

The Struggle for Holiness (Abbot Tryphon)

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Saint Paul

We are powerless to change those bad habits that dominate our lives without help from God. However we may attempt to change behavior, we can not do battle with the passions unless we surrender ourselves in humility to God, for such change can only come about by God's grace. Struggle as we may, our flesh will resist until that moment we seek help from the Lord of Mercy, Who is quick to hear our plea for help.

Many years ago, while teaching, I worked with another instructor who was arrogant, and condescending to anyone whom he felt was beneath him. There was

a wonderful black woman who served as the head cook in the school's cafeteria, a woman of wisdom, and with whom I enjoyed countless conversations (I was the disciplinarian during the two lunch periods in an all boys high school). I'd often sit with the cook, enjoy a cup of coffee, along with her wonderful home made cookies. This other teacher walked into the cafeteria to ask me about one of the students, and while speaking to me he totally ignored the cook. Race had nothing to do with it, for he was also black.

As he walked away, I found myself apologizing for his behavior, only to have the cook tell me that she loved him regardless of his treatment of her, for she knew Jesus loved him. «He doesn't have to love me, for me to love him», she told me. The cook was the only one on the staff who seemed to like him, and she was the one he totally ignored. This was a lesson I've never forgot. I don't always succeed in loving everyone, and there are certain people that I sometimes find myself wishing I could avoid, but the cook's words linger in my heart, and I try to love everyone, and try to return good for evil.

The holy Apostle Paul tells us, «I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13)», for he said of himself, «For that which I do I know not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I (Romans 7:15).» He said of himself, «I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).»

When Christ is invited into our hearts, it is important that we keep His commandments, and follow His example. To expect Christ to change our behavior, without making an effort of our own, is to invite failure. The Christian life is one of ascetic struggle, and not just in regards to keeping the fasts, and standing in prayerful vigil. If we are to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, we must live the Gospels, and must put the message of the Gospels into practice.

If there is someone we don't like, we must put on Christ, interacting with this person as though we do love them, for by being obedient to Christ, we will find that we can, indeed, love them. If we find ourselves being jealous of another person, say an office co-worker who's received a promotion, we must congratulate them, and offer our support. Even if others are telling us we should have been the one who received the promotion, we embrace the decision of office management, as though it came from God, and as an opportunity to grow in humility.

It is easy to compartmentalize our Christian faith, reserving the «spiritual» for times spent in church. However, it is in the day to day, often mundane, moments

that we can find the opportunities to grow in Christ. These are the moments when we must put into action what we've received during the services, knowing that Christ is providing us the means by which we can attain the sanctification that makes us one with Him. If we think our journey into the heart should be easy, we are fooling ourselves.

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