

Repentance & Prayer

Will postpone Spiritual Mourning until next
week

Ascetic Endeavor and
Journey toward
Virtue

Journey Towards Virtue

- * Can we agree that salvation is about a **Life in Christ?**
- * What does this require?
 - * **Purification and liberation from the passions**
Observance of the divine commandments.
- * This seems so difficult. What do we need to do?

Asceticism

- * What do we know about our **Body and soul**
- * They are **integral**. What does this imply?
- * Our journey must be an **ascetic endeavor**.
- * Asceticism properly understood strives toward the development and **transfiguration of the entire person** according to talents God has endowed us with.
- * **Not** simply a mental exercise.
- * More than Faith is required

Ascetic Endeavor

- * Necessary for **everyone**, not just monks.
- * Involves primarily **repentance, prayer, and fasting**.
- * Is this an effort to oppose our true nature?
- * No! Not in opposition to the body of human nature.
- * Does this mean we have to give up our current life and retreat somewhere?
- * What do we do if we want to participate in a marathon race, or excel in a sport?

Ascetic Endeavor

- * What is its purpose?
 - * To release the body and human nature from sin and passions which divert the natural energies of our soul contrary to it.
 - * Undoing mental programing etched in our brain
 - * Lifts us above concerns of this world
 - * Like physical exercise to condition the body.
- * Directed against the movements of the body that are **contrary to true human nature.**
- * Through ascetic endeavor we put ourselves in a position to find our true self.

Ascetic Endeavor

- * Heard of Mid age crisis?
 - * Face reality of death and seek meaning of life.
 - * Can move forward or back at this time.
- * As we search what do we find as ultimate goal in life?
 - * To grow in the image of God according *“to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph 4:13) until Christ is formed in us, Theosis.
- * Demands some extra effort

Ascetic Endeavor

- * What makes this possible?
 - * Baptism, but after Baptism with our free will what happens?
- * Faced with our passions and the attacks of the devil.
Our work has just begun.

Ascetic Endeavor

- * Gregory says,
*“The Lord has given us rebirth through Holy Baptism and sealed us with the grace of the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption, but He **allows our body to remain mortal and passionate.***
- * *And although He has cast out the evil counselor from the treasure chambers of the soul, He **allows him to attack us externally** so that the anyone **renewed** according to the New Testament... **who lives in good works and repentance,***
- * ***despising the delights** of this life, **enduring what is painful** and being trained by the attacks of the adversary,*
- * ***is prepared** to receive immortality and incorruptible good things to come in the new age.”* (Homilies 16)

Ascetic Endeavor

- * Gregory sees ascetic endeavor as a **preparation**, a **way of life** by which we can **transcend** the pain of the Fall in the light and hope of **our resurrection**.
- * Gives us the possibility to live out the death to the world through our life in Christ, to **transcend our fears of death**.
- * Does this seem a bit heavy?
- * What is meant by death to the world?

Ascetic Endeavor

- * Gregory: *Gradually he reduces and cuts away his eagerness for things below and **transfers his longing** from what is visible, physical and temporary **to what is invisible, spiritual and eternal.*** (Homily 16)
- * Instead of worldly success and pleasures we **seek a union with God** and His grace and joy

Ascetic Endeavor

- * Gregory describes two forms of asceticism: **outward** and of the body and **inward** and of the soul.
- * Bodily hardships aim at **mourning and repentance**.
- * Fasting is one of the most important for body. Why?
 - * To “*wither the desires, to humble the soul, to alter hatred, to extinguish wrath, to blot our rancor, to train and cleanse the mind and to labor for and purify prayer.*” (Homilies 12)

Ascetic Endeavor

- * The Fathers do not give permission for lengthy and physically exhausting fasts. We are to receive nourishment daily but avoid satiety and overeating.
- * Must consider one's special needs and bodily health. Distinguish need from excess. Seek **nourishment** not excess or pleasure.

Ascetic Endeavor

- * **Prayer** is the form for the inner soul.
- * The Lord stressed that when **prayer and fasting** are linked together one encounters a power that is great.
(Matt 17:21)
- * We seek Purification, a **pure heart**
 - * means **elimination of passions** and a reorientation of the powers of the soul to God.
 - * not easy task
 - * Done by **repentance**, sorrow, struggle and guidance from an experienced spiritual father coupled with **prayer and fasting** and participation in **sacramental life** of Church.

Spiritual Mourning

Spiritual Mourning

- * Important topic as goes against American “feel good” culture.
- * What is Spiritual or “godly” mourning?
 - * A **painful but gladsome state** through which the believer must pass if he desires to live the true and abundant life in Christ.
 - * Period of **Lent** in the Church is often seen as this kind of a period of godly mourning.
 - * A recognition with sorrow of our sinful condition.

Spiritual Mourning

- * St Gregory himself lived a life of spiritual mourning. He would cry out continually to God, “*Illumine my darkness!*”
- * He says when mind (nous) is freed from everything connected with senses, it **ascends** above quest of earthly things and we then see the “*odious mask*” that the soul has acquired from its wandering amid earthly things, and **we desire** to wash away its stain with **tears of mourning**.
- * As we progress we gain greater capability to see our sinfulness. Thus Gregory’s call to “*Illumine my darkness*”.

Spiritual Mourning

- * This mourning is seen as **fruit of grace**.
- * Also assumes **cooperation or synergy** of man.
- * Must struggle and labor for **humility, self-reproach, hardship, fasting, vigil**, and above all **prayer**.
- * The experience of **stillness** enhances our diligence in our labor for the virtues and our struggle to attain godly mourning.

Spiritual Mourning

- * This mourning is not a sickly state or despondent state.
- * Provides us with the **preconditions for spiritual joy**, consolation and the “*gift of gentle gladness*” and our loving relationship and communion with God.
- * What is this mourning for?
 - * For **Paradise lost**, what Adam and Eve gave up.
 - * we realize what was lost and our true nature

Spiritual Mourning

- * Who is this different than the kind of sorrow we have from the many painful trials of our life?
- * Also seen as **spiritual poverty**. This goes hand in hand with spiritual mourning.
- * Gospel can lead us to realization of the spiritual poverty in our lives.
But with repentance the soul feels joy of the Gospel.
“Your sorrow shall be turned into joy” (John 16:20)

Spiritual Mourning

- * Our worldly sorrow, the kind experienced when we are deprived of things of this world, is a foreshadowing and beginning of the eternal mourning to come.
- * Those who choose not to repent and mourn in this life will feel it in the next.
- * Mourning blessed by the Lord not only attracts God's consolation and mercy, but it also **bears fruit with the pledge of eternal life**, while it guards the virtues cultivated by the soul.

Spiritual Mourning

- * Gregory says,
*“this is **godly salvific sorrow**, when we accuse ourselves for all the wrongs that we have done and by no means blame anyone else, when we sorrow over ourselves and when through the confession of the sins we have committed and through sorrowful contrition for them, we become reconciled with God.”* (Homilies 29)
- * Self-reproach **guides the soul to the fear of hell.**
Brings to mind the terrible punishments that the Lord has described in the Gospel and that become even more terrible when they acquire an **eternal dimension.**

Spiritual Mourning

- * In Orthodox Tradition ascetic endeavor is interwoven with mourning.
- * Without **contrition of the heart** it is impossible for anyone to be released from the passions.
- * Why would this be so?
- * Our contrition releases the soul from passions the the soul experiences a **spiritual gladness** of heart.

Spiritual Mourning

- * In our sorrow or contrition we recognize our shortcomings and our attachment and enslavement to passions.
- * How is this a release?
- * Have **knowledge of how we are bound** and it is our own doing and now desire to work to overcome our sorrowful condition.
- * We have **discovered what constrains our spiritual life**. We can see the way back.

Spiritual Mourning

- * The Lord tells us
“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matt 5:4)
- * Paul writes,
“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted.” (2 Cor 7:10)
- * With **sorrow and a contrite heart** we are now prepared to act to make changes in our life that will bring us closer to God.
- * Describe how you understand spiritual mourning. How does this differ from low self-esteem?

Repentance

Our first step in Purification

The first teaching of Christ was “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**” (Matt 4:17)

Repentance

- * How do you understand idea of repentance?
- * Comes from Greek metanoia (μετάνοια) which means change of mind.
- * a compound word of preposition 'meta' (after, with), and verb 'noeo' (to perceive, to think, the result of perceiving or observing).
- * The preposition combines the two meanings of time and change, which may be denoted by 'after' and 'different'; so that the whole compound means: **'to think differently after'**.

Repentance

- * Metanoia is a **change of mind** accompanied by regret and change of conduct, "change of mind and heart", or, "change of consciousness".
- * A change in the trend and action of the whole inner nature, intellectual, affectional and moral.
- * Is a change in mind, heart, and life wrought by the Spirit of God.

Repentance

- * Repentance is maybe a mistranslation - it more than a having a feeling of remorse over past actions.
- * Recognition with a contrite heart of how we fail to live up to what God intended for us coupled with a commitment to make a change in our life through the grace of God and our cooperation with this grace.
- * What is a key description of repentance in the New Testament?
 - * Parable of the prodigal son found in Luke 15:11

Prodigal Son



- ✿ *But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, **I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.**”’ And he arose and came to his father.*
- ✿ What does this say about Repentance?
- ✿ **“I have sinned”** - admitting sin
“I am not worthy” - repenting
“Make me one of your hired servants” - promise to work and serve Him.

Repentance

- * Gregory sees our **worldly life** as a **period of repentance**.
- * Its the way we recover from Fall according to Scripture and Fathers.
- * Think about significance of following:
God allows every **sinful** person to live & have a chance to repent, a chance to change and he will help.
- * What does this imply?
 - * We should **not despair** or **deny our state of sinfulness** - this is how the devil leads us away from God and permanently separates us from Him.

Repentance

- * Is **our greatest guarantee** God will receive each of us and **have mercy** on us.
- * God's **love** is so great that He even allows for the repentance of those who have fallen into serious sin.
- * Examples from Scripture?
- * If a sinner decides to turn away from sin and return to God he **will not** be denied eternal life and salvation.
- * We have this **freedom to choose** between the way of life and the way of death - It is a **permanent** feature of the present life.

Repentance

- * Gregory warns that we must be aware of our **little sins**.
Why?
 - * Leads to greater sin.
- * When & where do we experience sin?
 - * Our **whole life** is subject to sin,
 - * Implications?
 - * Must live every moment with **watchfulness** and **repentance**, constantly **seeking grace and mercy of God**.
- * Repentance, this change in us, is the **beginning** and **foundation** of life in Christ. It is what leads us to a new way of life.

Repentance

- * Repentance is given as a promise **before** Baptism, experienced **at** Baptism and remains necessary **after** Baptism.
- * At Baptism we are called to confess that *“we ally ourselves with Christ who is good and above all good and renounce the evil and arch evil enemy. We promise to cling to God’s beneficial commandments with all our strength and to refrain from every evil thing and way of thought.”*
- * Baptism is a burial and resurrection with Christ Himself
- * Afterwards we are called to do what?
 - * **Go forth in repentance** and fill life with its fruits.
 - * What are the fruits?
 - * **Virtues**

Repentance

- * We are no longer subject to temptation of the tree of good and evil in Paradise like Adam and Eve or even God's command not to eat of the tree, but what is a similar command we are now subject to?
- * We are commanded to **repent, to change.**

Repentance

- * Saint Gregory writes
- * *We were expelled from the land of divine light, we were justly shut out from God's paradise, and we have fallen into this pit where we are condemned to dwell together with dumb creatures without hope of returning—in so far as it depends on us—to the paradise we have lost.*
- * *But he who initially passed a just sentence of punishment or, rather justly permitted punishment to come upon us, has now **in His great goodness, and mercy descended for our sake to us.***"

Repentance

- * Out of His love God became man to teach and redeem that *which is similar by that which is similar*.
- * To save us Christ offered the redeeming commandment of repentance:
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt 4:17)
- * These were also the words of John the Baptist since repentance is the **foundation** of a life lived in Christ.

Repentance

- * The entire tradition of the Church stresses repentance referring to a deep inner and outer change in man.
- * Not some **short lived** contrition arising from the awareness of a sin that has been committed.
- * **Constant turning to God** seeking recovery, forgiveness, healing and support in undertaking the spiritual struggle.
- * **New frame of mind** and spiritual course that must accompany us **until moment of death**.
- * Path for a **dynamic transition** from the unnatural state of passions and sin to the natural state of virtue.

Repentance

- * St. Gregory put it simply,
 - * *“Repentance is
hate sin and to love virtue,
avoid what is bad and to do what is good.”* (Homilies 59)
- * Get rid of bad habits and create good habits.
- * Simple?
 - * Double movement:
Utter repulsion of sin combined with intent to **do what is good**, returning to do God’s will.

Repentance

- * For Gregory Repentance is not a routine or mechanical change but a **renewal** of human nature.
- * How does this differ from going to court to pay a fine?
- * How do we do this?
 - * Gregory: *The man repenting with all his soul reaches God by both his good predisposition and his opposition to sin.*
- * Not an external gift or some superficial state.
- * It is deep and personal. A personal departure of the soul from sin and arrival at God's presence.

Repentance

- * Repentance is both a **beginning** and **end** and the very **aim of this life**.
- * **Everything** we do should be done in this context. Rejecting sin and embracing good seeking inner change.
- * How can we make this part of “everything we do” ?

Unworthy of God's Mercy

- * What precedes repentance?
 - * **Awareness of our sins.** Must see our shortcomings and be sorry (contrition) before God.
- * Must **truly believe we are unworthy of God's mercy** and to be called His son, we are like prodigal son.
- * We attract God's mercy by an awareness and sense of our sinfulness and a desire to change.

Three stages

- * St Gregory identifies three stages in repentance.
 - * 1. Awareness of our sins
 - * 2. Self-reproach
 - * 3. Sorrow on account of our sins.
- * This **godly sorrow** leads us to a redeeming confession and sincere supplication to God with a contrite heart promising to abstain in the future of this sin.

Repentance

- * Repentance is a new condition in the life of man accompanied by certain consequences that in biblical language and the writings of the Fathers are called “*the fruits of repentance.*”
- * The first fruit of repentance is **Holy Confession.**
- * In Holy Confession the believer’s **soul is healed and purified** creating a new life.
- * Important recognize the **sacramental nature** of Holy Confession.

Repentance

- * Gregory stresses need for a humble frame of mind, compunction and spiritual mourning.
- * Yearns for righteousness, seeks purity and becomes vessel of peace.
- * remains patient and forbearing while in persecutions, reviling slanders losses and whatever else he suffers for truth and righteousness.
- * Feels joy and thanksgiving.
- * Hears the One Who blesses the humble, the meek, those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness”, the pacemakers, the merciful and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

Way of Repentance

- ✦ Not like getting a parking ticket or committing a crime.
- ✦ It's missing the mark. Not being what God intended for us to be and making a complete change of life.

A return - to join with God in His household.

Renewal of our baptism

- ✦ It about desire, zeal, love and relationship.



Way of Repentance

- ✦ Repentance must be **reflected in action**.
 - What kind of action?
- ✦ Time, work, ascetic effort, struggle supported by God's grace to practice virtue.
- ✦ Requires work of **divine grace** - Divine love pulsing in one's heart.
 - ✦ What is Grace?
 - Illumination of our inner being by Holy Spirit that allows us see our separation, our spiritual desolation, our sinfulness in eyes of God.
- ✦ What do we need to do with this illumination?
 - ✦ We must use our free-will in cooperation with grace - Synergia - to do His will.



Way of Repentance

- ✿ Which comes first, repentance or Confession?
- ✿ 1st comes Repentance and **then** Confession.
- ✿ Confession comes when we know our sinfulness and are prepared to confess with our spiritual father as our witness seeking aid to make a change in our life.

Way of Repentance

- ✦ Confession is **NOT** a **chat listing our sins** as if we had too many parking tickets and want mercy from the judge.
- ✦ **NOT** seeking **relief from guilt** that we feel burdened of.
- ✦ It **IS** an action because we **love** God so much.
- ✦ **IS** revealing a sickness we know we have in our soul, and enslavement to a passion, where we act separate from God.
- ✦ We lay bare our soul, reveal our wounds, our sickness and our personal pain and our longing for God's love and forgiveness.



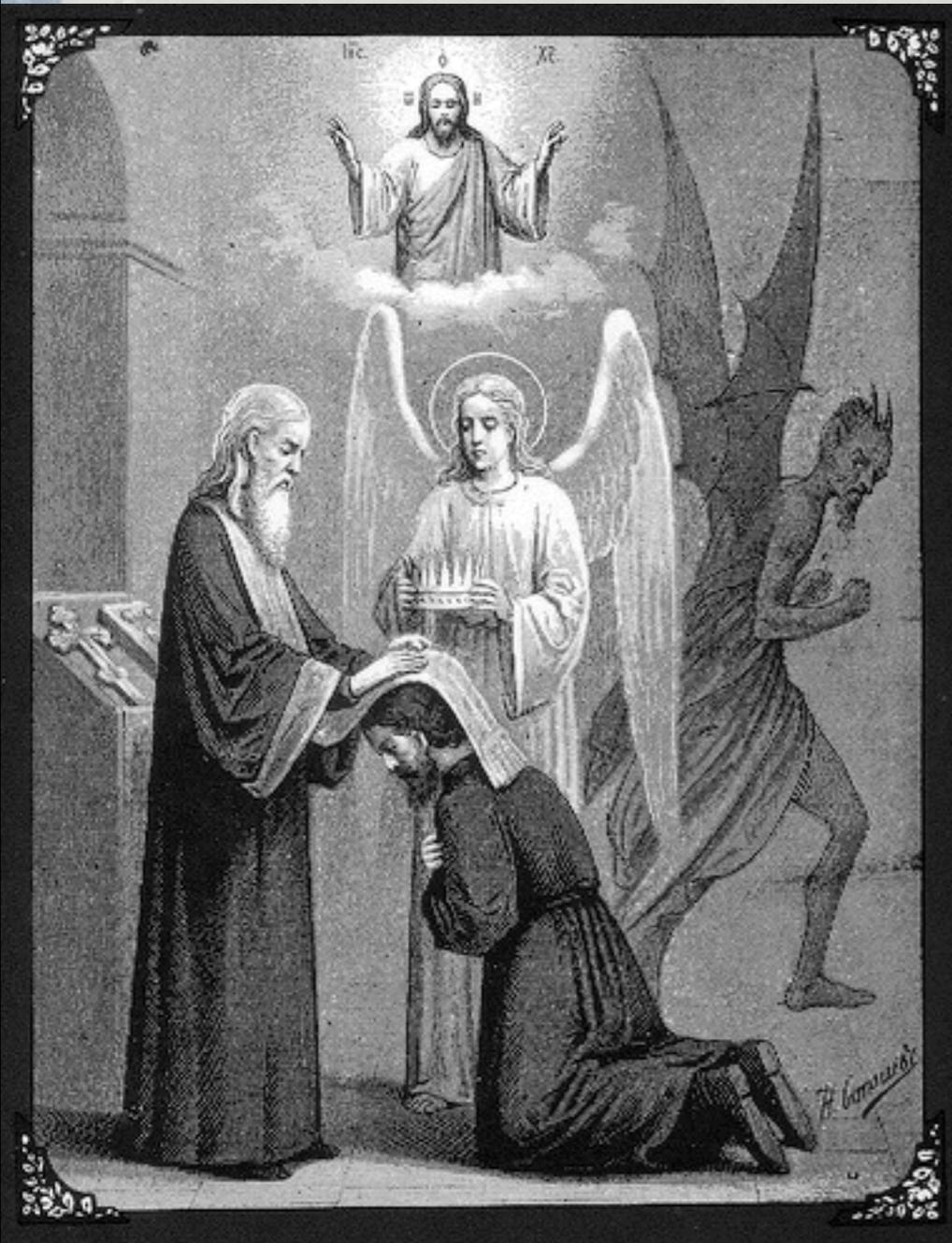


Mystery of Repentance

- ✦ Mystery for the Remission of Sins
- ✦ Remission of sins is bestowed through the mercy of God through the intermediary of the Priest, after we offer our repentance of our sins.
 1. Confession of sins before a priest
 2. Prayer of forgiveness pronounced by the Priest.
- ✦ An act of mercy for our spiritual benefit.

for edification, and not for destruction

(2 Cor 10:8)





Mystery of Repentance

✦ Instituted by Christ



He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:22-23)

Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matt 18:17-18; 16:19)

- ✦ Priests are the instrument of God's mercy. Sins are remitted not on their authority but in the name of the Holy Trinity.

The Order of the Sacrament of Confession

- ✦ Trisagion Prayer
- ✦ Penitent says: Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I confess before You all that is in my heart and mind, both hidden and known, that I have committed this day. Wherefore I beg of You, righteous and merciful Judge, remission of the grace to sin no more.
- ✦ Priest says: My brother/sister, whatever brings you before God and to me, you relate not to me, but to God, in whose presence you stand.
- ✦ Penitent then makes oral confession.

The Order of the Sacrament of Confession

- ✦ Priest puts his stole over the penitents head and says:
- ✦ My spiritual child, what you have confessed to my humble person, I who am lowly and a sinner have no earthly power to remit, but God alone.
- ✦ But because of that divine word, spoken to the Apostles after the Resurrection of our Lord saying,
- ✦ *“Whosoever sins you remit, they are remitted, a those you retain are retained,”* we make bold to say whatever you have related to my lowly self, and whatever you have failed to relate, whether through ignorance or forgetfulness, may God forgive you in this present life.

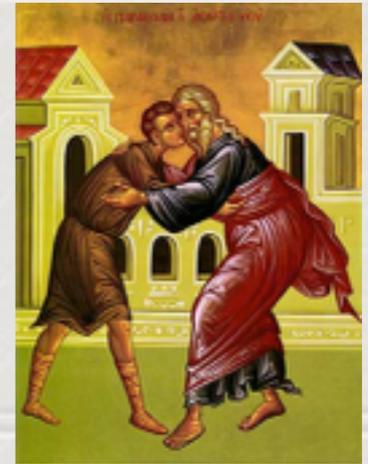




Mystery of Repentance

- ✿ Priest will give you guidance to help you change.
Often called penance
Is to help you.
- ✿ Must forgive yourself.
Burn the written list you used.
- ✿ Carry out the guidance you received.

After Confession



- ✿ *The Father called his servants, ‘**Hurry!**’ he said. ‘**Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet.**’*
- ✿ We are again clothed in the white garment of our baptism.
- ✿ God restores us into full and perfect communion with Him and welcomes into His home once more as a member of His family.
- ✿ The Book of Life is wiped clean of all sinful deeds.

After Confession

- ✿ Take special care immediately after confession.
- ✿ Many feel unburdened but confession is not like a drug.
- ✿ Now have greater consciousness of our sinfulness
- ✿ Need greater watchfulness of ourselves as well as boundless love of God.
- ✿ Priest does not have a magic wand.
Still need to make **our effort** to change our ways.
- ✿ Repentance is a **never ending journey requiring our full effort.**