

A Message from the Patriarch of the Apostolic Orthodox Church

Out of My Mind . . . Back in Five Minutes

That's a sign I saw on an office door. I stood for awhile and watched people as they passed by and saw it. Their reaction was similar to mine: they paused, read those eight words, then gave a chuckle and nodded their heads knowingly. There was no need to have it explained to them. They understood; they related, on a personal level, to the concept that was being expressed.

But let's step back a moment and read those words again. Is the person upon whose office door the sign hangs insane? That's what being "out of one's mind" means, doesn't it? "Back in Five Minutes?" How is that possible? From what we know of insanity, it takes much longer than that to recover—if at all. And why is that person being so glib about their insanity? Why do they advertise the fact? Are they *insane*? Must be, as they feel that state will only last for five minutes. What more proof do we need? Then why are they permitted to be in society rather than . . .

"Now, just a minute," I hear you saying, "you're taking that too literally. How can you even think of such a thing? Don't be ridiculous!" And you'd be right, of course. But stop and think for a moment as to why we don't take this or other similar expressions in their literal sense. Two reasons immediately come to mind.

The society in which we live is the first. We are flexible enough to see double—and sometimes triple—meaning in both the written and oral word. Some peoples are more rigid, and there are clear-cut lines of demarcation separating the serious from the humorous. We like to think of ourselves as "enlightened," that we are geared towards the subjective as well as the objective, hence we have a scope of vision that allows us to see the humor of our sign.

The second is the age in which we live. Meanings are continually changing. When I was a child in the 1950's, *crack* was a fissure in a surface, not a form of cocaine. Usage changes with a rapidity that boggles the mind. Now, to be *bad* means to be good, or at least clever. And there are cycles of usage as well. *Cool* was very "in" during my youth, became *passé*, and now is "in" again, although the subtleties of meaning are different now than forty years ago.

But what if time travelers from the future happened upon the remains of our society and age, far removed from their own? What would they make of our sign? Would they laugh along with us, or shake their heads in disbelief that such a people could be so stupid as to believe that insanity lasted only five minutes? Had they made a thorough study of our time, the former would most likely be true; if not, perhaps the latter.

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“So, what has this to do with the subject of your message,” you may ask. Everything. In a society and age which considers itself to be the pinnacle of human evolution thusfar, there are those among us who would take the words of the Christian Sacred Scripture which we know as the Bible as absolutely literal statements. And not only do they take this position for themselves personally, but with a veracity that would stagger the Holy Apostles and Fathers of the Church, take every opportunity to foist their convictions upon all who are within ear- or eye-shot Why? Where is the open-mindedness they would tout concerning any other manuscript? Why do we see bumper stickers reading, “The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it?” Black and white—not a daub of gray. Such an attitude is unfortunate, and if you haven’t yet been offended by my words, you may wish to return for the next installment of our look at Christian Scriptures. You may not agree with what I’ll say, but I can promise you’ll have plenty food for thought. And that’s the purpose of these messages—to make you think—for you don’t have to be ignorant to be a Christian.

May the Light of Lights enfold you!

Mathias Mar Yusef, Patriarch

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