

Who is a Good Man?

by

Father Michael Azkoul

Too many people just assume that they know what a "good man" is. Because a man or an organization (composed of "good men") builds hospitals, schools, an orphanage, an old-folks home, gives to medical research to needy relatives, to charities, or because he is pleasant, honest, kind, loyal, refined, cheerful, honorable, or possesses those qualities which endears him to his neighbor, he is called "good", a "good man". I repeat, people *assume* that a "good man" is defined in this manner, but rarely do people critically examine the assumption to discover whether a "good man" may actually be what he is generally accepted to be.

The thinking on the "good man" has simply ignored Christianity and naturally Orthodoxy which is true Christianity. Christian experience, dogma, doctrine, canon law, are casually excluded as something personal and having little to do with the essential character of a "good man". The Church is "what you make it" and very few people would include in their definition of a "good man" his religion. Surely, he is expected to have one and must live up to it, but as such, it is secondary in the analysis. Of course, he must believe in God (whatever that means), but "each in his own way and each in his own words."

Now, can these *ideas* about the "good man" be reconciled with the Christian Truth? Is a "good man" (in the Christian and only sense) to be identified with the common conception of him? Is a "good man", as is ordinarily believed, a man who does "good", "good" as we usually think of it? Is the belief, any belief in God, sufficient to make a man "good"? What is the source of our opinions concerning the "good man"? Are they from God or men? Are the ideas that most of us hold on this matter given by our environment or are they the revelation of God? In any case, let us see what the Church has to say about the "good man".

The Church teaches that three things are required for a man to be "good": 1) conversion 2) grace 3) faith. *Conversion* means repentance (literally from the Greek, "change of mind"). Conversion necessarily requires *faith*, the right faith, the faith given, revealed, disclosed in Christ Jesus. A man must be converted to be "good". He must be changed from a son of Adam to a son of God by *grace*. He must be "born again" (John 3:3), renewed, made a "new creature" in Christ. The result is a new mentality, a "change of mind", a new attitude and approach to all things. This is accomplished primarily by the Sacraments, especially, the Holy Eucharist, which give *grace*. "But God, Who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-6). It is grace, an energy of God, a gift, an undeserved favor, divine and activating, which converts us, which makes us "good".

With a converted being a man receives "illumination", "light", "sight", so that his faith in God has truth, direction, substance. The life of grace gives Christian faith. That faith is

the faith of the Church, the Body of Christ, the Bride with Whom Christ is "one flesh". This communion of Bride and Bridegroom, this common life of Head and Body, this mystical and Divine intimacy, gives rise to the experience of incomprehensible beauty. From it issues Truth, a Truth which is set in words, words which can hardly hold their meaning; and these words are Creed and canon and certitude. This is all obtained in sacred community with others *in* Christ, *in* the Church, not alone. Certainly, it must become a personal possession, but the acquisition comes through the common life in the Body of Christ. It is this experience, this knowledge, through conversion, through grace, through love and unity in the Beloved, Christ Jesus, that creates a "good man". A "good man" is the result of what the Blessed Trinity and the Church has done. In other words, *it is impossible to be a good man without Jesus Christ.*

One may build hospitals, donate to charity, etc., be characterized by all those "moral" qualities which the world calls "good", but they are meaningless and illusory without the Christian experience: conversion, grace, faith. The very definition of a "good man" relies upon his relation to Jesus Christ. Thus, an anti-Christian is utterly wicked and a true Orthodox only is fully a "good man". Conversion, grace, faith, that without which a man cannot be "good", no matter what the world thinks. In other terms, the more fully a man is integrated into the life of the Church, the better man he is, and without Jesus Christ and His Bride, goodness would be impossible. "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another; but when the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior, appeared, He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, so that we might be justified by grace and become heirs of hope of eternal life. The saying is sure" (Titus 2:3-8).