

A Reflection on Great Lent

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How often do we, as American citizens, hear the same things over and over again? How many times have we seen the same commercial ten times in one day? How many times have we heard the same song on the radio twice in one car ride? For most of us, the answer is no doubt countless. And in this hectic American society, we find ourselves doing numerous things over and over again, almost to the point of mechanical repetition. We wake up, brush our teeth, wash our face, comb our hair, throw on some clothes and eat our breakfast. Day after day we repeat these activities, and it is likely that we can go about our day to day monotony without even keeping our focus on the task at hand. How often do our minds wander while performing menial tasks, or even tasks that require more focus such as driving or cooking? In our busy world, full of infinite distractions, we sometimes even lose sight of why we do the things we do. We forget to ask ourselves the question, "Why?", and instead drudge on aimlessly, ignoring the context of the very thing itself. Society has saturated us with all its responsibilities and distractions, drowning us in our own lives. A sponge may float atop a pool of water for a time, but eventually it will sink as the weight of the water absorbed by it pulls it down.

And the unfortunate truth is this saturation has a way of creeping into our spiritual lives as well. How many times have we, as Orthodox Christians, recited the same prayers over and over again? How many times have we said, "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty..."? How many Sundays have we spent in church, participating in the Divine Liturgy? And how often have we done these things unconsciously, only remembering after the fact what had happened and was said? No doubt this has also happened countless times. It is something that we are all guilty of. As human beings we struggle with the weight of this world's distractions every day. However, as human being we have also been given an amazing gift to help us cope with these struggles. In essence, it is really quite simple. God loves us. Christ said to his apostles, "In this world you will have troubles. But take heart! I have overcome the world." God has overcome this world with His love. His most perfect love for humanity. Despite all our shortcomings and "troubles", God gives us a gift of love. Paul tells us that, "...God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." For in recognizing and being repentant for our shortcomings, we establish a stronger relationship with God than that which we would by showering Him in praise. We must remember the Publican who humbled himself before God, unlike the Pharisee who instead sought to prove his dedication to God through good deeds. Good deeds alone will not grant us the kingdom of heaven. But good deeds coupled with a humble and contrite heart will open to us the gates of paradise.

Yet the question still remains, "How can we apply this to our daily lives?" as well as, "How can we apply this to our spiritual lives?" The answer to this is also quite simple. We must remember. To remember every day that we are not perfect but are loved despite our imperfections is already a step in the right direction. And when we are in church worshipping, we must remember the implications of our words and to whom we are speaking. As easy as it might be to fall back into our default monotonous repetition, we must be vigilant and remember that He whom we are addressing has given us the very ability to address anything or anyone at all. He has given us everything. By this we may then say with conviction, "But like the thief will I confess thee, remember me in thy kingdom."

So, as we enter into this Lenten period, it would be wise to take time every day to stop what we are doing and remember that we are loved by God. Truly, one of the main ideas of fasting at all is so that we may empty ourselves of those things we think we need in order to experience God's love more fully. For in the end, delicious meals and chocolates and video games will not last forever. They will come and go in our lifetimes. However, we have been told that God is love. And if God is eternal, love must also be eternal. Paul tells us that, "...where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away," but despite all these things, "Love never fails."