

WEEKLY MEDITATION

Last Sunday at our parish feast day dinner, we were blessed to have as our speaker Dan Christopoulos of International Orthodox Christian Charities. Dan spoke very well about prayer, and I would like to highlight two of his points. First, prayer must be honest. Say what you mean, and mean what you say! Our Lord Jesus stresses the same point when he writes; “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.” (Matthew 6:5) The word ‘hypocrite’ meant an actor, someone pretending to be something on the outside, which they weren’t on the inside. In other words, these people liked to put on a show with their praying. Our Lord Jesus condemns this kind of prayer. He also said, “When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” (Matthew 6:7) Rather, our Lord said that those who worship the Father must worship Him in Spirit and in truth. (John 4:23-24) Whatever else this means; it certainly means that prayer (being a part of worship) must be honest.

The second point of Dan’s that I would like to highlight is that prayer is meant to be from the heart. If one were to read the ascetic (spiritual) writers of the Orthodox Church, one would find that they talk much about the ‘gift of tears’ and ‘prayer of the heart.’ Without getting into technical details on what exactly these are, both of these imply prayer that engages the whole person, prayer that is fervent, from the depths of our being. Mental, intellectual prayers that do not engage the emotions do not reach deep enough.

Of course, for the rank and file of us, the prayer of the heart and the gift of tears are quite beyond us. So we need to pray the best we can, even if it is a far cry below the teaching and example of the spiritual (ascetic) Fathers and Mothers and the saints of the Church. Nevertheless, if we strive to be honest before God (and men!) and do our best to pray from the heart, we will be on the right path.

Fr. Stacey

