

AWAKENING THE HEART LECTURE TWO: "TURNING THE MIND"

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Coming To and Seeing Ourselves

"[...] But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have enough to spare and I am dying with hunger! I will get up, go to my father, and tell him, "Father I have sinned against heaven and before you"' (Luke 15:17-18).

When we live in sin, we do not live in our right mind and we must first come to our senses before we can be conscious of our unworthiness before God. This is the starting point of the prodigal: to realize we live with the swine and we feed them. More importantly, we are starving spiritually and there is no food outside of our Father's house.

How do we "come to ourselves" and see our unworthiness?:

- Services of the Church:
 - Especially felt in Great Lent
- Situations in life that God sends to us:
 - Pain (comes from pleasure)
 - Suffering
 - Death
- Private prayer and examination:
 - The Jesus Prayer
 - Especially in the read prayers of compline and various compiled evening prayers.
(See Appendix I)

In summary, we can only see ourselves for truly what we are if we are living an inner life.

- "Until the soul is established with the mind in the heart it does not see itself, nor is it properly aware of itself." -*St Theophan the Recluse (Art of Prayer, 222)*
- "I have come to the conclusion that you are still in the head and not in the heart. Descend into the heart and you will know at once what you are worth. You expressed the wish to attain a sense of your own unworthiness. This you will begin to see and feel as soon as you descend into the heart. The deeper you go, the clearer it will appear." -*St Theophan the Recluse (Ibid.)*

What is "Repentance"?

From "Repentance and Confession" by Hieromonk Gregorios

The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia*

- It is a change (*meta*) of the mind or nous (*noia*), which is very different from what is expressed in the English word *repentance* which comes from the Latin word *penitentia* whence comes penance and penitence indicating the payment of a penalty.

Repentance (*Metanoia*) is the process of correcting one's mind and turning it back to God, not a judicial penalty where one must pay a price.

- It is a journey by which we begin our healing and sanctification.

- It is our return to God and the beginning of this return is becoming conscious of our sins: *Have mercy on me... for I acknowledge my iniquity* (Ps 50)

The Stages of the Soul According to Archimandrite Aimilianos
From "The Way of the Spirit," Talk One: The Progression of the Soul

What happens when a soul confronts the problem of spiritual progress?

- This movement does not have foundations in human logic (p. 1)
- First step: Acknowledging our exile:
 - “When is it then that a soul says: ‘I must live a Christian life, I must live differently’? When it acquires the sense that it is a soul in exile; when it realizes that it is something that has been cast away, and now exists outside of its proper place, outside of paradise, in a foreign land, beyond the borders within which it was made to dwell. [The soul] remembers its place of origin then it can say, ‘I must return to my home.’” (p. 2)
 - “When this soul begins to make progress: with it feels what scripture calls *the dividing wall of hostility* (Eph 2.14), the barrier that has risen up between God, and which separates us from Him. But if we don’t feel such a wall [...] we haven’t even begun to think about the spiritual life.” (p. 3)
 - We feel this reality when we pray: “God is in heaven, and I am down here on earth... So when I pray, I feel at once this unsurmountable obstacle blocking me off from God, namely: the fact that I am carnal, that I am flesh...” (Archimandrite Aimilianos: *Catechism on Prayer*, p. 199)
- Embarking On a Path
 - There is no “must” in the Christian life
 - “The force ‘must’ moves neither God nor the heart. It pertains to the logic of human deliberation, to the endurance of human determination, which is as we all know is something that unravels very easily.” (p.5)
 - We cannot say, “What must I do now?”—Christian life is not a moral obligation, but a living reality of conforming oneself to the image of God.
 - The soul has to realize its nakedness before God
 - This is the most important moment in the life of the soul
 - Takes extreme courage and strength because we must be honest with ourselves about ourselves. Do we cover with fig leaves or do we come before God as we are without hiding ourselves?
 - If we reject to acknowledge our pain, our true self, we do something even worse: live outside of reality.
- Ascending into the Spiritual Life
 - Repentance is the basis of everything

Obstacles to Repentance

From "Repentance and Confession" by Hieromonk Gregorios and Archimandrite Aimilianos

1. Insensibility: *"I have nothing to confess..."*

- a. That is, thinking we have not done the “big sins” and justify our many other sins.
 - b. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us...If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (1 Jn 1.8-10)*
 - c. Insensibility is the necrosis of the soul and is accompanied by the judgement of others, a lack of contrite prayer, and a shallow inner life.”
 - d. If insensibility is not defeated, it will become hardness of heart. Therefore, *today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts (Heb 3:7-8).*
2. Despair: *“What is the point? I am unforgivable...”*
- a. The lie of the devil that we are so sinful that we cannot be forgiven
 - b. Where does unhealthy depression and despair come from?
 - i. Our Pride and Egotism
 - ii. Many times we cannot except even the smallest blemish of ourselves in a healthy and positive way. We cover it up, do not deal with it, lie to others about it, etc.
 - iii. We live then a double life and do not approach for true healing.
 - c. Lies from the Devil
 - i. What looks like negativity, sadness, and darkness, is actually a thin veil that blocks us from seeing the glory of God’s mercy and the beautiful light of transformation.
 - ii. In going to a doctor, sometimes we must do things that are uncomfortable and humiliating to begin our diagnoses and healing.
 - d. Why is our depression and despair unnecessary?
 - i. When we make even the smallest journey toward God in acknowledging our unworthiness, He runs to us with His embrace.
 - ii. “But while he was still at a distance, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. He ran and embraced His Son, and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20)
 - iii. The Father only remembers the things about his son that move him to kinship, sympathy, and mercy. He never mentions what his son did, but only mourns what befell him.
 - e. Confession does not depend on the gravity or the amount of sins we have, but on God’s infinite mercy and boundless compassion
 - i. “Your wickedness has a limit, but the medicine has no limit... Think of a spark that falls into the ocean. Is there any chance it could remain there or be noticed? As the spark is to the ocean, so too is your wickedness in comparison with God’s loving kindness.” *–St John Chrysostom (On Repentance)*
3. Shame: *“How can I go...?”*
- a. “You should feel shame when you sin, but not when you repent: listen to me carefully: shame follows sin, while courage follows repentance... knowing that sin carries shame with it, which to a great degree can dissuade a man from sin, whereas repentance has courage, something which is able to attract the penitent. Satan reversed this order and attaches shame to repentance and courage to sin.” *–St John Chrysostom*
4. Postponement: *“I will go tomorrow...” or “I still have time...”*

- a. This statement and mode of thinking has been proved wrong in the lives of men and women for centuries.
- b. The enemy “steals today from us, and leaves our hopes for tomorrow. Then, when the next day comes, the unjust associate [namely the Devil] appears to again claim the day for himself, leaving tomorrow for God. Thus, endlessly, by using the bait of pleasure to secure the present and leaving our hopes for tomorrow, without us realizing it he takes us away from life.” -*St Basil the Great, Exhortation on Baptism*

Why We Need to Turn the Mind

From St Nikodemus the Hagiorite: Counsels for the Penitent

Sin wrongs God in three ways:

1. By our sins we have offended the Most High and dishonored God.
2. By our sins we show ourselves to be thankless servants
3. By our sins we make a mockery of redemption

Sin wrongs the sinner in three ways:

1. Consider how it removes the supernatural grace of God, His gift of sonship, being His dwelling place. All these graces are worth more than all the wisdoms and treasures of the world.
2. Consider how it removes from us the blessedness of Paradise, the delight and vision of God, the vision of the most-sweet Theotokos, the fellowship with the angels, the company of the Saints, inexpressible joy, participation in the heavenly Kingdom, etc.
3. Consider how it brings you to hell, the unquenchable fire, the everlasting gnashing of teeth, the sleepless worm, the tormenting of all the members of your body, etc.

Breaking Down the Dividing Wall with “Manliness”

“The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force”(Matt 11.12)

“Awake, you sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you”(Eph 5.14)

Ways to “force” us to *come to* ourselves (ie how to waken a deadened soul):

1. Remembrance of the Martyrs
 - a. The sufferings and courage of the martyrs moves us to imitate them in a spiritual way.
 - i. We should reach the point where we can say, “Even if I am put to death, I will not take a single step away from my faith in Christ Who has called me. I will give up my life for my Christ, but not one inch of concession will I concede to sin.” -*Elder Ephraim of Arizona, “Counsels from the Holy Mountain,” (p. 191).*
2. Remembrance of Death:
 - a. The reality of our death will move us to compunction.
 - i. “We are departing to another world—how beautiful and blessed it is! I wonder, shall we dwell in that world of such beauty? Let us reflect upon this most blissful place constantly, so that we will be able to despise this false and deceptive world.”—*Elder Ephraim of Arizona, “Counsels from the Holy Mountain,” (p. 189).*

- ii. “Then the deception is uncovered, and a person dying realizes what an important role the world played for him. He feels regret and distress; he yearns for the time that is gone; he would give all his wealth to buy one day in order to repent and receive communion. Unfortunately though, not one favor is given to him. Previously time was at his disposal for years; he, however, wasted it in business, in bars, in cinemas, and in every shameful desire.” —*Elder Ephraim of Arizona, “Counsels from the Holy Mountain,” (p. 148).*
- 3. “Keep thy mind in hell and despair not.”—*St Silouan the Athonite*
 - a. Put yourself in hell and think of how unbearable it is. Do you want to stay there any longer?

Appendix I

Prayer III to the Holy Spirit

O Lord, Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, show compassion and have mercy on me Thy sinful servant, and loose me from mine unworthiness, and forgive all wherein I have sinned against Thee today as a man, and not only as a man, but even worse than a beast, my sins voluntary and involuntary, known and unknown, whether from youth, and from evil suggestion, or whether from brazenness and despondency. If I have sworn by Thy name, or blasphemed it in my thought; or grieved anyone, or have become angry about anything; or have lied, or slept needlessly, or if a beggar hath come to me and I disdained him; or if I have grieved my brother, or have quarreled, or have condemned anyone; or if I have been boastful, or prideful, or angry; if, as I stood at prayer, my mind hath been distracted by the wiles of this world, or by thoughts of depravity; or if I have over eaten, or have drunk excessively, or laughed frivolously; if I have thought evil, seen the beauty of another and been wounded thereby in my heart; if I have said improper things, or derided my brother's sin when mine own sins are countless; if I have been neglectful of prayer, or have done some other wrong that I do not remember, for all of this and more than this have I done: have mercy, O Master my Creator, me Thy downcast and unworthy servant, and loose me, and remit, and forgive me, for Thou art good and the Lover of mankind, so that, lustful, sinful, and wretched as I am, I may lie down and sleep and rest in peace. And I shall worship, and hymn, and glorify Thy most honorable name, together with the Father and His Only-begotten Son, now and ever, and unto the ages.

(From the Jordanville Prayer Book, Evening Prayers)