

## WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

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Last week, brothers and sisters, we began a series of sermons on the *PHILOKALIA*, an anthology of spiritual texts collected from Christian scholars from the fourth century to the fifteenth century. We defined *philokalia* as *love of beauty and goodness*.

Now, in order to understand such deep insights into the spiritual experience of centuries upon centuries of Christian living, it is important to understand the concept of *spirituality* - *πνευματικότητα*. 'Spirituality' is to the soul, what 'fitness' is to the body, and what 'education' is to the mind. In other words, it is a healthy, nourished, vibrant, cultivated condition of the soul.

If we do not exercise the body, we have no fitness; if we do not exercise our mind, we have no education; if we do not exercise the soul, we have no spirituality. People go to the gym and they exercise, they grow stronger, they feel fitter and virile. But how true is it, that the other two aspects could often be lacking. How often do we see brawn, but no brains. A similar thing can be said about academics and people of knowledge and science. How often do we see brilliant minds in atrophied bodies or detached, and distant, and even desensitized to what we might call humaneness (*ανθρωπιά*).

But *spirituality*, what an altogether elusive state of being! ...When do we see it?... Can we even identify it if we saw it in someone?... How rare indeed! What is it?... What is spirituality?

Here is a quote from the *Philokalia*: "*The heart itself is but a small vessel, yet dragons are there, and there are also lions; there are venomous beasts and all the treasures of evil. But there too... is God, the angels, the life and the kingdom, the light and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the treasuries of grace - all things are there.*" (Ps. Macarius).

In other words, in here, [point to the heart] there is a whole world - the spiritual world - the spiritual dimension. Most of us, keep it closed, hidden, lost,

forgotten... in fact, most of us convince ourselves that this dimension does not even exist.

We always hear the phrase *body and soul*. *Body* refers to what is material and *soul* refers to what is immaterial... our thoughts and our feelings for example. In the Orthodox Christian Tradition we dissect this further. We have the body, and then the mind - the realm of the intellect, and then the heart - the realm of the spirit. These three are of course a trinity, they are in union. But the dichotomy allows us to better understand our inner being.

Lets take this deeper... lets go back to basic linguistic etymology. In both English and Greek, the basic building block of the concept "spirituality" has to do with *breathing*:

*pneo* - I breathe;

*eispneo* - I breathe in;

*pnoe* - breath;

*empneo* - I breath in, but also inspire.

*pneuma* - spirit;

*pneumatikoteta* - spirituality.

So what is so special about breathing?... Breathing is a reflex. It happens on its own. We may not notice it, but it is there, happening in the background. We can learn how to control it... swimmers, divers, and singers for example, but we cannot stop it. If we stop breathing, we die. St John, the golden mouth, Chrysostomos uses the image of breathing to describe spirituality:

The Sun gives forth light; it cannot help doing so. Animals breathe in and out; they cannot help doing so. Fish swim in rivers and the sea; they cannot help doing so.

*What, then, are the things that a Christian cannot help doing?*

*First of all, a Christian cannot help praying.* To be a Christian is to regard God as a loving Father; and it is natural to talk and listen to one's parents.

*Second, a Christian cannot help praising God and giving praise to Him,* To be a Christian is to affirm God as creator of the universe; and when a Christian looks at the beauty and glory of what God has made, praise and thanksgiving pour from the lips.

*Third, a Christian cannot help being generous.* To be a Christian is to acknowledge that everything belongs to God, and that human beings are merely stewards of what they possess; so they naturally want to share their

possessions with those in need. *Fourth, a Christian cannot help but reading the Scriptures* and also studying the insights of other Christians. To be a Christian is to rejoice in the power of the Holy Spirit; and the Spirit speaks to us through the insights of our spiritual brothers and sisters..."

And so to have a healthy spirit, to be spiritual, we need to be aware of the spirit, nourish the spirit, cultivate the spirit, let the spirit grow. Which brings us to that Christian idea of *growing up, "maturing to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."* (1 Corinthians 13).

Baptism represents our spiritual birth. The Philokalia uses the image of a newborn baby, to describe how growth occurs after baptism. Possessing all the limbs it will ever have, the baby is already complete. Yet it still has to grow. Thus it is quite true to say, that we receive the life of the Spirit through baptism. Baptism is indeed valid and true. Yet we still have to make progress by growing in the new life. Only so, will the Spirit grow in us and become manifest as It makes us perfect.

Finally, growing up has to do with development, has to do with change, but change for the better. We need renewal, we need to start fresh. The Greek word for temple, or the church building is *naos*, and *naos* means *the ark*, the ship, like Noah's Ark. But with Noah's Ark, writes St John Chrysostomos, *"the rooster entered the ark a rooster, and a rooster it departed. The wolf entered the Ark a wolf, and a wolf it departed. But when someone enters the ark of the Church, they enter a rooster and depart a dove. One enters a wolf and departs a lamb. One enters a caterpillar and departs a butterfly."* Amen

Next week, we will talk about the key that lets us enter that realm of the spirit we were talking about today. That key is none other than prayer.