

Philotimo

There is a word in Greek, which has no translation in English. It is a rich word full of significance to the Greek people. I was reading an article this week where the author Stav Dimitropoulos relates the story of a German civil servant and writer named Andreas Deffner.

This man discovered the Greek concept of philotimo quite by accident. This is how the events went...

Grandma Vangelio, who was the owner of the place where he was staying, warmly greeted him one day by asking him one simple question.

She said: "Good morning, how are you?"

Deffner sleepily answered "So, so"

The very next thing that Deffner knew he was seating over a bowl of Grandma Vangelio' hot chicken soup. Both Grandma Vangelio and her Daughter Irini.

Where her brother Pericles came home Irini started wildly waving and making gestures at her brother.

This seemed really weird to Deffner and he broke out into a cold sweat. He asked: "What have I done?"

Pericles answered: "You said to Vangelio that you weren't feeling well" To which Deffner replied: "I beg your pardon? I just said I was so, so."

Pericles explained that if you answer "so, so" the locals think you are sick and their sense of philotimo urges them to do what they can to heal you, thus the chicken soup. Pericles though this was hilarious... Deffner had his first experience with Philotimo.

So what does this word mean?

Well this is a hotly debated topic and it really depends on who you ask.

The exact translation of this word means: "Love of Honor" yet it is so insufficient to convey the constellation of virtues squeezed into the worlds four syllables.

When the author asked a local doctor named Pinelopi Kalafati he was told it meant: **Doing the right thing**

Priest Nicolas Papanikolaou described it as: **Loving and Honoring God and your society**

Actor Kostis Thomopoulos said: “It is striving for perfection” A volunteer at a detention camp named Tatiana Papadopoulou said: “It is stepping out from your comfort zone to help someone in need”

It seems that not only is the word difficult to translate directly, some people don't agree on a single definition.

“The mythology that accompanies this elusive concept is without precedent. Indeed, the word cannot be translated precisely to any other language,” said Vassilios P Vertoudakis, lecturer in Ancient Greek philology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.”

The concept really took off around the 15th Century in the High Middle Ages, when Ottoman rulers enslaved Greece, forced a large part of the population into subsistence farming through heavy taxation and limited education, and cut each region off from both the rest of the country and Western Europe.

“While the West was experiencing Enlightenment and developing modern states that tied together individuals under the rule of law and an abstract sense of responsibility, the subjugated and inward-looking Greeks were bound by pride, localism and interpersonal relationships,” Vertoudakis said. “Instead of developing the kind of institutional consciousness seen in Western Europe, Greek communities were imbued with *philotimo*, which was triggered not by law and logic but intense emotion and some degree of intimacy.”

Also nominated was 41-year-old fisherman, Stratis Valiamos, who often takes his tiny wooden boat into the Aegean to rescue people off his own accord. “I'm out fishing, I can see people shouting for help. What can I do? Pretend I can't see? Pretend I can't hear? That's the right thing to do”.

“We may not return with our nets full of fish, but our hearts are warm,” Diamantis Zannikos, a fisherman-rescuer from Chios told me. “We have *philotimo*.”

I am sure Kamvisi, Valiamos and Zannikos are all uninterested in whether *philotimo* is an emotional crutch or an indefinable cultural trait. For the hundreds of fishermen, housewives, retirees, teachers, volunteers, artists and students who wait by the beach every day to offer dry clothes, water, food and shelter, and open their arms and homes to people fleeing war and terror, the emotional and moral satisfaction drawn from exhibiting *philotimo* far outweighs any attempt at conceptualising it. For them, *philotimo* is simply a way of being.

So what?

This concept of Philotimo provides, in its meaning, a culture of honor whereby one does not help another because of rules, laws or obligation but rather out of a moral care for humanity in general and the recognition of our duty of care for others. This is a radical departure from mainline western culture.

In English we have the word "Love"

In Greek this word is actually four different words:

- Eros - Erotic, physical passionate love or desire
- Philia - This is brotherly love, friendship or affection
- Storge - This is the love between good friends or a parent to a child
- Agape (Ancient Greek ἀγάπη, agápē) is a Greco-Christian term referring to "love: the highest form of love, charity", and "the love of God for man and of man for God".[1] Not to be confused with philia – brotherly love – agape embraces a universal, unconditional love that transcends, that serves regardless of circumstances.

Agape is considered to be the love originating from God or Christ for humankind. Cf. Matt 3:17, Mark 10:21. In the New Testament, it refers to the covenant love of God for humans, as well as the human reciprocal love for God; the term necessarily extends to the love of one's fellow man.

In his book *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis used agape to describe what he believed was the highest level of love known to humanity – a selfless love, a love that was passionately committed to the well-being of the other.

Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love (agapēseis) your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love (agapāte) your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?

— Matthew 5:43-46,

In short, I really like this word Philotimo, but it falls short of Agape. As a culture we need to practice philotimo as a foundation of Agape.

Philia or Brotherly love is the love for one's fellow-man as a brother. The expression is taken from the Greek word Φιλαδελφία (Philadelphia = "love of brothers"), which trait distinguished the Early Christian communities.

As a Church we:

Worship God - with our words – with our actions – with our lives

Love All People – We embrace Philotimo, philia and Agape as principles of Christian living and showing Gods love. We exemplify as Christians, a selfless love, a love that is passionately committed to the well-being of the other.

Embrace Community – We reach out to our community and show them Jesus to establish a re-creation of the philotimo sense of community. We need our citizens to truly have a place to belong. We need to invite them into fellowship in God’s family.

Consider a person who knows how to fish...

Good for them; but lets consider how this impacts community...

Community provides the encouragement and sometimes remuneration to fish,
Community provides a place in which to fish and the freedom to fish.

As a church community in the community of Salmo.

- We have a loving God that people need to know and we are doing what we can to introduce them to him.
- We love people “one on one” unconditionally and show Agape love. It doesn’t matter if we are being used or not. We must love the person and pray for them if they are using us.
- We embrace community as usually more than one person at a time, we come together as a whole, providing purpose, making people feel wanted, loved and valued in a culture of honor.

This concept of caring simply because it is the right and honorable thing to do instead of motivations based on expectations placed upon us, or how we will look, is a subtle thing but it is a significant thing.

When we do the right things for the right reasons God honors our faithfulness.
When we do things for the wrong reasons, he looks to the intents of our heart and works to turn our focus outward.

This is our hope, this is our community.

I leave you with this though from Romans 5:5 BLB

And hope does not make us ashamed, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, the One having been given to us.

Our Lord and Saviour has cautioned us in Matthew 25:40-45

Matthew 25:40-45 Amplified Bible (AMP)

The King will answer and say to them, 'I assure you and most solemnly say to you, to the extent that you did it for one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it for Me.'

"Then He will say to those on His left, 'Leave Me, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels (demons); for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me [with help and ministering care].' Then they also [in their turn] will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or as a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will reply to them, 'I assure you and most solemnly say to you, to the extent that you did not do it for one of the least of these [my followers], you did not do it for Me.'

Today, more than ever before we need to show the love of Christ here in Salmo and quite frankly everywhere else. Let us embrace the concepts we have learned today and show God's love.