

The Life of Fr. Matthew Baker Is a Triumph of Orthodoxy

By Hierodeacon Herman Majkrzak in *The Sounding*

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It is easy to doubt God's Providence in taking away a young priest, newly installed in his first parish, a husband, and a father of seven (his youngest, Alexis, so recently taken from his mother and father in stillbirth).

It is tempting to question God's Providence in taking from the Church one of the most brilliant theological minds of the twenty-first century at a time when the Church is very much in need of sound and sober, yet penetrating, teaching, in both the academic and the pastoral spheres.

It is, for me personally, difficult to see the hand of God's Providence in taking from me my best and most intimate friend, the man who taught me what true friendship means by pouring himself out year after year after year in boundless dedication to every aspect of my spiritual well-being and human flourishing.

Yes, in all of this we are reminded – harshly – that God's Providence is a mystery that cannot be grasped by the minds of men.

And yet: Fr. Matthew was taken from this life on the Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. And because of this seemingly small detail, there can be no doubt, no question, no difficulty in perceiving that God is at work here, that His Church will triumph still, that His Truth will prevail over all falsehood, darkness, distortion and exaggeration – all those evils against which Fr. Matthew fought, exhaustively, ruthlessly,

and bluntly. And when Truth is triumphant, love is victorious. For Fr. Matthew love and truth were inseparable, distinguishable only in thought. “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” When truth triumphs over falsehood, there love triumphs over coldness, mercy over suffering, and light over shadow. There life triumphs over death. Orthodoxy has triumphed! And this means, as Father Matthew would teach us, that Christ – the whole Christ, the *totus Christus*, Head and Body, the Savior and his Bride, holy Church – Christ has triumphed. He is triumphant over death, since He is the firstborn of the dead and the author of life. And in Him, the presbyter Matthew also is triumphant.

On each of the last two days of his earthly life, Christ’s faithful presbyter Matthew offered the Holy Liturgy, preached the Word of God and communed of the precious and all-holy Body and Blood of Christ. He spent the last week of his life – the first week of Lent – in fasting and prayer, in the reading of Scripture, and in ministry and care to his new parishioners. Fr. Matthew grew an immense amount in the last year, but also in the last month, since becoming a parish priest, and even just in the last week, in which he entered into new depths of his priestly ministry. The Lord was truly preparing his servant for this moment of exodus on yesterday’s feast of triumph.

I am honored to say that Fr. Matthew spent the last evening of his life on the telephone with me, and while now I wish that some aspects of that conversation had been different, I am heartened to think that, among other things, we spoke of how the dead in Christ, while awaiting the resurrection and the final consummation of all things, are granted even now to partake of the light of Paradise.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me: ‘Write: Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.’ (Rev. 14:13)

Fr. Matthew, in Christ, is now seeing the triumph of Orthodoxy much sooner than he expected, this triumph for which he labored single-mindedly. He beholds the triumph of Christ and the triumph of His holy and spotless Bride, the Catholic and Apostolic Church whom he loved and served so ardently. Christ is risen! Let us be of good cheer, for Christ has overcome the world!

Forgive me if these words are uncouth. Let us also mourn – for death is real, and Fr. Matthew’s death is a horrific tragedy – but let us not mourn “as those who have no hope.” In our friend and brother, the presbyter Matthew, our dear and merciful Savior has given us much cause for hope.

He lived most of his life near the city of Providence, Rhode Island, and throughout their thirteen years of marriage, Fr. Matthew and Presbytera Katherine trusted fully that God would provide as they opened their hearts to the abundant gift of life, raising six children without ever having a steady income during Fr. Matthew’s many years of study. Now we have no doubt that God will indeed continue to provide for Fr. Matthew’s widow and children, as indeed God has provided so much for all of us through friendship with Fr. Matthew and Presbytera Katherine.