

Thoughts on Better Preparing Ourselves to Teach Our Students

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THE NEED TO LISTEN

Shinichi Suzuki, the Japanese music educator whose methods have helped thousands of children master musical instruments, offers us some thoughts applicable to Orthodox Christian education. He claims children's memory is improved when they are trained to *listen* to music rather than reading or seeing the music in written form. He claims studies prove that the activity of just listening improves both memory and learning skills. Perhaps there is a lesson for us in a church that constantly calls for us to pay attention during our services. Instead of always depending on having a written text for liturgy, maybe we need to train ourselves to listen! Suzuki also says that sensitivity to beauty can be both taught and heightened. That is another important lesson for us. Did you ever stop to think that beauty was one of the traditional evangelical appeals of Orthodoxy? St. Vladimir is perhaps the only ruler in the world who picked a religion for his nation based upon the criterion of beauty! It was in fact the beauty of Orthodox [worship] that so inspired his emissaries and sold them and St. Vladimir upon embracing the Orthodox faith. As a last thought, Suzuki also says that respect for others is taught and learned. This would certainly be a worthy church school lesson!

JUDAS WAS TAUGHT BY THE BEST

Recently, a friend reminded me of two things that Fr. Alexander Schmemmann pointed out. First, when we wonder why people don't understand something we've said, even after our "brilliant and convincing" teaching, we should keep in mind that Judas had the best possible teacher, The Teacher, Jesus Christ. Certainly this is one of the most frustrating aspects of the mystery of freedom which God has given to us. Second, when Judas went away from Christ, into the darkness of that night, Christ sent him with a morsel of eternal life. We, who are involved in that essential teaching ministry of Christ's Church, must remember these truths. We may wonder if what we do matters at all, but we can do no more than Christ. Some will reject the Light, but still we must give to each student (actually to any person) some portion of the life giving Light of Christ.

TRANSFIGURING THE WORLD

Perry Shaw writing in the *CHRISTIAN EDUCATION JOURNAL* Spring 1997, "Jesus: Oriental Teacher Par Excellence," says that analyzing the teaching style of Jesus brings us to certain conclusions. Jesus followed many of the standard teaching practices of his day and so was understandable to those around him. He also, however, went beyond his contemporaries, opening new insights to those who were willing to follow him and his way of thinking. He concludes his study by calling all Christian educators to "examine and understand the culture to which we wish to communicate the gospel."

Though we are not "of" the world, Christ called us to be "in" the world which He loved. We are to be [the] light to the world and the salt of the earth. This requires us not to flee the culture but to gain clear insight into it so that we might proclaim the gospel to those who will listen. This is a prerequisite for us to teach our students in a way that they can understand. It means we must speak fluently in the same language as our students (meaning not just English, but culturally as well). We must also keep in mind that our goal in teaching is to renew our hearers as well as our culture and to transfigure and transform it, as Christ himself transfigured the world.

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