

# AWAKENING THE HEART

## LECTURE ONE: "WITH THE SWINE"

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### Why This Topic?

#### Some notes on why we should talk about confession:

- It is a great medicine:
  - "Sin is a wound; repentance is a medicine. Just as there are for the body wounds and medicines, so for the soul are sins and repentance. However, sin has the shame and repentance possesses the courage." -*St. John Chrystotom, Homily 8, On Repentance and Almsgiving (Fathers of the Church Patristic Series)*
- It is a great teacher
  - "Every genuine confession humbles the soul. When it takes the form of thanksgiving, it teaches the soul that it has been delivered by the grace of God." -*St. Maximos the Confessor, Various Texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice 3.62, The Philokalia: The Complete Text (Vol. 2)*
- It drives away the devil:
  - "Nothing gives the demons and thoughts more power against us than the unconfessed sins in our heart upon which they feed" -*St John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent*
- It is how we are healed:
  - "The sick one who is acquainted with his sickness is easily to be cured; and he who confesses his pain is near to health. Many are the pains of the hard heart; and when the sick one resists the physician, his torments will be augmented." -*St. Isaac the Syrian, "Six Treatises on the Behavior of Excellence", Mystical Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*

#### The Five Benefits of Frequent Confession (By St Nikodemus the Hagiorite):

- *Benefit One:* Frequent confession does not allow passions and addictions to become deeply rooted in the heart. Also, as a great tree cannot be chopped in one swing, so our great sins need to be constantly worked on and uprooted.
- *Benefit Two:* A person who frequently confesses comes to better knowledge of himself through self-examination and is able to find sins easier and work himself to get rid of them. A person who does not do this becomes burdened with many sins and in examination he is anxious to find all them. The latter situation is a joy of the devil who works to conceal sins, leave them unforgiven, and torture us with them at the hour of death.
- *Benefit Three:* Frequent confession brings the grace of God quickly, even if a person commits a mortal sin, and his works are always done with the blessing of grace. Infrequent confession deprives us of God's grace and even the good works that we do are not as blessed as a person who is frequently confessing his sins.
- *Benefit Four:* A person who frequently confesses experiences joyful death because he knows that he has received forgiveness and the grace of God.
- *Benefit Five:* Frequent confession deters and restrains people from committing more sins and committing them frequently, for they tell themselves "I am going to confession soon!"

and does not want to bear the shame. St John of the Ladder wrote: "By resolving to make one's confession, the soul is therefore held from sinning as by a bridle."

### Short History on Holy Confession

Confession in the New Testament:

- Confession of sins to one another: James 5:16; Ephesians 5:21; 1 John 1:9; Acts 19:18

Confession in the Early Church:

- From the Acts of the Apostles
- From the Didache
  - "Confess your sins in church, and do not go up to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life. . . . On the Lord's Day gather together, break bread, and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure" (Didache 4:14, 14:1 [A.D. 70]).
  - "Assemble on the Lord's day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; But first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one...For this is the offering of which the Lord has said, 'Everywhere and always bring me a sacrifice that is undefiled, for I am a great king, says the Lord and my name is the wonder of nations' (Malachias 1, 11,...)." [90 - 150 A.D]).
- From Early Church Fathers
  - Cyprian of Carthage. (c.250).
    - "I entreat you, beloved brethren, that each one should confess his own sins while he is still in this world - while his confession can still be received and while the satisfaction and remission made by the priests are still pleasing to the Lord." - (ANF. 5.445).
    - "[S]inners may do penance for a set time, and according to the rules of discipline come to public confession, and by imposition of the hand of the bishop and clergy receive the right of communion. [But now some] with their time [of penance] still unfulfilled . . . they are admitted to communion, and their name is presented; and while the penitence is not yet performed, confession is not yet made, the hands of the bishop and clergy are not yet laid upon them, the Eucharist is given to them; although it is written, 'Whosoever shall eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord' [1 Cor. 11:27]" (Letters 9:2 [A.D. 253]).
  - Basil the Great
    - "It is necessary to confess our sins to those to whom the dispensation of God's mysteries is entrusted. Those doing penance of old are found to have done it before the saints. It is written in the Gospel that they confessed their sins to John the Baptist [Matt. 3:6], but in Acts [19:18] they confessed to the apostles" (Rules Briefly Treated 288 [A.D. 374]).
  - John Chrysostom
    - "Priests have received a power which God has given neither to angels nor to archangels. It was said to them: 'Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose, shall be loosed.'

Temporal rulers have indeed the power of binding; but they can only bind the body. Priests, in contrast, can bind with a bond which pertains to the soul itself and transcends the very heavens. Did [God] not give them all the powers of heaven? 'Whose sins you shall forgive,' he says, 'they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.' What greater power is there than this? The Father has given all judgment to the Son. And now I see the Son placing all this power in the hands of men [Matt. 10:40, John 20:21 The Priesthood 3:5 [A.D. 387]].

### The Prodigal Son as the Model of Our Lives

(Notes from Archimandrite Aimilianos and Fr Zacharius of Essex)

#### Living in the Father's house

- Adam and Eve received Divine Revelation and experienced God within their heart. All faculties were one pointed, participating in the divine life. The mind was captivated by the heart and the heart filled with God's presence.

#### The Exile of the Mind from the Heart

- At the Fall, the heart and mind become darkened while man's being is thrown into disorder and chaos. The divine life withdraws and the mind is led into captivity by the passions.
- We participate in God outside of the heart when we think, act, speak, and even pray. The mind then, is led into the "far away country."

#### Acknowledging our Exile

- The soul becomes famished and living in the filth of swine (that is, with the demons) and eating their food.
- When the soul realizes its exile—when it "comes to itself"—it experiences pain of separation, like a great wall or a chasm between itself and God.
- The soul then is consumed with coming back to its Father's house and the pain brought about by acknowledging our exile gives birth to repentance.

#### The Journey Home

- The journey back into our Father's embrace is a journey from a remote and inhospitable land back towards the Kingdom of God. It is the turning of the mind (metanoia) from a life ruled by passions to the inner life—for the Kingdom of Heaven is within.
- This takes self-examination, purification of the heart, and a life of frequent confession.
- Diving deep within the heart:
  - "The heart is but a small vessel; and yet dragons and lions are there, and there poisonous creatures and all the treasures of wickedness; rough, uneven paths are there, and gaping chasms. There likewise is God, there are the angels, the heavenly cities and the treasures of grace; all things are there." -*St Makarios the Great*
- Such a life is work, but with grace it is blessed and joyful

#### The Father's Embrace

- We are enraptured by Divine Love
- The whole person becomes a heart



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