

Holistic Approach to a Healthy Soul!

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As Christians we look to Christ for guidance on finding peace and eternal life. Christ makes it very clear that if we eat His flesh and drink His blood we will have life that will never end. (John 6:54) For this reason early Christians would gather every Sunday, which was referred to as the day of the Lord (κυριακη-ημερα - Kiriaki Imera), to partake of God's body and blood.^{1 2} This tradition has been maintained through the centuries so that, despite false accusations of being cannibals³, the disciples of the Lord would make this weekly feast the center of their lives. This month's reflection is to emphasize that as Christians we must partake of the Lord and have this as our focal point of our everyday existence. No matter if it be Sunday morning, Wednesday afternoon or Thursday night our actions reflect our desire to adhere to Christ's proclamation that when we partake of Him we have life eternal. With this in mind, if you are Christian you are not one only on Sunday's but everyday because of your desire to live forever consumes your being and embellishes every breath you take.

Your initial response to reading this reflection might be, "father it is hard enough to make it to church on Sunday now you want my entire life focused on God." The scriptures and tradition compels us to begin our relationship with God on the Lord's Day, therefore if you have a difficult time doing that either you need to change your schedule or find a new religion. In our country you are not the only one faced with this challenge. Statistics show that only 47% of Americans attend church services regularly on Sunday mornings.⁴ But even if you are part of the church attending minority you are still faced with the reality that our country is surrounded by the cultural mind set of secularism. Americans like to keep everything separate, proclaiming that each part of life, e.g. work, family, leisure, etc..., functions independently of each other and should not influence the other. This secular mindset creates problems for practicing Christians. It would be somewhat strange to say "I want to live for ever but I am only going to try to accomplish that on Sunday morning's from 9:00 AM to 10:30 AM." This is where we need to take a holistic approach when dealing with our spiritual growth. The word holistic comes from the Greek word ολος (olos) which means the entirety or completeness. Therefore in this way we look at our entire lives completely focused on the hope that in Christ our soul and body can live forever.

St. Paul says that we are called to pray constantly. (I Thessalonias 5:17) As breathing happens intrinsically without hesitation so should we also call on the Lord for guidance and life. To cultivate this rhythmic invocation we need to create fertile soil within our souls by setting time aside everyday just for dialoging with our Lord. Start the day by fervently crying out repetitively (beginning with 30x) the Jesus prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." Through the grace of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of your priest and spiritual father, you can cultivate a discipline of prayer that fills every space of your hollow life. Also community prayer should not be limited to a few moments on Sunday morning but rather Saturday night vespers and week day services should be the spiritual discipline which is the norm of our schedule. These service should not just be the mystical events that you hear mentioned every so often by father. Don't make prayer with God limited to one of the many parts of your life rather have the spirit of prayer give energy to every moment to your life opening up the path to Lord.

The Church has its times and seasons for holding fast to abstaining from certain foods and practices. They are designed to promote a life of Christ which envelopes our entire being. It is clear in Scripture and the historical practices of the Church that fasting is a continuous discipline that mimics Christ's way of life. We make the decision to forgo certain delicacies so to insure our will is ready to be denied in order to make way for the sacrifice we need to make for others. In addition God's flesh and blood is not limited to a Sunday quick fix rather it is what we methodically approach by cleansing our palate from the obsessive mind consuming

thoughts of what we wish to devour. Eternal life is brought to us through the sacrifice of Christ, therefore during the week on Wednesday and Fridays, throughout the year during Great Lent, the Christmas fast, the Dormition fast and the Sts. Peter and Paul fast we are purified both soul and body to receive His bountiful gift.

One of the largest criticisms of Christians is that of hypocrisy. What are we saying about our beliefs when we leave the church doors on Sunday morning just to maliciously lash out at our loved ones, co-workers or even our God given pastor? The church is full of wounded people who make mistakes and live hypocritically but this reality should motivate us to allow our actions match our words. We need to volunteer at the soup kitchens, nursing homes and orphanages and we also need to be more sensitive to the needs of our own family members. Our children, spouses, parents and siblings will often be the object of our malice which attacks image of God that needs to be shining from within us. The way to God is through sacrifice, which we do on Sunday morning by sacrificing our time and spirit to attend the services, and it is also by sacrificing ourselves and having understanding, patience and compassion for all of Christ's little ones, no matter what the day of the week it might be. When we do this we draw closer to the one who give life to all.

In conclusion, don't be a secular Christian limiting your relationship with God only to one day of the week if you are lucky. Reach out to God diligently by making your highest priority the Lord. Therefore as the minutes, hours, days and years go by they are filled with practices that reflect our belief that eternal life only happens when we live in Christ and are partaking of Him.

1 Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume I*, First Apology of Justin, Chp. 66 &67.

2 Richardson, Cyril, "Early Christian Fathers", *Didache, Teaching of the Holy Apostles*, Touchstone, 1996, pg. 178.

3 Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume II*, Writings of Athenagoras, A Plea for Christians Chp. 35 .

4 <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=10>