

Homily 47 - Concerning Fasting, Dispassion, and Purity

by St. Paisy of Neamt

The sermon emphasizes the importance of fasting, dispassion, and purity in the Christian life, and provides practical guidance on how to cultivate these virtues during the holy fast.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:27, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 6:12, Philippians 4:7, James 4:7

Topics: "Spiritual Discipline", "Christian Living"

Description

St. Paisy of Neamt preaches about the significance of fasting as a means of renewing the soul and drawing closer to God. He emphasizes the importance of abstaining not only from food but also from sinful passions, distractions, and negative behaviors. St. Paisy warns against the deceptive nature of worldly desires and urges believers to be vigilant in guarding their hearts and minds against the devil's traps. He encourages a life of prayer, humility, kindness, and mutual support among believers, seeking the peace and kingdom of God.

Transcript

Concerning Fasting, Dispassion, and Purity

Fathers and Brethren: The present days of the holy fast are, among the other periods of the year, a calm haven to which all gather and find spiritual serenity; not only monastics, but laymen as well, the small and the great, those in authority and those in submission, kings and priests; for this period is beneficial and salvific for every country and age of mankind. At this time every disruption and disorder comes to a halt, and doxology and hymnody are multiplied, charities and prayer by means of which our good God is moved to compassion and is propitiated to grant peace to our souls and forgiveness of sins; if only we shall sincerely turn to Him with all our heart, falling down before Him with fear and trembling, and promising to cease from every bad habit which we might have. But Christians living in the world have their teachers, that is, their bishops and pastors who guide and instruct them. For even as warriors and soldiers need stimulation, so do festers require the encouragement and consolation of teachers. And since I find myself desired among you in the place of leadership and abbacy, then it is my obligation to say unto you a few words concerning this soul-saving fast.

Brethren, fasting is the renewal of the soul, for the Apostle says insofar as the body weakens and withers from the podvig (ascetic labor) of fasting, then so much is the soul renewed day by day and is made

beauteous and shines in the beauty which God originally bestowed upon it. And when it is purified and adorned with fasting and repentance, then God loves it and will live in it as the Lord has said: "I and the Father will come and make Our abode with him" (John 14.23). Thus if there is such value and grace in fasting that it makes us into habitations of God, then ought we to greet it with great rejoicing and gladness, and not despond because of the meagerness of the food, knowing that when our Lord Jesus Christ blessed the five loaves in the wilderness He fed five thousand people with bread and water. He could, if He so desired, command all sorts of manifestations to appear; but He gave us an example of restraint, so that we might be concerned only for that which is necessary. Now at the beginning the fast seems to us a difficult labor, but if we shall apply ourselves from day to day with ardor and discipline, then with the help of God it will be made easier. At the same time, if we desire that the fast be for us a true one and acceptable unto God, then together with abstaining from food, let us restrain ourselves from every sin of soul and body, as the sticheron instructs us in which it is said, "Let us keep the Fast not only by refraining from food, but by becoming strangers to all sinful passions" (First sticheron of the Aposticha, Tuesday Vespers of the First Week of Lent). Let us guard ourselves from sloth and carelessness concerning our cell rule and church services, and even more from vainglory and envious zeal, from malice out of spite, and from enmity, and secret passions such as these, which kill the soul; let us guard against ill temper and self-assertion, that is, let us not appropriate things for ourselves and indulge our self-will. For nothing is so loved of the devil as to find a person who has not forgiven another and has not taken advice from those able to instruct him in virtue; then the enemy easily deludes the self-assertive and traps him in all that he does and reckons as good.

Let us vigilantly attend to ourselves, especially in regard to the desires of the flesh; for it is just now, when we fast, that the chameleon serpent-devil fights us with bad thoughts. Beauteous in appearance and pleasant to the taste is the fruit of sin, but in reality it is not so. Thus sometimes the outside of the apple seems nice, but when it is cut open rot is found within; so the desires of the flesh seem to have within them delights, yet when a sin has been committed, it is bitter to the stomach like a two-edged sword. Our forefather Adam suffered this when he was deceived by the devil and tasted of the fruit of disobedience and hoped to receive life from it, but found death. Thus do all from that time to this suffer who are deceived by the ancient serpent with bad desires of the fleshly passions. For the devil is darkness that takes the semblance and appearance of an angel of light. So the inventor of evil, Satan, makes evil to appear as good; and bitter to appear as sweet; and dark, as light; and the ugly, beautiful; and he represents death as life, and thus deludes the world and tortures it. But let us, Brethren, pay special heed so that he will not trap us with his many and evil snares and we suffer like birds that fall from the bait into the nooses and nets. Let us be careful to scrutinize our mind for the craftiness of evil, and in every instance be aware of evil, where it is concealed, and shun it. Above all, let us be ardent and careful in the chanting of the psalms and services of the Church; let us strive to keep our minds attentive to what is being read. For as the body, when nourished by bread, grows stronger, so also does the soul when fed by the word of God. Let us every hour of the day do prostrations, each according to his strength and as much as he is required; let us be occupied with our handiwork; for he that does nothing, according to the word of the Apostle, is not worthy even of food (II Thess. 3:10). Let us be helpful to one another, for one alone is weak, while another is strong; let us not be quarrelsome, but do only what is good; let us be gentle of speech, peaceful, gracious, kind, meek, submissive, filled with mercy and good fruit. And may the peace of God preserve our hearts and minds, and may He vouchsafe us the heavenly kingdom of Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom is due glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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