

FATHER ANDREW SMITH ON THE MARTYR DANIEL'S METHODOLOGY

What we can learn from Fr Daniel Sysoyev's talk on Missionaries

Posted by Fr Andrew on 12 October, 2011 ·

Having summarised the translation of Fr Daniel's speech, entitled 'What is a True Missionary', I have attempted to sort by category of information and give these by category.

What is it to be a missionary?

People talk about the monastics and the hierarchs, and how great saints they are. Some will even say that it's unfair that only a few people can be monastics or hierarchs. However, missionaries are greater than either – being equals of the Apostles – and this is open to any Orthodox Christian. The canon for holy Communion mentions missionaries, but doesn't mention monastics; Scripture says much about missionaries but little about monastics.

So: who is the true missionary?

- Must be committed to the Lord unto death (like St Paul – Romans 8:35-39).
- Must totally and completely love God and, in Him, love all.
- This love must impel the missionary to rescue people from perdition and bring them to Christ. A missionary that isn't concerned about people perishing is neither Christian nor missionary.
- The missionary must keep the faith and desire greater depth in it, aspiring to full knowledge despite the impossibility of its attainment (our faith is in the Trinity, Who is incomprehensible to all).
- Missionaries must keep reading the Bible – a missionary who doesn't is a contradiction in terms.
- Missionaries must have pure lives – keeping the holy commandments of God, keeping clean from every sin.
- Missionaries must yearn for holiness and to be in God's Kingdom.

The work of a missionary is to be on the borders of worlds: undefiled by this world, being the living letter of Christ, and being the breath of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in and directs the missionary to truth, reminding the missionary of what the Saviour has promised, and giving them the power to preach and to convert.

The Lord said 'whosoever receive my messenger because he is mine shall not lose his reward, even if he but give a cup of cold water to drink' (paraph., Mark 9). Imagine how great the reward of the preacher who preaches the word of God where they don't want to hear it.

Knowing this, what can we do?

Firstly, pray for missionaries.

Secondly, recognise that being a missionary is a path open to any Orthodox; moreover, it is greater than most other paths, with an incomparable reward from God.

Third, consider if you're a missionary. If you are - you need to start working! If you aren't, pray that you – and others around you – may be in the future.

Lastly, remember that missionaries are dwelling in a number of realms. Seriously, pray for them.

Missionaries: Where they came from, where they are going to

It was the day after Pentecost that the Apostles gathered together and divided up the known world in which to preach.

The Apostles, however, did not complete the task of evangelism. They worked in an area, and succeeded in converting many to Christ, but many other areas were not converted until later – Sts Cyril and Methodius were only sent in the ninth century, and Japan only evangelized by our Church in the eighteenth.

Missionaries serve the ancient plan of the Trinity, a plan that predated the creation of the world. The Father created the world that we might, through Jesus Christ, be the children of God. The Holy Spirit calls the people into the Kingdom. Those who love Truth will follow Him; those who do not, will not. Christ wants all to be saved, but knows from the beginning those who would follow Truth.

Missionaries not only need the special help of God – they have the special help of God. God wills that all will come to salvation, and has even given us 'seeds of the Word' in various religions and philosophies to help bring people to God (the White Hostess of Altai, the Logos, the Tao, etc).

The end of the world (and eternity with God) will not come until the Gospel is preached to everyone. Missionaries allow this to happen, by preaching to everyone in every city, island, village, etc. Missionaries don't just pray for it ('Thy Kingdom Come') – they actively make it happen.

Knowing this, what can we do?

Firstly, if we are in areas that are not overwhelmingly Orthodox, we are in exactly the right place to be a missionary. It's not someone else's job – it's our job.

Secondly, in most parts of the diaspora, there are various jurisdictions present. If we are in that circumstance, we should consider establishing a pan-Orthodox initiative to avoid duplication of labour.

Thirdly, in any culture, there is something there that will lead a people to Christ and to salvation. The missionary must find it and use this to lead people to God.

Fourthly, not everyone will be saved. God respects our freedom to choose – we are responsible for choosing well.

Lastly, remember that 'Thy Kingdom come' isn't just a phrase – it's a prayer that God will establish His kingdom, allowing us to spend eternity with Him.

The Life of a Missionary

Missionaries go, like sheep among wolves – but like a sheep with an unbreakable skin, de-toothing the wolves. Missionaries snatch souls from the devil for Christ, going everywhere – the mosques, the sects, the pagans, the non-believers – proclaiming the word of Christ, pulling from darkness to light, with the word that is of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:4).

Miracles follow a missionary, and the missionary sees Scripture fulfilled. Missionaries don't have city or homeland, only the heavenly Jerusalem with God and His saints. Missionaries are strengthened on the foundation of Christ, His apostles and prophets, as their inheritor and follower. The missionary follows in their steps to receive their reward from God.

The missionary, being a weapon of God against the devil, must remember that his job is to announce the word of God unchanged – neither added nor subtracted. The missionary who adds will be punished, the missionary who subtracts will be taken away from the book of life (Rev 22:18-19).

Missionaries are to know only Christ, and Him Crucified (1 Cor 2:2), and are to live like this – co-crucified with Christ, showing victory over the power of death and a sign of the world's end.

God sends His messengers to the ends of the world, in particular times and places. One cannot schedule or predict a missionary – a missionary lives in the hand of the Father. He is there

when the missionary needs Him, bringing people to them when needed (seemingly by accident, but really by providence).

Missionaries must not be afraid because they sinned at one point, even greatly. They must stop sinning and cover those sins by converting unbelievers, strangers and the ignorant to Christianity, and bringing sectarians to the Fullness of the Faith. Not only that, but the missionary will then have all of those people praying for the missionary and the mission work. The missionary co-operates with the angels, the saints and the Mother of God in seeking the salvation of all.

Knowing this, what can we do?

Firstly, though seemingly weak and unprotected, Missionaries operate under the protection of God. He will nourish the missionary, He will provide for and give inspiration for the missionary when it is required.

Secondly, missionaries should expect a life like Christ: co-crucified, showing victory over death and reliance on God.

Thirdly, missionaries go where others dare not to bring as many people as possible to Christ, preaching the fullness of the Gospel (neither added nor subtracted).

Lastly, missionaries are sent to any place at any time. One cannot predict or plan for a missionary – one trusts in God.

What is Missionary Work?

People talk a lot about mission, and how they 'do mission', but not everything called 'missionary work' is actually missionary work. If you go amongst Orthodox and tell them about Christ, it's not 'internal mission', it's catechism. You're teaching people what they should already know, and making up for the shortage of their spiritual formation. However, if you go to those who don't want to listen, then you are a missionary.

Being a missionary is being a co-worker of God – not just a child of God, but a direct co-worker of the Holy Spirit, a messenger of the Kingdom with an incorrupt crown in holiness.

Knowing this, what can we do?

Firstly, it's only missionary work if you're going to people who don't want to hear you.

And finally, a missionary is a co-worker of God, a messenger of the Kingdom.

Who is a True Missionary? Part 1

Posted by Fr Andrew on 20 September, 2011 ·

The original is translated by 'Gentleman' and posted on the OrthodoxChristianity.net forum. Below is my summary. Like the translation, I'm going to divide my summaries into four parts before doing a commentary...

Fr Daniel's parish has a school for preparing Orthodox missionaries. On the patronal feastday of the Holy Spirit, Fr Daniel's missionaries receive a blessing from the Trinity to preach the full teaching of Christ to the world. This is not by coincidence, because it was the next day (the day after Pentecost) when the apostles gathered together and divided up the known world in which to preach (e.g. St Thomas went to India).

The apostolic labours are incomplete: evangelism of all nations is necessary before the end of the world will come (Mt 24:14). In a sense, missionaries prepare the angels of the apocalypse, by preaching to every holy, island and village, seeking everyone who searches for truth. Missionaries need the special help of God.

The crown of the apostle is even greater than the crown of the monastic or hierarch. Anyone can be an equal-to-the-apostles – there are no restrictions in age or gender, any Orthodox is able to receive this crown.

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Who is the true missionary?

- Must be committed to the Lord unto death (like St Paul – Romans 8:35-39) – must love God and, in Him, love all.
- Because of this love, he wants to rescue people from perdition – if a missionary isn't concerned about people perishing, he is neither Christian nor missionary.
- A missionary should strive to keep the faith and go ever-deeper, while knowing that full knowledge is impossible even to angels. Our faith is not theory but the Trinity.
- A true missionary keeps reading Scripture (Sysoyev's missionaries would recite Holy Scripture every year) – a missionary who doesn't read Scripture is a contradiction in terms.
- A missionary must be seethed with the divine fire of love,
- A missionary must keep the holy commandments of God and keep clean from every sin
- A missionary must yearn for holiness and to be in the Kingdom of God

Sysoyev's Missionary Program for Westerners: The Talks

Posted by Fr Andrew on 21 June, 2011 ·

This post will be continuing the series on Fr Daniel Sysoyev. If you don't know who he is, check out my first post.

Fr Daniel not only set the ethos of his program, not only trained other people to work; he also did a lot of work himself, particularly events, lectures and sermons.

- Give two talks each week and three sermons each weekend.
- First talk was a Bible study, after Vespers. 2 hours, Old and New Testaments, serve refreshments afterwards.
- Second talk was the catechetical school. Five talks over five weeks, 2 hours each, repeated cyclically through the year.
- First sermon on Saturday night vigil, about the Saint and ethics.
- Second sermon in middle of service, about the Gospel reading.
- Third sermon at end of service, about the Epistle reading.
- Post recordings of all sermons online.
- If services have gaps – such as during the time when clergy commune – then fill them with Scripture.
- After services, have refreshments.
- Have special talks during the year.

The reality of these points is that there is little application that needs to be done – any one of these things can be done immediately in a Western context. Some things already are in some parishes: it's part of the Liturgy to have a sermon after the Gospel, though in other parishes it's given at the end of the service; Fr Patrick Reardon said that he gives a sermon at every service; in some parishes, recordings of Sunday sermons are posted online, such as Ancient Faith Radio's Frs Josiah Trenham, Gregory Hallam, Theodore Paraskevopoulos, Tom Soroka and Patrick Reardon. It is common to have Bible studies, with some even being put online (such as Fr James Early's), and to put lectures online (such as Fr Andrew Stephen Damick's series *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy*, now a book from Conciliar Press). Indeed, most parishes in the West have refreshments after services; many Greek-tradition parishes (as Fr Peter pointed out) have readings during the time when clergy commune.

The primary adaptation for each of these things is parochial – that is, which ones will work at a parish, and how many can a priest do. If a priest is able to do all of these talks, and have twice-daily services, then he is probably exceptional – and certainly a full-time priest.

Yet, there would be no reason why all of the sermons would need to be prepared in advance. The Prologue of Ochrid, for example, has sermons on ethics and virtues – one for every day of the year, in fact. There are numerous books that have sermons for each Sunday of the year.

Many of the Fathers have commentary on Scripture – St John Chrysostom’s are the most famous, but there are many others. It would not be a great stretch to simply use these sermons, and for a priest to simply write one sermon each week. Cutting down the size of Patristic Scriptural commentary to the length of an average sermon could be one of the tasks that a missionary is tasked with.

Bible studies are a staple in many parish ministries. These are commonly done as an ‘interactive sermon’, with the leader of the Bible study (usually a priest, but sometimes a trained layperson), having researched, gives the fruit of their research; subsequently, the attendees will ask questions and receive answers. However, they are often 1-1.5 hours – rarely longer than that.

Fr Daniel was a successful missionary, and doubtless needed to make five week courses. Being in a country where being Orthodox was standard, he may not have felt it necessary for a lengthy period of study. Yet, in Western countries, it is often standard for those who are coming into the Church to have a lengthy catechumenate – 12 months seeming to be a rough standard. Even if the catechumenate is 6 months, there is no reason why the talks could not be a 10 week series – it may even be better for the catechumens. In addition, it may be that there is not a similar need to deliver a talk for catechumens every week. However, this course could easily be run yearly, twice-yearly, or even five times a year if need arose – depending on the parish itself.

Some may enquire as to the benefit of giving a sermon during a Saturday evening vigil – given that such a service is often 2.5 hours long in most parishes, some may ask why it should be lengthened. The reality is that for many parishioners, it’s just seen as a very long service without application to any part of life. Sermons are the best way of changing this.

Adding special talks to this schedule may seem impossible, but I suggest that it isn’t in most places. In cities where there is more than one Orthodox church, it is not difficult to invite a priest from another church to deliver a talk. It may still be feasible to invite a speaker from out of town – even overseas. Often, church dignitaries will come from overseas for a special occasion – the opportunity should be seized for them to deliver a talk, be part of a panel discussion, or some similar way to ensure that the faithful can interact with them.

While each of the talks and sermons can be directly implemented, it may be daunting to attempt to implement them all. As a proposal, I would suggest:

- Give two talks each week and three sermons each weekend. After each stand-alone talk and each weekend service, serve refreshments (finger food and drinks).
- Have a Bible study, perhaps one that follows a short prayer service (e.g. Vespers).
- Have catechumen classes that generally follow an established pattern (approx. 10 weeks each time). Offer this 1-5 times each year, but at least annually.
- Have a sermon read on Saturday night vigil from the Prologue of Ochrid – whether by the priest or someone he blessed to do this.
- Give one or two sermons during the Divine Liturgy about the Scripture readings. Make sure

at least one is written by the priest (or the one who is preaching).

- Record each sermons. Post them online. This is as much for visitors as it is for any parishioners who couldn't get to church that week or if a parishioner wanted to hear the sermon again.

- If services have gaps – such as during the time when clergy commune – then fill them with Scripture or other spiritually beneficial reading.

- Invite guest speakers to have special talks during the year.

Sysoyev's Missionary Plan for Westerners: the Co-Workers

Posted by Fr Andrew on 14 June, 2011 ·

This post will be continuing the series on Fr Daniel Sysoyev. If you don't know who he is, check out my first post.

Continuing the series on applying Fr Daniel Sysoyev's missionary techniques to Orthodox who live in Western countries, we come to his missionaries, lay co-workers and missionary school.

- Educated laypeople are important and need to have their talents directed.

To some extent, this is already done in parishes. Parishes often look at their needs and see positions that need filling. Priest, Choirmaster, various Parish Council positions, leaders of ministries (e.g. Sunday school teacher), and so on.

This can actually be fairly short-sighted. Instead, start looking at the people that are in the parish, and the talents that they can contribute. These might be gifts that they use in their day-to-day lives, such as the teacher who also teaches Sunday school; or it might be vaguely related, like the person who likes reading becomes in charge of a bookstore.

Where possible, a person should be put in charge of something that they are already good at – an accountant helping (or being) the treasurer, for example, or someone who spends a lot of time on the internet to maintain the website. There are, obviously, roles that need to be filled because they need to be filled – someone to open the church and light the candles, someone to handle the church finances, etc. Time spent on these things, if given to the wrong person, may be time better spent elsewhere.

The critical finding from this is that people have talents that are for ministries that the parish hadn't previously thought of. A salesperson might be well placed to be the foundation of a greeter's ministry, for example. This is some of the development of ministry that is possible.

- Establish a missionary school.

Most parishes will find this difficult to imagine. Not just who would design the curriculum for

this, but who would be the people involved in this?

An application of this may not be too difficult. A missionary-minded priest may have one or two willing helpers, for example: start there. It doesn't have to be too involved – have a discussion over coffee once a week, aiming to have one idea to implement each time. People who come into the church will often want to share their joy with others – this can grow the number of missionaries.

In time, successful missionaries can start sharing what has worked for them – and from here, a school can be born.

- Have these trained missionaries doing progressively more difficult tasks.

After a couple of meetings trying to find new methods to use – or using the ones in my upcoming book – there should be a way to identify which ideas are easy and which are challenging. That's okay – start on the easy ones first, then move to the harder ones as time goes on. By the time you get to the hard ones, you might have a few more helpers to make it just that much easier.

- Recognise that days when nominally-Orthodox people come to church are great opportunities to talk about the significance of the day.

Every church-going Orthodox, particularly those who are in more established parishes, is aware that there are particular fluctuations during the year – Easter, Christmas, Theophany, days when memorial services are done – when all these people will flood into the church, and then leave, not to be seen until the next major day. Where do these people go?

That's more of a rhetorical question, of course. The more important one is, why do these people go?

Rather than be derisive (which unfortunately happens in some places), Fr Daniel identified that these days were great opportunities to encourage people to come more often. He would explain the significance of the day as part of the Christian life – something that is easily applicable for us today.

- Use loudspeakers so that people outside the church can hear you, especially when it is overcrowded.

This suggestion will depend on the church building itself. Larger parishes can do this, particularly for Easter and other big feast days, as there is 'overflow' of parishioners into the surrounding area; smaller parishes will have more difficulty, and will have less need. In many Western countries, also, this could be a problem with neighbours or other noise violations.

Having come to the end of this section, how many suggestions do we have?

- Educated laypeople are important and need to have their talents directed.
- Have a group of missionaries sharing ideas on a regular basis.
- Have these missionaries train themselves by doing progressively more difficult tasks (with

the goal of a 'school' of sorts)

- Recognise that days when nominally-Orthodox people come to church are great opportunities to talk about the significance of the day.
- If you're able to use loudspeakers and it is beneficial to your congregation, use them.

Obviously, these suggestions may need further adaptation depending on the parish being evangelised, but the principles are still there – and two can be utilised verbatim.

Sysoyev's Program for Westerners: Ethos and Plans

Posted by Fr Andrew on 7 June, 2011 ·

This post will be continuing the series on Fr Daniel Sysoyev. If you don't know who he is, check out my first post.

Fr Daniel headed an extremely successful missionary program in Moscow. His activity was 1993-2009, cut short by martyrdom – being as he was active a mere 18 months ago (indeed, most of his success came in the last few years), his methods are far from dated.

However, Fr Daniel was operating in 21st century Moscow, in a country that was generally returning to Orthodoxy after decades of Communist repression. My question is, can Fr Daniel's methods be applied in Western countries? If so, how can they be applied?

- Identification that having a spiritual program and a missionary program were both needed.

This is the first step in any missionary plan. A missionary program without a spiritual program leaves, at best, stunted Christians (and often lapsed Christians), which is not a positive goal. It is important to remember that Orthodox missionary work is not about the numbers of people in the pews on Sunday – it's about bringing people to God through the Church that He founded.

Conversely, a spiritual program without a missionary program isn't a missionary plan – it's just a schedule of services. Good work can come from this – indeed, it's probably the single most common program in Orthodox parishes today – but it's far from a missionary program.

This would be somewhat difficult in current parishes, though. Some parishes are very comfortable serving the people that they're serving, in the way that they are serving them. A priest who finds himself with such a parish would find it difficult to motivate the people towards establishing a missionary plan – and any who came into such a parish could be made to feel entirely unwelcome and unwanted.

- The priest must pray.

Nothing will come from a missionary plan that lacks a praying priest. It just doesn't work like that. At best, it becomes an exercise in getting people to be in church or at church events, but it misses the whole point of bringing people to God.

- Leaving the church open with a tour guide.
- Twice-daily services

These are both extremely time-consuming activities. Many doubt whether they could be done today in the context that many parishes are in: most adults working, many priests having secular employment.

This makes it difficult, but it also means that less likely people need to be considered. Is there someone in the parish who is a university student? Works in different hours than others?

Could the church be left open with a resident tour guide? Perhaps. Perhaps a team of tour guides would be necessary – with one person for each day of the week, for example. This is especially the case for beautiful churches, or churches in good locations with lots of people walking by. If a church is in the middle of a suburban area and people go places predominantly by car, then this may not be feasible.

Perhaps having twice-daily services is too much – once-daily services could be a good start. Perhaps services couldn't be in their expected times – a 7pm vespers may attract more people than a 4pm vespers. Perhaps these services could be led by trained laity, rather than requiring clergy to lead each service. It goes without saying that there will probably be few people at these services – those people leading the services will need to be self-motivated.

What does this mean, so far?

- If a parish wants to do missionary work, they must have a spiritual program and a missionary program; that is, services and talks, and ways to attract people to those services.
- The priest of such a parish must pray.
- Perhaps the church could be left open, particularly if it was in a good location.
- Daily services can be workable if there are trained people to lead them.

Rather than continue with the next section immediately, I'll move to the last section of Fr Daniel's plan, including a publishing house and plans for further expansion of his missionary program. This is probably a good thing to remember: a missionary program should not stand still. There will always be a point where doing something isn't working anymore. People used to talk about having an ad in the Yellow Pages – something that is probably not as effective as having a website, for example. Always be on the lookout for other ways to spread the message.

- Run a publishing house, publishing prayer books, etc, in different languages.

There's a limited amount that this is practically feasible. Parishes generally have access to some form of publishing, and are doubtless able to send books off to Lulu.com (or ebooking) to get books made up. However, in most cases, this is simply impractical, and it's much easier

to get the book from a local Orthodox bookstore or seminary press.

However, the principle can still be upheld. Parishes, where possible, should have a parish bookstore so that people are able to read books, order books in, and learn more about the faith.

Many Western countries are multicultural. California has a high Hispanic population, various parts of Australia have high Chinese and Indian populations, Canada has an entire French-speaking province. All of these are opportunities: where there are 'minority' languages present, parishes should be careful to stock a couple of introductory or prayer books in these languages – even simple booklets that the parish has made with comb binding.

- Consider having confession vigils.

This will depend on the parish. The purpose of this was for people who wished to be cleansed of their deeper sins to have the opportunity, without feeling like they are holding up the line. However, this may not be immediately necessary in many parishes. In Greek-tradition parishes, for example, people confess outside of services (say, during office hours), so the priest and penitent are able to work through any major sins together without needing to listen for the next part of the service. It is something that major Slav-tradition parishes could consider, but most parishes would be too small for this to be a great issue – and when it is, an appointment through the week would suffice.

- Consider making missionary trips to different parts of [your country].

This was another thing that Fr Daniel considered. It certainly seems to be the mark of a mature ministry, to be able to help other regions that needed help. It may be beyond the scope of a beginning parish ministry in Western countries, though a pan-Orthodox ministry could do this. OCMC is well-known as the American external missionary body, also doing trips to Alaska (as well as overseas), but there's no reason why a council of churches together in a city (e.g. all the churches in, say, Alberta) couldn't organise such a trip to a small region within or outside the state.

However, depending on the people involved, it could be a good training exercise: do missionary work in another place, being a full-time missionary for a week or two, then coming back...it's perhaps worth considering.

So, how can we apply this section?

- Have an active bookstore. Make some booklets for speakers of 'minority' languages.
- Make sure that people who need 'deeper' confession are able to get that.
- Missionary trips to other places could be a good goal for a missionary ministry.

Applying Sysoyev to Parish Life

Posted by Fr Andrew on 31 May, 2011 ·

This post will be continuing the series on Fr Daniel Sysoyev. If you don't know who he is, check out my first post.

Fr Daniel had a number of fantastic ideas, most of which he applied, and many of these were quite successful. What were they?

- Identification that having a spiritual program and a missionary program were both needed.
- The priest must pray.
- Leaving the church open with a tour guide.
- Twice-daily services
- Educated laypeople are important and need to have their talents directed.
- Establish a missionary school.
- Have these trained missionaries doing progressively more difficult tasks.
- Recognise that days when nominally-Orthodox people come to church are great opportunities to talk about the significance of the day.
- Use loudspeakers so that people outside the church can hear you, especially when it is overcrowded.
- Give two talks each week and three sermons each weekend.
- First talk was a Bible study, after Vespers. 2 hours, Old and New Testaments, serve refreshments afterwards.
- Second talk was the catechetical school. Five talks over five weeks, 2 hours each, repeated cyclically through the year.
- First sermon on Saturday night vigil, about the Saint and ethics.
- Second sermon in middle of service, about the Gospel reading.
- Third sermon at end of service, about the Epistle reading.
- Post recordings of all sermons online.
- If services have gaps, fill them with Scripture.
- After services, have refreshments.
- Have special talks during the year.
- Run a publishing house, publishing prayer books, etc, in different languages.
- Consider having confession vigils.
- Consider making missionary trips to different parts of Russia.

[Sysoyev Program: Press, Plans and Fruits](#)

Posted by Fr Andrew on 24 May, 2011 ·

This post will be continuing the series on Fr Daniel Sysoyev. If you don't know who he is, check out my first post.

In addition to Fr Daniel's work forming a missionary school and delivering lectures and sermons, Fr Daniel also ran a publishing house. This publishing house produced a number of books, including prayers, psalters and introductions to Orthodoxy; notable because these books were published in the many languages of those people who lived and worked in Moscow.

Fr Daniel was not limited to the plans he put into place; he had other plans that he wanted to put into practise before his untimely martyrdom. Fr Daniel wanted to organise 'confession vigils'. Often in confession, it can seem like sins are blurted out and prayers are read without any kind of discussion as to how to improve; confession vigils, Fr Daniel hypothesised, would allow people to speak to a priest properly for particularly difficult sins that may require more than simple advice. Further, Fr Daniel wanted to broaden missionary work from Moscow to other parts of Russia, making trips to places that needed Orthodox missionary work.

Perhaps most significantly in this series was the results that Fr Daniel saw through his work. He was able to see joy in his parish as a result of his missionary outreach – both for the missionaries, who were able to bring people to God, and for those who were brought to God, because of their relationship with Him.

Sysoyev Program: Lectures and Sermons

Posted by Fr Andrew on 21 May, 2011 ·

This post will be continuing the series on Fr Daniel Sysoyev. If you don't know who he is, check out my first post. The second post was on his co-workers and the missionary school.

Key in Fr Daniel's strategy are his talks and lectures. He would deliver 5 talks every week, from Thursday to Sunday.

On Thursday nights, Fr Daniel would serve vespers, then after that he would lead a Bible study. This was not a Bible study in the 'everyone gives their opinion sense of the word', but one that focused on what holy people had interpreted the Scriptures as being. Scriptures are the most sacred text in the Church; it is only fitting that they be interpreted in the proper manner – doing otherwise has led to tens of thousands of denominations in America alone.

This Bible study would last for two hours. Fr Daniel would start on the Old Testament, and then move to the New Testament, and then after the Bible study, tea and coffee would be served alongside a small meal. This Bible study attracted all sorts of people – from inquirers

and catechumens to Protestant pastors and Muslim imams.

Friday night was Fr Daniel's Catechetical School. He would deliver five talks, each lasting for 2 hours, over five Friday nights, simply repeating the series many times over the course of the year. His first talk was about God – who He is, what His nature is, and so on. The second talk was about the creation of the world, and he'd discuss angels, the rebellion of Lucifer, creation, revelation and science, ancestral sin, human nature, among other things. His third talk was about salvation and the last judgement, a talk largely based on 'The Life in Christ'. The fourth talk was based on the structure of the Church and its sacraments. Fr Daniel would intentionally dwell on baptism, because this was what catechumens needed to know. This also created a natural curiosity in his listeners about what was next – that is, communion – and meant that inquirers and catechumens were not overwhelmed with too much information that couldn't be put into practise. It was an early Church practise to only allow those who were sacramentally in the Church to be present in the Liturgy, and could be a practise restored today for the same reason. The last talk that Fr Daniel would give in the series was about ethics and asceticism, discussing the commandments, spiritual life and fighting sin.

On weekends, Fr Daniel would preach during the major services of the week – Saturday night Vigil (which, despite the name, usually goes for around 2-2.5 hours in Russian practise) and Sunday Divine Liturgy. The first sermon he would deliver during the first part of Vigil (i.e. during Vespers), which would be about the passions and the virtues, and also about the Saint who was being commemorated that day. The second sermon he would preach during the Divine Liturgy, after the Gospel reading (where the sermon is traditionally preached), and this would be about the Gospel that was read; the third sermon would be preached at the end of the Liturgy, and it would be about the Epistle. Each of these sermons would be posted online.

In addition, there is often a portion during the Divine Liturgy where there is a great gap of time and nothing appointed to be sung – that is, while the clergy are communing and before the laity commune. During this time, Fr Daniel would appoint that Scriptures were to be read (Fr Peter points out in his podcast that, in Greece, often lives of saints or patristic texts would be read during this time).

After the service, tea and coffee would be served. This is common in Western countries, but is mostly unknown in Russia (and other traditionally Orthodox countries). The reasoning often given is that in Western countries, Orthodox are few and far between, whereas in traditionally Orthodox countries, nearly everyone you meet is Orthodox. Fr Daniel, however, found that there was a need for community to be built. I would guess that this is because it allowed people to see other believing Orthodox – not simply nominal Orthodox – and to interact with them.

Aside from the regular talks that Fr Daniel held every week, he would also hold special talks, generally around Nativity and Pascha. These would be about the sacraments, and he would invite parishioners and the newly-baptised. The talks would be different every time, mainly because Fr Daniel was able to tailor them to his parishioners' needs at that particular point in

time.

Sysoyev Program: Co-workers, Missionaries and the Liturgical Year

Posted by Fr Andrew on 19 May, 2011 ·

This post will be continuing the series on Fr Daniel Sysoyev. If you don't know who he is, check out my first post.

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The most important part of Fr Daniel's program was the people alongside him.

As much as the priest needs to be praying and inspiring others to pray, a lot of the work of evangelism comes from laypeople who are educated. This really important. Perhaps because it is seen that priests have something to gain that laypeople don't; perhaps because priests are supposed to be ministering to laypeople (rather than bringing in more laypeople). Whatever the reason, it's absolutely essential.

Laypeople in key positions need to be educated and responsible, and are the best way of ensuring that the priest is able to keep focused on prayer and teaching. These laypeople are able to ensure people come to talks, and to keep catechumens and the newly-baptised within the Church. And, perhaps most importantly, they have to be reading the Scriptures each day. It's a part of being connected with God.

Fr Daniel didn't allow this to happen by chance – he planned for it by establishing a missionary school. Not a rubber stamp or semi-private lectures, but a school, including exams. Missionaries were taught how to preach the Gospel to those who were not Orthodox – whether of various denominations or of different religions, particularly Islam, Theosophy, pagans and various cults. He taught how to do this in modern language, and working from the Scriptures.

So, what did a missionary do?

Missionaries, wearing the badge of the church (so that they were identifiable), would be on streets around the parish building. They'd invite people to come into the church, and would have leaflets on hand for those who wanted to know more about specific ideas (particularly confession or baptism). For those who seemed very interested, the missionaries would have a copy of the Gospel of Mark to give.

So, what were the results of this? In this case, there were two results. Firstly, people were often happy that it was an Orthodox person approaching them, rather than those of another

sect. Of course, part of this was probably to do with familiarity with Orthodoxy in Moscow, but this was part of the result. Secondly, many people came to the Church – from as varied backgrounds as protestant Christians to Satanists.

The missionaries would then be sent to more difficult tasks – preaching to guest workers, to meetings of non-Orthodox Christians, where the Scriptures would be shown to follow the Orthodox teaching, and the Church that Christ established shown to be the same as in Acts and the Orthodox Church today. It was seen by the missionaries that Orthodoxy was the bringer of Christian unity – that is, by looking at Scripture truthfully and uniting under that truth.

On special days, missionaries would have different activities. In the Orthodox Church, there are certain days that will attract people who are nominally Orthodox – Christmas, Epiphany (with the blessing of the waters), and Soul Saturday (where prayers for reposed relatives are offered). On these days, people would be encouraged to not simply come to church, but also to participate in the mysteries. On Soul Saturday, there would be sermons delivered in cemeteries. On major feast days, missionaries would also be called upon to talk about sacred history, confession, the need for baptism (or marriage, in some cases), and to hand out leaflets and invite people to meet with clergy.

Easter presented an even greater opportunity, given the multitudes of nominally Orthodox people present. Between the time between the midnight office and the proclamation of the Resurrection, Fr Daniel would read the Gospel passage about the women who brought ointments to the tomb late at night (Gospel of John, chapter 20), and would tell parishioners about the main hope of Christians – that is, the hope of the Resurrection and forgiveness. Moreover, loudspeakers were set up to broadcast these services, and missionaries would be tasked with approaching passers-by, inviting them to the service and distributing leaflets about confession and communion.

Fr Daniel Sysoyev's Program – Introduction and Ethos

Posted by Fr Andrew on 17 May, 2011 ·

On this post – and a few upcoming posts – I'm going to be talking about Fr Daniel Sysoyev. Some people will be very familiar with his life, but many won't have heard of him, so I'll give a brief introduction here.

Fr Daniel Sysoyev was an Orthodox priest who served in Moscow. He was murdered in 2009, in part because he was a successful evangelist. He was notable because he evangelised the people of Moscow – not just Russians, but any ethnicity or religion who happened to live there. His missionary work was in earnest for about 10 years, and most of the people he converted were in the last 5. Fr Daniel didn't do this by chance: he had planned and instituted programs designed to bring people into the Church.

Firstly, I'm grateful to Fr Peter Alban Heers, an American priest serving in Greece, for talking about Fr Daniel's program in a Postcards from Greece podcast on Ancient Faith Radio. Check out the show for yourself.

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Any parish interested in growing needs a program, of sorts. Not necessarily a high-priced program, not even a slick program, but some sort of plan to go about bringing people into a parish – and, of course, having a parish worth bringing people into.

This program – rather, two – a spiritual program and a missionary program – must work hand in hand. The spiritual program covers things like services, when Liturgy will be on, prayer and the like. The missionary program is about talking to people, making the church welcoming, and so on. Foundational to this is the priest praying. They have to pray themselves, and have to encourage prayer in the congregation. Prayer isn't just one person talking to God, and isn't a group talking to God – it also allows other people to talk to God as well. There can't be any evangelism without prayer.

In Fr Daniel's parish – named for St Thomas the Apostle – there was always someone praying. This person was able to welcome people to the church, to assist people who were walking by and were curious for whatever reason (in business, termed 'locational marketing'). This person was knowledgeable enough to give a tour of the church, and to give flyers about important matters – Baptism, Communion and the like – but did not need to be tertiary-educated in theology or anything like that.

Others have written about Fr Daniel's achievements, lauding them and saying how they wouldn't work in Western countries (e.g. America, England, etc). What is noteworthy is that while Russia is a culturally Orthodox country in a way that Western countries simply aren't, this doesn't translate into every Russian being in church on Sundays. Quite often, it would mean much the same as in Western countries, where people might go to church for Christmas or Easter but mostly ignore the church for the rest of the year. Fr Daniel was working in a place of superficial Christianity, and there may be more similarities than are immediately apparent.

Moreover, such challenges may have been worse in a culturally Orthodox milieu. Like in Western countries, Fr Daniel also struggled against a merely cultural kind of Orthodoxy – a mindset that is easy to fall into in that culture, but a mindset no less spiritually damaging.

Having someone in church wasn't just limited to private prayer, either. Fr Daniel made sure that his church did morning services, evening services, as well as services on weekends. It really was a place of prayer, and this was very attractive to a lot of people.

[Article: Church as Liberated Zone in war against evil](#)

Posted by Fr Andrew on 9 February, 2011 ·

Soon after the martyrdom of Fr Daniel Sysoyev, an article was written by Deacon Stephen Hayes on Fr Daniel's ecclesiology (understanding of the Church). Fr Daniel explained the Church as being an army that was fighting evil, as follows:

Churches are linking stations. There we get information from our governing body: ciphers (New Testament), reinforcement (Holy Communion), and we get support through mutual communication. We master all kinds of tricks in order to commit terrorist attacks against the prince of this world, that is, we learn how to do good. Obviously if an agent of the Holy Kingdom shirks attending the headquarters and does not keep in touch with the command center, he can easily get lost, lose his power, and fall in battle.

It's a fundamentally different understanding of what the Church is, and one that makes a lot of sense. When considering that Fr Daniel was murdered for teaching Orthodox Christianity (in Russia, 2009, of all times and places), this makes his analogy all the more suitable.

Deacon Stephen delves into this more deeply in his article, *The Church as the Liberated Zone*, which is on his 'Khanya' blog.