

The Three Principles of Orthodox Spirituality: The Path to Prayer

By Met. Jonah (Paffhausen)
(continuation from last week)

DO NOT REACT

... [the] first spiritual principle – do not resent – leads to the second: We must learn to not react. This is just a corollary of “turn the other cheek.” When somebody says something hurtful, or somebody does something hurtful, what is it that’s being hurt? It’s our ego. Nobody can truly hurt us. They might cause some physical pain, or emotional pain. ... We have to take responsibility for our own reactions. Then we can control our reactions.

... But there is a deeper level still. Because if somebody hits you, and you don’t hit them back – but you resent them, and you bear anger and hatred and bitterness against them, you’ve still lost. You have still sinned. You have still broken your relationship with God, because you bear that anger in your heart.

One of the things which is so difficult to come to terms with is the reality that when we bear anger and resentment and bitterness in our hearts, we erect barriers to God’s grace within ourselves. It’s not that God stops giving us His grace. It’s that we say, “No. I don’t want it.” What is His grace? It is His love, His mercy, His compassion, His activity in our lives. The holy Fathers tell us that each and every human person who has ever been born on this earth bears the image of God undistorted within themselves. ... The implication of this truth is that we have no excuses for our sins. We are responsible for our sins, for the choices we make. We are responsible for our actions, and our reactions. Our choices are our own.

... Our watchfulness needs to be focused on God. We need to maintain the conscious awareness of God’s presence. If we can maintain the conscious awareness of His presence, our thoughts will have no power over us. ... But as soon as we engage in something hateful, we close God out. And the converse is true – as long as we maintain our connection to God, we won’t be capable of engaging in something hateful. We won’t react.

KEEP INNER STILLNESS

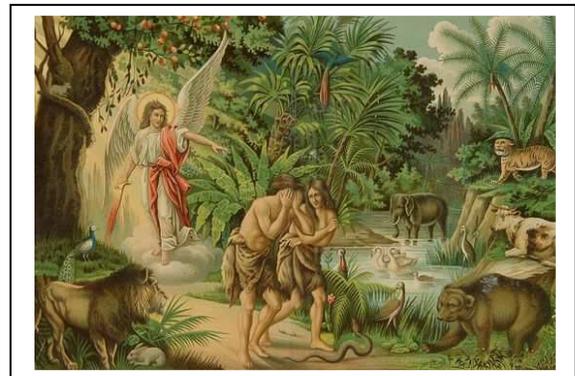
[The] third principle is the practice of inner stillness. The use of the Jesus Prayer is an extremely valuable tool for this. But the Jesus Prayer is a means, not an end. It is a means for entering into deeper and deeper conscious communion. It’s a means for us to acquire and maintain the awareness of the presence of God. ... It is a focus on the awareness of the presence of God in the depths of our heart. One of the essential things we have to constantly remember is that God is not out there someplace. ... God is everywhere. And God dwells in the depths of our hearts. When we can come to that awareness of God dwelling in the depths of our hearts, and keep our attention focused in that core, thoughts vanish.

In order to enter into deep stillness, we have to have a lot of our issues resolved. We have to have a lot of our anger and bitterness and resentments resolved. We have to forgive. If we don’t, we’re not going to get into stillness, because the moment we try, our inner turmoil is going to come vomiting out. This is good – painful, but good. Because when we try to enter into stillness and we begin to see the darkness that is lurking in our souls, we can then begin to deal with it. It distracts us from trying to be quiet, from trying to say the Jesus Prayer, but that’s just part of the process. And it takes time.

The Fathers talk about three levels of prayer. The first level is oral prayer, where we’re saying the prayer with our lips. We may use a prayer rope, saying “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” or whatever form we use. The next level is mental prayer, where we’re saying the prayer in our mind. Prayer of the mind – with the Jesus Prayer, with prayer book prayers, with liturgical prayers – keeps our minds focused and helps to integrate us, so that our lips and our mind are in the same place and doing the same thing. ... The final level of prayer is prayer of the heart, or spiritual prayer. It is here where we encounter God, in the depths of our soul. Here we open the eye of our attention, with the intention of being present to God who is present within us. This is the key and the core of the whole process of spiritual growth and transformation.

note: to read the article in its entirety, see:

<http://www.pravmir.com/the-three-principles-of-orthodox-spirituality-the-path-to-prayer/>



Сѣде Адáмъ прѣмо рай и свою наготу рыдая, плакаше: Увы мнѣ, прелестію лукавою увѣщанну бѣвшу, и окрадену, и славы удалену! Увы мнѣ, простотою нагу, нынѣ же недоумѣнну! Но, о раю, ктому твоея сладости не насладѣюся, ктому не узрю Господа и Бога моего и Создателя, въ землю бо пойду, отъ неяже и взять бѣхъ. Милостиве Щедрый, вопію Ти: помилуй мя падшаго!