Don’t Hold Your Breath

by Yianni Pappas

Reconciling the behaviors of citizens at a home game of the Philadelphia Eagles might be a good parallel to reconciling the behaviors of some militant fundamentalists who are self-appointed arbiters of dispensing any type of consequence to those who are “not Orthodox enough”. But the City of Brotherly Love has shown some type of leadership by adding a courtroom/jail of sorts within the stadium itself, whose proceedings are (like all such proceedings) a matter of public record. People whose behavior shows anything except “brotherly love” (i.e. violence) are swiftly dealt with due process. As a Church institution, we could learn a lot from this: we could learn the valuable lesson of dealing with the issues that plague us in a timely fashion, without denying their existence, and simultaneously, not be afraid to refine the process and the skills of our leaders themselves.

The theme for the 42nd Congress is “The Orthodox Christian Family”. A beautiful subject to share with those who can afford (or have subsidized) the costs to attend such a congress. Those attendees are leaders from throughout the Archdiocese of America. Hopefully the valuable lessons they will learn can be brought back to the local parish and implemented to benefit all.

But it is too early to tell if there will be any acknowledgement of our unseemly shortcomings that have been in the media throughout America. Embezzlement, superfluous and overly generous “honoraria”, fundamentalism, tax-evasion and unseemly monetary manipulation, are some questions that people wonder about, that the media has brought to the public’s attention. While the Congress is not a forum to “air our dirty laundry”, it is a forum where our leaders can say “We have many issues that we need to deal with that are challenging our effectiveness. Proper handling of funds, the divisive message of fundamentalism that undermines our call to love one-another, and the voices of heresy that mask themselves as true Orthodoxy. On the one hand, we can all be assured that we have made progress and are looking at bringing remedy to these issues, but on the other hand, we as leaders must take a critical look at ourselves and how we can improve in being accountable, transparent, and true leaders of substance, in order to better bring the message of the Holy Gospel into our homes and our country.”

Don’t hold your breath. But you can pray for such things. Truth is always the majority and inevitably surfaces. Like the rays of the sun (or God’s love for that matter) truth can be experienced as a refreshing warmth, or, a scalding, searing, cauterization – depending on which side of the fence you are on.

There have been many a father or mother that can sit at a dinner table with their children, and have no clue as to who they are. Those parents certainly have an idea of what they want their children to be, but are missing the opportunity to bond and connect by understanding where they are at that moment. Once they get that, the leadership of inspiration and motivation becomes more effective. In like manner, we are a Church family. We sit around the Eucharistic dinner table (i.e. the Holy Altar) and yet many of our Fathers (including Hierarchs) do not have a clue as to who we are. There a few individual clergymen that do get it. We are blessed to have them. Perhaps a little leaven of this sort will cause the entire entity to rise. However, by and large our executive leaders do a better job at telling us what to do, while they themselves live large and rationalize it by saying all of their material possessions that we
know of, belong to the Metropolis, not to them personally. One wonders if they feel they themselves are the Metropolis.

As Orthodox Christians we are called to love and respect our leaders. But we are also called to help them lovingly and respectfully call attention to issues that are affecting us. Here is where we are. We will not admire the nakedness of an emperor who asks us to adore his fictitious robes. Take us by the hand and let’s grow together, individually, and as a Church – from the inside out.