

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,
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