

Repentance

By Bishop George Khodr

Repentance, being a coming back to God, to His being and His life, takes place in the coming down of His life on you. You suffer at the beginning because you have veiled His face from you to give yourself the right to see what He does not want you to see, and to give your hands the right to touch what He does not want you to touch and to give your feet the right to tread where He is not. In other words, you come back to Him from an estrangement because God is not where you have set yourself (in the estrangement) thinking you will have happiness there flying away from toiling in this life; yet one cannot enter the Kingdom of God without striving.

And you have forgotten that you would be yourself only when you open your heart to receive Him; and without Him being your guest, you would have serpents nesting in your heart and your heart would dwell in an unreal world. Through the Lord you would be able to behold yourself. And you will see some of His image in you in the midst of the delusion you are in; and that would put in you a longing for Him. And when you remember His ancient splendor in you, you would set forth anew towards Him. The point of encounter between Him and you is a mystery. And the meeting takes place in His pleasure and in His ongoing care for you but you prefer yourself to His visitations because sin has made you shallow and deceived you into think that it is “real being”; you think that it is existence, yet it never was so.

I am not one of those who say that there are people who are wholly pure. Our Fathers desired that but they considered themselves sinners. Such consideration has brought them to Heaven. The human heart, for those great Fathers, is in a tension between the “residues” of sin and the virtues they aspire for. And so the heart is the arena where that strife takes place until the human being is put to rest through death. The remembrance of death purifies us if we love God. Remembrance of death is a seeking after Heaven until God receives us in it through His mercy. Until repentance starts springing from our heart, we would be only in a longing for it. Repentance is in changing the longing to a decision which God would receive you for, when He knows it is authentic. Then the “latter” longing will descend on you, the longing to behold the Divine Glory.

Repentance is the fruit of faith; if you believe that sin is a stain and that repentance is a new baptism, then the journey of repentance has started. But if your longing for the good is only emotional and aesthetic, then that is a type of a poetic move. If one longs for the good to adorn himself with it, then that is not repentance. Repentance is the longing for God’s face (person). It involves exchanging everything else in one’s life with the Lord. And so though we weep and ask for mercy, the human soul has the residues of sin there.

Those we consider perfect do not get to complete purity while they are still in the body in the realm of space and time; which means that it is imperative for us to strive continuously. We would be truly virtuous, if after we accomplish a loving deed we still regard the corruption that is in us amidst that loving act. You are pleased when many speak well of you, and that is a type of pride; any bragging after doing good is a stain on that good act. If you are not convinced that you are nothing, all what appears good to you in you is an attack of that pretentiousness and boastfulness in you. That is why the Church finds it important that one should examine one's heart always so the "serpents" would have no access to it.

You examine yourself in the light of the commandment: Love the Lord... Love thy neighbor as thyself. In the first part of the commandment, one might get deluded since you might consider yourself pious because you fast and pray while your prayers might be a repetition of words only and your fasting might be a food diet in which there is no compunction or brokenness. In this you are in need of a spiritual guide who can tell you what it is that makes your prayers and fasting of no spiritual value. Yet it remains that the "great" test is the love for others. And in this, one can also be deluded. The issue is not whether you have forgiven him or not, the main issue is that you have to have your heart "filled with him" so that you would always be in his service. And another question comes up here; do you show preferences in your service caring for one and neglecting the other? Or does the Divine Generosity in you cause you to give to everybody alike so that they can see the tenderness of God through your love thus they "repent to Him through your repentance" and with that the Church obtains?

From where do we get the power of repentance or the power of its continuity? We get that from hope; that is from the trust in Go, from our belief that He keeps us from temptations. That's why despair is considered to be the enemy of repentance; same is true of despondency and lethargy when we fall repetitively.

The great mystery is in the fact that a quick passing prayer is not going to save us but there should be a striving to see the Divine Glory. If yearning for Him is not enkindled in such a way to make us more attached to Him, we will not go back to virtue.

Repentance is a flame in the soul; it is love and passion for Christ. This does not mean a senseless dependence on His love. You always need to have reverence for Him; we need to fear getting back to sin. Reverence and fear keep us and educate us (spiritually) and if they remain with us, they would lead us towards loving God which itself is repentance. Lent is the time for repentance because it surrounds us with the Divine Word and makes us absorb it so fully that what remains is only the presence of the Word and its action in us. And if we do not fall in despair, then the countenance of the Resurrection looms before us.