

- 1) **04/14/2024:** Meet & Greet: Quick go-around to briefly introduce ourselves
  1. Name
  2. Where were you born
  3. 3 words that a close friend might use to describe you
- 2) St Theodora Adult Ministry 4th meeting for 2024
  1. **Why this ministry?** As Fr Gabriel described – we come to Church to worship the Holy Trinity and have communion, but individually we are all working to put off the “old man”. We have questions...but collectively we have wisdom.
    - a. We want to share that wisdom – Fathers, the “Saints”, and everyday saints...us!
    - b. Have a focused study
    - c. Cheer each other on as we run our races as if our lives depended on it – because they do!
  2. **Ground rules:** We love and accept each other – we “listen”
- 3) **When does prayer begin?** Prayer begins the day when God is absent; when He is silent.
  - A. **Please answer the following 3 questions**
    1. Were you able to read the chapter titled “Going Inward”?
    2. Were you able to sit in stillness for at least 5 mins 1X-2X per day?
    3. Do you have any “quotes” or “saying” from the Saints or Fathers that you would like to share on this chapter?
- 4) **Questions for Chapter 3: Going Inward. What we will cover in our discussion...**
  - A. Metropolitan Anthony suggested that we direct prayer to ourselves, were you able to practice this approach?
  - B. In choosing a prayer (words of a prayer), what three (3) ways approaches can we use?
  - C. Metropolitan Anthony states that we are delusional if we expect to pray in which type of approach to choosing our words?
  - D. Why are the Psalms so important in our prayer life? Why are the prayers of the Saints important to learn, and why are they special?
  - E. What does Metropolitan Anthony mean by “A prayer makes sense only if it is lived? Have you tried to “live” a conviction from your prayer for any period of time?
  - F. What time limit is suggested for your prayer sessions? Why?
  - G. What does he mean by taking the words (of our prayers) for what they mean (ordinary speech), but we don’t connect them with other things we know?
  - H. What do we need to be aware of (within ourselves), when asking for God for help with our sins and temptations?
  - I. Is it important to have physical effort during prayer? Why?
  - J. What “monsters” do we meet as we go deeper into prayer? How do we deal with them?
  - K. Why is it important to “sit with yourself in the face of boredom”? Can you name a Saint that has a quote that applicable to this question?
  - L. What is meant by “throwing coins to someone without ever having seen him”? Why is that important? How might we “see” who we donate to, especially as we head into Lent?
  - M. How can despair help us to go deeper into our prayers and our relationship with God? How does Metropolitan Anthony suggest that we so first thing in the morning? Why is it important? How might we sabotage our prayer life?
  - N. What are your thoughts on “it does work, if you are simple enough to do it”? St Porphyrios tells us to ask God to give us the “strength to lead a simple spiritual life”...Why is the word “simple” profound in our Orthodox lives?
- 5) **Quick recap from Chapter Two (Knocking at the Door):**
  - i) Sensing the depth of which we are outside of the Kingdom; changing our understanding of perception – there is more depth and breadth to the heart and Kingdom than we can possibly imagine
  - ii) Everything that we have belongs to God – we are only stewards; belongings and wealth burden us, weigh us down. When we take something and claim it, we take it out of the world (out of the realm of love). Become poor in spirit
  - iii) All evil begins in the imagination; learn to say “NO” – listening to that tiny island that is apart from our conscious brain – the part that warns us when we are about to do something “stupid”

- iv) Shifting from the absence of God to the presence of God is a process – doesn't happen overnight
- v) Where do we turn our "gaze" during prayer? – Arrow-point inward. Not towards ourselves, but through ourselves
- vi) The first act of Prayer is to choose such words of prayer as are completely true to what you are, words which you are not ashamed of, which express you adequately and are worthy of you. Offer them to God with all the intelligence of which you are capable. Put all your heart into the act of worship. Recognition of God, an act of cherishing (true meaning of charity), which involves the heart and mind.
- vii) *If you cannot be attentive, then why should God attend?*
- viii) If you learn to use a prayer you have chosen at moments when you can give all your attention to the divine presence and offer God this prayer, then gradually your awareness of God grows within you
  - (1) One can pray at any time, doing anything, we can condition ourselves to an attitude of 'worshipful attention and of broken-heartedness' first

## 6) **Chapter Three: Going Inward**

### A. Finding the right words – Three Approaches:

- i) Spontaneous prayer – the type of prayer that gushes out of our souls
  - (1) Can come from moments when we are vividly aware of God (response of worship, joy, heightened awareness beyond what we have perceived previously). "Marvel" of suddenly finding ourselves face to face with God.
  - (2) Can also come from moments when are aware of deathly danger, despair, of having no hope – no salvation unless God saves us. Godless, lonely, longing and yet incapable of breaking through
  - (3) Note: when we can pray spontaneously and it doesn't matter what words we use...we can say "words", because words do not matter – foolish/madly of our love or despair; we are overwhelmed and reaching beyond ourselves
  - (4) We cannot maintain spontaneous prayer...It is not there for us to draw from, to use at any time. It comes from the depths of our souls from either wonder or distress
  - (5) If we cannot pray spontaneity, you can pray from conviction
    - (a) May people who begin a life a prayer, feel strongly about the words and phrases that they use – that they are not being sincere. This is not true. We can have prayers that mean something to us, but maybe not at this particular moment (we are feeling it as strongly – but it doesn't mean that we are not sincere. (example of the "do you love" ...with the aching back..."I love you, but at this moment, all I feel is my aching back!" But it is perfectly acceptable to say "I love you", because it is true.
- ii) Ready-made prayers – can be flattest productions of people who "invent" prayers, or can come from the Holy Spirit through the saints deepest experiences
  - (1) Examples: Psalms, Bible verses, prayers of the Saints. Have these available.
  - (2) Memorize them, have them at hand. Make note/mark them – know them well enough that you know which prayers to go-to when you need them.
  - (3) Why? "Because one day when you are so completely low, so profoundly desperate that you cannot call out of yourself any spontaneous expression or wording, you will discover that these words come up and offer themselves to you as a gift of God, a gift of the Church, as a gift of holiness. Helping our simple lack of strength."
  - (4) How long do I pray? About 30 mins in the morning and 30 mins in the evening is Metropolitan Anthony's suggestion.
  - (5) "It is not enough to pray from the heart though...a prayer must be lived." When you read a line of a prayer, a bible verse, a quote from the Saints, that means something to you. That you know is important to you – then you must pay attention. You must make a rule to try to apply it for as long as you can in the course of your day – ruthlessly...but this is difficult. "Say, 'I have read this prayer, my heart is ready, O Lord, my heart is ready for half an hour. I will make sure that my heart is open to God and ready to obey His will. Half an hour, not more..."

- (6) Try living sentences or slogans for a period of time, first one, then more...you will see that gradually all the words of the prayer, all the thoughts and feelings the Saint's express in their prayers come alive in you, they begin to go deep into your will and to mold your will and your body because it is with your body that you have to apply commandments.
  - (7) HOWEVER: you may say "I don't feel very strongly about these words." If these words express a basic conviction but you feel nothing at the moment, turn to God in repentance and say to God, "This is my basic Christian faith, and look, I don't feel anything about it", and then from that point you may discover that you suddenly burst into spontaneous prayer. You can express to God your sorrow, misery, and disgust with yourself; coming back determined to tell God what is true and that your will is united with His will." This is the feeling of depression and apathy – why this is a sin to ignore. Your Spiritual Father can help you with this.
- iii) Short Vocal prayers – very short, extremely intense in content and wide; containing as many meanings as possible
- (1) These can be more or less continuous, of a vocal prayer that serves as a background, a walking stick, throughout the day and throughout life. These are specifically Orthodox, what we call the Jesus Prayer: ***"Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."*** It is a prayer of stability...not discursive (rambling, roving, but instead is simple pinpoint).
  - (2) It is a profession of our faith: Christ is Lord, our Lord and our God, our life is within His Will and that we commit ourselves to His will and to no other way. It confesses our belief in the reality of the Incarnation and all it stands for. It opens up the Trinitarian way because He is the Son of the Father and no one can recognize in the prophet of Galilee the Incarnate Son of God unless the Holy Spirit teaches him to see, understand and commit themselves.
  - (3) Here is the fourth profession of faith that allows us to stand face to face with God in truth, and profess in spirit. This opens up for us up for God's mercy, healing, compassion, and expression of love. Look to deeper meanings in the words of our prayers.

## B. Understanding the Deeper, Truer Meaning of the Words of Prayer

- i) Our modern languages have specialized and narrower meanings than those of the Ancient Languages. We use words of prayer that are extremely rich, but we do not notice or perceive of the depth of the meaning. We take the words to mean what they mean in our ordinary modern speech, while they could have deep echoes in our hearts if we only connected them with other things that we know. (Veiled meaning...)
- ii) He uses the example of the olive twig at the end of the flood when the Dove brings the twig to Noah. The wrath of God has come to an end, that forgiveness is freely given, that time and new possibilities open up to us.
- iii) Healing: if we are sick at heart, broken in will or if we are incapable in mind or body either of discerning or of following the path, we need healing.
  - (1) Remember the oil which the Good Samaritan poured on the wounds of the man who had fallen victim to the robbers. (Olive branch...olive oil...sacraments of Baptism/Chrismation, and there is the anointing of Priests and Kings (to bridge the human world and the divine world))
  - (2) The healing power of God will make it possible for us to take advantage of the cessation of His wrath, of the gift of forgiveness that is offered and indeed, of the gift of time and space and eternity
  - (3) We need more than human capability, we need a divine gift in order to become "fully human" in the image of Christ. We need the grace and the help of God.
- iv) If we take the time to reflect and dig a little deeper for the meaning of the prayer words, our prayer would not just be one of empty words or words which are merely the symbol of something from which the true meaning is lost.
  - (a) The Greek 'Kyrie eleison' – "Lord have mercy on me"; "Lord, show me compassion; Lord, pour out Thy love and tenderness on me" - He asks, "Are we faced with infinite possibilities, and at the same time unable to realize any of them because we are so deeply wounded? Are we healed, and yet

confronted with a vocation so great that it humbles us to think of it because it is beyond us? Yet it can be fulfilled only if God grants us the power to do so.

- v) This implies an attentive perusal of words. It also implies such a treatment of words as to make them part of our emotions and that we bring and collect around them all the intensity and depth of our personal life...what is he saying here??? → he goes on to say, "But if the words that we use are not made real by the way we live, they will still be meaningless and lead nowhere." Like a bow without a string...you are missing something...a lack of your own will and determination.
  - vi) If we say, "O God, make me free from this or that temptation", while at the same time seeking every possible way of falling to just such a temptation, hoping now that God is in control, that He will get us out of it, then we do not stand much chance.
  - vii) God gives us strength but we must use it. When in our prayer, we ask God to give us strength to do something in His Name, we are not asking Him to do it instead of us, because we are too feeble to be willing to do it for ourselves.
  - viii) The lives of the Saints can enlighten us. St Philip Neri was irascible man who quarreled easily and had violent outburst of anger and of course endured violent from his brothers. He knew that he could not go on in the same way, and one day ran to the chapel and fell down in front of the statue of Christ and begged Him to free him of his anger. He then walked out full of hope, and the first person he ran into was someone he had never quarreled with. So, he burst out with anger and was bursting with rage. He proceeded to meet another brother who had always been a source of consolation and happiness to him; he then quarreled with him. He ran back to the chapel, and cast himself before God and said, "O Lord, have I not asked you to free me from this anger?" And the Lord answered "es, Philip, and for this reason I am multiplying the occasions for you to learn."
  - ix) This is often how God helps us, help ourselves...we must take up our own cross. When we ask for something in our prayers, we understand by implication to do it with all our strength, all our intelligence and all the enthusiasm we can put into action, and with all the courage and energy we have. In addition, we do it with all the power which God will give us. If we do not do this...we are wasting our time praying. (Sounds like a lot of work! Are we getting the message here?)
  - x) This implies that 'Kyrie eleison' or similar word which we may utter, must be turned against ourselves. Our mind must be formed, molded to the words, filled and harmonized with them. Our heart must accept them with complete conviction and express them with all the strength of which we are capable. Transforming them into action...
  - xi) So, prayer and action become two expressions of same situation – prayer = action
  - xii) Choose the right words and fasten all your attention to them; they are words of truth that God will hear. Make them live in your intellectual consciousness.
  - xiii) They will be words of commitment: you cannot say words of prayer without implying that this is what I will do when the occasion presents itself.
  - xiv) When you say, "At all costs, at all costs, O Lord, save me", you must remember that you must put all your will into that because one day God will say "Here is the price to pay."
  - xv) Ancient writers said, "Give your blood and God will give you the Spirit." That is the price, Abandon all, you will receive heaven; abandon enslavement, you will acquire freedom. As your will is already engaged not only in act of praying but in all the consequences of this prayer, so also must your body be, because a human being is not simply a soul engaged for a while in the body. It is a being which is body and soul, one unique being which is Man.
- C. There is a physical effort to be made in prayer, the physical attention, the physical way in which you pray. Fasting, if food has made you too heavy for prayer, is involved in it too. If you do this, you will be knocking at a door.
- D. **Christopher:** Going Inwards with the Words of Prayer:
- i) Boring down deeper and deeper – like boring into the earth – involves risk. Going deeper inwards, involves risk as well

- ii) On the Way, we will meet monsters of all sorts; they will not be demons or neighbors, they are just ourselves
- iii) We will meet our passions such as: greed, fear, and curiosity which make us live outwardly.
- iv) A French scientist living in America, Alexis Carrel, said in a book call Man the Unknown that if you ask yourself where your personality ends you will find that the tongue of a greedy person projected like tentacles towards all the edibles of the world; the eyes of the curious person are like tentacles projected and attached to everything around; the ears of the eavesdropper become long and wide and go far, far, afield. If you could draw a picture of what you like in those terms, you would see that precious little is left of you inside, because everything is extroverted.
- v) So the first thing that one must do is to detach the tentacles and bring them in. You cannot go inwards if you are completely outward.
- vi) Experiment: Try to find time to stay alone with yourself: shut the door and settle room at a moment when you have nothing else to do. Say "I am now with myself, and just sit with yourself." Did anyone try this experiment? How long did you last?
  - (1) We get insight into the fact that if after ten minutes of being alone with ourselves we feel like that (bored, anxious, coming out of our skin, etc...), it is no wonder that others should feel equally bored!
  - (2) We have little to offer our own selves as food for thought, for emotion and for life.
  - (3) If you watch your life carefully, you will discover quite soon that we hardly ever live from within outwards; instead, we respond to incitement, to excitement (negativity, what we find ourselves discussing or pondering). We live by reflection, by reaction. Something happens and we respond someone speaks and we answer.
  - (4) When we are left without anything that stimulates us to think, speak or act, we realize that there is very little in us that will prompt us to action in any direction at all.
  - (5) This is a really dramatic discovery – we are completely empty, we do not act from within ourselves, but accept our life a life which actually fed in from outside; we are used to things happening which compel us to do other things.
  - (6) How seldom can we live simply by means of the depth and the richness we assume that there is with ourselves
- vii) Dickens' Pickwick Papers
- viii) Since we don't know yet how to act without an outer reason, we discover that we don't know what to do with ourselves, we become increasingly bored
  - (1) First of all you must learn to sit with yourself and face boredom, drawing all the possible conclusions...
  - (2) This becomes worse than boredom
  - (3) We begin to discover something else...WE are bored when we try to get out of this boredom by turning inward to see if there is anything in ourselves that will put an end to it, we discover that there is nothing, since we have thought about everything we have to think about dozens of times.
  - (4) All of our emotions that we have in store are there (like a closed piano playing by itself)
  - (5) We must have someone else playing on the keys, we are not in the habit of doing nothing, and so it becomes worrying and can lead us to the point of anguish. If you have read the Desert Fathers, who had good experience of this, or the monks who spent their lives in monasteries, you will see that there are moments when they dimly ran out of their cells shouting for help, trying to meet something or someone, whatever...Anything better than this emptiness and self-contemplation.
  - (6) St Theophan the Recluse: "Most people are like a shaving of wood which is curled round its central emptiness." Is this an apt description of us?
- ix) Then we must be able to fight this anguish and to say, "No, I will stick it through, and I will come to the point where the anguish itself will prompt me to do what good will is incapable of doing."
  - (1) And a moment comes, a moment of despair and anguish and terror, which makes us turn even deeper inward and cry "Lord, have mercy! I am perishing. Lord, save me!"

- (2) We discover that there is nothing within us that can give life, or rather is life; that all we called life, imagined life to be, was outside and inside there was nothing
- (3) Then we look into the abyss of nonentity and we feel that the deeper we go into it, the less there will be left of us. This is a dangerous moment; this is the moment when we must hesitate...
- x) At this point we have reached the first layer of depth where we begin to be able to knock at the door. For on the layer where we were just resting from our neighbor before we felt bored, on the layer where we are simply bored and feel offended that we should be, on the layer on when we begin to fidget and worry, then feel slightly anguished, we have as yet no reason to cry and shout with a despair that fills all our mind, all our heart, all our will and all our body with a sense that unless God comes I am lost, there is no hope, because I know that if I emerge out of this depth I will simply be back in the realm of delusion, of reflected life, but not real life.
- xi) This is the point where we begin to knock at the door, which is still closed, but beyond which there is hope; that hope which Bartimaeus, the blind man at the gates of Jericho, felt, out of his utmost despair, when Christ was passing, He was hopelessly blind, having lost all faith and all hope in human help, and reduced to beg for his living, to hope not really on charity (the word meaning "cherishing"), but on the kind of charity which consists in throwing coins to someone without ever having 'seen him'....Out of this desperate hope he began to cry and shout 'Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me'.
- xii) He says that it is enough to simply shout out of despair "Lord have mercy" or "Help!", and you will be heard.
- xiii) Intensity of our prayers:
  - (1) Intensity, conviction, sufficient faith, because our despair is not deep enough.
  - (2) We keep God in store for our last push...we ask for God to help the princes and sons of man to help us, and not turn away for the princes and sons of man to say, "I will not ask anyone for help, I would rather have Your help".
- xiv) Turmoil (what goes on around us)
  - (1) Back to Bartimaeus...He cried out, but what does the Gospel say of everyone around? They tried to silence him, they didn't "see him", they wanted to talk about their more pious and important matters. They said – what did his eyes matter? They were discussing God and Godly things... He was destroying the good harmony, the way of things, and they tried to shut him down. He was an embarrassment.
  - (2) The point: the story of St Maxim – learning to pray unceasingly. He went into the mountains and all went well until the sun went down and darkness and cold descended...He went from other prayers like the Lord's Prayer, to fervent prayer of "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!"....
    - (a) Lessons he learned as a result of the turmoil he encountered
  - (3) The devil taught him to pray
- xv) When we know nothing about prayer, or have not prayed enough or at all, how can we learn?
  - (1) Awake in the morning, and immediately thank God for it
  - (2) "This day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be grateful in it"
  - (3) Reflect on this and give yourself time to realize the truth of what you are saying and really mean it (with conviction)
  - (4) Arise and wash, clean, do whatever you have to do
  - (5) Come back to God again, with two convictions
    - (a) One that you are God's own
    - (b) Two, that this day is also God's own, that it is absolutely new, absolutely fresh. It is unique and has never existed before
    - (c) Ask God to bless this day – to bless everything in it, and that it should be ruled by Him on this particular day. This is your function:
      - (i) Take this seriously
      - (ii) You walk in this day as God's own messenger, whomever you meet, you meet in God's own way
      - (iii) You are there to be the presence of the Lord God, the presence of Christ, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the presence of the Gospel

- (iv) Be prepared to walk into situations, one after the other, in God's name, to walk as the Son of God has done: in humiliation and humility, in truth and ready to be persecuted and so forth. When we walk in God's commandments, we expect to see a marvelous result at once – we read of that at times in the lives of the Saints...but we must be prepared to take the hit. We aren't though...we expect the other to say – “such humility” – but it doesn't work that way. You must pay the cost and very often you get hit hard. What matters is that you are prepared for that.
  - (v) If you accept that this day was blessed of God, chosen by God with His own hand, then every person you meet is a gift of God; every situation and circumstance you will meet is a Gift of God.
  - (vi) You can face any situation if you are prepared; whether you enjoy it or not, and if you walk in the name of the Lord through a day which has come fresh and new out of His own Hands and has been blessed for you to live with it, then you can make prayer and life really like the two sides of one coin. Act and pray in one breath...
- (d) Pray with common sense
- (i) Single out a few minutes and put all your energy into them
  - (ii) There are moments when you must have a rest. It is okay to say, “I simply have no strength to be with You all the time”. This is okay, You are not yet capable of bearing God's company all the time. Take a break when needed; God knows your limits and needs even when you do not.
  - (iii) Rest and look at things which are also God's things—trees and buildings—and then after a while we go back to Him. If you try to pray continuously, you will be defeated quite soon
  - (iv) Don't forget to be sober, because there is a spiritual sin that the Fathers call “spiritual greed, which consist of wanting to have more and more of God at a moment when you should be put on a diet and have just a little...what is enough for you

## **Questions for Chapter Four: Managing Time**

1)



# Chapter 4: Managing Time

## OCA Website:

# Time Management: An Orthodox Perspective

By Albert Rossi, PhD and Julia Wickes, MA

The first thing to say, from an Orthodox perspective, is that there is no such thing as time management. We don't manage time. Time manages us if we allow the Lord to have a place in our schedule.

### Whose time is it?

Christ is everything, including the giver and owner of our time. He is the Way we format our schedule, the Truth about the meaning of time, and the flow of Life that moves us through time.

C. S. Lewis makes a profound point about time. He says that we usually regard time as our own. We start our day with the curious assumption that we are the lawful possessors of an upcoming twenty-four hours. With that hazardous assumption we then plot a matrix for our day, filling in time slots with tasks or restful moments. We might hope that we are managing our time in a way that will somehow please God. But when we begin with the assumption that time is ours, inconveniences and unexpected interruptions become intrusions into "my time."

By contrast, we can begin with the assertion that time is not our own. Time belongs to the Lord and He has a plan for time that He desires us to accept for our own peace and joy.

### Adjusting our expectations

Those who are trying to use their time to do the Lord's will must begin every day, and every moment, with Jesus Christ. One question might be, "Lord, what do you want me to do, now?" But an even better question is, "Lord, what do *you* want to do through me now?" This takes the emphasis from the ego and places it on the Lord.

If we believe that God has a plan for each moment, we can then be sensitive to each moment as it unfolds in unexpected ways. When we receive each moment as from the Lord we will begin to experience our time on earth as a series of small deaths and resurrections.

Every loss is a gift that God gives us so that He can give us more. It might be saying goodbye to high school or college days, a move from the old neighborhood, the loss of a

job, the loss of physical or mental health. We might lose loved ones through separation or death. In degrees, the reactive thought might be, “This is the beginning of the end.” A more truthful thought would be, “This is the beginning of the beginning.” Death is the beginning of a new relationship with Christ, a fresh beginning of an entirely new life. Each loss and little death is a new beginning towards our ultimate beginning—heaven.

As we adjust our expectations time takes on a new meaning.

## Sacrament of the present moment

Simple awareness of the presence of God is the power within the present moment. The present moment—now—is the only place where God is. He discloses Himself through the reality of the present moment. Nowhere else. This is a mystery we can participate in by simply trying to be aware of His presence.

Awareness, conscious contact with God, is the key.

## The Prayer of Metropolitan Philaret

An Orthodox morning prayer by Metropolitan Philaret says: “In unforeseen events let us not forget that *all* are sent by Thee.” Here it is helpful to refine exactly what is meant by the idea that God *sends all moments*. God did not send terrorists to fly planes into the World Trade Center in New York City. Rather, God allowed terrorists to fly those planes. What, then, is implied by the *all* in Metropolitan Philaret’s prayer? An Orthodox perspective would say that events outside ourselves are subject to God’s *allowing* will, and moreover are beyond our understanding. However, by faith we believe and confess that God sends *all* of the events that pertain to us. All events in our day, even those that we anticipate in a human way, can legitimately be described as “unforeseen,” because they bear a divine potential which is not revealed to us in advance. But even “unforeseen events,” in the most mundane sense of the term—the unforeseen phone call or the inconvenient request—can take on a new meaning, simply because our time is not our own.

Our freedom consists in embracing all that happens to us, exhaustion and all, as a blessing in divine disguise.

## Making the most of time



There is a paradox inherent in the Orthodox approach to time. We do not “manage” our time yet we must be prudent and skillful in the way we use our time. We must plan without being a slave of our plans. So, we are back to basics. We need to allow the Lord to flow through us all the time, as best we can. Sometimes we must use the present moment to plan for tomorrow and the long-term future. But, again, it is the Lord doing the planning through us. When we finish the planning we can’t obsess about it or allow the

plans to become larger than life. We must be stable in the present moment and flexible enough to change plans as the Lord directs, at a moment's notice. One saint said she wanted to be a ball on a table top in the hands of the Lord, allowing Him to move her anyway He chose, for His pleasure.

The truth is that we have all the time we need, and abundantly more, to do all that the Lord has us on the planet to do. He gives us our tasks and ministry, and resources with sufficient time. "And my God will supply your every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:19)

We, however, often have other ideas. Enter stress and dissatisfaction. We make our own stress, in large part.

## Ready for virtually anything

We can only be ready for virtually anything if we know what else we have to do and choose to not do. Then we can do or not do what appears in the moment, based on a deep intuition of what the Lord is calling for now. All too often we walk through life responding to the "latest and loudest" voice clamoring for our attention.

David Allen in his interesting book, *Ready for Anything*, emphasizes a few key points. We need to have some system where we have written down everything we need to do. These are called projects, anything that requires more than one step to accomplish. We also need a list of next action steps, those things that can be accomplished in one action. These next actions can be grouped into categories that make life better organized. We might group together all the next actions which require a computer, or the phone, or when talking with my boss. Then, when we are at the phone or have a slice of free time, we will know what calls we might or might not make on the spot. All this helps us think less about what we need to do.

The brain is a fine instrument for creative thought but a poor container to remember all the outstanding commitments and projects that are ours. When projects and next actions are written down, and backed up, in some trusted system, we can allow the system to remember for us. For computer users, an external hard drive can serve as a trusted backup system. For those who prefer pen and paper (and this number is growing), a copy should be made of all that is written down. A backup is necessary because we must feel free from the possibility that we wrote down everything we need to do and that list got misplaced, or thrown out with the trash, or mauled by a well-meaning pet.

The idea is to free our mind from worry about commitments we have made with ourselves and others. Then we can use our brain for other things. If we try to keep our commitments in our head, like a computer with too much in the memory, the entire system slows down.

We need to take copious notes and be willing to process and organize these notes at least weekly so we have more freedom in the way we use our time.

To let the Lord work through us means that we give him space, and, of course, time. All too often we act reactively. Our responses often take the form of a stimulus-response reaction. Too many times we want to say, “Yes” to all the requests that come our way, and they all may have great merit. But then, one can get so overloaded and overburdened. However, it is not always easy to discern to what we should say “yes” or “no.” It does require growing closer to the Lord, to hear His voice and His direction. Often, we do not go in the direction to which He has pointed. However, we take comfort in the knowledge that He is the Great “GPS”. He is always ready to “recalculate” and reroute us.



## Push pause

One handy suggestion is to push pause as often as we can. We can pause between the stimulus and our response, thereby gaining perspective. The pause itself is usually sufficient to break the reactivity cycle. We can become aware of something else going on besides the unconscious reaction. This is a fine opportunity to try to remember that we are in the holy presence of God.

A way to gain more conscious contact with God is to gently and quietly say, “Jesus.” His holy Name is an expression of belief, adoration, expectation of salvation and unity with Him and all the members of His body. His name is sacred and is a power He asked us to use. “Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name. Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:23) We need to know that when we use His Name we are acknowledging that we are his disciples. We pause and say His Name, as an act of obedience and surrender of the present moment. We can match this with an awareness of our breathing, centering us more inside our body.

We can simply say the one word, “Jesus,” to transfigure what is in front of us, or in our minds. The name Jesus can be a filter through which our thoughts, words and deeds have to pass to be freed from their impurities. Needless to say, this is severe spiritual warfare. It requires a forgetfulness of the self, a dying to the negative thoughts the ego wants to indulge.

To be free in the Lord requires that we are as free as we can be from internal baggage and preoccupation. David Allen calls this “Mind like water,” that is, a mind ready to receive the next pebble thrown in and naturally allow the ripples to move out.

## Conclusion

Time manages us because the Lord lives within the time He gives us. So, it is He, through the reality we call measured time, who manages, leads, nourishes and strengthens us. We don't live life. Life lives us.

Time is our friend, not our burden to endure. We need only remember that we are in the holy presence of God. We can pause and say the Name of Jesus, thereby bringing us into His very life within us. While on earth we have an opportunity to "sanctify time."

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# The Sacrament of the Present Moment

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There is a wonderful translation of Jean-Pierre De Caussade's *Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence*, which bears the same title as this post. I am borrowing the phrase, not to comment on the volume (though I highly recommend it), but to bring into focus something of at least equal importance.

It is the reality of our moment by moment encounter with God. We confess that God is everywhere present and fills all things, but we still largely walk through the world treating all the things that we encounter as just that – things. We carry no sense within us that God is in fact sharing His life with us in and through all things.

This goes to the very heart of living life as though the world were secular, of living life in a “two-storey” universe – the storey in which we live being the one not inhabited by God.

It has been a common observation that when various reformers set about to reform the Church, they declared “all days to be holy days,” and thus rid the calendar of any particular holy day. The unintended result was that before long not only were all days not holy days, no day was a holy day.

In the same way, the decrees concerning the “priesthood of all believers” rather than making every individual a priest, became a meaningless phrase, for without the sacramental priesthood, the phrase lost its reference of meaning. No one had seen or dealt with a priest so to be told that they had some kind of “priesthood” from Christ was meaningless.

The same has been true of the more recent democratizations of the liturgy where the “people” gather around the altar and God is in our midst. Somehow, God becomes lost. All boundary between myself and the holy disappear and I can no longer know the holy.

Strangely, most of these reforms were not misguided. They were rooted in Scriptural truth and embodied a certain amount of truth. But invariably they were reforms that were lost in the “law of unintended consequences.” The general principle triumphed over the particular instance and the result was the abolition of something important.

But God is indeed “everywhere present and filling all things.” One of the clearest examples of this in Scripture is to be found in the resurrected Christ's encounter with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They conversed and the disciples did not recognize Him. Indeed, their hearts “burned” within them as they walked along and He instructed them in Scripture concerning the Christ. But things became clear – they recognized the risen Lord when He stopped with them for the evening meal. There He “took bread, blessed, broke and gave it to them,” and we are told, “their eyes were opened.” Those four verbs, “take, bless, break, and give,” are always used in Eucharistic encounters in Scripture. They are keys for our understanding. Nonetheless, the Scriptures do not say that there was a “formal” liturgy or even a clearly demarcated sacred meal. Only that Christ was present, and that He “took bread, blessed, broke and gave it too them.” And He was made known to them.

The Eucharist reveals Christ to us. But as Fr. Alexander Schmemmann always noted, the Eucharist not only reveals Christ to us, it also reveals the true nature of creation to us. Bread can no longer be the same if Christ has taken it and made it His body.

It is always possible, indeed it has already happened, that we build a fence around that sacred moment and confine it to the liturgy itself. Outside the service, everything returns to “normal and ordinary,” and the Orthodox become as secular as every Christian around them. This is a denial of the Orthodox faith.

God is “everywhere present and filling all things,” thus there is no “normal and ordinary,” no “secular.” Everything is changed. There is no eating of bread that is not a communion with God. There is no encounter with a tree that is not an encounter with the hard wood of the cross, the “weapon of peace.”

In Jeremiah (23:23-24) we read:

*Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.*

We do not have a “neutral zone” where we live apart from God. Instead, we have zones of ignorance, where believing Christians live as unbelievers, awaiting their next attendance at a “God permitted” zone.

No, the truth is that God has united Himself not only to humanity in the incarnation, but to matter itself. Man is the “microcosm” according to the Fathers, a “little cosmos” in himself. This is most fully and completely true in Christ, who has truly summed up the cosmos within Himself. Thus we look forward to the redemption and resurrection of the whole created order and not just man (Romans 8).

Thus we are never separated from God who is freely with us, but also giving Himself to us in everything around us. This is no profession of pantheism. God has not *become* everything else. But everything else holds the possibility of encounter with God as surely as the holy water within the Church or every sacrament He has given us. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.”

Fr. Schmemmann said that there were two “no’s” in his life and one “yes.” “No” to secularism; “No” to religion as a human institution; and “Yes” to the Kingdom of God. I am saying nothing different.

This carries us as well to this great season of Lent. We begin by formally asking forgiveness of each member of the Church. But if such a service were confined to Forgiveness Vespers, then not even all the members of the Church would have participated. But, in truth, it only occurs in Church so that we may be taught our true relationship with everyone and everything around us. Repentance is not a legal state in which we say, “I’m sorry,” so that we can hear, “You’re forgiven.” Repentance is part of the true state of human beings, a small part of the larger humility that is our true natural state of being. God Himself is humble (cf. Philippians 2:5-11). In figurative terms, the Old Testament even speaks of God “repenting Himself.” It is the simple openness of ourselves to others and the truth of their existence, and the true existence of all things as revealed in Christ. Only the pure in heart shall see God (Matthew 5:8) and is also true that only the pure in heart see anything as it truly is.

So this brings us to the “sacrament of the present moment.” Everything, everyone, every place, filled with God, becomes a moment of communion and theophany. Thus we pray for the whole world, and finally know the fullness for which God is preparing us.

And lest we forget, forgiveness reaches backwards in time, and thus not even the past is fixed in some secular mode, but is subject to the Spirit of God and may be changed by my forgiveness. As God has promised through His beloved Apostle:

For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will (Ephesians 1:9-11).

And because the existence of all is underwritten by the Good God (“in Him we live and move and have our being”) we are in no way the lords of our own existence. We do not control history nor its outcome. Acts of murder do not remove the existence of our victims, only increase our own distance from the truth of existence. There is no place to run, to flee, to hide ourselves from the truth which resides in God and it is to this truth that we must finally be reconciled if we are ourselves to stand in the truth at the end of all things. And so to everything that is we announce the goodness of the Kingdom of God and ask forgiveness of everything and everyone and for all time. Less than this would not be the fullness of life. Glory to God for all things.



About Fr. Stephen Freeman

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