

TOOLKIT FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

I. PRAYER

“Prayer is both a ‘holy art’ and ‘holy work’ – a gift and a task. As gift, prayer is the power of God’s grace raising us to the realm of God’s life. As a task, prayer is unceasing struggle to walk Christ’s straight and narrow path, to bring our whole life under His lordship to let him change us and our ways that we may be worthy of God’s blessings...It is said that prayer is the very soul of Orthodoxy, the breath of the Church, the light of each Christian’s conscience.”(Fr. Ted Stylianopoulos, *The Way of Christ: Gospel, Spiritual Life and Renewal in Orthodoxy*, Holy Cross Press, 2002 p. 89)

St Symeon the New Theologian: “The Three Methods of Prayer”

- ❖ “For it is the love of obedience that delivers us from entanglement with this evil world, rendering us free for anxiety and impassioned cravings...First practice exact obedience...and so act always with a pure conscience; for without obedience it is impossible for your conscience to be pure.”
- ❖ “Keep your conscience clear in respect to God - refrain from anything that conflicts with the worship due to him i.e. anything that enslaves our desire and replaces God is an idol.
- ❖ In respect to your spiritual father- do everything he tells you to do, neither more or less and be guided by him i.e. listen to the teachings of the Church, these classes etc.
- ❖ “In respect to other people and material things – do not do to others that which you hate and that which you do not want them to do to you.”
- ❖ “In respect to things: take care not to misuse food, drink or clothing...do everything as if you were in the presence of God, so that your conscience does not rebuke you in any way.”

1. Prayer is Liturgical = *the work of the people* of God

- a. Forgetting what we know – Protestant, Catholic, Evangelical
 - i. Pride: avoid being the self-directed in prayer
 - ii. Praying in ones’ “own words” is part of our ongoing dialogue between us and God, confessing our limitations, listening for direction and clarity concerning distressing situations.
- b. The content and form of prayer is primarily learned through the common, communal prayers of the Liturgy.
- c. A rhythm of preparing and fulfillment are given as a symbol of our lie – our life on earth is nothing more than a preparation for the Kingdom of God. Personal prayers throughout the week prepare us for our foretaste of the Kingdom to come!

2. How do we pray?

- a. The Lord’s Prayer

As Metropolitan Anthony Bloom has explained, the Lord’s Prayer shows the whole meaning of the life of man (cf. Anthony Bloom, *Living Prayer*). Delivered from evil, man is saved from temptation, in so doing he is merciful to all and receives the forgiveness of his own sins. Being forgiven his sins, by his mercy to others, he

has all that he needs for life—his “daily bread”; and being nourished by God, he accomplishes His will. Having accomplished His will, God’s Kingdom is present, His name is sanctified and He becomes the Father of the one who shows himself to be in truth the child of God who can say, “Our Father.”

3. The Purpose of Prayer

- a. The remembrance of God –
- b. “Prayer is about regaining and restoring the importance of the immaterial aspect of the human person, which has been ignored for so long.” (Fr. Evan, Toolkit, pg. 17)
- c. Restoring the right order: the body is meant *to serve* and be *led* by the soul. Prayer is communion with Christ – *Theosis* is the living and loving as Christ does, this is what it means to be holy.

4. The Mechanics of Prayer

- a. Create a space in your home, a **prayer corner** that is dedicated for your devotion of God.
 - i. A prayer book, koumboskini/Prayer rope, cross, icons, candle/oil lamp, incense, bible/psalms, spiritual writings, altar cloths
 - ii. Caring for it, attending to it, cleaning, dusting all help to create a habit of prayer. *Practice makes permanent*
- b. Sometimes it is helpful to find a space outside of one’s home in creation, a place you journey to that is free from distractions, a park, or place in the desert.
- c. Facing East is facing and orientating our life towards our destiny, our home towards which we journey: Paradise the Kingdom of God
- d. Standing, sitting (not on a coach with tea) or kneeling.
- e. The Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner” - during all activities: driving, walking, hiking, exercising etc.

“And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed (Gen 2:8).”

- f. “Have a keepable (repeatable/daily) rule of prayer that you do by discipline (Fr. Hopko).”
- g. Prostrations/Metanoia – *to repent*, involve our bodies and express humility, the offering of oneself before God.

5. Elements of a rule of Prayer :

- a. Jesus Prayer with prayer rope
- b. Invoking the Holy Spirit – *heavenly king, comforter, spirit of truth ...*
- c. The Trisagion Prayers (Lord’s Prayer)
- d. Morning/Evening Prayers from Orthodox Prayer Book
- e. Confession/Silence/ Praying in your own words from the heart
- f. Thanksgiving – name at least three things for which you are thankful
- g. Daily Scripture readings/silent reflection/journal note scripture that hits home
- h. Lists of names of living and dead to pray
- i. Doxology – giving glory, praise to God