

Catechism & Theology Course

Session II, Class II

11/14/23

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

- *St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians 5:16-18*

“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen *do*. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.”

- Sermon on the Mount, *Gospel According to St. Matthew 6:5-8*

“Be attentive (Beware) to yourself, lest an unlawful word be hidden in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,’ and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you.”

- Deuteronomy 15:9

“The chief end of our life is to live in communion with God. To this end the Son of God became incarnate, in order to return us to this divine communion, which was lost by the fall into sin. Through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we enter into communion with the Father and thus attain our purpose.”

- St. Theophan the Recluse

Watchfulness, Silence, Solitude, & Prayer: A Matter of the Heart

Watchfulness

“Let us be attentive!” (“Πρόσχωμεν!”)

- Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom

“Be attentive to yourself that you may be attentive to God.”

- St. Basil the Great, *On the Human Condition*

“If you wish to save your soul and win eternal life, arise from your lethargy, make the sign of the Cross and say: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Faith comes not through pondering but through action. Not words and speculation but experience teaches us what God is. To let in fresh air we have to open a window; to get tanned we must go out into the sunshine. Achieving faith is no different; we never reach a goal by just sitting in comfort and waiting, say the Holy Fathers. Let the Prodigal Son be our example. He *arose and came* (Luke 15:20).”

- Tito Colliander, *Way of the Ascetics*

- Attention, mindfulness (προσοχή)
- About watchful vigilance; about not forgetting God
- Confronting laziness, passions, carelessness, etc., our ego, and danger self-medicating
- The moment for salvation is now, today, the present
- Being a watchman of our heart and mind
- Importance of fasting and acts of mercy
- Seasons of fasting
- Disciplining our tongue and stomach (St. John Climacus)

“I will only add this: throw out of your head the idea that you can, through a comfortable life, become what you must be in Christ.”

- Theophan the Recluse

Silence

“...Jesus Christ, the Word, that came out of silence.”

- St. Ignatius of Antioch

- Stillness, quiet (ἡσυχία)
- A term used already in the 4th and 5th centuries by such as Evagrius of Pontus
- A hesychast usually referred to a monk living alone, outside of cenobitic life
- About interior silence and quiet
- Not just about going into the desert, but making our hearts and minds as a quiet desert
- Associated with the Desert tradition of *nepsis*, or spiritual sobriety or vigilance
- To remember God and denial of self; self-emptying
- *Hesychia* is the return to God and a return to ourselves

“...to stand before God with the mind in the heart, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life.”

- St. Theophan the Recluse, *The Art of Prayer*

“It is impossible for muddy water to grow clear if it is constantly stirred up; and it is impossible to become a monk without *hesychia*.”

- St. Nilus of Ancyra, *Exhortations to Monks*

Solitude

“Be still and know that I am God.”

- Psalm 46:10

- Seclusion, privacy/retreat; on one's own (μοναξιά or μονάξ; from which monastery is derived)
- Separation from the world/from worldly things
- We cannot see ourselves or God in the busy-ness of the world
- To be alone, but not to be selfish

“Go and sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything.”

- Abba Moses, *Sayings the Desert Fathers*

“The monk is one who is separated from all and united with all.”

- Evagrius of Pontus

“Jerusalem the Holy is right here, in and around these caves; for what else is my cave, but the place where my Savior Christ was born; what else is my cave, but the place where my Savior Christ was taken to rest; what else is my cave, but the place from where He most gloriously rose again from the dead. Jerusalem is here, right here, and all the spiritual riches of the Holy City are found in this *wadi*.”

- Abba Moses, *Sayings the Desert Fathers*

- Story about the Romanian priest who was in solitary confinement for years
- A space for focus on God- fundamentally interior and spiritual; not necessarily or primarily a geographical destination
- Can be house of worship, a sanctuary, a place of meeting God
- A spatial place at first towards which to flee, to keep silent, and then to move inward

“One person may accomplish the visible and geographical flight into the desert, and yet in his heart may still remain in the midst of the city; conversely, another person may continue physically in the city, and yet be a true *hesychast* in his heart. What matters is not the special position but our spiritual state.”

- Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*

Prayer (προσευχή)

“First of all, it is very important to remember that prayer is an encounter and a relationship, a relationship which is deep, and this relationship cannot be forced either on us or on God. The fact that God can make Himself present or can leave us with the sense of His absence is part of this live and real relationship. If we could mechanically draw Him into an encounter, force Him to meet us, simply because we have chosen this moment to meet Him, there would be no relationship and no encounter.”

- Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray*

“To pray is to descend with the mind into the heart, and there to stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all seeing, within you.”

- Theophan the Recluse

- A laying aside of all thoughts, and turning towards the Lord
- Corporate and personal; public and “in our closets”
- God dwells within us; closer to us than our own soul
- The power of the invocation of the name of Jesus
- A combating of temptations, dillusions, and distractions, and meeting and taking refuge in God
- Prayer transfigures the cosmos around us, and transforms it again into *mysterion*/sacrament. All things are rendered translucent, and thus God is seen everywhere and in all
- It can be verbal and silent
- Not a purely meditatively matter, but one of invoking and being aware of God’s presence
- Not an effort of human strength, but of God’s will

References:

Books:

- *The Inner Kingdom*, Kallistos Ware
- *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, St. John Climacus
- *The Orthodox Way*, Kallistos Ware
- *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, Olivier Clément
- *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers (The Alphabetical Collection)*, Translated by Benedicta Ward
- *Way of the Ascetics*, Tito Colliander

Video:

- “The Mysteries of the Jesus Prayer,” with Rev. Dr. John McGuckin and Dr. Norris J. Chumley (Available online at YouTube)