



From heart to heart

Essays on purity



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Fr. Tadeo Y. Malon



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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
One God, Amen

Table of Contents



1. Let us begin on a sound basis!	4
2. Chastity in the positive sense	11
3. Practical steps in a life of purity	14
4. The incarnate God and the life of purity	26
5. What is love?	31
6. How can I free myself from lustful love?	40
7. Spirituality and withdrawnness	44
8. Christian youth and patriotism	53
9. The academic life of a young Christian	56

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1- Let us Begin on a Sound Basis

MEDITATION

- ❖ My dear God... I yearn to know You and to acquire You, O my Beloved...
- ∴ You are my comfort, the happiness and desire of my heart, my refuge, and my exultation...
- ∴ I love You, my dear Lord - reveal Yourself unto me, make haste, O joy of my soul, for I long to find You and to contemplate You.
- ∴ You are my strength, "I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer." (Psalm 18:1- 2)
- ∴ Indeed, my quest is loving You; You are my God, my protector, my invincible fortress, and my solace in all my hardships...
- ∴ I wish to adhere to You; You are the embodiment of goodness - no good would exist without You...
- ∴ May all my happiness be You, O All-righteous One, since without You there is no righteousness...
- ∴ O Divine Word, You pierce my soul as a two-edged sword; open the depths of my hearing, so that I may hear You.
- ∴ "The Lord thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice..." (Psalm 18:13)
- ∴ O dear God, may the sea and all its waves roar and quake the earth, may all therein tremble, and may Your thunderbolts lightning obliterate everything on it.
- ∴ O Imperceptible Light, grant me two eyes capable of

seeing You; O Divine Aroma of Life, create within me a new sense of smell, drawn to Your fragrance.

My Lord, purify within me the sense of smell; grant me a heart which pulsates only with Your love, a soul that endears You, a spirit faithful to Your mention, thoughts capable of understanding Your mysteries, and a serene mind united with Your wisdom... and versed in devoutly loving You - You, the Love that is the source of all wisdom."

Saint Augustine

This was the calling of Saint Augustine, who was once a proud, blasphemous, perverse, young man; he nevertheless became a great saint, and a righteous bishop, who drew thousands towards our Lord Jesus.

Saint Augustine knew how to start; that was the secret of his success.

For this reason, our tender mother, the Church, unceasingly teaches me to pray each day saying, "**Let us begin on a sound basis.**"

Many who have started and became bishops, priests, monks and servants to the Church and its congregation, seem to have the mannerisms, zeal and righteousness, which are indispensable for worship and evangelization. Nevertheless, in a single moment, they could fall - and great indeed could be their fall - because their beginning was not sound.





FIRST: WHAT IS THE WAY?

How numerous are the short, wide, paths! However, they do not lead to life. As a youth, you could be attracted to the path of virtue, or to the love of behavioural traits.

Alternatively, you may lean towards a life of service, which could lead you to serving in Sunday School or to managing the funds earmarked for the poor, both of which avenues would seem to satisfy the desire of establishing a good relationship with God.

Finally, religious fanaticism might seem to some as the way to devout worship.

My friend...

None of the above represents the beginning, the middle, or the end of the path! The path is: **“Encountering our Lord Jesus.” Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.**

If you happen to be agonizing under a sexual or emotional yoke, which is impeding your attempts to fast, pray, or serve, then your first priority is to know our Lord Jesus.

Are you thirsting for a particular sin which you fancy - which could be sexual indulgence or a desire to accumulate wealth? Remember: **our Lord Jesus alone is the Paradise of your soul** - He is your soul's Bread and Water (John 6:35), your soul's Shepherd and Life (John 10:11), and your soul's Friend and Groom (John 11:25).

Our Lord Jesus is beautiful and sweet. You cannot know Him unless you experience Him. If you do not know Him, you are incapable of loving Him, and if you are unable to love



Him, then how can you live with Him, and through Him? For this reason, I cry to Him openly: “O Lord, reveal Yourself unto me. I desire to know You, since I wish to love You.” In your pleading cries to Him, never assume that He is outside you or distant from you. Rather, He is within you, and closer to you than your own soul.

If you seek to experience our Lord Jesus, pour out your heart candidly to Him, saying, “My Lord, I desire to love You, even though I do not wish to sacrifice anything for the sake of Your love, I choose to read erotic stories over Your Book, I delight in the company of evildoers while I drag my feet to stand before You, I prefer to visit my relatives over being in Your house. My Lord, enable me to love You.”

Augustine was frank - he repeated similar, and stronger, words, and the Lord did not abandon him...



SECOND: DISCOVER YOUR ABILITIES AND GIFTS!

- ❖ My God, since without You nothing would have been created, then being away from You makes us nothing, through sin.
- ❖ Woe is me! Darkness has prevailed over me and, although You are the Light, I have hidden my face from You.
- ❖ Woe to me! My wounds are many and, although You are the Comforter granting peace, I have distanced myself from You.
- ❖ Woe to me! I have committed a multitude of follies and, although You are the Truth, I have never sought Your counsel.
- ❖ Woe to me! I have strayed down numerous paths and, although You are the Way, I have separated myself from You.
- ❖ Woe to me! I have suffered numerous strikes from death and, although You are the Life, I was never with You.
- ❖ Woe to me! I often fall into evil and nothingness and, although You are the Word through Whom everything came into being, and without You I would not exist, I have detached myself from You.

Saint Augustine

My dear, young brother/sister, what are your capabilities?



That was the extent of Augustine's capabilities during his days of wickedness: he was nothing, and he carried the burden of corruption of his heart, mind, instincts, senses and body - all of which were enveloped by sin, which caused him to deliriously reject any substitute for material pleasures.

It is true that - as he confessed - he felt a tendency to transcend above the animalistic life which he led, similarly to others. However, he had a significant obstacle, namely, the impossibility to lead a chaste life.

He was able to overcome that obstacle only by experiencing our Lord Jesus, and accepting His grace.

Therefore, the lax young man who succumbed to the ecstasy of carnal desires cries from his depths saying that he wishes to be pure - but how can he abandon the pleasure which now embodies all of his life and being?

The struggle within him is, on the one hand, between a quiet voice yearning to embrace the angelic life and, on the other hand, the powerful feelings - which he is reluctant to give up - of pleasure enslaving his person and emotions.

The secret behind this struggle lay in his inability to understand the reality of chastity, coupled with his ignorance of the means at his disposal: let us start first with the "sexual instinct."



According to some people, “chastity” could be any of the following:

- ∴ refraining from committing adultery,
- ∴ avoiding any habit or activity which might induce sexual arousals or fulfillment,
- ∴ shielding the eyes from observing something which might give rise to internal evil lusts,
- ∴ preventing the senses from being exposed to evil sexual or emotional feelings,
- ∴ avoiding people, places or situations which might stimulate bad pleasure, or
- ∴ shielding the heart from unclean thoughts and from bad emotions or feelings involving the other sex.

All of the above represent negative aspects of chastity; whoever fails to understand any other perspective will conclude that chastity is an insurmountable obstacle, or an elusive, imaginary, lifestyle.

Many were crushed in their struggle because of such a perception; they thus lost the true, sweet, taste of chastity. Therefore today, we need to understand the positive meaning of chastity, in order for us to live and experience it.



2- Chastity in the Positive Sense

Chastity is the adherence of man to God alone as the Groom of his/her soul. It is both the correct understanding of the capability which God granted us, and using it as intended. It is loving and cherishing the heavenly Groom - the soul cleaves to God, while loving and cherishing Him through His grace. The soul thus offers God, through the Holy Spirit, the heart with all its emotions and reactions, the mind with all its imaginations, and the senses with all their feelings; simply, each member of the body leaps towards the Lord and is consecrated to Him.

Chastity thus does not constitute inhibition or suppression of those emotions, feelings or instincts which God created in man; rather, **it is a powerful leap taken by all of those towards their proper place and intent.**

BETWEEN THE CHILD’S IMPOTENCE AND THE YOUTH’S STRUGGLE

From the preceding discussion, we conclude that, just because of their sexual inactivity, neither a young child, nor a sexually impotent young man, is considered to be leading a chaste life, in the true sense of the word. This is the chastity of impotence, rather than the fruit of struggle. On the other hand, if a young person, struggling to absorb, and respond to, the love of God, were to stumble and fall, such a setback should in no way be an indication of his/her defilement or lack of chastity; chastity is not inherent just in “not falling”



- rather, in loving God, abhorring sin, and fighting it unto death.

Though he/she may fall seven times, the upright will stand, not by being lazy or frivolous, rather, through his constant struggle and prayer, and his/her yearning for chastity.

The young man to whom were granted the instincts and who, coincidentally, is fighting the old man - hence, lust of the flesh - in addition to all the worldly allures and his war with the demon of adultery, should arm himself with the grace of God, while persevering in his struggle through prayer, confession and partaking of the holy sacraments, with tears, cries, groaning, and strict self-discipline. In this case, even if he were repeatedly tormented by thoughts, leading to his fall, he would be meritorious of the crown of chastity - the chastity of struggle and triumph, not that of impotence.

HOLY INSTINCTS

It is fair to say that those to whom God has granted strong sexual instincts, sensitive emotions, and delicate feelings, are the most vulnerable to fall, significantly, into sin; it is equally fair to say that, if they submitted all their feelings and emotions to the Holy Spirit, they would interact most favourably with God's love, and be envied by all.

Dear brother, neither envy others, nor be ashamed, if your sexual drive happens to be stronger than that of others - this strong instinct is a gift from God, since, "...those members

of the body which we think to be less honourable, on these we bestow greater honour; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty." (1 Corinthians 12:23)

CHASTITY FOR ALL!

Chastity is neither restricted to one class of people over another, nor should it be attributed solely to hermits and monks; rather, virtuous married couples and struggling youth may also lay a claim to it - it is a lifestyle available to all. The young man struggling to sanctify his desires will experience it when seeking the strong helping hand of God to rescue him; similarly, the virtuous husband will have that experience when seeing our Lord Jesus as the only Groom of his soul, and when he sees in his bride a pure holy vessel - not simply an object to temporarily satisfy his desires; his bride is his partner in their unity with the Lord's holy body. The monk's experience will render him drunk with the life of Divine love.





3- Practical Steps in a Life of Purity

How can I acquire a life of purity, given that I am a young man with sexual instincts, living in a society filled with rousing attractions, and having friends who never cease to incite me to do evil, and to scoff at me if I refrained?

The following clarifications are a prerequisite for answering this question:

1. Never lose sight of the fact that our Lord Jesus's concern with respect to my purity is greater than mine. This is not only because I am the dwelling place of His Holy Spirit, but also because He alone, the Holy One, is able to sanctify me, along with my instincts, emotions, feelings, and every member of my body, regardless of the extent of my uncleanness, and of the degree of evil to which I have sunk.

2. God desires to sanctify me and to retain me as His pure bride; I can only profit from this fact if I interacted positively with His work in me, since, "...the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." (Matthew 11:12)

Let us now return to the question: Where do I stand, as a young man overtaken by evil, and yearning to lead a life of purity, compatible with God's work in me?

FIRST: SANCTIFYING THE THOUGHTS



I desire to acquire holy thoughts; but all my attempts are in vain, even those aimed at just getting rid of the evil, unclean thoughts - these seem to creep inside me, or to stem from within me, against my will. I try, unsuccessfully, to rid myself of those thoughts, but they control me in my sleep, during my periods of relaxation, and even while fully awake or working; what should I do?

1. First of all: **never give up**. As long as you are in this body, unclean thoughts will always haunt you. The spirit and the flesh will constantly pull in opposite directions - each desiring what the other abhors. A man of God, on the other hand, whose resolve is to march in the path of Christ, will reject such thoughts and will not yield to them; rather, he will chase them out immediately and will not attempt to entertain any of them.

The safest avenue is, therefore, **to flee**; this is corroborated by St. Paul the apostle in his second letter to his disciple Timothy: "Flee also youthful lusts..." (2 Timothy 2:22) Yielding to those thoughts, even for a few minutes, will require a greater effort the following day to get rid of them and, day after day, they will establish roots in your heart and you will have given them control over your life. This is analogous to an unwelcome guest: it is difficult to get him to leave, once he has entered.

If you are now at the latter stage, and evil thoughts are controlling you, **do not despair**. Above all, do not complicate matters by willingly accepting new ideas. You have to muster



your courage in resisting those controlling thoughts, knowing that our Holy God sees your humility, accepts you, and keeps count of each small sacrifice you make, in order for you to maintain the purity of your thoughts. This is God's intent for you: to retain your sanctity and to refrain from adultery.

It may be useful to train oneself, initially, to the notion that sudden death and Judgment are imminent. This is because the principle of "love" might not be attractive to a frivolous person while, on the other hand, fear mixed with trust might be a viable starting point; experiencing love will follow.

2. We must also be aware of the fact that lustful thoughts may not be necessarily the starting point; rather, they usually take a **deceitful form at the outset**. For example, a person may yield to daydreaming for long periods of time, dreaming of what may seem to be benign future prospects, but which often stray from reality, and lead the dreamer insidiously down the path of fantasy mixed with lustful thinking.

3. One factor contributing to unclean thoughts is **anxiety coupled with lack of dependence on God**; for this reason, many students complain of domination by unclean thoughts during examination periods - their busiest time of year. In their anxiety, they try to escape from reality by resorting to unclean thoughts. **A strong remedy against such thoughts is prayer, so that the Lord may grant you peace, internal joy, and reliance on Him.**

4. This fourth point reminds the reader of an old saying: **"Satan establishes his lab in the lazy mind."** Normally, our minds are active; they may work to build or to destroy - for good or for evil. The mind does not rest by ceasing to

function since, by nature, the thought process cannot stop or "take a break." Rather, at times of physical inactivity or sleep, the mind regurgitates what it had reaped during the person's daily activities.

Therefore, the young man who spends much of his time in enjoyment, in merrymaking, in the company of scoffers and in places offering eroticism, should not expect his thoughts to be holy during his sleep, or during his times of rest, when his will-power is at its weakest. At the other end of the spectrum, he who would have offered for himself spiritual food, sincerely and from the bottom of his heart, should expect holy thoughts during those periods of relaxation. Therefore, readings from the scriptures and spiritual books such as the lives of saints and their sayings, coupled with memorizing and reciting the psalms, are all very helpful in terms of storing for yourself that which will satisfy you when you hunger.

5. The last point to bear in mind pertains to learning and chanting church hymns, spiritual songs and psalms. These direct the mind towards sanctification, and close encounter with our Lord Jesus.

May the Lord grant us pure and holy thoughts, focused on our Lord Jesus, and despising all the past, old ones. God be with you.





SECOND: SANCTIFYING THE SENSES

- ❖ My dear brother... who has fervently sought to be in God and to contact this Holy One Who knows no sin. I beseech you to hearken lovingly unto me and to forgive my weakness.

Control your senses, my dear brother, and be mindful of them - through them death creeps into the unwary person's body...

Direct your sight towards God, thus shielding it from contemplating man's perishing beauty.

Listen to the Almighty's mysteries, in order to protect your ears from listening to all that is disagreeable.

Beware of evil odours - seek, instead, Christ's sweet-smelling aroma.

Preserve your lips - let complete caution fully guard your mouth - let your speech be with God, the Creator.

As for the final sense, that of touch, submit it to the ever-watchful Preserver, seeking chastity in all your actions, in order for the Lord to keep you from evil thoughts.

All those aspiring to preserve themselves and their conscience from evil deeds: **let them keep those senses, and submit them into the hands of our trusted God, Who aids the weak.**"

St. John Saba
The Spiritual Sage



My friend...

God granted you senses without which you lose your liveliness as a sensitive, feeling, human being.

Your senses distinguish you from any other earthly being, since God assigned you a will which plays the significant role of directing your senses.

You may choose to give free rein to those five senses, thereby allowing their strong energy to propel you towards enjoyment of fellowship with the Lord. On the other hand, you can also succumb to the forces drawing you to the depths of defilement, leading to your wallowing in uncleanness, and from thence to your belief that purity does not belong with humans endowed with such senses.

I assure you that, as a youth undergoing difficulties associated with sexual desires, and having no willpower to control all your senses, **know that the problem does not lie with the existence of those senses, rather, with directing them and using them to work in their intended function.**

But, you say, how can I direct my senses to work for good, while my entire life is aflame with lust?

I am neither demanding that you immobilize your senses, nor suppress their function; on the contrary, I would like you to give them free rein to their maximum possible extent - but only after you have been sanctified internally which, in turn, sanctifies your senses allowing them to lead you towards spiritual growth. **The Holy Spirit is the One Who sanctifies the senses, and He is the One Who is not only**



close to you, but indwells you. Unfortunately, you are not interacting with Him.

Therefore, you need to interact with the Holy Spirit by fervent and open prayer, asking that He fill your heart, and that He enlighten your senses. Our Church has thus taught us to pray daily, during the Third Canonical Hour, saying: **“Do not deprive us, O Holy, Righteous Lord, from Your Holy Spirit, Whom You have sent on Your saintly disciples and holy apostles, in the third hour; rather, renew Him within us.”**

- ❖ The Holy Spirit helps us follow the commandments which we have learned; He guides us towards ridding ourselves of lusts, both which stem from the soul independently from the body, and which were inflicted on the soul through the body.

The Holy Spirit teaches man to keep his entire body in harmony - from the top of his head to the sole of his feet.

He maintains the eyes' purity of sight, the ears' peaceful listening, and the lips' refraining from gossip or slander.

He ensures that the tongue only utters that which is good and well-balanced. He thus does not allow any foul or inappropriate language to be spoken.

He maintains natural movement of the hands, so they may be raised for prayer and for rendering mercy and honour.

He maintains the stomach such that it has suitable limits for food and drink, ensuring that ingestion is in accordance with the body's needs, thus preventing gluttony.

He keeps the feet along the path of God's will, aiming to perform good deeds.

In this way, the entire body becomes attuned to righteousness, and submits to the authority of the Holy Spirit; the body changes gradually until it finally shares - to a certain extent - the attributes of the spiritual body of Judgment Day.”

St. Anthony the Great
First Epistle

Spiritual exercise

Memorize the various pieces of the Third Canonical Hour, and recite them fervently, inaudibly, especially during breaks between lectures.





THIRD: THE STRUGGLE ASSOCIATED WITH SANCTIFYING THE SENSES

Although sanctification is done by the Holy Spirit, the previously-quoted epistle of St. Anthony also states: “The struggle to acquire full purity requires, in matters of **repentance, that both body and soul fight together, equally and harmoniously.**” Furthermore, St. Paul says in this regard, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2:13)

The Holy Spirit will only work within us to the extent of our interaction with Him, through hard work and struggle. As mentioned previously, the first step in a life of struggle is prayer, coupled with the quest for a life continually filled with the Spirit, and a constant effort to keep the senses away from any potential source of offence. This will lead us to move towards, and to be filled with, all that is holy in the sight of the Lord.

1. The sense of sight

St. Augustine considers this to be the first element in a person's downfall. Here are some practical pointers addressing evil sights:

a- **Flee the place** where you feel you might weaken (sexually) before a particular person - the reason may not necessarily be that person, rather, your own internal weakness. Such an escape would be attributed to courage not cowardice, since you will have succeeded in resisting a strong emotion within you. You should,



however, not content yourself with this negative action; rather, continue with repentance (returning to God), prayer, and enjoying Jesus your Saviour, and looking forward to having innocent eyes which are not susceptible to being offended by anyone.

b- **Let not your eyes wander**, seeking erotic scenes; remember that David, the Psalmist, fell into sin through one careless glance.

c- Do not regard others searchingly, seeking sexual arousal; rather, remember that you should **regard those before you as family members** towards whom you have no sexual tendencies.

d- **Do not trick yourself** into believing that you are simply contemplating the person's beauty for beauty's sake; since beauty represents the absolute “good”. Beware of the disguised desire lurking behind it.

e- If you get the feeling that you are eyeing someone “abnormally”, in any given circumstance, lift up your heart to God crying, **“The Name of Jesus!” This will sanctify your looks.**

f- **Make sure to hang images of our Lord Christ** and the saints in your room and on your desk in order for you to remember the sanctity of whom they portray, and the purity of their lives.

f- Stay away from cheap bad sites, books, magazines and movies which depict romantic and inappropriate erotic scenes; **know that your time is much more precious than to be wasted on such nonsense.**



2. The sense of hearing

a- As far as practicable, **flee the company of scoffers**; this protects your ears from obscene, lascivious, or erotic talk, jokes or anecdotes; these will quickly recur to your mind at times of relaxation in your mental faculties, such as during daydreaming, sleep, extreme fatigue or sickness.

b- **If you are a music lover, know full well** that many have entered into the depths of fellowship with God through the beautiful church hymns, especially those sung during Passion Week. These are capable of satisfying your hobby while benefitting your soul.

3. The sense of taste

Make sure that food intake to your stomach is well suited to your health and to your physical activities.

4. The sense of smell

a- Remember that you should not indulge in adornment and worldly appearances; your preference should be a life of watchfulness and prayer, that would qualify **you to be a source of Christ's sweet-smelling aroma for those who are saved.**

5. The sense of touch:

Ensure, especially in crowded places, that your heart is raised to the Lord, that you call upon His name, and that your mind is focused on Him.

Finally, may the Lord grant that we always bear in mind, that all our body members and senses are the Lord's. Remember that you are a child of God, that you have been redeemed by His Son's precious blood, and that He holds you in high esteem; you will then have no difficulty in directing all your energies to work in full accord with the will of God.





4- The Incarnate God and the Life of Purity

- ❖ Glory be to You... Who have adopted Adam's perishable body and converted it to a source of life to the perishing.

You have descended from on high to the lowly, to hand out to them Your treasures.

Glory to Him, Who took from us in order to give us; we take from Him, in great abundance, that which is His, through that which is ours.

Indeed, through this "intermediary" humanity has acquired life through its helper.

You have found Yourself a body, and became as a slave, in order to offer us that which is acceptable to You, and that which gladdens us.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

Let us now have a closer look at the body from which you are suffering - which suffering is echoed by St. Paul: "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24) This discussion follows our preceding arguments concerning our misuse of God's gifts of "thought and senses," which He granted us to help us enjoy our fellowship with Him; instead, we used them as avenues for committing sin.



MY FRIEND, YOUR BODY IS A GIFT FROM GOD

This very body from which you are suffering, asserting that nothing good dwells therein (Romans 7:18), **is a beautiful gift offered to you from the Creator Who loves you and Who desires your well-being.**

But why, then, did this body become a gateway to sin?

Adam disobeyed his God; consequently, his body disobeys his soul, even though the latter may reject uncleanness, and yearn for a life of purity.

So what is the solution?

God, Who loves you, did not seize from you the body which continues to bother your soul. Rather, He sent His Only Begotten Son - the Creator - in the same body which you have. He came from a sinful pedigree, and was counted among the transgressors. He came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3) while He, Himself, was sinless.

He came forward and struggled for your sake in order to offer you triumph in your body, if you put on our Lord Jesus, meld with Him, and interact with His work. The following relevant quotations are by St. Ambrose and St. Cyril the Great:

- ❖ "Through His fasting and seclusion, our Lord Jesus intended to heal us from lust's attraction. Thus, for the sake of us all, He accepted to be tempted by Satan, in order for us to learn how to triumph in this body."
St. Ambrose
- ❖ "Christ triumphed over Satan, and crowned human nature with the crown of glory and victory."

St. Cyril the Great



PRACTICAL STEPS

1. Transposing the preceding discussion into the practical realm, we can say that our Saviour Jesus did not fast for us in order for us not to fast anymore, rather, in order for us to fast in Him. Put differently, fasting alone, without tying it to the fasting Christ, has no value other than subjecting the body and suppressing its senses. This will lead to rebellion and distress, and any resulting effects will disappear as soon as the fasting period ends.

Let your fast, therefore, be tied to Jesus your Saviour; do not restrain your voice, since He desires that you call on Him and that He call on you; cry to Him, and reproach Him whenever you suffer from lustful feelings or thoughts. Train yourself to cry out saying: **“My Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me!”** everywhere and as often as you can. Set aside for yourself “quiet times;” during those periods you should meditate on the Person of our Lord Jesus, on His love, on His passion, on His suffering for you, and on the inheritance awaiting you. You will quickly feel, on your own, the heavy yoke imposed on your body by those lusty and unclean thoughts, and you will spontaneously say, “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil that I will not to do, that I practice.” (Romans 7:19)

2. Fasting does not only mean abstaining from food; rather, say with the apostle: “I suppress my body and subjugate it.” Subjugation means that the body becomes an obedient slave serving its master. **Let this body and all its members become enslaved to the will of the Holy Spirit, obeying all the divine commandments.**

Your hands, eyes and all other members of your body are Christ's. “Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!” (1 Corinthians 6:15)

The upshot is that the body will no longer be a heavy burden on the soul, once the person is with our Lord Jesus. Rather, his hands will be raised in prayer, resulting in the soul praying, and in the spirit prostrating itself before its Creator, and rejoicing, as the tongue chants lauds.

My friend, there is no middle ground: your body is either Christ's or Satan's.

3. Do not claim rights for your body, and do not follow the old adage, “Give an hour to the Lord, and let your heart enjoy the next one.” Nothing stands to heal the ailing of your body better than having your soul in full fellowship with Him. It is true the body needs necessities, but I assure you that, on the other hand, **your body will rejoice in the soul's happiness, since this is the body's gateway to submission to the Lord.**

4. Let your fasting be accompanied by repentance and communion from the Lord's body and blood. This will edify you in Him, and Him in you. This way you will acquire peace, joy and triumph in Christ Jesus Who is with you.

5. Do not transform the feasts' celebrations into a springboard for the body to indulge in gluttony. The feast does not consist of food and drink; rather, joy and exultation in the Lord Who humbled and impoverished Himself for your sake. You will thus retain the purity and chastity which





you enjoyed during the fast. **Finally, do not trust this body - rather subjugate it always, and keep it under the Lord's control.**

May the Lord keep your body and sanctify your members, so that they become a source of blessing and grace aiding your soul towards its enjoyment of all that is heavenly, and its preoccupation with the Groom, the saints' Holy One, Amen.



5- What is Love?

Our Church, as a wise mother, maintains a constant, frank, dialogue with her children, concerning all their problems, even when they are too self-conscious to address such matters openly. The children, in obedience to, and complete trust of, their mother, are obliged to accept the Church's arguments - which stem from Christ's teachings - even though they might dislike what they hear, or it may require some sacrifice on their part.

THE PROBLEM OF LOVE

This problem is one of the most important issues our children face, and about which they hear from numerous sources. The Lord willing, I therefore aim to address several related topics, the first one, being "The concept of love."

THE CONCEPT OF LOVE

One of the Church's tasks is to rectify the cumulative effects of understandings which the world has injected into our minds; for this reason, St. Paul says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." (Romans 12:2)

Many people assign the label "love" to some social tendencies or natural instincts, particularly those experienced towards the other sex; even the Holy Bible, speaking to humans in terms they understand, uses similar terminology. At the same time, though, the Holy Bible makes a clear distinction between true love, and other feelings.



ATTRIBUTES OF TRUE LOVE

A loving person puts his beloved ahead of him; he gives up his life for the sake of his beloved and her/his happiness. The Lord Jesus has given us a practical lesson in love: “...**in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” (Romans 5:8) Christ came forward as a silent Lamb, He didn’t utter a word, He accepted to bear all our iniquities, and He endured all the blows inflicted on Him for the sake of His beloved. This is the sacrifice which differentiates between “**true love**” and “**lustful love.**”

Let us consider the example of a high school or college young man, who thinks, “I’m in love with so-and-so. She is suitable for me and I am comfortable with her. She would make a good wife for me.” In his fear of losing her, he proceeds to extract a promise from her to reject all other suitors and wait for him to graduate.

My dear brother, let me elaborate on that example and clarify its underlying meaning. **You are lusting after so-and-so and, because you love yourself, you desire that she become your wife to make you happy and comfortable, even at the risk of not realizing her own career prospects, and/or rendering herself unhappy.** Lust is not love; it is something emanating from within a person. It is a projection of one’s self onto another, and an indication of loving oneself in the other person.

Therefore, be honest with yourself and, rather than saying “I love her,” say, “I love myself and she is well-suited to satisfy my emotions, lusts, and heart’s desires.”



1. LOVE IS SELFLESSNESS, LUST IS SELFISHNESS

St. John Chrysostom wondered: Who, really, loved the other, was it Joseph or Potiphar’s wife? Potiphar’s wife loved Joseph, her heart clung to him, she hung onto his garment, until he finally left her his garment, but:

If you loved someone, would you force them to do something they hate, to the extent that they run away from you naked?!

If you loved someone would you bear false witness against them before the entire household?!

Potiphar’s wife despised Joseph, because she told her husband, The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me...” (Genesis 39:17) She had him jailed through her husband’s authority.

“On the other hand, Joseph who fled from her presence did love her “. He spoke to her kindly and never hurt her feelings. He said, “Look, my master...” as though he were telling her that she was his mistress and he was her slave. He refrained from saying “Look, your husband...” to avoid hurting her feelings by implying that she was cheating on her husband.

He did not lambaste her. Rather, he reminded her gently of both her and her husband’s graciousness...

He neither criticized her before the prisoners, nor did he narrate his story to Pharaoh.



When he was promoted to becoming second only to Pharaoh, he never thought of avenging himself against her, or even reproaching her.

Do you really love one of your relatives or classmates?

Then, let her lead her own life, and do not cause her heart to be occupied by lustful thinking, which would impede her spiritual and intellectual growth. Why do you fear her becoming betrothed to someone else? Again, if your love for her were sincere, you would desire happiness for her, whether you married her or not. The reason you want her only for yourself is because you love yourself.

My dear sister, do you love him? Then, do not offend him by dressing revealingly, or by speaking inappropriately; also, make sure you do not get drawn with him in conversations which incur the risk of ruining his life or stemming his spiritual growth.

OBJECTIONS

Some of you may disagree saying, “If this is love, then why did God create within us sexual instincts? Is there no love between a man and his betrothed, or between two spouses?”

First question: The sexual instinct, like all other instincts, is a holy gift, which should be used in accordance with God’s intended natural use for it. **It is not up to us to use this gift, granted by our Holy God, except in its natural application, at the proper time and having been sanctified by the Lord.**

Second question: Whether you are a man or a woman, projecting your love for yourself onto the person of your betrothed or spouse, is an indication that you are not a loving

person. The Church does recognize marital love, but **there is a difference between marital love and lustful love. Each member of a loving couple will sacrifice for the other’s sake.** Even in sexual relations, each of the two spouses will seek to satisfy the other in accordance with the Lord’s will, not with the intent of satisfying one’s own desires at the expense of the other.

The preceding brief account of the meaning of “marital love,” is undoubtedly quite different from the notion of a young man meeting a young girl, and feeling attracted to her demeanour or her physical beauty, through which attraction he might conclude that she would be an ideal wife satisfying his heart’s desires.

2. LOVE IS LIFE

A self-centred person who is constantly seeking to satisfy his body’s desires and tendencies, will have uninhibited, misguided, roaming eyes, whose only feedback to him will be that he indeed is in love.

a- Living spiritual love: Unless our hearts are opened up and filled with the Spirit of God Who indwells us, we will be unable to shed our self-centredness and to expend all our energies for the sake of our loved one.

b- God is love: In order to love someone sincerely, be it spouse, offspring, relative, or anybody else, we must surrender our hearts completely to God; this, in turn, gives us the true image of Jesus Christ Who gave Himself up for the world.





This is the kind of “living love” which will guide the young man towards full enjoyment of real life, living with an open personality, and vibrant energetic love, devoid of any selfish, concealed, desires.

OBJECTION

If all love stems from God, and pours into Him, does this mean that man should not consider marriage?

In order to answer this question, it should be pointed out that a young man living in true love would be active, outgoing and open to everyone in the Lord; upon marrying. This person’s relationship with his wife would be at a deep spiritual level, he would love her as a part of his body, and as a partner in her membership in the mystery of Christ’s body.

He would see beauty in his wife despite others’ failure to see it.

He would realize that she is the best suited person for him, since it was God, the bounty giver, Who granted her to him.

He would love his wife, offering her his full emotions in the Lord, without thinking of, or considering, any other.

He would continue loving his wife even if she were disfigured, or became bedridden for many years. Their physical relationship would be one of the Lord’s holy signs, but by no means the only tie between them.

That is the kind of love which edifies the souls of both loving and loved.



As for the physical, lustful, love, it is based entirely on the body plus whatever pertains to it (hence, wit, sense of humour, good taste, wealth, etc.); such physical love kills the spirit, perturbs the soul and, often, leads to weakening the body. This is a deadly love.

EXAMPLES

1. Amnon’s soul was trapped by the desires of his body; he looked at, and was enthralled by, the beauty of his sister Tamar’s body. The Bible says, “Amnon was so distressed over his sister Tamar that he became sick; for she was a virgin. And it was improper for Amnon to do anything to her.” (2 Samuel 13:1-2) Amnon became sick, and his condition worsened every day. Is not this exactly what we hear about many, who loved girls or women and whose hearts clung unto them?! They fall ill, and might fail in their studies due to their excessive preoccupation with the object of their admiration - not to mention perdition of the very souls for which Christ died!

Amnon managed to satisfy his lust for his sister through trickery, and he subsequently hated her more than he had loved her. He could not stand seeing her, and he kicked her out, despite her bitter pleas that he allow her to stay. His soul, which he had thought abounded with love, was now filled with anxiety, harshness and cruelty, to the extent that he shut out his sister in great shame.

He inflicted illness and worry on his body and soul, he ruined his sister’s psyche, and he wronged his father’s household by sowing in it divisiveness and great shame.



2. Samson, the mighty man, also allowed his soul to be enslaved by the desires of his body; he loved Delilah, succumbed to the lust of his body, and slept on her knees. (Judges 16:19) The end of this mighty man, who had vanquished many, was that he became fettered like a bull to a grinder in prison.

3. When Potiphar's wife saw that "Joseph was handsome in form and appearance" she "cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." (Genesis 39:6-7) When her body blinded her, she forgot all about her social standing, and pleaded with a foreign slave to commit wickedness with her, disregarding the sanctity of her marriage.

These are examples of people who allowed their souls to be blinded by their body's desires; their spirits perished, their souls suffered, and they even lost their body's aspirations.

My dear brother, award the first priority to your soul, for which Christ died, in order to be dead to terrestrials, and to exult in celestials.

3. UNCONCEALED LOVE

A living, giving, love, is unafraid of light; man proclaims it openly, just as Christ proclaimed His love for all on the Cross. Conversely, when David's heart desired the wife of Uriah the Hittite, he asked for her secretly but his evil was revealed, since "there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known." (Luke 12:2) Indeed, man can stoop so low as to boast, before others, of his lustful desires; this is especially true in the company of



a crowd his own age. On the other hand, this person stands to be ashamed of himself, since **he would have become a submissive slave to the body of a person. The Lord is able to free our hearts from all slavery, so that we may love all in the Lord, through Him, and for Him, in order that we may lead a life in the Spirit.**



6- How can I free myself from lustful love?

Here are some questions which preoccupy the minds of most of our youth:

1. What about a young man who is in love with a girl, and who is unable to free himself from that love? How can I free myself from a certain girl's love?

Undoubtedly, falling in love is not an easy situation to get out of, especially for a relationship which had lasted for a long time. However, we know of many young men who managed, through the grace of God, to sever a relationship unequivocally. The remnants of those relationships were external struggles waged against Satan-induced thoughts or dreams, reminding the person of past exploits, or attempting to revive within him dormant desires - what, then, is the path to victory? The path is summarized in the answer to the next question.

2. Given that love is an emotion, would willpower have a role, or would love dominate?

a- We must have **faith that, through the grace of God**, we will be able to liberate ourselves, however strong the feelings, ties and emotions may be.

b- A dumb animal behaves fully in accordance with its instincts, not being endowed with the willpower to challenge the course of nature. **But you, a human being, are capable of changing instinct's course, if you so wish, despite its strong influence, it should not dictate your behaviour.**

You might argue that, practically, you are unable to apply this theoretical viewpoint. I would counter that even though you might have willingly accepted to be enslaved as such, you still have (the power of God) the Lord's Cross through which sin is demolished, and with which your love and instincts are purified.

c- For this reason, and in order for the Lord to liberate you, you should fast and pray ardently crying, **"My Lord make me repent, so that I repent; render sin bitter in my mouth!"**

d- It is necessary to **find a substitute**: you love this girl because she is pretty, or well-dressed, or witty, how can you rid yourself of this infatuation? Contemplate the Lord's beauty and majesty, His gentleness and fatherly tenderness, and His bounties and blessings to you; love the One hanging on the Cross.

e- Be very strict with yourself; do not pamper your soul. If it is not drawn to Christ's love, contemplate death, and remember the awesome Judgment Day, and the fact that you are accountable for each word, deed, or unclean thought.

f- Remember who you are. You are God's creation. **Your body is the Lord's**. You carry the status of child of God. Your place is in the bosom of God. Repeat all day long: "Is it befitting for a child of God to think thus?"

g- **Be candid with your father in confession**. Talk to him; he is your father, your guide and your physician. Be open with him since sin abhors light and thrives





in darkness. The longer you hide it, awaiting more favourable circumstances for your confession, the stronger its grasp on you.

h- As far as practicable, sever your relationship completely with the girl, and do not allow your thoughts to wander back to her.

3. Is there any danger associated with a young man meeting a young lady among church goers, if he happens to have been deprived from his deceased mother's love?

The girl's presence in church does not necessarily mean that she does not err, or that she has lost her femininity. If you are in need of sympathy for the loss of your mother and her tenderness, then seeking a girl to make up for this loss carries three hazards:

a- Your expectation of the girl's sympathy or tenderness stems from selfishness on your part and, if offered, will be mixed with physical tendencies.

b- Such a quest risks eroding your personality, since many who have been deprived of their parents at an early age needed sympathy and tenderness, but, instead of their trying to fill this void from the surrounding community, **they channelled their energies to work and struggle**. Furthermore, many famous inventors lost their parents early in life, but they emerged in triumph not humiliation.

You, as a child of God, should not beg pity from another human being. Our Lord Jesus, your God, is capable of flooding you with His love. In fact, He does envelop you with

an amazing love. You only need to open the eyes of your heart to appreciate His tenderness towards you.

c- What is the goal or outcome of such a relationship? After marrying this girl, or any other, do you expect her to fulfill the functions of a mother? Or, would you not want that relationship to be based on love exchanged in Christ Jesus?

4. Despite my having loved everyone indiscriminately, a young lady became attracted to me, and I am not sure what to do, especially as she is a devout Christian.

How did you conclude that the girl is a devout Christian? It is likely that her attraction to you reflects a weakness in her life which needs rectification, not the other way around. If you really loved her in Christ, flee from her, for her and your salvation's sake. Finally, bear in mind that Satan tempted Christ on the temple's pinnacle; there is thus nothing stopping him from beginning his work between you both by way of being sympathetic to her circumstances. This is likely, even if she were a servant in church, and if everyone were to testify to her piousness.

It should be noted, though, that we are neither promoting full isolation from society, nor are we equating instincts with sin. Rather, the arguments presented above are levelled at the person who feels a particular attraction towards a certain person of the other sex. This is the relationship which requires complete severance. May the Lord grant that His grace work within us, and sanctify us unto the end. Amen.





7- Spirituality and Withdrawnness

The previous discussion addressing ways to rid oneself of lustful love, leads some of the youth to believe that every girl or woman must be regarded as an evil demon from whom we should flee. This perception, in turn, culminates in their withdrawal from their surroundings and society. In their view, a pious person should isolate himself completely from everything and everyone.

This is what we have observed in some youth who purport to be pious, and who believe that their piousness necessitates isolation from family, relatives, colleagues and society...

1. At home, we find our young man living in complete isolation under the guise of “piousness,” having withdrawn from all communications and fellowshiping with members of his family. He does not share in their troubles, happiness, or hardships, and considers himself to be the only person who prays, fasts, sacrifices, and meditates on the Holy Bible, **He preaches thus, and despises all deeds of his family members.**
2. Whether he be in an academic or business setting, he views all people as being “evil.” He flees socialization and is completely withdrawn.
3. He lives in isolation, as a secluded society within a

society; he has no interest in knowing anything about his surrounding community. Strangely enough, when blamed or questioned about his attitude, he considers that criticism to be the cross he has to carry for the Lord. This, in turn, increases his efforts at being withdrawn. Unfortunately all this propels him to be defensive both with others and with himself.

At the other extreme, we have a class of youth which perceives spirituality as being a vibrant lifestyle, unimpeded by rules or plans; they confuse liberty with unruliness and anarchy.

This group believes that freedom means doing what we want, in any way we want, unrestricted and unfettered. They have no problem sitting for hours on end watching erotic shows or movies, and they lack the impetus to get up and pray or study the Holy Bible. **This is all done under the label of “freedom” and under the pretext that worship is done within the heart, with no need for such things as prayer, fasting, studying, etc.**

A person in this group would allow himself to participate with friends and/or family members at a party in consumption of alcohol and drugs, considering this a part of his freedom. Again under “freedom,” or to engage in secluded, inappropriate, conversations with girls, in order not to be accused of being unduly moralistic. He would furthermore go along with others in laughter or depraved conversations, having sexual connotations, under the guise of “**embracing everyone.**”





Many of our youth stand before those two significantly different groups and wonder:

1. What do we mean, then, by spirituality? What is withdrawnness?
 2. Why do some pious people resort to withdrawnness?
 3. To what extent should I be open to others, and mix with them, and when should I opt to withdraw?
 4. To what extent should I associate with the other sex?
- May the Lord give us an opportunity to respond to those, and other, questions.

CONCEPT OF SPIRITUALITY

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24) Put differently, they prostrate and worship through God; hence, **spirituality is man’s attachment and adherence to God Who indwells him.**

It is the enjoyment of the Saviour’s Person in our lives, our increasing edification in Him, while offering all that is ours to Him.

It is the submission, within God’s hands, of our hearts, senses, emotions, members and all our souls’ and bodies’ energies.

It is full surrender to God, instead of “Me, Myself and I;” it is placing Christ ahead of me in all my thoughts, conversations and conduct.

It is walking along the Lord’s path and enjoying His work in us through prayer, fasting and studying the Holy Bible.



It is constant melding with the Lord in our lives, especially through the holy sacraments.

CONCEPT OF WITHDRAWNNESS

Withdrawnness, on the other hand, represents the exact opposite of spirituality; this is because it constitutes **the soul’s revolving around “Me, Myself and I.”**

For a withdrawn person, worship revolves around himself not around the Lord. His prayers will not probe the depths of his soul, soaring with it to the Lord’s heavenly heights. Rather, he locks himself up within his soul, seeking to submit the Lord to his own self. His prayers therefore only serve to appease his conscience and to elicit praise from others or even from himself. Such a person would not know how to talk candidly to the Lord as His Father. Fasting would only be practised to satisfy the person’s ego. He would talk much about himself seeking his and others’ admiration for his fasting and worship!

Finally, when that person confesses, he would neither be broken-hearted nor contrite before the Holy Spirit; rather, he would have lengthy accounts of his iniquities with his Father in confession, with no hint of regret or repentance. His primary objective is to solicit his confessor’s attention and sympathy. He might even go so far as to serve and to evangelize, without knowing how to preach repentance to his own soul. He delights in the appearance of his service, and in everyone’s interest in him and his work.

This is a picture of “sick piety;” it promotes the self, relies on self-righteousness, and the person remains



unrepentant. In fact, “piousness” is a misnomer. This is better described as isolationism; isolating the soul from others. The person thus does not adhere to the Lord as the Lover of mankind, and from thence to love everyone, Rather, he withdraws from society, even from God Himself, despite the **outward appearance** of worship and service. Engrossment is with material matters related to the service, without the ability to be preoccupied with the Lord.

In this case the soul and everything else is wrapped around the self.

WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY WITHIN THE CHURCH’S FOLD?

A spiritual person follows in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus. Our Lord Jesus indeed came into this world with principles which the world neither tolerated nor accepted. Despite the fact that this made Him a stranger in this world, He walked among the people as one of them with neither pride, disdain, haughtiness, nor contempt for anyone, no matter how they erred. **Our Jesus came for the world’s sake, not to condemn the world or be isolated from it. “For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son...” (John 3:16)**

Since His childhood, Jesus opened His heart to obey His parents, and He never exalted Himself throughout His service. He conversed with the Samaritan adulteress, He had pity on a harlot, He opened His heart to an outcast tax-collector, and He spoke with the young children. Finally, He spread His arms on the Cross to proclaim His love for all, and to proclaim His desire to serve everyone.

This is the Spirit of our God, and this should be the spirit of all who experience Him: to serve everyone and to be open to everyone with no exception. “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?... And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others?... Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is Perfect.” (Matthew 5:46-48)

This is perfection: our heavenly Father delights in humans, He loves and desires salvation for all. The sun of His blessings rises over all humanity, even over the heretics and those who blaspheme His Name. Similarly, **whenever God’s children meld with their heavenly Lord, their hearts burn with love for all their fellow humans**, even the hermits and those living in isolated monasteries. This is because those should be closer to God, Who indwells us and, consequently, their love for humanity should be greater than ours.

We learn those principles from our Church whose loving heart is open to all. During the Divine Liturgy, with our slaughtered Lord before us on the altar, and while the Church is preoccupied with the wondrous sacrifice, she asks the clergy and congregation to pray for the shepherds and flock, the leaders and troops, the elderly and youth, the sick and heavy-laden, the needy and the rich, and even the plants, herbs and wind.

The presence of the sacrifice on the altar opens up our hearts to embrace everyone, and to pray for our weakness and for the well-being of the entire world...this is not due to any worthiness or righteousness on our part, rather, to the love of Him Who loves the world, and Who gave up His body and blood for all.





Another marvellous facet of our Church's teaching, is that even those who have reposed in the Lord, continue to pray for us with their open hearts, while we also pray for them, although we may not know their names.

Analogously, each child of Christ and the living Church should be open to loving and serving all, even the enemies and trouble-makers.

Such humility, proclaimed by the Lord and revealed by the Church, does not constitute random or haphazard openness; **its clear aim is that the knowledge of truth, and the presence in the bosom of God, be attained by all, for the ultimate enjoyment of eternal life.**

The Lord accepted the adulteress, who was caught in the act, and who was sentenced to be stoned to death by the religious community; the same humble Lord strongly rebuked the Pharisees, Sadducees and lawyers - not because they angered Him or desired to kill Him, rather, in order for them to know the truth and return to their senses.

The same love which drove Christ to converse for hours with the Samaritan adulteress, led Him to stand silently before Pilate, to give him a chance to reconsider his position.

Whatever we say about Christ applies to the Church, His bride; through her love and openness for all, she opens her doors indiscriminately, and lovingly isolates the deceitful for their chastisement and for the protection of her children.

To recap, we can say that our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church open their arms wide for everyone, while

ensuring that they do not deviate from the truth, even if this entails driving them to the Cross.

Hence, every true son should be open inwardly to accept salvation, and also open to others, since the Lord died for them, regardless of their origins, religion, habits, mannerisms, and regardless of the extent of their love or absence thereof.

There are others, however, who do frequent church services but, in reality, are quite distant from the Church; unfortunately, their purpose is just to socialize with a community in isolation from the outside world. This gives them satisfaction in accordance with their perception, and not in accordance with God's will. They mingle with believers in order to hear their praise, while concealing their faults under ostentatious expressions which they themselves do not comprehend, such as: **spiritual silence, spiritual inclinations to monasticism, spiritual seclusion, etc.** In so doing, they fail both in meeting with the loving Lord, and in developing a full understanding of those spiritual meanings in orthodoxy.

To correct such misconceptions, a person needs to be alert and fully cognizant of his/her faults and weaknesses, rather than attempting to couch them in misleading expressions. Furthermore, owning up should be done candidly with the person's confessor, at the foot of the Cross, and in the light of the Holy Spirit Who indwells us. The goal is the salvation of that person's soul, not the consolidation of his/her social standing. The personality will be edified as a natural consequence.





The Church opens her doors hospitably to all; however, unless we submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit at the hands of our confessor, we will remain enclosed, and our worship will degenerate to blind fanaticism, self-righteousness and disdain for others. The Church stands for the exact opposite of those principles.

8- Christian Youth and Patriotism



Christian youth harbouring a spirit of love, will love their country from the depths of their hearts. Their quest for a permanent, eternal, heavenly abode and their feelings of alienation in this world, simply edify and support their patriotism. St. Mark says in his gospel concerning Christ: “Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him.” (Mark 6:1) Rather than negate the parenthood of our parents and the fatherhood of our spiritual fathers, our heavenly Father supports and edifies those relationships on deeper spiritual foundations; similarly, our love for our heavenly motherland accentuates our love for our earthly native country, as faithful patriots. This is deeply enshrined in the most sublime meaning of loyalty, neither for the purpose of appeasing men, nor in quest of praise; rather, for the Lord’s sake. The words of our Lord Jesus will forever proclaim to us: “**Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.**” (Mark 12:17)

The Church instills the spirit of patriotism: The day of your birth as a Christian, when your mother had you baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, your spiritual father, the priest, recited the following prayer over the water in the baptismal font:



“Remember O Lord the leader of our land, keep him in peace, justice and power; grant that all the Barbarians and nations seeking war be subjected to him; grant him fertility; speak in his heart; accord him peaceful thought towards us and in Your Holy Name.”

Furthermore, in each Divine Liturgy (of St. Basil), we hear the celebrant saying the following before the prayer of reconciliation: “O King of peace, adorn in all peace the leader, troops, chiefs, generals, ministers, multitudes, neighbours, and all our places of ingress and egress.” The celebrant also prays for them during the inaudible litany of the Gospel. This is the spirit of the living, loving, Church, which she acquired from her Groom Jesus, and from His disciples and apostles. In so doing, the Church carries out the commandment of St. Paul the apostle: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority...” (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

THE YOUTH’S POSITION WITH REGARDS TO WAR

Some may wonder, “Didn’t our Lord require us to love our enemies? What, then, should be our position with respect to war?”

My dear friend, you must differentiate between personal rights, hence those situations where you have the right to behave/react as you see fit, and communal rights, entrusted to you before God. You are accountable, not only to society but also to God, for any negligence and breach of trust pertaining to the latter. Indeed, a person could strike you, and you love

him, and respond to evil with good; however, if someone attempted to rape your wife, then any laxness or leniency on your part would be a crime against your family and before society. More importantly, it would be a crime in the eyes of the Lord, and your blood would be the price.

As a faithful Christian, you are bound to fulfill dues to your country. It is your responsibility to submit your body between the hands of those who defend your country and plan its well-being. You will then advance in warfare courageously and forcefully; you must not fear death, since you have no authority over it. You must advance in your struggle with all your energy, for the sake of your loyalty to your motherland. For this, you are accountable before men and God.

A young Christian is a patriotic person, whose patriotism stems from the depth of his/her soul, and is anchored in his/her boundless trustworthiness.





9- The Academic Life of a Young Christian

1. YOUR VIEWPOINT WITH RESPECT TO STUDYING

A true young Christian, who has known our Lord Jesus, will follow in His footsteps: “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” (John 5:17)

Work is part and parcel of a person’s worship. For this reason, Adam submitted to the law of “work” and worked in paradise, despite the availability of all his physical necessities, to the extent that he really did not need to work.

For you, a young Christian, “work” translates to “studying.” This is the “talent” offered to you by society, and for which you are not only accountable to society, but also before the Lord.

My dear friend, do not marvel at this. Do not complain about the “excessive” time which prayer, fasting and service consume, leaving no time for studying; this perception is wrong.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was faithful in His work with Joseph, and submitted fully to Joseph and Mary. He only started devoting His life to His ministry at the age of about thirty. **Are you more zealous than our Lord, such that you abandon your studies in favour of worship or evangelization?**

For this reason, the apostle instructs you: “**He who works not, eats not.**” This is true even if food were available. You would be undeserving of such food.

A young man who starts his academic year by being lax in his studies will have invalidated all his prayers and service, although he might have felt peace, comfort and joy. He will have tricked himself. God rejects the lazy and/or lax person. He who is unfaithful over a little, how can he expect God to entrust more to him?

Through our Lord’s grace, your faithfulness in your studies qualifies you before God; God appeared to Moses amidst his work, He blessed Jacob because he was faithful in his work, He chose David who shepherded his father’s flock faithfully, He sent His angel to the shepherds who were watchful in their task...

2. BEING ORGANIZED AND METICULOUS

Do not manage your time carelessly. Your days on earth are very few; you need every minute, and every second to edify yourself and your brethren.

Starting with your first day of study be diligent in assigning and spending your time. This is a talent granted to you, and remember to “give God what is God’s and to give Caesar what is Caesar’s.” There is a time for studying, a time to discharge duties towards your beloved native land, a time for prayer, a time for service, and a time for family-related obligations.

Be diligent in everything like your God, “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace...” (1 Corinthians 14:33)





3. YOUR WITNESS ARE ALL FOR THE LORD JESUS:

The Church is one vibrant body; her members consist of elders, men, women, youth, and children. They are all linked in spirit, and each one has a specific task and mission. One neglectful person will increase the burden on the rest of the body.

4. WHAT IS YOUR MISSION?

a- As far as you are concerned, establish a life with the Lord. Experience a life of repentance, coupled with the prayer: “Make me repent, O Lord, so that I may repent.” Struggle so that His grace might manifest itself in you, regardless of the uncleanness in your heart or thoughts. Rest assured that this is the first and greatest mission, since laxness in any member will impede and burden the entire body.

Always remember that the word of God is your daily bread. Without it, you will be unable to grow or live on your own.

b- As far as your family is concerned, your responsibility is to love and serve them, and to be a source of blessing for them. However, beware of assuming the position of teacher, preacher, or reproacher before your elders. through prayer, love and service, you will be able to win them over to Christ.



c- With respect to your friends and colleagues, remember the words of our Lord: “And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.” (Matthew 10:42)

d- With respect to your motherland, remember the Lord’s instruction, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” Your native land needs your strength and loyalty.





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