

Digital Outreach Conference: Blogging Your Sermons,
V. Rev. Fr. James Guirguis

I began the Out of Egypt Blog in 2012 and have been regularly posting to it nearly every week for the last 7 years. I began the blog for two separate and distinct reasons.

The first reason is that in my previous parish at St. George Utica, NY, I was asked and encouraged to prepare a children's sermon each and every week. I decided to place that children's sermon immediately after the gospel reading each Sunday and I would preach the normal sermon for the adults at the end of the liturgy once the children and church school teachers had left for their classes. Some of the church school teachers used to ask me to record the sermon or email it to them and so that is what I used to do. Each week, I would send them the sermon or homily on Saturday afternoon so that they could read it and help themselves prepare for the church school classes. So that was the first reason.

The second reason relates to the publishing of the book "Ask for the Ancient Paths." When Ancient Faith approached me about publication, one of the points that they stressed was the need for an online presence from potential authors. I found that this would be the most efficient way for me to have an online presence without many of the negative aspects of too much online activity.

I chose the Title "Out of Egypt" because I am Egyptian by birth and grew up in the Coptic Orthodox Church. In some ways it is a play on words because I believe that the Lord opened the door to my family as we left the Egyptian Church and entered into the Antiochian Church. I also chose this verse because it is my hope that each of us will be called Sons (and daughters) of God.

I chose the Wordpress site because I found that it was the perfect balance of usability as well as powerful plug-ins and features. I also appreciated that it was well optimized and well liked by many bloggers worldwide.

My process for writing the sermon each week is as follows: I begin by reading the epistle and the gospel for the coming week on the Tuesday before. I typically try to take Mondays off and so Tuesday is my first day back at the office. I read these readings and meditate on them a few times during the week. Often I will go for a long walk while praying and thinking about what the Lord would like me to give to our people, and ultimately that is what the sermon is all about, feeding the people with the message of God's word. Our people are starving. They aren't fed by much in their daily lives. But we have them and for those 7-10 minutes, I want to give them some nourishment.

When I finally sit down to write it is usually on Thursday or Friday morning but sometimes Saturday. It ought to go without saying but, I start by making sure that I've spent some quiet time in prayer and the reading of Scripture and as I sit down to write I look up at the icons and make the sign of the cross and ask the Lord to inspire me and give me a message for our people.

When I prepare the sermon, I am preparing this sermon for my own people, but I do this with the firm belief that the Holy Spirit will use these words not only in the lives of some of my own people but in the lives of whoever might stumble across them later on. In being granted the grace to preach and teach, the Lord has allowed us to become co-creators with Him. We work through His inspiration and we create with His words. We bring light to dark places, especially the darkness of men's hearts. We bring life to the dead, and we are used by the Lord in the regeneration of the spiritually dead and their transformation back to life. We are bringing Jesus Christ, and His healing presence through our participation and expounding upon His word, because St. John calls Him the "Word of Life."

In a way, the word, which the Lord has given us, is multiplied when it is put online. You do the work once, but the work continues to bear fruit after the fact, by the grace of God. Most of the time, you and I will not have any idea of how our teaching and preaching of the word had a powerful impact on others. God in His wisdom, hides much of it from our eyes, so that we won't become puffed up or arrogant. It's not about us. I must decrease, He must forever increase.

While I typically share 98% of the sermons that I've prepared, there are typically a few that don't get shared. I would call these "family meetings." Every church is a family to some degree and sometimes we have to have a heart to heart that is not meant for public consumption, not because the message is not sound, but because the message is meant to be a private one that usually involves some aspect of correction. Out of love for the people of the church, we don't want to expose those matters to others. But it's not always because we are correcting the parish. Sometimes it involves speaking of someone who departed and was well loved by the community. We don't want to mention them publicly when we may not have had permission to do so by the rest of the family.

But back to our main point. This is a really easy and effective practice for maximizing your reach and your ministry with a very minimal amount of work. In a way, we are taking the talent given to us by His grace and increasing it, which is pleasing to the Lord. When we go above and beyond with what the Lord has given us, we are like the servants to whom the Lord said "Well done, good and faithful servants. You have been faithful over a little, I will make you ruler over much!"