

Spiritual Preparedness for Partaking of the Holy Communion

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Most Biblical writers referred to the term "spirit" as the inner nature of man. St. Mark describes the human Spirit's propensity for readiness saying, "the spirit is indeed willing but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38).

In this verse, the spiritual attitude of the disciples is described as eager, ready and willing to serve. Fatigue might have overtaken the spiritual preparedness of the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane when they were told to continue watching and praying. However, Physical fatigue eventually won over their will. This sluggish state fell on them right after the Lord's Supper during which Judas had actively planned to betray the Lord Jesus Christ. Did this overriding physical fatigue serve to make them weak also during the arrest and trials of the One they had left every earthly thing to follow Him?

How can we guard against such similar fatigue that may affect our spiritual life; hindering our desire to become worthy of partaking in the Holy Communion? Do we seriously consider the honor and sacrifice of the Mystery of the Holy Communion?

Ignatius, a bishop of the Church of Antioch ardently told his listeners, "I desire the bread of God, the Heavenly Bread, the Bread of Life-which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God And I desire the drink of God, namely His Blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life."

The first step towards guarding against spiritual fatigue and desiring to be worthy of the Holy Communion is to thoroughly examine your spiritual growth. Do you have a special place for prayer and self examination? The Lord Jesus Christ had chosen the Garden of Gethsemane as a special place for prayer and privacy. There, in the Garden He refused to succumb to His physical feelings and submitted to His Fathers' plan. "Nevertheless not what I will but what Thou wilt" (Mark 14:35-36).

Self examination should begin by recalling all our sins before us. David the Prophet and King said, "My sin is before me continually" (Psalm 51:3). St. John Chrysostom emphasizes and adds to this by saying, "Examine yourself; if you remember your sins, God will forget them; but if you forget them, God will remember them."

Examine yourself immediately after having sinned, and repent accordingly. Also at the end of each day examine yourself to begin a new life the very next day. Prior to participating in the Mystery of Confession, examine yourself carefully so that your confession may be considered complete before God. Before receiving Holy Communion, examine yourself once again by questioning your worthiness of partaking in the Lord Jesus Christ's Body and Blood.

It is always beneficial to end self examination with a personal prayer, lifting your heart up to the Lord asking for forgiveness and thanking Him for His love and mercy. Ask for strength to overcome life's challenges knowing that comfort and salvation can only be found through the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Clement of Rome during the first century taught, "Let us draw near to Him with holiness of spirit, lifting up pure and undefiled hands unto Him."

The second step is to realize the eternal value of your soul. The Holy Great Fast should be the time when we increasingly remember and contemplate the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ which has been shed for our salvation as a price paid to purchase back our souls. Thus we get to know how eternally valuable our souls are. While we must live in the world we must not let the world live in our hearts. "He showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and said to Him, All these things will I give Thee and Jesus said unto him, Get thee hence, Satan" (Matthew 4:8-19).

Remember the parable of the foolish rich man, "Eat, drink, and be merry." The Lord told him, "This night your soul shall be required of you" (Luke 12:19-20). Therefore abiding in treasured material things of this world will not add to but take away from your soul. On discovering an ancient tomb, can an archeologist distinguish a wealthy man's bones from those of a poor one?

The worth of your soul can be found in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ which was shed upon the Holy Cross for our salvation. Consider the urgency of taking care of your soul during fasting and particularly when partaking of the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ during Communion.

The third step is to beware of the snare of despair. Often when examining our sins we become despaired and overwrought; feeling that our struggles are overtaking us. Actually struggle is a necessary part of the earthly life and we are given the spiritual exercises of prayer and fasting to battle our struggles.

A learned Christian scholar and teacher, St. Clement of Alexandria said, "Although disease, accident, and death come upon the spiritual man by the power of God they become the medicine of salvation. Through discipline, they benefit those who are difficult to reform. They are allotted according to what is deserved by providence, which is truly good."

It is a comfort to the Christian to know that all sins can be forgiven if repentance is done with the right spirit. "Verily I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men and blaspheme. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost has never forgiveness but is in danger of eternal damnation" (Mark 3:28-29).

What exactly is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit? Blaspheming in this context is a spiritual condition which a person has acclimated himself to, because he continuously and uncontrollably desires to do evil. It is something of a different nature than killing or stealing. Blaspheming against the Holy Spirit involves refusing to adhere to what will grant us the forgiveness of sins. It involves refusing the work of the Holy Spirit in our earthly lives. St. Paul blasphemed directly against the Son of God unbelievably but allowed God to renew his life. Once St. Paul allowed God to renew his life his was reprovved of all his sins. The wise St. Mar Isaac said, "There is no sin that cannot be forgiven except the one without repentance."

Another important step towards achieving spiritual readiness, is to remember that a broken spirit is a an essential virtue to attain. The more a person continues to grow in his spiritual life, the more will he regret having committed sin. While increasing in good deeds, we ought to see our past sins before our good actions. Thus, we will be prone to focus more on our weaknesses than our strengths. It is wrong to do good, thinking that it will erase our sins. In an attempt to lead a more holy life, a broken-spirited person will focus on his shortcomings. Such a mental and spiritual attitude will eventually cause this person to want to confess his sins before God and renew his life daily.

St. Paul spent many years converting others to Christianity and performing many miracles. Yet he saw himself as the least. He did not insist on being praised by the others for his good deeds; nor did he draw attention to himself by preaching and teaching loudly on the street corners, or claimed superiority over the others for his teachings. His spirit was a broken spirit. St. Paul's internal spiritual disposition is well expressed in his words to the Corinthians, "I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God" (I Corinthians 15:9).

"This therefore was the object of the long suffering of God: that man may always live in a state of gratitude to the Lord. For, having passed through all types of trials, then acquiring the knowledge of moral discipline, then attaining to the resurrection from the dead and learning through experience who is the Source of his deliverance, and finally having obtained from Him the gift of incorruptibility, man might love Him the more" (Irenaeus, Bishop of the Church of Lyons).

During this Holy Great Fast, may we all contemplate spiritual preparedness in order to be worthy of partaking in His Body and Blood; knowing that "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls" (Proverbs 25:28).

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