaac, during that time he was over 65 years of age but his spirit was young and his passion for the ministry was limitless. He gathered the dispersed, sought after the isolated.

He started building the church of St. Mary one member at a time before he built our magnificent church building which everyone marvels at its beauty both from inside and outside.

Fr. Isaac did not get distracted by the problems of the past and their circumstances, rather he started building everything anew, a new place with a new spirit. He was a man of a powerful mind and very sharp thinking, he quickly understood everyone he came across and was able to speak to everyone at their own level. In doing so, he attracted many souls to serve in the church whether from the old generation or the new generation that only speaks English.

He was a perfectionist throughout his life, and had an artistic touch in everything he did. Therefore, he was successful in all his endeavors whether in his personal life as a lay servant and as an engineer before he was ordained priest, or in his ministry as a priest. He was unique in that he provided this personal touch to everyone he served. He remembered everyone by his/her name and in many cases memorized people's phone numbers, probably because he would call people very frequently and ask about them.

He used to observe everyone in church during the liturgy and takes a mental image of the attendees, then reasserts this image as he gives out the blessing bread at the end. When he would return home that day, he would mark the names on a list for the whole congregation, then he would start calling everyone who was absent. In many cases he would pay a visit to those who were absent at their homes during the week. In doing so, he captured the hearts of many, helped them to sanctify the day of the Lord, and be regular in attending the liturgy and partaking of the holy sacraments.

Fr. Isaac understood the true meaning of serving and caring for others. He realized that serving is about self-denial, carrying the cross, and continuous giving. Therefore, he did not complain from anyone regardless of the tribulations he faced, rather he endured much with patience, thanksgiving, faith, and a great heart. He was keen on the salvation of every soul, and had willingness to sacrifice for the sake of everyone and to be patient towards all. He had great management skills, so he recognized the abilities of every person, then he would place the right person in the right place, and he did that in a smart and convincing way. Above all that, he was characterized with a true spirit of fatherhood so he was a strong yet compassionate father in the same time.

He paid attention to the details all throughout his life, spoke little, carefully chose his words, he recognized the consequences of actions, and always seized every opportunity to offer his love. He kept a diary documenting everything around him until a short while before his departure. Throughout his ministry, he published a periodical newsletter sharing some simple meditations and thoroughly documenting the church news and events. These periodicals are considered an accurate and comprehensive account of the history of St. Mary church of Chicago since its birth. He assembled all the issues of this newsletter and presented them to H.H. Pope Shenouda III, may God repose his soul, in an elegant book during his last visit to Cleveland, OH towards the end of last November, 2011. Pope Shenouda admired the book very much and considered it as an invaluable historical documentary which contains a very important facet of the modern church history in the land of immigration.

We can say about our beloved father the Hegumen, Abouna Isaac the same words that were said about David the profit that *he served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers* (Acts 13:36). May the Lord repose his soul in the paradise of joy and repay him for his labor in building the kingdom, and accept his prayers on our behalf, Amen.

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