

Pastoral reflection, October 2023: We were created to show the Trinity and Christ's love by sharing with others and striving for the common good: In the Orthodox Christian spiritual life, our hearts are the spiritual center of our existence. Our heart is not a place filled with mere sentimental emotions. It is the place in which we each of us — body, soul, mind, and spirit — is able to stand in God's presence. But the heart is also the place of all kinds of passions and thoughts that will close off this meeting place between ourselves and God if we yield to them. Our heart is the inner battle ground of good and evil. To resolve this battle, we are called to live like Christ, to "put on Christ" (Rom. 13:14), or to become imitators or living icons of Christ.

However, striving to be a living icon of God is a bit like being a wind spinner. The wind blows, the spinner turns, and it passes the wind on. A well-made spinner doesn't try to hold onto the wind or hoard it. It responds to all breezes. But we humans have to be very vigilant about the "winds" and "breezes" to which we respond. There are the many breezes of our own passions and thoughts, seductive influences of our society, and daemonic temptations. These breezes blow us away from God, our neighbors, and ourselves into the prideful individualism of seeking our own self-interest above everything else. If we respond to these breezes, we become obsessed "selfies" cut off from any fullness of life. To counter these winds and breezes, we must attend to the breeze or wind of the Holy Spirit who, with the Father and the Son, sanctifies us and renews our lives. For wind of the Spirit directs us to the kingdom of heaven, which Christ tells us is even now at hand, in which we are enabled to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and minds, and to love one another as Christ has loved us. We are to be perfected and deified as living icons of Christ in community with others. Metropolitan Kallistos once wrote:

The human being is made in the Trinitarian image in the image, that is to say, of God who is not just one, but one in three. Man is therefore called to express himself, as God does, in community or communion... We become ourselves — fully human according to the divine image — only when living in and for others. We become human by sharing ("The Mystery of the Human Person).

This means that we live not just for our own personal good but for the common good of our fellow humans. As St John Chrysostom powerfully wrote:

But how may we become imitators of Christ? By acting in everything for the common good, and not merely seeking our own.... Let no one therefore seek his own good. In truth, a person (really) seeks his own good when he looks to that of his neighbor.... What is their good is ours; we are one body, and parts and limbs one of another. Let us not live though we were torn apart. Let no one say, "such a person is no friend of mine, nor relation, nor neighbor, I have nothing to do with him, how shall I approach, and how address him?" Though he be neither relation nor friend, yet he is a human being, who shares the same nature with you, has the same Master. He is your fellow-servant, and fellow-sojourner, for he is born in the same world (Commentary on Gospel of St. John).

Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Albania well expressed how this living for and with others in community should shape our own "liturgy after the Liturgy."

The Liturgy is not an escape from life, but a continuous transformation of life according to the prototype Jesus Christ, through the power of the Spirit... since the Liturgy is the participation of the great event of liberation from the demonic powers, then the continuation of Liturgy in life means a continuous liberation from the powers of the evil that are working inside us, a continual reorientation and openness to insights and efforts aimed at liberating human persons from all demonic structures of injustice, exploitation, agony, loneliness, and at creating real communion of persons in love (cited in Ion Bria, "The Liturgy after the Liturgy")

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