

But Seek First the Kingdom of God

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

This part of the Biblical text in particular is often repeated throughout the days of Lent, because at the height of Lent is abstaining from all that is of the flesh; the most important need of the flesh being food, drink, clothing, or the needs of the body.

So, when we fast, we put these matters to the side, and we maintain only what is the bare essentials of the body.

Of course, if the Lord would alleviate the burden from us; that is, this mortal existence, then we would be blessed, because this burden of the flesh is born with the flesh, from the time a child is born, and the preoccupation with the body, his food, drink, dwelling, growth, illness, is something is never-ending.

However, when we fast, the entirety of our concern shifts to that which remains, and that which is greater. It shifts towards our souls, our repentance, the purifying of the soul, heart, and thoughts.

At the end of this biblical text, the Lord points to the creation and how He cares for it in all its needs.

So, man as a created being is given to be cared for, both with regards to his body and to his entire existence. Jesus says: 'all these matters the Gentiles seek after, but your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things' (Matthew 6:32)

So even when the things of the flesh are given to us, we take it from His hand. Of course, our connection with our Lord Jesus Christ has changed our thoughts completely.

When one lives in Christ, compared with one who is not living in Christ, the two are different. They may look the same, they may both eat, but they are different. One eats for the glory of God, even in the physical matters. He said, 'Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God' (1 Corinthians 10:31).

So even the necessities of the flesh have become for the glory of God. He says at the end, 'But seek first the kingdom of God'.

That doesn't mean that man should wish for the Kingdom, saying I want to go to heaven. It's a good thing to wish for; however, seeking the kingdom is an action, it is a labour.

Just like overcoming and caring for the flesh does not mean lazing in bed, not working, and expecting to find the means for the flesh to be clothed. So what should one do? Well, He says, "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (Genesis 3:19).

You shall work so that you can attain the needs of the flesh. So when I say 'to seek the Kingdom of God,' it is not a wish, but it is labour. One should be striving for the Kingdom with all his power, and with all his abilities, with all his energy, and with all the desire of his heart if he indeed seeks the Kingdom.

So, one should be preoccupied with his Labour, for example, how he will manage his life and his livelihood. A student studies so he can succeed and graduate, so he can earn money and can create a future. It is a series of things that build upon one another. However, it is all connected to the same thing, which is building a future.

Therefore, if one is truly concerned with his eternal life and the Kingdom of God, then the flow of his life will be a string of attentiveness towards the Kingdom of God. So the singular events all point in the same direction, which is seeking the Kingdom of God.

So then I may wonder, why wouldn't I go in the same direction as other people, to go to such and such a place or carry out such and such a job? And how come other people are doing so? But you will find these are not aligned with the path of your life. There will be obstacles to the Kingdom, and matters that take a person off course, as though he goes off the right path.

The worldly preoccupations are distractions for the mind and tend to disturb our peace. There is one who is in the world but the worldly matters are not concerning him, as though he is a stranger. But there is another in the world, and his thoughts are all worldly.

So Christ, to Him be the Glory, when he elevates our material earthly thoughts to heaven, if the truth is told, He relieves man greatly, and He takes away such a heavy burden, the burden of the worldly distress. The Book of Proverbs says 'Anxiety in the heart of a man causes depression' (Proverbs 12:25).

He is brought low because this anxiety is a weight. Colloquially, we say he carries a load, meaning it is pressing down on his heart, to the point he can't breathe, so he can't lift his head, or he can't sleep from all that he bears.

When the Lord says 'do not worry,' this is a freedom of choice, but some say they can't do it. If there is reliance on God and belief in Him, then one would be so comfortable knowing he has put the matter in God's hands. The Lord said 'Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?' (Matthew 6:25).

Who can add to his height? Who gives us our stature other than Him? So He says if you cannot change the small things; will you change the bigger matters? Indeed, if you cannot change a hair on your head, then this big load you are carrying is so destructive to your life.

No one can change a thing. The Lord, to Him be all glory, liberated us from this burden and allows us to live free and joyful. So I trust in his plan for my life, more than my own understanding. I also trust that God provides care for me more than anyone else in this world. In this case, I would not worry.

This is not, however, a matter of laziness, apathy, or incompetence. When our fathers the saints believed this, God carried them in all their needs. When you read the story of Elijah, God said to him, 'I will care for you.' He hungered, and God said: 'I will care for you, one way or another, and he did indeed'.

There were many times when Elijah fasted 40 days and 40 nights. But he knew God would care for him. The waters of the brook dried up, and there was no food, but he cared for him in an unbelievable way. The crow, who is known to be a snatcher of food, was made to serve him and provide for him. Then there was the poor widow, who had nothing to give, again was the source of provision for him. Did God ever abandon his children? Never!

When the fathers believed and abandoned the world and had nothing to rely on for provision, did God leave them? Never!

Within the past 2000 years (referring to His holy church), He has not abandoned anyone. But we need to believe very well that his promises are faithful, honest, and true. He said 'I will care for you, do not worry. If you worry and choose to carry the burden yourself then I will leave you to carry it.' So it is in our best interest to live out this Gospel. 'Do not worry'.

They lived in the mountains, deserts in all parts of this Earth, did He forget them? Never! Some of them could not be easily found, in total isolation, amongst the mountains. St. Paula lived in isolation for over 70 years.

I don't mean by this just simple stories, but rather living examples because it is true and not a figment of the imagination. In those 70 years, did God abandon him? Never!

So these great examples in our life and within the church lead us to be very practical, putting matters in God's hands joyfully, since these burdens cause all kinds of mental health issues, like

depression, anxiety, failure, and in times even suicide. Since thoughts accumulate in us, and there seems to be no way out of all these worldly pressures weighing us down, causing the soul to be destroyed.

But then you find someone truly believing in God Who cares for him, Who cares for the birds of the air and the plants of the field.

A long time ago, I was visiting one of the monasteries, I asked a father, who was like an angel, a wonderful man; I asked him, do you pray for us? He said: what are you asking? We even pray for the grass that grows in the ground. I mean we pray for that which seems to have little value. Christ said, 'look at the birds of the air, they fly around happy without a worry'.

So what are worries? it is like tying down this bird with a string, you make him lose his freedom. The worries bind the human soul. But people ask what can I do? I say, no matter what you do, what can happen; you should let God do it for you.

Believe me, miracles occur daily in the life of a person that relies on God, truly. The plans of God are amazing. I put my worries on God.

One of my (spiritual) children came to me few days ago. He had a court case that was entangled with a very terrible thing, and that indeed depressed his soul because of great injustice. The matter was to be heard on the 9th of March (Pope Kirylos' feast), and he talked to Pope Kirylos saying: don't you see the matter? You need to come with me, don't leave me. Few days before the date set for hearing, the plaintiff dropped the charges, saying that he would not be attending. He told me: I only asked him (Pope Kirylos) to come with me, and the whole case was dropped. Because this man was reliant on God. He had trust in Him.

That which seems impossible to me is not impossible for God. This is why burdens bring down the body, leading to concern for the flesh, fear over the flesh, fear of disease, fear of the future, and saving up to secure our futures. All these things make a person weak in faith.

He said, 'O you of little faith'. Let your faith be strong, practical in everyday life, to believe that we are strengthened by Divine power, protected by grace, and have attained Godly security.

When he says 'the hairs of your head are numbered' (Matthew 10:30). 'Not a hair of your head shall be lost' (Luke 21:19). Is there any hair that does not fall? Is there a person born who will not die? However, the feeling that God is in my life (keeps us strong).

Father Bishoy Kamel, when he began chemotherapy and his hair fell out, and Tasoni Angel (his wife) would weep, he would say 'why are you weeping? This hair falling was given (The Lord's) permission to do so.

All of us will fall asleep, but a person with such faith, no matter the circumstances small or big, good or bad, but his reliance on God and faith in Him, will keep him unto eternal life.

To God be the glory, forever and ever. Amen