



HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH

THROUGH THE CROSS JOY HAS COME INTO ALL THE WORLD

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SEPTEMBER, 2011

Volume 6, Number 1

GUARDING THE THOUGHTS, GUARDING THE HEART

Hieromonk Calinic (Berger)



One of the major themes in the Philokalia and the writings of the Holy Fathers in general is that of the “guarding of thoughts.” A thought is a seed which, when planted in the heart, can affect the totality of not only how we act, but of our entire attitude towards life, towards a particular situation, towards others and even towards

ourselves. Thoughts are powerful, and can either motivate us or totally discourage us.

For this reason, the Orthodox Fathers placed great emphasis on the guarding of the thoughts and the guarding of the heart. They recommend a constant vigilance over oneself effected by perpetually standing before God in the depth of one’s heart. Here, each thought is brought before Christ to be judged. Unworthy thoughts are expelled from the mind. More simply, we need to pay attention to our inner monologue. If we give place to negative or defeatist thoughts, they will become a prophecy that we ourselves will fulfill.

Prayer is the greatest aid to maintaining positive thoughts. When we invite God into any situation, He will come – and His presence is always one of power, energy and light. He may not reveal Himself immediately, but He is not absent from that moment forward. An old saying goes, “the Lord may not come when you want Him to, but He’s always right on time.” But it is up to us to invite him. A simple “Lord have mercy,” or “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” is powerful enough to do this.

Prayer cracks the stronghold of negative or defeatist thinking. God is all-powerful. He created the world out of nothing. There is no situation in our lives too difficult, nor too trivial, for God’s help and action. But again, it’s up to us to make the first move, and to persist in our supplications.

Discouraging thoughts are not necessarily irrational. Often, they are mixed with truths, or half-truths. Sometimes thoughts come to us from others, sometimes from ourselves. But what others think is ultimately meaningless. Only God’s “opinion” matters. Take, for example, both Joseph and David. Both were called by God to be kings, yet both came from large families in which their own brothers and parents did not believe in their calling or abilities. Both were unjustly accused; one imprisoned, the other persecuted. Yet by keeping their eyes focused on God, they did what no one thought they could do. They over came the negativity and discouragement of others.

Often, however, our own thoughts are more difficult to conquer than those coming from others. Here we only wrestle with ourselves. This is why prayer is so important – prayer is the bringing in of another, independent perspective: that of God.

How do we know if thoughts come to us from God, or from the devil? What should we do if thoughts of our failings and sins are presented to us? The Fathers give a simple rule: if the thought of a past failing discourages us to the point of depression, draining all our energy and zeal, tempting us to quit every struggle for virtue, or to remain complacent, it is from the devil. If, however, the sorrow such a thought brings gives us a desire to change, energy to repent, fast, pray, forgive, etc., it is from God. St Paul himself talks about these two sorrows: one which is worldly, and brings death; one which is godly, and brings zeal and energy to change (2 Cor 7:10).

If we turn our thoughts over to God for His judgment, they

become pure, and catalysts to a correctly ordered life. More than this, healthy even in the midst of great trials. Only a soul filled with God's love is such, and the first step is in our thinking. Love for God leads to pure thinking, and vice versa. "Love is essentially the banishment of every kind of contrary thought, for love thinks no evil (I Cor 13:5)," wrote St John of the Ladder.

Our thoughts must be turned over to God, such that their effects will be positive. Yes, we need to encourage ourselves in our inner monologue, but most importantly, we need to bring God into our thinking and hearts by prayer. Then our thoughts will become seeds of transformation and victory in our lives, aiding and abetting us to fulfill God's purposes.

The article above is by the pastor of the Holy Cross Orthodox Church in Hermitage, PA, the Rev. Hieromonk Calinic (Berger), from his column in Solia, the diocesan publication of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America: http://www.holycrosshermitagepa.org/files/2008_01_GuardingThoughts.pdf



AN ORTHODOX JOURNEY

In an effort to continue to build community and a shared life together here at Holy Cross, Father Christopher decided to add a new section to the newsletter where each month a different person tells a bit of their story and also answers the question - How has Holy Cross helped you grow closer to Christ as an Orthodox Christian? Mick generously agreed to offer the first article in this series.

Born in London, England, to Roman Catholic parents on the same day as Mark Knofler of Dire Straits (Friday, August 12, 1949) I spent my infant years innocently inhaling much London smog, happily surviving the Great Smog of December 1952 which caused thousands of Londoners to die prematurely and tens of thousands of others to become ill.

I was baptized into the Roman Catholic Church two weeks after my birth and as I grew in stature I also grew into the Catholic religion. I attended Catholic school but when I entered my teens I began to resent the rules, regulations, guilt and fear that I perceived as constituting the faith of

my father and also to develop an idea of God as being like somebody that was constantly on the lookout for people having fun so he could put a stop to it. Eventually I stopped attending Mass.

After the tenth grade I left Catholic school and following a spell working in local government I spent the next four years soldiering in the British Army, resurfacing as a civilian in 1971. After my discharge from Majesty's Forces I felt an urge to return to Catholicism. So one Sunday morning feeling like a prodigal son of sorts I set off to hear Mass. It had been some eight years since I'd set foot inside a Catholic church and on that Sunday morning I received a monumental shock. The Mass that I remembered was evidently no more. In its place was a "New Mass" wherein guitar players strummed and sang while the congregation clapped and gyrated as if they were at a concert. I felt very uncomfortable and totally alienated. It was as if the Prodigal Son had returned only to discover his father had disappeared and that an imposter had taken up residence in the family home.

Alarmed and confused I sought explanations and quickly discovered that the New Mass had come as result of the "updating" approach that had sprung up in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. For the next decade I struggled to come to terms with "the spirit of Vatican 2" and the commensurate decline of the sacred inside Roman Catholicism. But it was a losing battle and in 1982 I conceded defeat and defaulted to the view commonly held by most of my English countrymen i.e. that religion of any kind is pretty much a waste of time.

Some years later I married my American wife, Liz, and in September 1990 I came to live stateside. My worldview now hovered somewhere between agnosticism and deism so the American enthusiasm for organized religion wasn't exactly my cup of tea. But in the year 2000 I was invited to an Evangelical church and that visit caused me to reconsider how I viewed God and religion. I continued attending that church and after much soul searching, reading, and discussion I converted to Biblical Christianity.

Around that time I switched jobs so this was a period of great change during which I met many new people amongst whom was a convert to Eastern Orthodox Christianity named Bob. We were both converts albeit to different traditions and both cognizant of church history so we found much to talk about. We quickly became close. Regrettably, our friendship had little time to blossom because Bob developed colon cancer and was given six months to live. Un-

deterred, we met up several times every week and when Bob became confined to his bed and preferred to listen rather than to talk he took pleasure in hearing me read to him from the Bible. So when Bob passed on I was amongst the pall-bearers at his funeral with much sadness in my heart.

Several years later I became disillusioned with Evangelical Christianity and subsequently joined the United Methodist church. And when doubts and difficulties beset me in the Methodist context I recalled those discussions with my Orthodox friend, Bob, and resolved to explore Holy Orthodoxy.

Prior to encountering Orthodoxy at close quarters my perception of Christendom was that Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy were very similar and fell together on one side; and that Protestantism, being totally dissimilar, fell on the other. So I was surprised when I read that from the Orthodox perspective Roman Catholicism and Protestantism were sometimes seen as being two sides of the same coin. And when I read in a book about Orthodoxy the notion that the pope was “the first Protestant” I was quite taken aback. The division inside Christendom that had always been evident to me was the division between Tradition and Reform. Orthodox Christians perceived that same divide but in addition they identified a division between East and West. This idea was new to me.

After reading about Orthodoxy I visited Holy Cross Orthodox Church for the first time early in 2008. There I encountered the familiar and the unknown.

Upon entering church Roman Catholics take holy water from the font, make the Sign of the Cross upon themselves, walk to a pew and genuflect before entering it and kneeling down. But at Holy Cross there were no pews. Orthodox Christians stand to worship. So I saw people enter the church and before taking their places and standing quietly they made the Sign of the Cross, kissed, and then bowed before, three different icons. I noticed, too, that they made the Sign of the Cross in a way that looked odd to my Catholic way of thinking. But vestments and incense were in evidence, candles were burning in candleholders and although people were present silence reigned. There were no statues to be seen but the walls of the church were covered with icons so I immediately recognized the idea of “sacred space” that I’d imbibed during my Catholic formation.

My first visit to Holy Cross was also the first time I’d heard an Orthodox choir. Orthodox Christians rely solely on the human voice and small choir though it was I found the har-

monies almost ethereal. How glad I was to discover that Orthodox Christians had never discarded the solemnity and reverence in their worship.

So my journey commenced and I slowly began to grow into the Orthodoxy Way: first as an inquirer and then as a catechumen. I attended the inquirer classes and gradually developed my daily prayer rule, observed the fasts, and attended as many Orthodox services as I could. Just before becoming a catechumen I asked if I might be allowed to stand with the choir so that I could be close to that beautiful sound. Not only was I allowed to stand with the choir I was even encouraged to sing as well.

As a former Catholic, Evangelical and Methodist I had a considerable amount of baggage and was unable to stow it all away immediately. But as time passed my doubts and difficulties dissipated. Believing that Orthodoxy contains the fullness of truth and is the path to holiness, I was chrismated at Pascha in 2010 and became “newly illumined.” So now as well as praying, fasting and worshipping (which for me includes singing in the choir) I’m able fully to participate in the sacramental life of the Church.

Thanks be to God.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Adult Study - We will be continuing with our Adult Study this fall. In the spring we began answering the questions - How do we read Holy Scripture in the Orthodox Tradition? How do we understand Scripture and Tradition? How do we read the Old Testament and how is Christ the fulfillment of the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets? How is it that the disciples were so clueless at the death of Christ? How is it that the resurrected Christ was not immediately recognizable by Sts. Luke and Cleopas on the road to Emmaus? We concluded in May by engaging particularly the services of Holy Saturday and Pascha as well as some articles and writings from the Fathers. This fall we will continue with this discussion by looking at some of the feasts that we celebrate around this time of the church year looking at the texts of the hymns and scripture readings for the feasts.

This will give us more time to discuss the use of Holy Scripture within our Orthodox liturgical life. Please join us on Wednesdays beginning on September 21 for some discussion. We will begin with Small Compline at 6:30 and will begin the study at 7pm.

Weekday Festival Services - It is difficult for most, impossible for some, to attend services of the Church during the week. Those who are able to participate in these services of the Great Feasts of the Church find them deeply meaningful, and a help in remembering and reconnecting to the cycles of Sacred Time, and the timeless meaning of these sacred events. This month we celebrate the Nativity of the Theotokos and our parish patronal feast, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

Nativity of the Theotokos - The Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos will be celebrated with Great Vespers and Litya at 7:00 PM on Wednesday, September 6th and Divine Liturgy at 8:00 AM on Thursday, September 7th.

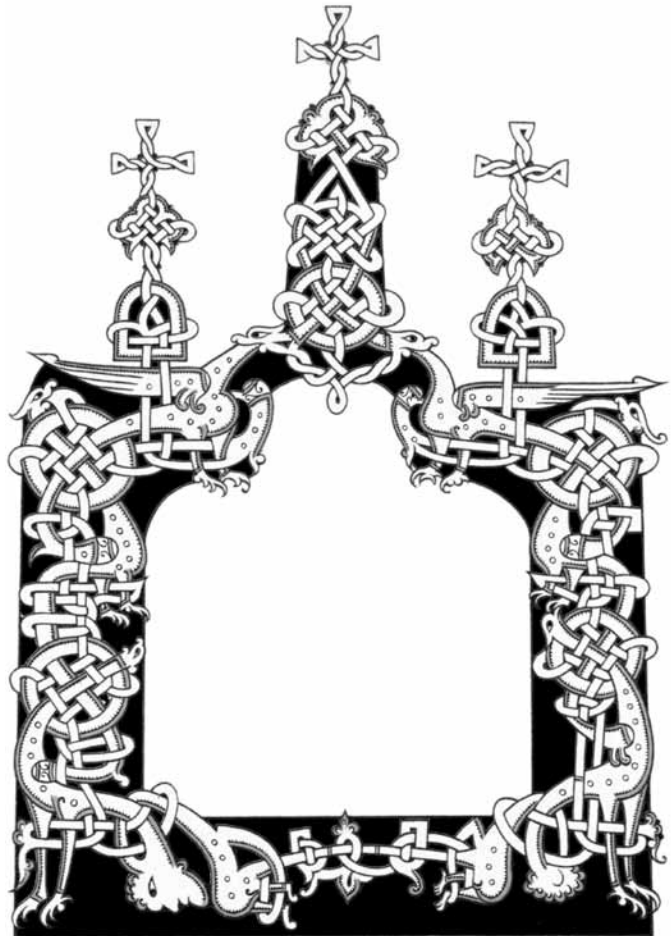
The Exaltation of the Holy Cross - Our parish was founded and dedicated to the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and this Great Feast of the Church will be celebrated with Vigil at 7:00 PM on Tuesday, September 13th and Divine Liturgy at 8:00 AM on Wednesday, September 14th.

Annual Holy Cross Parish Picnic - Again this year, on the Sunday following the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Sunday, September 18th, at 10:00 AM), we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy in a covered pavilion outdoors at City Lake Park, and share a picnic together following the Liturgy. There are sign-up sheets at church for those who will generously help set up before, pack up after, help with food, etc.. This has been a very popular and joyous event in our parish. Please be sure to come!

Sisterhood Meeting - The Sisterhood will be meeting from 7-9pm on Tuesday the 20th.

Men's Group - Our parish men's group will gather on September 15th at 7:00 PM (Location to be announced). All men in the parish are invited to attend.

Inquirer's Class - Inquirer's Class, preceded by the brief Compline service, will begin at 7:00 PM on September 8th and 22nd. These are not limited to inquirers, and all are invited!



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SEPTEMBER, 2011

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3 5PM Great Vespers
4 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	5	6 7PM: Parish Council	7 7PM: Great Vespers and Litya	8 Nativity of the Theotokos 8AM: Divine Liturgy 7PM: Compline & Inquirer's Class	9	10 5PM Great Vespers
11 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	12	13 7PM: Vigil	14 Exaltation of the Holy Cross 8AM: Divine Liturgy	15 7PM: Men's Group	16	17 5PM Great Vespers
18 10AM Divine Liturgy at City Lake Park, with picnic following	19	20 7PM Sisterhood Meeting	21 6:30PM: Compline & Adult Study	22 7PM: Compline & Inquirer's Class	23 5:15PM Open Door Ministry	24 5PM Great Vespers
25 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	26	27	28 6:30PM: Compline & Adult Study	29	30	

