

Deacon Joe's Reflection**On Watchfulness**

“Watchfulness is a spiritual method which, if practiced over a long period completely frees us: with God’s help from impassioned thoughts, impassioned words, and evil actions. It leads, in so far as possible, to a sure knowledge of the inapprehensible God, and helps us to penetrate the divine and hidden mysteries. It enables us to fulfill every divine commandment in the Old and New Testaments and bestows upon us every blessing of the age to come. It is, in the true sense, purity of heart, as state of blessedness in Christ, when He says: ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’”

St. Heyschios then goes on to say that there are five steps, if you will, in practicing watchfulness.

1. Scrutinizing every mental image or provocation.
2. Freeing the heart from all thoughts, keeping it profoundly silent and still, and in praying.
3. Humbly calling on Jesus for help, especially using the Jesus Prayer. “Lord Jesus Christ, son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner.”
4. Always have the thought of death on one’s mind.
5. Fix one’s gaze on heaven and pay no attention to anything material.

Question 1. St. Heyschios’ understanding of the quality of watchfulness is a well developed understanding of the spiritual watchfulness that we, as Christians, are encouraged to develop in relation to keeping our eyes on Christ.

Why do you think it would be important to be spiritually watchful of the mental images we find flitting across our minds eye and making a concerted effort to study ways to free our hearts from all thoughts, keeping them silent and practicing a certain effort at being still?

Question 2. Why do you think St. Hesychios encourages us in his 5 steps to watchfulness to keep the thought of death on one’s mind and to fix one’s gaze on Heaven, paying no attention to material things?

Question 3. Have you ever used the Jesus Prayer as a way of praying? If so, did it help you with keeping a certain peace of heart? If you have never prayed using the Jesus prayer, why do you think St. Heyschios encourages us to use this form of prayer?

On the Sacrament of Confession

Deacon Joe encourages us to make use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to make use of the examen prayer as a means of identifying one’s sins. In order to confess one’s sins, one has to first ponder the state of one’s soul and look at the underlying motivations and contributing factors to why one chose to sin a particular sin. On its face, the process of looking at one’s sins would not seem to give much in the way of peace. And yet from a practical perspective we know that in naming our problems, we identify them, and once that happens, we can begin to make an

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effort to overcome them. How do you think identifying your sins and naming them will help you to be watchful and give you some measure of peace?