

Conspiracy

There we sat, I and a couple dozen others, under the ancient stone vaults of a former farm, located in the beautiful Aveyron region of Southern France, which now serves as a summer vacation destination. We were gathered there for a choral workshop sponsored by “Borysthène” – a choir which bears the ancient name of the Dniro River dear to every Ukrainian. As this disgusted American frantically swatted flies (the French have yet to discover the concept of window screens), the director of the workshop was giving us a pep-talk. It was then that surprising words came out of his mouth: “We are involved in a conspiracy here!” A conspiracy? A conspiracy!

The very word caused my mind to whirr, conjuring up images of Mary Surratt and her co-conspirators swinging at the end of ropes after Abraham Lincoln’s assassination; of guys looking like Humphrey Bogart, all dressed in trench coats and wide-brimmed hats, whispering in dark cafés or unlit alleys; or of radical extremists in flannel shirts and overalls skulking about in wilderness hideaways, plotting the overthrow of the government and the end of civilization as we know it. (Shudder!) Is this why I’m here putting up with kamikaze insects? (There was, by the way, a zapper in one corner which – I am ashamed to admit - occasionally gave me joy by loudly sending one of the critters flying off to its Maker in a puff of smoke. Apocalyptic indeed!) But I digress ...

The music man – who, like all Frenchmen, is much taken with his language, and is proud to exhibit his mastery of its complexities, including etymology –continued: “The word ‘conspiracy’ is derived from two Latin words, ‘*cum*’ which means ‘with’ and ‘*spirare*’ which means ‘to breathe’; conspiracy is all about breathing together; members of a choir need to learn to breathe together!” Much relieved, I listened as he proceeded to wax eloquent: “That respiration is about sharing the same air, but it’s also about the Spirit – being inspired, revitalized, rejuvenated, spurred on by the Spirit.” Now you’re talking my language, I thought, and NOT just the French language, either! But hang on, folks, he wasn’t quite done yet: “You need to get enthused. Did you know that enthusiasm comes from the Greek for ‘filled with God’?” At this point, my consciousness left the earth, uplifted by lofty thoughts of the heavenly realms.

Coming back down, I marvel: perhaps unwittingly, he was talking about the Church! After all, the same Spirit of God in Whom Christ was raised from the dead fills us too, drawing us together into the newly-enlivened body which we can only form when, emerging from behind walls of fear and mistrust, we allow ourselves together to be fashioned into His image and raised from our torpor. And the whole choir thing fits right in with our whole liturgical theology, which is summarized in the Cherubic Hymn, “Let us who mystically represent the cherubim and sing the Thrice-Holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity now lay aside the cares of this life”: as the angels in heaven sing in celestial perfection gathered around God’s throne, so do we here on earth - gathered around the altar and singing God praise, clinkers and all. Oh, my!

But, wait a minute: we were talking about a conspiracy; does being a member of the Church mean that I’m involved in a conspiracy? My answer is an unabashed “You betcha!”

It's all a plot, and the plot-lines are read in the Good News of the Gospel – the One written not only in jewel-encrusted books on our altars, but also in lives of service where the God of love is easily recognizable.

Conspirators ultimately only work together when it is in their own best interest; when it ceases to be in their perceived best interest, they jump off the sinking ship and rat on one another. Now, I hope that it's not cut-throat opportunism that brings any of us to the Church! Nonetheless, it is fair to ask, "What's in this Church thing for me? What brings me here, and what keeps me coming?" Ultimately, it's about life: Jesus said, "I have come so that you might have life, and have it more abundantly." The conspiracy of the Church is not to bring anything or anyone down, but instead to make visible the Kingdom of God on earth – which, to my mind, means building a community matrix of care and concern where each and all are not only allowed to live, but are also encouraged and helped to flourish and to find salvation. As my novicemaster taught me, "God made me to know, love, serve, and be happy with Him - both in this world and in the next.

Is this what your parish looks like? If not, why not? There is much emphasis on 'the Living Parish' in our Church these days, coming down from +Sviatoslav himself. Some may see this as a plot to get them to change – that is, to be converted from their pre-conceived notions to the ways of the Lord Jesus. How radical! Conspiracies are good!

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