

20 Μαρτίου 2017

The purification of the Heart (Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi)



Our entire life is

preoccupied with the spiritual law. This is the reason why we have withdrawn from

the world and have forsaken family life, which itself is not something sinful. We have abandoned these in order to express our love towards the Lord in a unique way, obeying the first commandment precisely. Having been called by the Lord, we have followed Him in order to obey this commandment. We withdrew from society and denied our family to follow the proper, or rather the undisturbed way, preoccupying ourselves with inwardness and paying attention to the meanings of things. In this way, we hope to be able not only to win over practical sin but also to eliminate it as soon as it appears. That is, not only not to commit a sin in practice but also to deny any mental association with it. In this way we are able to attain to our Lord's beatitude: *'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'* (Matthew 5,). Our Jesus has also told us that *'what comes from outside into the heart does not defile man'*. What defiles him is what comes out from the inside of his heart *'For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies'* (Matthew 15, 19). These are the things which overflow from the heart and constitute the widespread wickedness.

Thus the freedom of man's personality has been disgraced; the former gentile, created *'in the image and likeness of God'* became wicked and corrupted. Since we are also part of this sick condition, we withdrew from the world for this reason. When we are talking about *'the world'* we do not mean *'people'*. *'The world'* is the entire system of the former self, which according to Paul is *'passions and desires'*. According to John the Evangelist *'the world'* is *'the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes'*, foolishness and generally speaking *'vain glory'*.

Now, we are here and we are concentrating our attention on how to accomplish the purity in heart, since it is the only way to see God, as far as it is possible for any human to experience the perception of the Lord. The issue of the anticipated Regeneration is not about transferring people to a blissful state. These are advocated by foreign dogmas. After the (Second) Coming of Word God, man will not be transferred to a blissful place neither will he be restored to a better life having been in exile. Our Church does not believe in such things; these are delusionary ideas. The emptying of Word God conveyed deification onto human nature. Therefore, if man begins to obey God's will from this life, he as a person will be transferred to be united with the Lord through Grace. Just as the adopted child participates in his father's property, his name and personality, similarly even though we have in some sense not been born of the Lord, we have acquired the same status as a natural child, because the Lord adopted us. For us this is called Theanthropismos(God-man-ism). This is what Word God brought on earth. As He said: *'just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them'* (John 17, 21-22)

) and also *'I desire that they also may be with me where I am, to see my glory'* (John 17, 24) and elsewhere *'You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants' (John 15, 14)*. When the disciples asked him how to pray directly to the Father, He said: *'Our Father, who art in Heaven...'* (Matthew 6, 9)

However if we are to accomplish this and enter into the bosom of adoption, we must be careful not only to avoid sin, but also to exclude sin even from our mind by attacking the root of sinfulness. As soon as our heart is cleansed from the activities of the various passions, which make up our former self, the Holy Spirit enters and takes up residence. Pay attention to how Jesus says it: *"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (John 14, 23)*. He says *'make our home'*. He doesn't say *'we will come to visit you'* as when we normally pay a visit to someone, but *'we will come and make our home'*. This is what Theanthropismos is.

Freeing ourselves from sin is not an immediate but a gradual process which resembles growing up. Through our perseverance, the purification of the heart is attained to slowly and inexplicably with the assistance of Grace. First the mind is cleansed and illuminated and then it recognizes the essence of thoughts and is not deceived. After making proper use of thoughts and obeying the commandments exactly, the heart is purified. Then divine Grace enters and resides permanently and turns man into a genuine God-bearing (θεοφόρος) person. This person, while still living, has passed from *'death into life'*. This is sanctification. No natural laws have any relevance to him. He permanently communicates with divine Grace and enters into the state which is *'beyond nature'* and he either acquires the gift of perspicacity or of prophecy. He is not afraid of any sickness or danger, since he is protected by divine Grace, having been transferred to the state of adoption. When the time comes to leave this world, he will win the trophies promised by our Jesus.

These days, if you are a little more conscientious, you will be able to perceive the effect of Grace a little more clearly. Our blessed Elder was saying that our Jesus hands out His gifts abundantly during the days of great feasts, as a special blessing. But is there a reason why we should not be or become more attentive? This is our target! How is it possible not to strive to become more pious and zealous and diligent and genuine lovers of our Jesus if, as we believe, He is the One who has called us to follow Him, having predestined and vindicated us? The only thing left now is for His Mercy to glorify us during the last hour after we depart from this world.

Behold, now we are about to enter our *'cell'* and close our door to pray and

confess and bow down in front of our Lord. We are about to submit our supplications with our entire heart and soul and mind and will and intention and deeds in the face of our Lord, Who has given promises to the sinners. You ought to bow down in the face of the Lord with meekness, humility and kindness. This is the most secret way to change your personality and cause spiritual elevation and changes: *'This is the change of the right hand of the Highest'* (Psalm 77, 10). Such change will modify the man of flesh, the sinner, the one clothed in fleshly garments into a spiritual being, which the angels will surround in order to look at. The angels look at these good, rational beings trying to overcome the law of gravity and ascend to the heavenly altar where our Jesus *'entered once in the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us'* (Hebrews 9, 12). You ought to forget anything which has nothing to do with Heaven. For in Heaven is our abode. Our Jesus is waiting for us there. *'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also'* (John 14, 3). Is there any heart which will consider these words and not be torn even if it is made up of granite? His inexplicable All Love did not end with His divine emptying and His descend to earth among us, having been clothed with our humility and deficiency. But, even though He is resting in His Father's bosom in 'all His glory', He still remembers us and promises: *'I will not leave you as orphans'* (John 14, 18) and *'I am with you always, to the end of the age'* (Matthew 28, 20)."

Let's all of us now begin with spiritual emulation to aspire to overtake each other. This is praiseworthy. *'This is the generation of them that seek Him'* (Psalm 24, 6)'.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Question: Geronta (Elder) must we pray for anyone who asks or for the members of our brotherhood who are outside in the world?

Answer: We have a duty to pray for the members of our brotherhood since we all belong to one body. When one stays outside of his normal environment he does not have the same perception of Grace neither he is as vigilant as when he is here. In these circumstances when the sheep is outside the den, we have no idea what the devil will plot against it; we are humans; who can safely rely on his own ability? Therefore, we ought to turn our minds towards our Jesus and call upon the divine Grace to assist him in accomplishing his outside mission; one brief prayer ought to become the cause of protection for whoever finds himself outside the brotherhood, since he is open to attack and we do not know from whence the onslaught will begin.

On the other hand, our holy fathers say that the novices and the young monks

derive no benefit from praying for those who live in the world, since this is an excuse which appears from the right and aims to cause the diffusion of the mind. Naturally, as I have already explained, we do not aspire to pray for everyone not because we hate them- perish the thought- but because we are a little shy, knowing that we are weak and have found no favor in the face of the Lord; seeing our humility, the Lord in His mercy will supplement our good intentions and the love we feel in our hearts for everyone.

THE END OF CH 3: THE PURIFICATION OF THE HEART

source: Translated by Olga Konari Kokkinou from the Greek edition: Γέροντος Ιωσήφ Βατοπαιδινού, Διδαχές από τον Άθωνα, Εκδόσεις 'Το Άγιον Όρος' Θεσσαλονίκη, 1989.