

Valuable Lessons from the Holy Scripture and the Lives of the Saints

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Let a man so account us as ministers of Christ as stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover that which is required in stewards is that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by man's tribunal. Yea, neither do I judge mine own self. For I know nothing by myself, yet I am not justified by this, but He that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time until the Lord come, Who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts and then shall there be praise unto each one from God... God hath shown forth us Apostles to be last as ones appointed to death; for we are made a spectacle unto the world and to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ, but ye are wise in Christ. We are weak, but ye are strong. Ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling-place and we labour working with our own hands; being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure it; being defamed, we entreat; we are made as the filth of the world and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I admonish you. (I Cor 4:1-5, 9-14)

Giving no occasion of stumbling in anything that the ministry be not blamed; but in all things we commend ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in scourgings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in vigils, in fastings, in pureness, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God, by the weapons of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers and yet true, as unknown and yet well known, as dying, and, behold, we live, as chastened and not killed, as grieved yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. (II Cor 6:3-10)

"Beloved, malice is a terrible and unsettling thing. It is always at work and never ceases to effect its basic characteristic, which is to ascribe blame to those that are not at blame, to condemn the innocent, and to defame those that are pious and most Orthodox as heretics and impious. As proof of this, it is sufficient to mention the examples of the great teachers and saints of our Church: Athanasius, Basil, Gregory, Chrysostom and the rest, who were most pious and most Orthodox, but were defamed by their adversaries as impious and heretics.

"So if these great saints of the Church were not spared from malice and defamations, how would it be possible for us, who are not even worthy to sit at their feet, to remain above what they suffered and not endure such things? It is nothing new, therefore, that we also are being criticized and defamed with slanderous names and called heretics by certain people who are moved by malice, spite and hatred. [These latter] resemble those foolish Athenians who condemned the innocent man Aristides and wrote on an *óstrakon* [potsherd] against him that he deserved to be ostracized and banished from Athens, without having known him at all, but only from hearsay and from hearing from others that he deserved to be "ostracized" and exiled*. So we rush to slander people and we fulfill that popular proverb which says, 'When one dog barks, all begin to bark.'

St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (in his apology to those who labeled him derisively as being one of the "Kollyvades", as if this were something evil!)

*Concerning the ancient Athenian practice of ostracism, and also concerning the distinguished, capable and honest Athenian leader Aristides the Just (who elicited the jealousy and malice of his fellow politicians), Plutarch writes the following:

"The sentence of ostracism — to give a general outline — was as follows: Each voter took a *óstrakon* [a potsherd], wrote on it the name of the citizen whom he wished to remove from the city, and brought it to a place in the *agorá* [the city center] which was all fenced about with railings. The *árhons* [city elders] first counted the total number of *óstraka* cast. For if the voters were less than six thousand, the ostracism was void. Then they separated the names, and the man who had received the most votes they proclaimed banished for ten years, with the right to enjoy the income from his property.

Now at the time of which I was speaking, as the voters were inscribing their *óstraka*, it is said that an unlettered and utterly boorish fellow handed his *óstrakon* to Aristides, and asked him to write the name "Aristides" on it. He, astonished, asked the man what possible wrong Aristides had done him. "None whatever," was the answer, "I don't even know the fellow, but I am tired of hearing him everywhere called 'The Just.'

On hearing this, Aristides made no answer, but wrote his own name on the *óstrakon* and handed it back. Finally, as he was departing the city, he lifted up his hands to heaven and prayed — a prayer the opposite, as it seems, of that which Achilles made — that no crisis might overtake the Athenians which should compel the people to remember Aristides."