A few weeks ago, Father Anthony asked me to talk about “Christian Leadership”. I was truly humbled and accepted the offer. All kinds of thoughts were running thru my head, it was difficult where to begin and where to end. I thought long and hard and concluded, that I should start with our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no better example for Christian Leadership than Christ Himself. I remembered reading the story quite a long time ago about “The Good Shepard”. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. It is within this verse that I think we see the perfect description of the concept of Christian leadership.

I believe that when Jesus referred to us as “sheep,” He wasn’t speaking in affectionate terms. In truth, sheep rank among the dumbest animals in creation. A stray sheep, still within earshot of the herd, becomes disoriented, frightened, and incapable of finding its way back to the flock. Unable to ward off hungry predators, the stray is perhaps the most helpless of all creatures. When I was in Greece three years ago, I was amazed when I saw a flock of sheep being led by a dog. The dog moved to the right, they moved to right. It was amazing how they followed their leader. I was told, that this dog (without a herder) leads the flock every morning without fail. Can you imagine, if the dog wasn’t around, they would be lost going every which direction. Entire herds of sheep are known to have drowned during times of flash flooding even in sight of easily accessible higher ground. Like it or not, when Jesus called us His sheep, He was saying that without a shepherd, we are helpless. He is our True shepherd.

The shepherd has several roles in regard to his sheep. He leads, feeds, nurtures, comforts, heals, corrects and protects and even lays down His life for them if necessary. All Christian leaders are the servants of the Shepherd of the Lord’s flock; they lead by modeling godliness and righteousness in their own life and encouraging others to imitate Christ. The Christian leader is one who follows Christ and inspires others to follow Him as well.

The Christian leader also comforts the sheep, binding up their wounds and applying the balm of compassion and love. As Christians in the world today, we suffer many injuries to our spirits, and we need compassionate leaders who will bear our burdens with us, sympathize with our circumstances, exhibit patience toward us, bring our concerns before God and encourage us in His Word. This is the only food that will produce strong, vibrant Christians.

My dear brothers and sisters, God has ordained a plan for the Church, Christian leadership is a position of humble, loving service. We, the Church leadership, have a ministry, not management, that we experience every day out there in the business world.

Those of us whom God designates as leaders are called not to come across as kings and queens, but humble slaves; not celebrities, but laboring servants. Those who would lead God’s people must above all exemplify sacrifice, devotion and humility. If you recall, Jesus Himself gave us the pattern when He stooped to wash His disciples' feet, a task that was customarily done by slaves. If the Lord of the universe would do that, no church leader has a right to think of himself or herself as a bigwig. This is a church not the corporate business world. Leaders are in the business world, in the Christian world we are servants. We choose to serve our church, our community, therefore, we need to lead like a servant, as Christ did, so that our parish may flourish in the community it serves.
All the years that I have been involved in the church ministries, I have also come to define Christian leadership as the capacity to translate vision into reality. When Father Anthony first came to our church, he asked the Parish Council to give him their vision statement. My vision is that we cherish and promote our Orthodox faith and Hellenic heritage, yet at the same time we accept and embrace people of all backgrounds. We should express our faith and Christ’s love through the offering of time, talent and treasure!

I have tried to translate that vision into reality as much as I possibly can. When I see people come in into our church, especially from a different background, I reach out as much as I can to make them comfortable. I have been offering my time, talent and treasure and serving our church, since I graduated from our Sunday School. My first year as President, I continued to wash pots and pans in the kitchen during our festival prep and I was told that I shouldn’t be in the kitchen anymore doing this, I was the President. My answer was, I will do whatever needs to be done. I am not the President of General Motors, but a servant of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary Church. I want to help the church that I love, and honor God. A servant does not seek to accumulate power as they serve God. This attitude should only exist in the crude business world.

We also need to keep in mind, that even though the Church that the Church is much more than meetings, ministries, and social events. It is foremost about Jesus Christ and the gift of Eucharistic Liturgy. This is the most important work of the Church. No matter how busy he or she is, a Christian leader makes time to attend liturgy and to be shaped by the liturgical life of the Church. Leaders are attentive and allow themselves to be formed by the Church’s teachings. They make it a priority to live the Liturgy in their daily lives with humility and mercy. A true leader conforms to the Church and does not ask the Church to conform to them.

As servant leaders, we also need to start thinking if our Dormition Church is a healthy parish that serves the needs of the community or a dying parish which expects the community to serve its needs. Leaders that act like servants help the Church serve the community — especially those who are weak and vulnerable. We as servants should give to the Church without expecting honor or recognition, seeking the good of our neighbor above all else. We need to understand that the true wealth of the Church is not in its buildings or bank accounts, but in the lives that it transforms.

Wealth, social status, and political power are not what make us Christian leaders. They are in many ways the opposite of what Christ looks for in those He calls to lead. He demonstrated as much when He called the Apostles. And much like the Apostles, every Orthodox Christian – however ordinary — can be transformed by Christ to witness to the Gospel and change the lives of those around us.

I want to conclude by inviting us all to engage in every way we possible can. Those whom God calls to lead in the Church are not perfect! One of the hardest aspects of leadership is managing expectations. Our leadership skills will not always be perfectly practiced in our lives. I’ve struggled and failed and also succeeded many times as a leader, and I’ve also struggled and failed sometimes as a Christian, I am not perfect, only God is perfect.
I’m grateful God gives many chances to us. I truly believe that Christian leadership is to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit by using the gifts God gives us, then the humility and openness can help us to develop as we lead others towards Christ’s Kingdom.

Please approach Father Anthony, myself or any servant of the Parish Council and become part of it, to spread the good work that the Lord wants us to do.

Thank you and Happy New Year.