

Sunday, January 2, 2011

The Inner Life

The inner life is a special personal relationship with God. Inner life is the state of being attached to Him and enjoying His fellowship. The stronger and more rich our inner life, the more we grow in the love of Christ and succeed in witnessing to Him. Focusing on our inner life is a key reason to succeed in our spiritual life in general.

In approaching the New Year, where we are used to examine ourselves to rectify our path and to raise ourselves to a higher spiritual level, we need to pay close attention to our inner life. Just as we pay attention to our external lives, our worldly success, and our outlook before of others, we also ought to pay attention to the purity of our hearts before God and the edification of our inner lives and being filled with the grace of Christ. **Ignoring the inner life creates a serious unbalance in our lives, and this will certainly affect our future and eternity in a negative way.**

* The importance of the inner life:

1- It draws God's attention, as He said: *"man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."* (1 Samuel 16: 7). He has commanded us to, first, purify our hearts inwardly, then the outside would be cleaned as well (Matthew 23:26) The Psalm also confirms that the glory of the children of the king starts from the inside. Therefore they take care of their inner beauty and the adornment of their hearts rather than their outwardly adornment, *"The King's daughter is all glorious within; Her clothing is interwoven with gold."* (Psalm 45:13) *"Do not let your adornment be merely outward...rather let it be the hidden person of the heart"* (1 Peter 3:3-4)



2 - It is the true arena of spiritual strife. In it, we take the necessary power to succeed in all outwardly affairs. If we are able to strive and succeed in our prayers in our inner chamber, we will attain the power needed for self-control, peace and composure during tribulations, and wisdom in words and actions in all situations. Thus the scripture would be fulfilled in us: *"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city"* (Proverbs 16:32).

3 - It is like the root to a tree or the foundation to a house. It is the unseen dimension that supports the visible dimension, it strengthens, supports, and nurtures. As the root anchors the tree to the ground and provides it with nourishment to grow and bring fruit, and as the foundation supports the house and holds it in place, like wise, the inner life fuels man with spiritual energy and nourishes him with the divine grace to grow and bring fruit.

* How to give heed to our inner life? How to begin?

Giving heed to the inner life starts with an honest confrontation with oneself and to thoroughly examine it in the light of the Biblical commandments, the commandment of love, the commandment of purity, the commandment meekness and humility, and the commandment of strife in prayer, etc. This means that we need to have a focused daily quite time with the bible, then pouring ourselves before God in a deep prayer, asking for the power of repentance. The prayer chamber is the primary place where we conduct our spiritual inner work, through daily prayers and earnestly examining oneself. Therefore, giving heed the prayer chamber is the backbone of inner life.

To give heed to the prayer chamber is to simply dedicate a fixed time for prayer every day. The Church provides for us a wonderful collection of prayers that are taken from the Bible, especially from the book of Psalms such that we use them in our prayers, known as the Book of Agpeya. These are the prayers by which the saints of the church were raised and it is the prayer that makes saints. It fills the heart and mind with the spirit of prayer, and enriches the inner life. Additionally, memorizing the Psalms arms us with spiritual ammunition that fills our innards, and gives us an opportunity to pray anywhere and anytime.

Moreover, there is an important aspect of the inner life; it is self-examination and self- condemnation, then admitting sin before God and before the father of confession more frequently. This helps keeping the inner life fervent in spirit, because when sin abounds, the love of many grows cold (Matthew 24: 12.) But if we guard the purity of our hearts, we can, not only preserve our spiritual fervency but also, grow it and strengthen it with frequent confessions.

Honoring the prayer chamber is the foundation of inner life, and the sacrament of repentance and confession is the safeguard necessary to grow to be pure in heart which enables us to see God.

Fr. Yohanna Naseef

fryohanna@hotmail.com

St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Palatine, IL

