

Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal 5:24)

Do you not know that you are the temple of God dwells in you? (1Cor 3:23; see also 1Cor 6:19)

What we know about the Soul

Any description of the soul involves much which we do not know as it remains a mystery. The greek word Psyche is used in many ways by Jesus and the Apostles in the New testament. It is used to mean life, to describe the spiritual element in our life, the whole person. In the Old testament it is used in an allegorical way as the breath of God breathing Life into His creation of the first man.

But what is most commonly believed by the Church fathers are the following. First the soul is not separable from the body. The body cannot exist without the soul. It is the life giving element endowed with the power to act and the will. It is associated with the mind and in some cases thought to be the same as the mind. It is something that is not totally conscious there is a hidden part which is the place where Christ and the Holy Spirit reside within. This inner most part of the soul is often referred to as the heart. There is no single place that is the soul as it intermingles everywhere in unity with the body. We make an error when we think in dualistic terms of a separate soul and separate body.

The soul being created is not eternal. The immortality of the soul comes from the grace of God based on the resurrection of Christ and the coming resurrection of the bodies. Commonly we think of the soul as immortal separating from the body at our death and then waiting to be reunited with the body at the time of the resurrection. Its immortality comes from our union with Christ. It is ones life in Christ that makes man immortal.

The natural stance of the soul is to concentrate on God. But in our times the soul has lost its control to the body and is dominated by worldly concerns and its bodily demands. Today this is much new research on the brain with some materialist promoting an atheist view with this knowledge combined with the theory of Evolution. But the knowledge of the brain is not in conflict with what is taught by the Church Fathers. In fact much of what we know can help us understand the struggle to overcome the passions.

It is easiest for us to think of the mind as the soul. The term commonly used by the Church fathers is nous. John of Damascus calls the nous the eye of the soul and is its purest part. ¹We will use these terms nous, mind and soul interchangeably. Science of psychology tells us that there are aspects of our being that are hidden to us and that we can delve in to the depths of the mind and uncover information about our own beings that seemed to be hidden from us. We know that the brain which is the physical aspect of the mind is the most complex thing known to man. In the brain are over one hundred

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billion neurons that are linked to each other via 10,000 synaptic electro chemical connections. We know that are specialized parts of the brain and that the brain is changeable. Our experiences can reprogram these connections and the brain is constantly adapting to meet changing demands. The challenge we face spiritually is breaking down physical connection in our brain to free the soul so it can constantly concentrate on God. Repetition is key in changing these connections.

The condition that the Church Father describe for us is a sickness of the soul where we have become dominated by the desires of the body which become what are called passions. To find our unity with God we have to free the soul from these domination by these passions. There are then ascetic practitioners that are like physical training that help us to free ourselves from this condition.

Romanian theologian Staniloae describes our situation as follows. There is an innermost part of us that is hidden from our normal consciousness. This is referred to mystically as the 'Heart.' (From here on we will simply use the word heart to refer to this inner most place) When we start on our spiritual awakening the heart is almost completely hidden. The door to his place is closed. We can think of this as having a closed heart. It is closed because of our sinful condition or our separation from God and our inability to live a life consistent with the teachings laid out in the Gospels. Our challenge is to open this door to the heart and enlarge it. We have to fill this space with the Holy Spirit and allow it to work in us. It is this inner spirit that is the Christ that is working in us as mentioned in scripture. This we receive when we receive the seal of Chrismation along with our baptism. We have to protect it once it has been opened to make sure our thoughts don't cloud our vision and clutter up the entrance way. Think of it as a secret room or cave in the depths of your mind and being. It is also the highest point. It is very deep and very high. It is hard to get to. It has a door that is closed. Inside is a potential of spirit that can enlighten us. Our challenge is to find this place and open the door allowing the light of Christ to fill and the Holy Spirit to enlighten all our actions and then to make this place the center of our activity, to turn it into the control room of our being.

Now this is a gross oversimplification but we can only use metaphors to describe the workings of the soul. The only way to fully understand is through your own enlightenment where you come to know God through a union with Him and then you will have your own way of describing it or you won't feel any need to describe it. You will just know. So the only reason for this is to help those who have not yet come to this place in their spiritual growth to help them walk down a path that will lead to this understanding. Remember this will all come naturally with grace once we gain control of our passions and with humility love God unconditionally.

We will use from here on the terms soul and heart of the soul.

We know from Scripture that God is revealed in the heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt 5:8) Paul says that God has caused His light to shine "in our hearts to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of

Jesus Christ. (2Cor 4:6) He also prays “that God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your hearts being enlightened that you may know...” (Eph 1: 17-18)

What are these passions?