

“Beginning to Pray” by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom

- Opening Prayer
- (Kathy) Opening
 - What is St Theodora’s Adult Ministry?
 - A place to Study, Share our Stories, Enjoy Fellowship
 - Is it all based on books? No – there will be topics and Church services
 - Is there criteria for choosing a book or topics?
 - Fr Gabriel will determine special topics – and will be our guide
 - The author of books must demonstrate experiential knowledge – lived knowledge – for books or reference materials for topics
 - Classes will align with or support Scriptural/Orthodox tradition
 - Teaching is rational in relationship to Orthodoxy – and to the Orthodox mindset or outlook (phronema)
 - Centered on Jesus Christ/Holy Trinity
 - Is edifying
- (Christopher) Why this book?
 - Gives an introduction to prayer.
 - Chapter 1 for beginners in prayer
 - Met Anthony has the experience of one who has learnt prayer
 - His story in the introduction includes many trials
- Do I need help with prayer?
 - To borrow from Fr Stephen DeYoung:
short answer Yes, long answer Yeeeeessss.
 - It is said that many psychiatrists go to psychiatry to learn to address their own issues. I’ve checked with Sbdcn Denis (a retired psychiatrist) and he confirmed this is true.
 - I also need help with prayer and am learning alongside with you. I am no master of prayer but seek to deepen my practice.
- What is prayer?
 - As we’ve established I’m not qualified to tell you what prayer is: I’m going to quote some words from St Dimitri of Rostov and St Theophan the Recluse.
 - These are included in The Art of Prayer compiled by Igumen (Abbot) Chariton of Valero.
 - “Inner spiritual training begins with these words of Christ: ‘But when you pray, go into your closet and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.’ (Mt 6.6)” p 43
 - “In prayer man converses with God, he enters, through grace, into communion with him, and lives in God.” thus “prayer is the test of everything; prayer is also the source of everything... If prayer is right, everything is right. For prayer will not allow anything to go wrong.” p 51
 - And lastly some practical advice: “ You must never regard any spiritual work as firmly established, and this is especially true of prayer; but always pray as if beginning for the first time. When we do a thing for the first time, we come to it fresh and with a new-born enthusiasm. If, when starting to pray, you always approach it as though you had never yet

prayed properly, and only now for the first time wished to do so, you will always pray with a fresh and lively zeal.”

- (Kathy) Introduction (An interview by Timothy Wilson)
 - Possessions – Note that Fr Bloom was both monk and priest
 - “I don’t think that living in the marketplace is any different than living in the wilderness...to be poor financially is in a way easier...than to be poor inwardly, to have no attachments”. This is difficult to learn, and happens gradually
 - You learn to value things (what is really important)
 - “Look at people and see the radiant beauty which they possess, without the desire to possess them”
 - Saint Porphyrios, Wonderworker of Kafsokalivia Commemorated on December 2 – is a beautiful inspiration for us. A priest living out in the world. He started as a monk, but due to physical ailments, found himself living in Athens (handout)
 - I love you, is often said with a huge “I” and a little “you”
 - Christ’s type of love requires a kind of total surrender
 - He talks about being willing to pay the price for coming into God’s presence. If we turn to God, we discover that life is deep, vast and immensely worth living. The alternative is to walking as a beggar (in spirit)...
 - The Gospel much reach not only the intellect, but the whole being. Refers to meeting with God as the ‘cave of a tiger’—it is not a pussy cat – it’s a tiger. The realm of God is dangerous...You must enter into it and not just “seek information” about it. Part of why we have the fear of God – every encounter is a time of judgement. Will learn more about this in future discussions
 - We must prepare ourselves – in most every orthodox book that I have read – the need to focus on our preparation is there)
 - (Christopher) He described how during the Russian revolution; the Christ of the great cathedrals (splendor/splendidly architected liturgies) was lost. “We were rejected just as Christ was rejected...we had nothing”
 - God helps us when there is no one else to help. God is there at the point of greatest tension, at the breaking point, at the center of the storm. In a way despair is at the center of things—if only we are prepared to go through it.
 - We must endure, have fortitude and strength – we become meek to the God’s will, but strong in our faith and determination
 - This is why we can find the greatest break-throughs in times of crisis – but as he states, we must be prepared to go through it. As He wills
 - The day when God is absent, when He is silent—that is the “Beginning of Prayer”
 - Not when we have a lot to say, but when we say “I can’t live without You, why are You so cruel, so silent?” This knowledge that we must find or die—that makes us break through to the place where we are in the presence of God Himself
 - When there is a longing in the heart for God Himself, not for His gifts, but for God Himself. A longing...that can only be fulfilled by Him. A home where there is love, depth and life
 - Questions for next week: Handout

- Closing Prayer (Our Father) ... through the prayers of St Theodora and all our fathers and mothers in the faith, O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and save us. Amen.
 - (Unless Father Gabriel is doing the closing prayer)

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?

St Porphyrios(Bairaktaris) of Kafsokalivia



***Meekness, Patience
and Love, and
Strength in Leading a
Simple Spiritual Life***

"It is a great art to succeed in having your soul sanctified. A person can become a saint anywhere. He can become a saint in Omonia Square, if he wants. At your work, whatever it may be, you can become a saint through meekness, patience, and love. Make a new start every day, with new resolution, with enthusiasm and love, prayer and silence - not with anxiety so that you get a pain in the chest."

"Christ is Everything. He is joy, He is life, He is light. He is the true light who makes man joyful, makes him soar with happiness; makes him see everything, everybody; makes him feel for everyone, to want everyone with him, everyone with Christ."

"Little nightingale, who told you that I would pass by here? No one comes here. It's such an out-of-the-way place. How marvelously you unceasingly carry on your duty, your prayer to God! How much you tell me, and how much you teach me, little nightingale! My God, how I am moved. With your warbling, dear nightingale, you show me how to hymn God, you teach me a thousand things beyond number...'

I said to myself, 'Why? Did it have an audience? Did it know I was there and could hear it? Who heard it as it was bursting its throat in song? Why did it go to such a hidden location? But what about of all these little nightingales in the middle of the thick forest, in the ravines, night and day, at sunset and sunrise? Who heard their throat-bursting song? Why did they go to such secret places? Why did they puff out their throats to bursting?' The purpose was worship, to sing to their Creator, to worship God. That's how I explained it...

They weren't interested in being heard; but there in solitude, in peace, in the wilderness, in silence, they longed to be heard, but by whom? None other than by the Maker of everything, the Creator of all, by Him who gave them life and breath and voice."

This is an excerpt from the book "Wounded by Love", 2005, translated from Greek by Father John Raffan.