

Deacons Service

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2021-10-03: Faithfulness and Wisdom in Reading

Nehemiah 8

The people had not read the word of God for a very very long time. Especially after having come back from captivity. They weren't even familiar with some of the laws and the feasts that Moses had written about. So they called for Ezra to come and to read it to them.

¹ Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. ³ Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were *attentive* to the Book of the Law.

When the deacon says "Stand up in the fear of God and listen to the Holy Gospel" it is a message to stand and be attentive and to hear and listen to the word of God. You can test yourself now and ask "do I remember the Pauline from today? Do I remember the Catholic Epistle and the Acts and the Gospel from today?"

⁴ So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose;

A platform of wood that was made specifically for this purpose - this is for us, the [] . And it was a platform higher than the rest - actually the [] should be at the highest point in the church so that all of us are standing below the word of God because the word of God has authority over us. [] is Coptic for "place" and [] is "Gospel" so [] is the "place of the Gospel"

and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

This is like when Abouna reads the gospel and we find deacons on his left and his right, holding the candles.

⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God.

Just as Abouna says "blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord" before reading. And he holds the Gospel above his head when he says it in order to say that "all of us - even the priest or bishop - are under the authority of the word of God" and this is why the bishop or patriarch

removes the crown from his head while reading.

And all the people stood up, as the deacon says "Stand in the fear of God" - and if you enter the church and the gospel is being read, just stand in your place and don't move until the Gospel is done.

Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with *their* faces to the ground.

Just as when we say "Blessed is he..." we all bow our heads toward the ground

⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people *stood* in their place.

Sermon is to explain the gospel of today to the people, just as here the Levites when to help the people understand the law.

⁸ So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.

This part is very important for readings. "Distinctly" - "Gave Sense" - there is a difference between someone who is reading and saying all the words right, and someone who is giving sense. When you read a question, it's different from reading a sentence. You have to know how to read in a way to give the sense to the people - with the right pauses, and inflections. Need to read with a loud voice and help the people to understand.

⁹ And Nehemiah, who *was* the governor, Ezra the priest *and* scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day *is* holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this* day *is* holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

There was no screen or Coptic Reader back then, all they did was hear the word of God. And the word of God pierced their hearts even to the point that they were emotional and started to weep and mourn because they were not following the Law. It is a big responsibility for the readers. Maybe there's someone in the church who doesn't read the Bible at home... maybe this is the only time in the whole week that he hears the word of God. Give it a chance to pierce His heart. Maybe he will be like St Anthony, who heard a single verse in the church and went and sold all that he had.

All of this applies just the same with those who are serving in the sanctuary. Almost every deacon response is an instruction for the Congregation... "Pray for the Holy Gospel" - "You who are seated stand" - "Let us attend." - "Amen Amen Pray" - etc. If the congregation cannot hear you, then who are you talking to?

So when you come to say a response outside and you don't see a microphone, take the microphone and bring it to you to say your response. Or if you see the microphone is already out and the leading deacon took care of it, come close to it and say in it. And if you're on the altar, turn the microphone on, come close to it and say your response clearly.

In this way, we are giving our beloved congregation members the chance to hear the word of God clearly and to understand it, to follow along in the prayers, and to understand their role in the liturgy.

2022-01-12 Deacons' Meeting

Spiritual

Acts 6-7: Contemplations on the Life of St Stephen

- First of seven men to be chosen and ordained as a deacon
- Ordained because the apostles needed to give their time to Spiritual work
- The spiritual work is for apostles, bishops, priests. So the deacons are serving in the administrative work
- The role of deacons in the church is big. It's not just serving in the altar:
 - Making orban
 - Cleaning the church and its facilities
 - Preventing the heretics from entering the church
 - Serving on the board
 - etc.
- The apostles gave qualifications and criteria for those servants (Acts 6:3)
 - Good Reputation (inside and outside the church)
 - Full of the Holy Spirit (having the fruits of the spirit)
 - Full of Wisdom
- The Apostles, Bishops and Priests have a different role (Acts 6:4)
 - Ministry of the Word (i.e. sermons and preaching)
 - Prayers
- If the deacons didn't do their part, it ends up falling on the Apostles... And this happens sometimes now with Abouna
- The Result of the Deacons' Service (Acts 6:7)
 - The service multiplying
 - The word of God spreading
- When the service is organized and everyone is doing their part, the Church of God will grow and the Word of God will spread

Lessons from the Life of St Stephen

Brave Enough to Say Yes to the Call of Service

- "Speak O Lord, your servant hears"
- Christianity was not easy or popular in those days. The environment of service was martyrdom. It was a great risk
 - St Stephen and the deacons took a risk and showed great courage.
 - He didn't shy away when the times got rough, but received martyrdom
- We don't have risk of martyrdom, but we have many inconveniences and difficulties in our life and service. Schedule, tired, family, work, etc.

Filled with Faith and the Holy Spirit

- How could the apostles measure faith or holy spirit? It was manifested in their life and actions
- St Luke mentions St Stephen full of the Holy Spirit four times in these two chapters
- Conduct in our lives, in our business dealings, in daily transactions, etc.

Handled Opposition and False Accusations with Grace

- He did not defend himself but simply shared his faith with grace and love, seeking their salvation
- Be strong in the faith and stand up for the Truth

Good Knowledge of the Word of God

- No one would dare have this conversation unless he knew the Word of God
 - Acts 7 is a good A-Z summary of the Old Testament
 - "Be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15)
- This is shown in how you read the word of God. Someone who reads well can deliver a message to the hearer.
 - Sometimes the reader can delivery a clearer message than the sermon.
 - Every deacon should be **ready enough** to give a sermon in a moment's notice

Pray for those who Persecute You

- Many will stand against us and oppose us - Good intentions or bad, with knowledge or without
- How do I handle this?
 - Do I carry a grudge?
 - Do I speak evil of them?
 - Between deacons should be care and love, but we all still can grow
- Pray for those who treat us badly

Strive to be of Good Reputation

- When you have the urge to respond in a secular way, remember who you are and Who you are serving

Administrative

- Deacons' Meetings
 - These are important and require commitment
 - If you have a valid reason to miss it (i.e. sick, traveling, work, school), please communicate it with Abouna
 - The service of the Reader and Subdeacon is **as important** as Sunday School - both are services for TEACHING

- You should wear your Tonia even if it's not your day for service
 - "There's already a lot of people" is a reason sometimes, but if that's the case why would the Lord make thousands of thousands of angels?
 - To stand and serve as a deacon is the service you are ordained for, and you will greatly benefit from it
- Scheduling
 - Sending availability in a timely manner on the group every two months
 - Sending availability on groups for weekday liturgies (see Jonah in February)
 - Sending a message when you will be unable to make it to your service
- Attending the Tasbeha and standing with the deacons or in the front rows - especially during Kiahk
- Father of Confession and regular confession
- Proper Vestments (including Tonia, Badrashel, Taleeg) and respect for them
- Arriving 15min before the Liturgy Starts, regardless of your position

Announcement - New Adult Deacons Class

- Every Wednesday at 8:00-9:30pm
- **Arabic and English**
- Rituals, Dogma, Hymns, and the Deacons Service in General
- Purpose:
 - To remember things that were forgotten from lack of use
 - To be in harmony with the rituals and practices in our church
 - To serve the adult deacons
- Jan Guirguis will be responsible for and serving that class
- **Required attendance for Saturday Altar Servants**
- **Required attendance for Friday Altar Servants who are not already attending the Advanced Hymns**
- *It's okay if you don't know, but what is more important is a willingness to learn*
- **Starting Feb 2, 2022**

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.

2023-10-29: Wisdom and Discernment

<https://notes.morcous.com/books/virtues/page/the-virtue-of-discernment-wisdom-he-metropolitan-youssef>

Introduction

- Talk about milk vs solid food
- Hebrews 5:14
- What is Wisdom
 - Christ
 - Holy Spirit
 - Gift of the Holy Spirit

Wisdom the Requirement of the Deacon

Heavenly Wisdom vs Earthly Wisdom

- Story of Rebecca
- Example of craftiness - "I just took communion, but I know that we have an agreement in Deacons' Meeting that we don't go out to the water fountains during the Distribution... I see Morcoux is standing in the front row today. Okay I'll make a plan - when he takes the little boys in to take communion, I'll sneak behind him to get to the water fountain. What a crafty and cunning plan! So clever!"
- Examples of craftiness - When I use a method to "get ahead" at work or financially that is not edifying for me, or that is hurting someone else. Or making a plan to take an exam a day late so that I can cheat on it or get the answers from someone else. Craftiness.

Acquiring Heavenly Wisdom

- Prayer
- Reading Scripture
- Counsel
- Learning from the Mistakes of Others
- Reading

Why do I need Wisdom?

- To make good decisions in my life
- Protection from false spirituality
- To deal with crafty people

- To discern when to speak and when to keep silent
- Dealing with others in general

2024-02-04: Performing our Daily Vows

Introduction

- We are all composed of body and spirit
- Our body is taken from the earth - that's why our body tends to like the earthly (laziness, sin)
- Our spirit is taken from God - so our spirit tends to like holiness and connection to God
- "For the flesh wars against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (Galatians 5:17)
 - There is always a war between the flesh and the spirit
 - In order for our spirit to win this war, there must be some rule/canon/law - what we call Spiritual Rule/Canon/Law

Spiritual Rule

- ◦ If you don't have a Spiritual Rule, you will be under Spiritual Mood
 - "if you're in the mood to pray, you'll pray"
 - "if you're in the mood to read the bible, you'll read the bible"
 - "if you're in the mood to go to church, you'll go to church"
 - People who live according to their mood or what they "feel like" will go down because our natural tendency is laziness... lacking discipline
- "If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules." (2 Timothy 2:5)
 - If I want to be crowned at the end, I need to have a rule
- "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor 14:40)
 - Spiritual Rule will organize your spiritual life and put it in order
- Spiritual Growth is connected with the Spiritual Rule
 - "The main difference between the saints and us is seriousness." - HH Pope Shenouda III
 - They took their life seriously. They respected their spiritual canon. They did not break it. They started as beginners, but because of their discipline, they were able to grow.
 - For example, imagine two people who are in school together
 - One has a scheduled study time every day and a rule for studying; he takes his studies very seriously - and he is successful.
 - The other one studies whenever he feels like it, whenever he's in the mood - this person is not successful.
 - [Not HEMY] For example, imagine two people who want to get in shape
 - One takes his exercise and his diet very seriously - he has calendars and schedules, he wakes up early to hit the gym every day, he plans all of his meals.

- The other one exercises whenever he feels like it or he's in the mood, and eats healthy if he finds something.
- Which one will be in shape at the end?

What is the Spiritual Canon

- "So I will sing praise to Your name forever, that I may daily perform my vows." (Psalm 61:8)
 - No one makes a vow every day, but he is referencing here his Spiritual Rule
 - Take this verse as a motto for our life
- St John the Short, when attacked by Satan responded as such: "Today I am alive and I am healthy and I am able to pray; tomorrow, I don't know if I will be alive or healthy or able to pray. So let me pray today."
- "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." (Romans 8:5-9)
 - Those who live according to the flesh are the ones who do things when they feel like it
 - Those who live according to the Spirit are those who have a Spiritual Rule
- Barriers to Spiritual Rule
 - Maybe I want to pray, I want to read the Bible, I make a Spiritual Rule, I discuss it with my Father of Confession... but to apply it? I can't. I get bored easily.
 - Satan will fight you, and you WILL get bored.
 - There is a virtue called the Virtue of Coercion
 - "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." (1 Corinthians 9:27)
 - I need to force myself to build discipline... it will be difficult in the beginning, but once it becomes a habit, that's it! And you will even enjoy it.
- Spiritual Rule includes:
 - Prayers - How many Agpeya Prayers? How many Psalms in each hour? Personal prayers? Discuss with spiritual father
 - Readings - Scripture. Spiritual Books.
 - Fasting - All the fasts of the Church, besides personal fasting. How do you fast? What time are you abstaining? Unfortunately many don't take fasting seriously... No abstinence. Taking it easy (e.g. coffee with milk; pizza with cheese; etc.). Spoiling your flesh, not disciplining it.
 - Prostrations
- Spiritual Canon and the way we worship God is how HE wants us to worship Him, not as how WE like it.
 - For example, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son. And He appointed to Abraham a mountain that was more than three days walking away from where Abraham was.

- Abraham didn't say to God "isn't it enough that I'll offer my son as a sacrifice? And you want me to walk three days? What difference does it make??" - but rather, he respected God. God wanted him to offer in THAT place.
- Sometimes we worship God according to what we see right, not what God is asking us to do
 - I get tired, I go to school, long day of studying... I cannot do a spiritual canon.
 - 20minutes in the morning and 20minutes in the evening is indeed, tiring and not convenient. But what does it mean when the Lord said "Enter through the narrow gate" and "walk in the difficult way"
 - This is the narrow gate, when we discipline our body and bring it into subjection
 - Don't take your Agpeya and lay in bed and read the Agpeya... no. "Grant us sobriety O Lord that we may know how to stand up before You at times of prayer."
- "The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force" - you have to FORCE yourself into the Kingdom of Heaven!
 - King David was a king with many responsibilities and a whole kingdom, and yet he says "Seven times everyday I praise Your holy name"
 - Daniel and the three youth were in captivity, living as slaves, and the king wanted them to eat certain food which is considered unclean for the Jews. "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." (Daniel 1:8)
 - Sometimes we're fasting but if we're invited to a birthday party, we break our fast. We don't have the purpose and seriousness that Daniel had in his heart.
 - Why did the Lord Jesus commend John the Baptist? He was serious in his life! "Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.... Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.'" (Matthew 11:8-11)
- Spiritual Life is a life void of Distraction
 - Like Mary (sister of Martha) - it is time to sit at the feet of the Lord and to learn. But if I am praying and I get a text message, let me answer it real quick. My phone rings while I'm praying, I will answer it. Wait until you finish before you answer. What will happen if you don't? Nothing! But let me be serious.

Fruit of the Spiritual Canon

- Grow Spiritually
 - "How do I overcome the sin of anger? Lust?"
 - "How to grow in virtue of love? Humility?"
 - I don't have other answers besides what you know... pray, read the Bible, go to Church, confess, fast, repent, etc.

- If you follow your Spiritual Canon and you're committed to it, you will grow spiritually.
- Commitment.
- Discipline
 - Gives structure in your life
 - How to be disciplined in your life
 - Sense of responsibility - you are a responsible person
- Satisfaction and Spiritual Nourishment
 - Every day you take your spiritual nourishment from the Lord, so you will be satisfied by your relationship with God
 - Your heart will be full of peace as you communicate with the King of Peace
- Bearing the Fruit of the Spirit
- Living a Life of Repentance
 - The Holy Spirit will rebuke and convict you when you do something wrong!
- Acquiring Virtues and Overcoming Weaknesses
- Strengthen your relationship with God
 - Any relationship is strengthened by communication
 - Spiritual Canon is our communication with God
- You will know the will of God in your life
 - You will hear the voice of the Holy Spirit clearly as you grow in your commitment to your canon
 - You will be able to discern the voice of God

Some Practical Steps

- Set a Time
 - 7am I will pray the 1st Hour; 7pm I will pray the 12th Hour; 5pm I will read my Bible
 - Put alarms on your phone
 - Sometimes I say "I will read it later" or "After I finish this" or "After I do this" - and then I come to the end of the day and I say "I am tired... tomorrow I'll read two chapters instead of one" and then tomorrow is the same thing
 - In the monastery, when the bell rings at specific times of the day, every monk drops what he is doing and goes to the church to pray. If he's asleep, he wakes up. If he is working, he drops it.
 - One of the biggest excuses is "I don't have time"
 - It is not a matter of not having time, it is a matter of priority.
 - What is your priority? Ask yourself - what is the first thing you do in the morning? Check your phone? Instagram? Text messages? Play games on the phone? That is your priority.
 - When we have a convention or a Spiritual Day, we find that in a single day we have a Liturgy, we pray all hours of Agpeya, we have Vespers and Midnight Praises, we have two or three Lectures, a Bible Study, a Talent Show, and free time. How are we able to do so much in one day?? Because we have time management. There is a schedule. So everything fits.
 - When the Lord broke and gave the 5 Loaves and 2 Fish, He told the disciples to collect the fragments and they collected twelve baskets of remaining

fragments. Collect the fragments of your time. 10min here, 15min here, etc. If you use these fragments of time, it will add up to hours. Want to respond to text messages or check your social media, do it in these small fragments of time so that you can dedicate time to your Spiritual Canon.

- Keep a Table
 - Keep it by your prayer corner with the list of your Spiritual Canon and check it off
 - Challenge yourself to have a perfect record weekly
 - Choose an accountability partner - a friend, or your Father of Confession, or a servant - to keep you on track
 - Prayer, Bible, Prostration, Wed/Fri Fasting, Sunday Liturgy, Tithing, Confession,

2024-03-30 - Let us Attend

Copy and Shadow of the Heavenly Things

- "There are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See *that* you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." (Hebrews 8:4-5)
- "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy *is* the Lord of hosts; The whole earth *is* full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: "Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts." Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged." (Isaiah 6:1-7)
- Isaiah said "For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" - who is he referring to? He is referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. And we know this because St John in his gospel quotes from Isaiah chapter 6 and then he says: "These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him" (John 12:41)
- What does this scene remind us of? The Divine Liturgy! But really, it is the opposite - when we stand in the Divine Liturgy, we should be reminded of this scene. When we stand in the Divine Liturgy, we should recognize and realize that we are standing in the throneroom of God
- "Whenever we stand in Your holy sanctuary, we are considered standing in heaven" - Agpeya Part 6
 - We are surrounded by the cloud of saints in the iconography
 - We see incense
 - We see the vestments of the priest and deacons
 - We see the Body of the Lord Christ and His Blood in the Chalice
 - We see candles
 - All of these things are there to help us realize our presence in the throne room of God
- The chorus of the deacons should represent the angels that are in heaven
 - God is calling us to synchronize with the angels in heaven and to join their choir
 - So what is it that these angels are doing? What is it that we are expected to do? We have a hint!
 - "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3) - when do we say this in the liturgy? (The Sanctus)

- Now going from the Sanctus let's move backwards a little... the Sanctus is the last part of the Preface of the Liturgy. The beginning of the Anaphora.
- Anaphora
 - "O You, THE BEING, Master, Lord, God of Truth, being before the ages and reigning forever; who dwells in the highest and looks upon the lowly; who has created the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all that is therein; the Father of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, by whom You have created all things, visible and invisible; who is seated upon the throne of His glory; and who is worshipped by all the holy powers."
 - You who are seated stand
 - "Before whom stand the angels, the archangels, the principalities, the thrones, the dominions, and the powers."
 - Look toward the East
 - "You are He around whom stand the cherubim full of eyes, and the seraphim with six wings, praising continuously, without ceasing, saying -"
 - Let us attend
 - "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of hosts, heaven and earth are full of Your holy glory."
- The Liturgy is preparing us for this moment when we chant "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of hosts, heaven and earth are full of Your holy glory." - this is the praise of the Seraphim. This is what they say when they are around the throne of God. The Church is telling us to be prepared to enter the Throne Room of God with three commands: You who are seated stand, Look towards the East, Let us attend.
- Before we talk about them, one more point: they are actually said TWICE!
 - At the end of "Greet one another... Offer in order. Stand with trembling. Look toward the East. Let us attend."

You who are seated stand

- In Isaiah 6, we read that the Seraphim were standing
- The concept of standing to pray is very important
 - "And whenever you stand praying..." (Mark 11:25)
 - "Forasmuch as there are certain persons who kneel on the Lord's Day and in the days of Pentecost, therefore, to the intent that all things may be uniformly observed everywhere, it seems good to the holy Synod that prayer be made to God standing" (Council of Nicaea Canon 20)
 - "We pray standing, on the first day of the week, but we do not all know the reason. On the day of *anastasin* we remind ourselves of the grace given to us by standing at prayer, not only because we rose with Christ, and are bound to "seek those things which are above," but because the day seems to us to be in some sense an image of the age which we expect, wherefore, though it is the beginning of days, it is not called by Moses first, but one. For he says: "There was evening, and there was morning, one day," as though the same day often recurred. Now "one" and "eighth" are the same, in itself distinctly indicating that really "one" and "eight" of which the Psalmist makes mention in certain titles of the Psalms, the state which follows after this present time, the day which knows no waning or eventide, and no successor, that age which ends not or grows old. Of necessity, then, the church teaches her own foster children to offer their prayers on that day standing, to the end that through

continual reminder of the endless life we may not neglect to make provision for our removal from there." (St Basil - On the Holy Spirit Ch. 27)

- How do we stand?
- In the Liturgy of St Gregory:
 - Let us stand well
 - Let us stand reverently
 - Let us stand earnestly
 - Let us stand in peace
 - Let us stand in the fear of God, trembling and stunned
- So the purpose is not simply to be standing, but to stand well, reverently, earnestly, in peace, in the fear of God. The message is to put away laziness and focus on prayer - physical laziness and spiritual laziness.
- Sometimes when you see one of the elders sitting simply because the flesh is weak. But yet when he sits, it is well, with reverence, with earnest, in peace, and in the fear of God.
 - Compare it with how we sit sometimes, we are sitting as if to relax. Coming to the liturgy, in the presence of God, and just lounging on the pew. It is completely inappropriate!

Look towards the East

- Why do we look towards the East?
 - St Basil (On the Holy Spirit Ch. 27) says: "We all look to the East at our prayers, but few of us know that we are seeking our own old country, Paradise, which God planted in Eden in the East."
 - "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed." (Genesis 2:8)
 - "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matthew 24:27)
 - "Our holy place is the paradise - our original place. And since it was in the East, we are told to face the East when we pray." (St Ephrem the Syrian)
- Liturgically, the East is wherever the altar is. In a church that is being built, it is always built with the altar facing the East. But sometimes, when a church is bought or temporary or something, it might not work to make it in the East... so in that case, the East is wherever the altar is.
- In the long "Greet one another"
 - O clergy and all the people, with prayer and thanksgiving, with dignity and silence, raise your eyes toward the East: to see the Altar, and the Body and Blood of Immanuel our God placed upon it.
- Again, we see that looking in a specific direction by itself is NOT the main point. But to focus our eyes on the Altar, and on the Body and Blood of Christ. To look with dignity and silence. To look with prayer and thanksgiving.
- Looking towards the East helps deacons avoid distractions
 - Sometimes we are distracted by the deacons on the other side
 - Sometimes we are distracted by the deacons next to us
 - Sometimes we are distracted by the people in the congregation

- Sometimes we distract the deacons on the other side, or next to us, or we distract the people in the congregation

Let us attend

- The command of "Let us attend" means let us be attentive. Let us focus. Let us put our phone away and be attentive to the Liturgy.
- It is a preparation for singing the heavenly hymn of the Seraphim and attending with them around the Throne of God.

2024-12-11 - Giving

Our topic for today is the virtue of Giving. The Lord Jesus in Luke 6 says: "Give, and it will be given to you"

The commandment that He tells us is "give" - there is no specific, just "give."

There are many things that we can give: a smile, a good word, money, time, energy, a listening ear, a warm welcome. And the more we give, the more we receive.

We'll read together today from 2 Corinthians 8. We read in the Book of Acts, that there was going to be a famine in the world. And the disciples determine to send relief to Judea. So St Paul, as part of his missionary journey, collects some of those funds to go back to Jerusalem.

In 2 Corinthians 8-9, St Paul talks about giving to the Corinthians, by giving them the example of the Macedonians.

"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality."

- The churches of Macedonia (e.g. Philippi, Thessaloniki) were persecuted churches. They were being persecuted by the Jews and had great trials of affliction, and on top of that, St Paul tells us "deep poverty." Yet, what gave them joy was that they were able to generously give to the brethren in Judea.
- **Giving Imparts Joy**
 - We are in the season of Christmas here, a season of giving and you see the joy on someone's face when they give a gift, and even more, the joy of the gift-giver. It is something we have all experienced.
 - When you call someone to ask about them, and maybe no one has asked about them before, and they are joyful.
 - When you visit someone who is mourning, and your visit brings joy to their face
 - When you give appreciation to someone who has worked hard and done a great act, they have more joy from your gift of appreciation, than from accomplishing the thing itself
 - When you encourage someone who is down, they are joyful
 - And their joy is infectious and you too become joyful

"For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability"

- There is a servant who gives in his service according to his ability. Katar khero. But then there is a servant who gives beyond his ability. This is what the Macedonians were doing.
- **Give Beyond Your Ability**

- We can remember here the two mites of the widow. This woman only had two small coins - it was beyond her ability to give anything in the Temple. And yet, she did not hesitate to drop them both in the collection box.
- Fr Reweis told me a story once about a very elderly man in Canada who was over 80 years old, and insisted to stay in the service of Orban. And those of you who serve in the Orban know that it is not a gentle or light service. But you come out sweating and having exerted yourself. So this man was serving BEYOND what his body and his age allowed. And one day they came to the church and found him laying in the street outside the door of the church from exhaustion, after completing his service. He was giving beyond his ability.
- Many times when asked of a service, I might look at my ability and say I can't do it. But actually, I am underestimating my ability.
 - One time a youth told me that he cannot serve the service of the altar because he can't wake up that early because he sleeps late. But on the same day, another servant would work a shift the whole night, fasting from food and water, so that he can come to his service after work. Beyond the ability.

"they were freely willing,"

- The Macedonians heard about the need in Jerusalem, and they encouraged each other to give as much as they could and even more, freely. They didn't wait for St Paul to tell them or to ask them for anything.
- **Giving is Freely Willed**
 - The carnal man may look at his paycheck and say "if I give from this, I won't have enough to pay my bills." But the spiritual man will look at the paycheck and say "let me give from this, knowing that God will provide for me to pay my bills."
 - HE Metropolitan Youssef has said before that "man says seeing is believing, but God says believing is seeing." Believe first, and you will see.
 - Freely willed means giving without thinking. Someone asks a service of you and you say yes before knowing the details. Before thinking about it. Someone says "I need a service from you" and you say "I am at your service"
 - Fr Daoud Lamei gives an example of one time they were doing a service in a place of less means, and one of the men with them was so moved by what he saw that he took everything out of his wallet and asked Abouna "will God accept this from my hand?" To the point that Abouna told him "it's too much!" and the man said "if I knew people were living like this, I would have done more. But this is what I have right now. Will God accept it?" - He was not thinking or trying to be logical about it. He was giving with a free will.
 - I can't wait for someone or the church to tell me "come serve" - but let me go and serve, and that day of service will be the most valuable day of the week.
 - I can't wait for the church to say "we have a project and we need funds" - but let me come and give, and the day of giving will be for me the most valuable day of the week.
 - There is a point that sometimes waiting for someone to say "give me" may ruin the blessing of giving. Sometimes we have a servant very dedicated to the liturgy on a weekday, so we tell him "come and serve" with us and we put him on the schedule

and after that, he only comes on the day he is scheduled.

"imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."

- The Macedonians went to St Paul with humility and urged him to accept their gift to minister to the saints in Jerusalem.
- **Giving is a Grace**
 - See how St Paul calls the gift "the grace" (in Arabic translation... el ne3ma).
 - He who gives is just a middleman - taking from the hand of God, and putting it in the hand of someone else who needs it.
 - If you give a smile - where did you get that smile in the first place? Was it not from God, who imparts all joy and happiness?
 - If you give from your talents - where did you acquire those talents in the first place? Was it not from God, from whom all good gifts come?

"And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God"

- The Macedonians gave themselves to the Lord first, and then to the apostles - who are the ministers of the Lord.
- **Giving is to God**
 - To give yourself to the Lord means to say that all that I have is Yours. My talents, my money, my virtues, my ideas, my thoughts, my energy, my time - all is in Your hands. And then to give yourself to the ministers of the Lord - is to give all of those to the Church, represented by the father the priest, and to say "use it." Use my talents, my money, my virtues, my ideas, my thoughts, my energy, my time.
 - Sometimes we want to pick and choose what to give. I was talking to a youth once who told me "when I come to the church, no one gives me the microphone to sing in it" and this is not uncommon in the service of the deacons. But it's the wrong attitude. When I come to the church and to my service, I am giving myself in the Lord. I am giving my talents to be used in the service however I am asked to use them. And in the end, it is an offering to God.

"So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well."

- Titus went ahead to Corinth before St Paul, in order to start the process with them. The giving here was organized with Titus responsible for it - receiving the gift, organizing it, documenting and recording it, making sure it's delivered appropriately, etc.
- **Giving is with Order**
 - Any gift is given in order. When the Lord was given 5 loaves and 2 fish as a gift, He did not just haphazardly pass it around. But He told the disciples to organize the people in groups of 50, and then gave them baskets with which to distribute the food to those groups.
 - When we come to give ourselves in service, as deacons, we come and find that the liturgy is arranged with who will serve in what position, what does each position do,

etc.

- When we give from our money in the church, we find there is someone who is collecting it, counting it, documenting it, taking it to the bank, allocating it to specific services and projects and to the poor and needy, etc.
- When we give guidance, it needs wisdom and planning, and to be sound
- When we have a condolences in the church and we attend it (yes, this is giving!) we find that it is organized with prayers and psalms and songs and hymns and a spiritual word, with some other times for greetings and words of comfort.

"But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also."

- The Corinthians were abounding (excelling) in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in diligence, and in love. And St Paul is reminding them - see that you also abound and excel in the grace of giving.
- **Giving is Necessary**
 - Someone might say "well I pray and read the Bible and I attend many liturgies. Why do I need to give?" - see that you abound in the grace of giving also.
 - "Well I serve in Sunday School and I give from my time and my energy. Time is money! So why do I need to give from my money?" - see that you abound in this grace also.
 - "Well I give tithes and even more than tithes. Why do I need to give from my time or my energy? Or why should I go and serve?" - see that you abound in this grace also

"I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others."

- St Paul here was not giving a commandment to the Corinthians or trying to force or compel them to give, or to give a certain amount. But he was giving them the example of the Macedonians and their diligence and how it brought them joy.
- **Giving is Love**
 - I cannot give if I do not love. And by giving, I show my love.
 - When I ask about someone and call them and say "we missed you today!" - this is giving, and this is out of the abundance of love for him.
 - When I encourage someone and tell him "it will get better, the Lord is with you" - this is giving, and it is out of the abundance of love for him.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

- Christ, who was the richest, who sat on a throne and was ministered to by angels - decided to be born in a manger, to a poor family, to live as a carpenter. He came to the earth in its poverty, so that He can give us the whole of the Kingdom of Heaven in its riches.
- **Giving has a Reward**

- As the commandment says: "Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom."
- The Lord here used the imagery of a generous merchant. A cheap merchant may take his measuring cup and swipe it into the barley and hand it to you. But a generous and fair merchant will take the measuring cup, swipe into the barley, press it down, shake it to occupy all the space in the measuring cup, and keep doing this until the cup overflows. This is our Lord, the generous Giver who will give to us when we give.

"And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing *of it*; that as *there was a readiness to desire it*, so *there also may be a completion out of what you have*."

- The Corinthians had made a commitment to give to Jerusalem about a year ago, and now St Paul is telling them to finish what they started - "Shed 7elak." And again, he is not commanding them, but giving them advice.
- **Giving is Contagious**
 - When we first give, we are unsure. But then we see that there is a blessing, so we give more. The blessing increases and there is peace and goodness, so we are transformed from the Act of Giving to the Desire of Giving. It becomes second nature to us. We stop thinking about it.

Finally, what can I give?

- When we think of giving, we always think of money. And it is good and right and commanded of us to give from our money and our earnings that God has given us. But some people don't just need money...
- Some need for someone just to ASK about them
- Some need a smile
- Some need encouragement
- Some need appreciation
- Some need comfort (tub tub 3aleh)
- Some need visitation
- Some need guidance
- Some need honor and respect
- Some need a compliment
- Some need to mourn and someone to mourn with them
- Some are in need of money and other things like medicine or clothing or furniture

All of these are needs that have in front of them the virtue of giving

- I should give from my time
- I should give from my energy
- I should give from my talents

As deacons, we are servants. The deacons in Acts 6 were chosen in order that they can serve the tables and serve the widows. We are servants of the people, and part of our role and our responsibility is to give to the people. We have a very important liturgical role in guiding the people in prayer - whether from inside or outside. But the more important role is to give.

2025-11-30: Reverence for the House of God

The Church: House of God

Psalm 84

How lovely *is* Your tabernacle,
O Lord of hosts!
² My soul longs, yes, even faints
For the courts of the Lord;
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

³ Even the sparrow has found a home,
And the swallow a nest for herself,
Where she may lay her young—
Even Your altars, O Lord of hosts,
My King and my God.
⁴ Blessed *are* those who dwell in Your house;
They will still be praising You. *Selah*

¹⁰ For a day in Your courts *is* better than a thousand.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

The Dwelling of God

1. The First Paradise
 - God and man dwelling together
 - We lost this and were separated from God
2. The Altar
 - Meeting with God
3. The Tabernacle & The Temple
 - God dwells among us but He is still separate from us
4. The Church
 - God abides in us and we in Him

God is Holy

- Meet and right
- For truly it is fitting and right, and holy and becoming, and profitable to our souls, bodies, and spirits at all times and in all places of Your dominion, to praise You, hymn You, bless You, serve You, worship You, thank You, and glorify You.
- "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." (Leviticus 19:2)

My Response to Holiness

- Moses had to remove his sandals (Exodus 3:5)
- Joshua had to remove his sandals (Joshua 5:14-15)
- Isaiah recognized his sinfulness when in the presence of holiness
 - "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips!" (Isaiah 6:1-5)
- The High Priest would wear his bells and his robe when entering the Holy Place
 - "And it shall be upon Aaron when he ministers, and its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy *place* before the Lord and when he comes out, that he may not die." (Exodus 28:35)
- Elijah, when he heard the voice of God as a gentle whisper, covered his face with a mantle
 - "¹¹ Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, *but* the Lord *was* not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, *but* the Lord *was* not in the earthquake; ¹² and after the earthquake a fire, *but* the Lord *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. ¹³ So it was, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave." (1 Kings 19:11-13)

Consumed by Holiness

- When Moses was going to receive the Ten Commandments, God gave bounds to the people not to approach the mountain. "Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 19:12)
- Nadab and Abihu were consumed for disrespecting God's worship
- Uzzah was struck for handling the Ark of Covenant without reverence
- God's holiness is a consuming fire. When you put metal in fire, all of the impurities are consumed away and what's left is just the precious metals - the gold, silver, etc.

How to Approach God's House

- What do I wear
 - Clothing reflects reverence
 - We dress for interviews, weddings, graduations, etc. - how much more for God's house?
 - I am coming to meet the King of kings!
- How do I speak?
 - The Church is a house of prayer, not a house of conversation
 - Guard your tongue - silence gives room for prayer

- If a conversation is needed, then quickly and in hushed tones
- How do I walk?
 - Walk quietly, not running, not wandering aimlessly
 - I'm not chewing gum, I'm not eating or drinking, I'm not taking a phone call - honestly - I shouldn't even take a text message
- How do I stand?
 - Attentively
 - Not leaning
 - Not sitting casually
- How do I behave?
 - Games?