

Building an Orthodox life

Chapter 1

1. The most important words in the prayerbook *The beginning words of prayer book.*
2. Problems with western Christianity.
 - The wrong understanding of understanding
 - Crime and punishment mentality
 - **Loud mind and broken heart (what does this mean?)**
3. **The knowledge of Christ is not a mental exercise nor a “work to be done”**
4. No matter how smart you think you are, no matter what books you have read, no matter how many Holy fathers you have read, no matter how much scripture you memorize
.....**Information will not save you or protect you.**
5. **Must QUIET the mind...the endless stream of thoughts so that the Heart can “hear” must Fix your heart**
6. **Fix your noticer (what is a noticer?) your noticer will not outshout your mind!**
7. **Location, location, location!**

The knowledge that the soul seeks is found in relationships and experience

- Seek God in relationship!
 - *Do you want me to tell you about a great meal or feed you a great meal*
8. Allow a spiritual father to help you.
 9. **We are seeking a greater sense of God’s truth, not validation of our own truth**
 10. When we ask God to show us, or manifest his glory, then we are asking for him to strip away anything that prevents his approach. God will not harm us, he will not give us a wisdom that drives us away.
 11. **The stripping away must come first!**
 12. We must be willing to be naked and not ashamed.
 13. Love the gathering of prayer
 14. **Do not try to be monastic! It will leave you disappointed. Because you are not monastic!**
 15. Be very careful reading monastic literature (ask your spiritual father if you should read something.)
 16. **Be Ascetic!**
 17. Have a spiritual father. Seek a relationship with the spiritual father.
 - Confess regularly
 - Confess the thoughts that have taken control of you
 - If the priest talks, listen and take note.
 18. Do not need to recreate Mother Russia or the Byzantine Empire, be careful of churches that do, they will insert national culture for Christian culture.
 19. Take up your cross:
 - Self denial
 - Suffering
 - Sacrifice
 20. Christian culture is found in CULT, seek relationships, avoid isolation.
 21. Importance of the terms.....Apprehend & Comprehend
 22. Steer clear of theological books
 23. Create a dictionary, then use it frequently.
 24. Does posture matter?
 25. How often must I go to Church?
 26. Be cautious of books written by people **who do not have “St”** in front of their names. They often pass off opinion as truth. Even well known people must pass the test of time.

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Chapter 2

- The Orthodox Church is not primarily an institution (*Page 29*)
- The sense of Dialog that goes on (Our storyline) our Identity.
- Relating to God as power and Person. *Forcing God to be impersonal power (38)
- Where there is power (Page 38-39)
- Relationship and the fall (Page 37-38)
 - Discernment
 - The ability to know right from wrong.
 - “He gave them up to eating the fruit of having their own way.”
- “Strongly held opinion describes prejudice, not faith”.(39)
- The west and the need to be “Right”, in the East we are to be righteous!
- Humanity and divinity meet (41)
- We are not invited to return to our pre-fallen condition....(42)

Chapter 3Distraction

- Most of the time we seek distraction!
- Name some distractions that we engage in.
- Distraction in church.(52-53)
- The ephemera.....(55)
- Church can be nothing but distraction.... (59)
- We come face to face with our ability to concentrate.
- We must learn to lay aside all earthly cares.
- We do not go to church to understand. Rather, we go to church to meet God. (62)
- Pick our the main themes in wht is being sung or chanted.....
- Punctuate with the sign of the cross or a bow.
- Continue to recenter (often)

Struggle

27. Recognize the struggle! The struggle is not with GOD. If the struggle were with God, we would loose immediately. What is the struggle with?
28. Powers and principalities in high places.

Frederica Mathews Green.....

**“The key to spiritual growth, in the Orthodox Christian path,
is gaining increasing control over your thoughts.”**

*Part of the solution is to enlarge the strength of your “noticer,” the part of your mind.....
that watches your mind. Instead of being swept off your feet by seductive thoughts, you
gradually become able to see your thoughts as they approach, at a distance, and evaluate them,
deciding whether or not to entertain them. The further the distance, the better.*

*It’s not good or fruitful to get upset about them and frightened, or angry at yourself. You just
have to turn them aside and think about something else. You can picture how that might work, in
practice; thoughts that you succeeded in ignoring would weaken. And you would get stronger, in
relation to them.*

Swiftly turning your mind to something different prevents the thought **from taking root**.

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This approach can work for almost any habit you want to change.

If you have tried to give up a bad habit, you know that it goes right back to thinking about the thing you desire; if you think about it, you make yourself increasingly miserable.

You have the right to do this, and **you have the ability to do this**, though at first it may seem weak.

Practice makes it stronger!

It is effective in any arena of life, and especially key to spiritual growth.

I bring it up because people can greatly reduce the suffering caused by unwanted desires by building up the strength of their "noticer," and getting better at recognizing unwanted thoughts and deflecting them.

The concept of deflection.....Deflection is KEY

The ability to recognize thoughts at a distance.(focus on this)

Arrows in the wall.....and where they come from.

Example.....Story of repeated lust (what I watched last night)

Movies, books, places, etc.

Beware of the obvious (there are some things that are incompatible with Christ)

(Story of the dirty glass of water)

(Some things can be triggers for you and not others.)

The gift of the Conscience. (Abba Dorotheus)

How to activate the Conscience.

Your spiritual father will always remain in a place where your conscience is active, always tells you what you already know. Rarely will someone tell you something that surprises you.

We like to make excuses in our sin.

Avoid exposure!

Avoid the causes, what triggers sin. For example, if you have diabetes and you are supposed not to eat sweets..... how can you stop if you constantly wonder inside or around stores that sell sweets and pastries.....

Tricks to stop smoking, etc.

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Fasting and prayer

- Fasting and prayer are two powerful weapons for the spiritual struggle of every Orthodox believer.
- First, the weapon of fasting was used by our Lord Himself. As we know, the Lord fasted for 40 days without eating anything, and at the end of this fasting, He fought with Satan and defeated him. He also gave us instructions on how to fast, so that our fasting could be effective (see Matthew 6: 16-18). That is why the Church has established days of Fasting for all believers, such as Wednesday and Friday of each week and the Great Lent, which we are presently going through.
- Unceasing prayer and fasting were exercised by the Saints of our Church
- The Church has wisely defined how fasting should be done, so that it would not harm anyone's health. (Our ecclesiastical Calendar mentions the days of fasting from meat or dairy products, etc.).
- It is necessary to clarify here that fasting is not an end in itself, for example, such as love is, but it is a means of fulfilling certain goals.
- One may ask: "What are the goals of fasting?" Here is the reply:
 - **Obedience to God.** Adam and Eve did not obey God and ate the forbidden fruit, and as a result, they lost Paradise. We obey the voice of God, we fast and gain Paradise.
 - By depriving ourselves from some delicious food, **we strengthen our will not to do what we are attracted to.**
 - By limiting the amount of daily food and avoiding animal foodstuff, physical passions weaken and pure prayer is assisted. The Fathers of our Church say that fasting gives wings to prayer! (This is the experience of the Fathers)
 - By avoiding expensive food, drinks, sweets etc., and limiting ourselves to the simple food we need, we save money, which in turn we give as alms to others who cannot meet their necessities.
 - Avoidance of food is also accompanied by avoidance of drinks, entertainment, and other events, so there is more time for spiritual meditation, prayer, study of the Holy Bible, reading Orthodox books that feed us spiritually.
 - Finally, let us also add the advice of St. Basil the Great:

"Let us fast a kind of fasting which is pleasant to God. True fasting means alienation from evil, self-restraint of the tongue, abstinence from anger, separation of desires, gossip, lies and perjury. The lack of these is true fasting"
(Homily on Fasting).