

2023-08-27: Am I Spiritual?

Spiritual vs Church-Goer

What is a spiritual person?

A spiritual person is someone who, when he prays, he means it. He is not just saying words or going through motions, but he is speaking to God with genuineness.

What is a church-goer?

A church goer is someone who goes to church – they go to liturgy and Sunday school and Keraza and Bible Study and preservatives and Vespers and Tasbeha.

It is important to attend the Liturgy and receive the Eucharist on Sunday because it is the day of the Lord.

Some people say “well Sunday is so crowded” or “Sunday is so long” – but Sunday is the day of the Lord!

Some people say “well I went on Friday” or “I went on Saturday” – but Sunday is the day of the Lord! It’s good to go to an extra liturgy during the week and many people are even serving in the Friday or Saturday liturgy.... But Sunday is our day and the day of the Lord that we should be spending with Him and hearing His word and receiving His Body and Blood. Actually, the Church lectionary is based on the Sunday readings! The message that the Church is trying to give you is in the Sunday lectionary! On Friday and Saturday and the weekdays, it is related to the saint of the day... so it may be the same readings every week even... but Sunday the Church has a specific message for us that is communicated in a cycle over the whole year

One of the Commandments is to keep the day of the Lord, and that is Sunday. In Egypt, their day off every week is on Friday and so every church in Egypt has liturgy on Friday... but even so, the Christians pleaded with the government and said “we need to go to church on Sunday this is the day of the Lord” and the government said “fine – Christians can go to work at 10am on Sunday instead of at 7 or 8am”

Are all church-goers spiritual?

No... you might be going to all of the services and liturgies, but you do not have any relationship with God. And actually this is called living a dual life.

Life in the church – you are a servant, you are a deacon, you attend some meetings... but in the end, you have 0 relationship with God. And maybe not just that, but you are doing bad things! This is the life of hypocrisy (Matthew 23).

Are all spiritual people church-goers?

Yes! You cannot be spiritual without the Church.

Some people think that when they grow in their spiritual life, then it becomes less important to go to church (e.g. because they are spiritual and are speaking to God regularly outside of church prayers, and are fasting and doing prostrations, etc. That is not right. Actually, the more spiritual you grow, the more you need the church. The church feeds your spirituality and your spirituality feeds your benefit from the church.

People can go to church and they are not spiritual... but you cannot be spiritual without going to church!

How to be Spiritual (and not just church-goer)

Have a Spiritual Canon and Commit to it

With your Father of Confession

- E.g. You need to pray the 1st hour of Agpeya, 12th hour of Agpeya, read one chapter, write one line of meditation, fast Wednesday and Friday
- E.g. When you pray, focus on the quality and the depth; connect with God; not just reading.
- E.g. When you go to church, don't be just doing things... preparing the censer, lighting candles, organizing things... but not praying!

I will ask you a series of questions and I want you to answer them with yourself... don't answer them out loud, but really answer them seriously with yourself.

Do you Pray?

Do you pray every morning and every night? If you do not, then you don't have a spiritual life.

How can you grow spiritually without communicating with God?

You need to start your day with prayer and end it with prayer. Every day!

And not just "Our Father" – you are not children anymore. Use your Agpeya. Every morning and every night, at least!

Focus on the quality of prayer.

If you do not pray every morning and every evening... then you are just a church-goer.

Do you Read the Bible?

Do you read the Bible every day? If you are not, then you don't have a spiritual life!

How can you grow spiritually if you are not hearing the voice of God? In Prayer, I talk to God – in the Bible, God talks to me.

If you are not reading the Bible every day, then you are a church-goer.

Sometimes we do read the Bible every day, but we get nothing from reading it. It goes in one ear and out the other. We might close the Bible and not even remember one word that we read, and have nothing to apply for ourselves and it changes nothing for us... in this way, the Bible to me is DEAD like any other book.

But instead, after you read it, ask yourself: “What is God’s message for me?”

I can find in a chapter one verse, one promise, one inquiry, one request, one prohibition, one privilege... write it down! And write one or two lines reflection/meditation. This is what we give to you in MS and HS as the Bible Passport. It is for your own spiritual growth. It's one of the ways that we want to help you to become spiritual and not just church-goers.

In this way, I change the Bible from just “words on a page” – to LIFE.

Do you Fast?

Do you fast Wednesday and Friday? Did you fast St Mary’s Fast? Apostles Fast? Great Fast? You are not young... Fasting will not hurt your health. Fasting will help you to develop self-control.

When you fast, you need to be serious in your fasting... don’t say “I’m going out with my friends so it’s okay today to break my fast... no big deal. Fast is 55 days if I break one it’s not a big deal.” This is not fasting. It’s lack of self-control.

Fasting is not just abstain from a certain kind of food, but works with repentance, prayer and bible. Not instead of, but beside.

Fast from devices instead of spending hours and hours on devices. “e.g. This fast I will completely stay away from social media”

Fasting has three dimension: abstinence, quantity, quality

- Abstinence – when you wake up, wait a little bit before eating and drinking (according to your FoC... 11am, 12pm, etc.) On Sunday you don’t eat until 12 and no one is fainting! First meal in the morning is called what? BREAK-FAST
- Quality – sometimes when we’re fasting, we ask our parents “I’m fasting please bring me this and this and this” – where is the self-control? Vegan meat, vegan cheese... I am not fasting! Fasting is also about the quality of food. Whatever they bring me, I will eat it with thanksgiving. Whatever in the house is prepared for me, I will eat it with thanksgiving.
- Quantity – sometimes I like the food, so I eat until I am full and then I eat some more. And I might even have a stomach ache from eating too much... and this is called gluttony. Where is the self-control? If you like a food and can’t even tell yourself to stop eating it, then you don’t have self-control. And if you don’t have self-control, you will fall into sin

because you can't say no to yourself.

If you are not fasting and not developing your self-control, then you are just a church-goer.

Do you Confess?

Do you have a Father of Confession? Do you confess regularly? Are you honest in your confession? Are you living the life of repentance?

I lie, I swear, I gossip, I judge, I.... And Abouna prays the absolution, and two weeks later I come back and give him the same list. I am not fighting. I am not trying to be a godly man. I am not asking the Holy Spirit to fill me and guide me to live a godly life.

Steps before confession:

1. Admit to yourself that you are wrong (some people will deny that they are wrong)
2. You are sorry about it (some people know they are wrong and brag about it)
3. I will do whatever it takes to avoid it again through the grace of God (I will fight the good fight, I will complete the race) – some people know they are wrong and are sorry, but don't want to stop
4. Correcting the result of sin (e.g. if I got angry at someone, I need to go and apologize and say "I am sorry, I was angry and I should not have spoken to you like that"; if I lie, I should apologize and tell them the truth)
Prodigal Son, St Paul, St Peter, Ninevites, Jonah, Nicodemus, Manasseh the King, Rahab, Thomas, Samaritan Woman, Adam and Eve, Demas the thief, Zaccheaus – restored 4 fold and gave half his goods to the poor
5. Have confidence that God will accept your confession and forgive you (e.g. unlike Judas, who doubted God's forgiveness)

Then, after these five steps, sit with Abouna in confession.

If you are not living a life of repentance, if you are not confessing regularly, if you are not honest in your confession... then you are just a church-goer.

Is God the Priority in your Life?

We can sum these up with this question.

How much time do you spend with God and how much do you spend on your phones, tablets, social media or video games? If you spend 2-3min with God and 5 hours with the other things... what do you think?

For a church-goer, God is Friday night, Saturday night and Sunday morning and that's it.

For a spiritual person, God is every minute of every day. Everything that I do is for the glory of God. I like to spend time with the Lord every day. To speak to Him and to hear His words for me. To develop self-control that I may abstain myself from falling into temptation. To live a life of

repentance. To mirror Him.

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