

- 1) **02/25/2024:** 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 complete the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the – 9th chapter?
    2. Were you able to sit in stillness for at least 5 mins 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 1:**
  1. How do you feel the absence of God in prayer?
  2. How are we absent from our relationship with God?
  3. What is your experience with prayer (written prayers, the Jesus Prayer, etc.)?
  4. What does it mean meeting God is a moment of judgment?
  5. How often do we want something from God, but don’t want him in himself?
  6. Discuss the quote: “We find all sorts of ways of turning God’s judgment on us into a new way of praising ourselves.”
  7. As Lent approaches we hear the story of the Pharisee and the Publican; what are some lessons we can learn from it?
  8. What does it mean God’s strength is perfected in our weakness? (2 Cor 12.1-10)
  9. How does Jesus as the Door relate to our feeling His absence?
  10. How are we outside the kingdom?
- 5) **“Beginning to Pray” by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom – Chapter One: The Absence of God**
  - A. **Metropolitan Bloom explains what this book is about: “what one can do if one wishes to pray”.**
    - (1) **This is not a book about mystical prayer of high states of perfection (these things will teach themselves)**
  - B. **The day when God is absent, when He is silent—that is the “Beginning of Prayer” (Intro).** The day that we recognize or “sense” the absence...
    - (1) God is never really absent...He is everywhere, present, and filling all things
  - C. **Prayer is an encounter and a relationship with the living God**
    - (1) Invitation, mutual free will, our availability to God & Respectful

- (2) God may be knocking at our door and we answer, "I am busy, I am sorry" or when we do not answer at all because we do not even hear the knock at the door of our heart, minds, our conscience, and our life
- (3) We must be in the present moment in order to experience God's presence; (sometimes referred to as the 'ministry of present moment' or 'sacred moment'). This grounds us – example is bringing yourself to the present moment with experiencing in the now, your feet physically on the ground
- (4) How do we approach God? Do we come in repentance, and broken hearted?
- (5) We cannot expect immediately to be received with love and friendship
- (6) We are outside of the kingdom knocking in actuality' but he is always gently knocking for us to approach

**D. A meeting with God is always a moment of judgment for us.**

- (1) He does not mean this in the literal sense of the final judgement and condemnation. We may not be able to endure Him as we are – He is power, truth, purity...
- (2) We cannot meet God in prayer or in meditation or contemplation and not be either saved or condemned
- (3) Keep the remembrance of death (Sirach 7:36 'In all your works remember your end and you will not sin.') We never know when Christ will come...
- (4) If we are not aware of God's tangible presence, our first thought should be one of gratitude. He is merciful, and He does not come in an untimely way. He will not come to us if we are not ready to receive Him

**E. Obedience –this prepares us to enter into prayer**

- (1) Do we listen? God speaks to us in many ways...but we can only meet him in the present sacred moment
- (2) Scriptures, Church Tradition, Saints, Homilies, Devine Liturgy, Sacraments,
- (3) Do we refuse to do God's will? Do we try to "blind him" (as He sees all things), but end-up blinding ourselves to our own state of fallenness? Acting according to our moods, desires, which are contrary to God's will
- (4) We must bring our lives in-tune with His Will

**F. Hesitation to receive God and to be received – Do we say, "I am unworthy that He should come near me?"**

- (1) We can be impatient and demanding 'servants'...expecting immediately that God attend to us and receive us with love and friendship
- (2) We can come to Him in repentance, in broken-heartedness
- (3) Understand that we are unworthy to be in His presence, but with repentance we draw nearer
- (4) Start with being concerned with His will, even if we are not yet capable of fulfilling it

**G. God can be absent in our Coldness**

- (1) Fervent when we want something, but then grow cold
- (2) If we become more intense, pray stronger, from our hearts when we pray for a loved one, but the intensity/emotion/passion of our prayer changes before or after, we are probably praying to "get" something. Think...if only I could pray harder, God would answer my prayer
- (3) Our goal is to pray with intensity/heart/consuming yearning all the time

**H. God can be Absent when we are not our authentic selves**

- (1) The moment we try to be what we are not (pious/humble/caring/loving), we become an “unreal presence” – this unreal presence cannot be approached by God
- (2) In order to pray, we must be within the kingdom of God we must be willing to surrender our will to Him
- (3) We must always be truthful when we approach God – he sees all in any case
- (4) Metropolitan Bloom says that it is okay to say “I don’t know”, “I am not sure, but I trust in...”, “I don’t understand this or that...”. Just be truthful.

**I. God is not willing to be “just part of our lives”**

- (1) We yearn for a deep relationship with God, but sometimes it is another period of happiness (we want to feel ‘happy’)
- (2) We are not willing to sell all we own to buy this ‘pearl of great price’
- (3) “When a man has a bride, he is no longer surrounded by men and women, but by people.” We can contrast this to what should happen to our riches when we turn to God – they should pale and become insignificant. Would we not trade all for just one touch of heaven in our lives?

**J. (Christopher) We must now ask ourselves, “Who is to blame?”**

- (1) P 26 ‘We complain...more absent than he ever is’
- (2) God often tries to get our attention and we do not even hear him.
  - (a) Story of daughter trying to get my attention with my first name.

**K. God is not testing us...**

- (1) P. 31 Or We often blame God even in ‘pious’ terms. “God is testing me, my faith etc”. Wow, what good people we are we, we can be patient with God. We have an amazing ability to turn our weakness into an excuse to showcase our strength.
- (2) But as Holy Isaiah says ‘Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who establish darkness as light and light as darkness, who establish bitter as sweet and sweet as bitter. Woe to those who are intelligent to themselves and wise in their own presence.’ (5.20-21 Lexham LXX) Or Holy Paul sarcastically congratulating the Corinthians ‘I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers and sisters, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!’ (1 Cor 4.6-8)

**L. Approaching God with the certainty that we are sinners in need of salvation**

- (1) Rather we start with humility.
- (2) Humility the only virtue; pride the only vice.
- (3) Abba Anthony said ‘I have seen all the snares of the devil spread out on the earth and I said with a sigh ‘Who can pass these by?’ and I heard a voice say to me ‘Humble mindedness.’

**M. Preparing to meet God in prayer**

- (1) And so by humility we prepare to meet God. Preparation a major theme of the Church and the scriptures. We come to God and ask him for grace.
- (2) O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.

**N. Publican & the Pharisee p 32 Lk 18**

- (1) Today is the Sunday of the Pharisee and the Publican
- (2) Recap sermon and paragraph
- (3) Publican went home justified
- (4) The only hope is an act God's Mercy

**O. "My power is manifest in weakness"**

- (1) Completely abandoned in the hands of God
- (2) The weakness of the sail catches the wind

**P. Humility in the real, deep sense of this word p35**

- (1) The fertile ground

**Q. Christ says "I am the door" – in order for us to knock, we must realize that we are outside of the kingdom**

- (1) Read para. From 36

## **Questions for Chapter 2: Knocking At The Door**

- 1) Are you able to sense the depth that you are “outside” of the kingdom of God?
- 2) What is meant by increasing progression towards a deeper, richer, longing for the presence of God?
- 3) Have you ever heard the saying: “You will never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul”. How do our possessions and wealth burden us, and keep us from the kingdom of God?
- 4) What are the Beatitudes? Discuss the first Beatitude.
- 5) Why does Jesus say to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven...” (Matthew 19:23)?
- 6) How can our imagination entangle us?
- 7) Discuss: “Find the door of your heart, you will discover it is the door of the kingdom of God.”

## A Prayer of Humility and Honesty

### Morning Prayer of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow



O Lord, I do not know what to ask of Thee. Thou alone know what I need. Thou love me more than I know how to love myself. O Father, grant Thy servant what I myself do not know how to ask. I do not dare to ask a cross of Thee, nor consolation; I only stand before Thee with my heart open; Thou sees the needs that I myself do not know. Look, and work in me according to Thy mercy; smite and heal me, cast me down and raise me up! I am reverent and silent before Thy holy will and ways that are unfathomable to me. I offer myself as a sacrifice to Thee; teach me to pray. Do Thou Thyself pray in me. Amen.