

EMAILS FROM HEAVEN

[Concerning Race Horses and Jackasses]

by

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We humans complain too much.

I fondly remember a wonderful story, which is also true, that was told to us some forty years ago by a young man who, for a brief time, was a novice in our monastery.

His name was George Burke and he was from Springfield, Illinois.

He told us that when he was a young lad, he was always sickly, and so his mother would constantly complain to the doctor about this. "Oh, doctor, he's always coming down with something," she would whine. "If it's not this, it's that. And if it's not one thing, it's another." Whine, whine, whine.

The doctor was getting pretty sick and tired of all this constant whining and complaining. So, one fine day, he told little Georgie's mother, "Well, Mrs. Burke," said he in his slow, nasal twang, "I'm gonna tell ya one thing.....No matter *what* ya do..., and no matter how *hard* ya try... ya ain't gonna get no race horse outta two jackasses!"

That stopped the whining. That zipped the lip.

I vividly remember the first time I served as a bishop at Saint Mark's Cathedral some months after my stroke. As the sacred service was about to commence, our deacon (now Protodeacon) Father Demetrius Houlares turned towards me, solemnly raised his *orarion* and looked at me expectantly. I looked back at him with a blank expression on my face. With infinite patience, he continued to look at me with expectation. With a vapid expression and slightly lop-sided smile on my face, I looked right back at him, and thought to myself, "Is something supposed to happen now?"

Well, as a matter of fact, something *was* supposed to happen: the Divine Liturgy!

It was truly a miracle how we got through that service.

Ah, the human condition! Since all of us, to a greater or lesser degree, are in a faulty state, in one way or another, what do we gain by complaining about it?

A newspaper article I read some years ago, recorded that, thanks to the advances in modern medicine, 40% fewer people die of heart attacks, 25% fewer people die of cancer, 60% fewer people die of infectious diseases, 55% fewer people die of strokes, etc., etc., etc.

Who was the reporter kidding?! The death rate for everybody is still 100%!

A famous preacher in nineteenth century Greece, the monk Gerasimus of Zakynthos, wrote the following in his commentary on the Gospel passage which describes the healing of the Ten Lepers (which has to do with the subject of gratitude to God):

My brother Christians, be grateful to God for everything, both good and bad, since God bestows benefactions upon us, both with good things and with things which seem evil to us. Are you healthy? Your health is from God; therefore, give thanks to your Benefactor. Are you ill? Your illness is a healing for the soul. Therefore, together with Job, say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." Are you wealthy? Together with the Prophet David, thank God, saying, "He fulfilleth thy desire with good things." Are you poor? Give glory to Divine Providence which, in the stead of things fleeting and temporal, has prepared for you things everlasting. He will not forget you because of your poverty, and, together, with Job, say, "As it seemed good to the Lord, so let it be." Let not the glorification of God be absent from your mouth. Let not the words, "Glory to Thee, O God!" be absent from your lips. Yea, O Heavenly Ruler of all things, grant us the grace to have the remembrance of Thee always in our minds, that we may glorify Thee unceasingly, that at all times we may give thanks to Thee, our Father in the Heavens, to Whom is due all worship. Amen.

Our sicknesses are emails from Heaven, bearing the message: "You are a mortal. Remember the motto of the Boy Scouts, and 'Be prepared!' By your sickness, God is filing away the rust (i.e., your sins), so that you may shine in the resurrection, which awaits you. So, don't complain."

Christ is risen!