

## ON PRAYER AND FASTING

During the season of Great Lent, our attention turns to the topics of prayer and fasting. There is much written in our Orthodox Tradition about prayer and fasting, and I would encourage that one of the spiritual disciplines we engage in during our Lenten journey also be reading. There are so many titles available it is mind boggling. They are written for your edification.

Prayer is both personal and corporate. In other words, we should develop a habit of personal prayer daily. This takes effort. We must discipline ourselves to wake up a few minutes earlier for our Morning Prayer time, and break away from the television or whatever other distractions we might be engaged in, to pray our evening prayers. And, we should attend not only every Sunday Divine Liturgy, but as many of the other services of the Church in which we are able.

In his book, Encountering the Mystery, His Eminence Patriarch Bartholomew has a marvelous way of speaking of prayer and fasting. He speaks of them in terms of relationship; as tools of relationship; relationships with both God and others. Ultimately, he says, it is all about love; love for God and love for our fellow man.

On prayer, he says:

"Prayer is the touchstone of a person's spiritual life. It discloses the true stature and authentic condition of one's life. Prayer is what ultimately reveals who we are in relation to God and other people. If we can pray, then we can talk to others; if we know how to pray, then we also know how to relate to others. Prayer is a mirror of the inner life." (p. 75)

On fasting, he related the following insights:

"Together with prayer, fasting is a critical form of ascetic discipline in the spiritual life. Physical practices of abstinence assist in breaking forceful habits that accrue within and harden the heart over years and even over generations. The aim of fasting... is to refine the whole person, to render the faculties more subtle and sensitive to the outside world as well as to the 'inner kingdom'...Fasting means walking the way of the humble, assuming the power of prayer, and regaining a sense of wonder. It is recognizing God in all people and in all things; and it is valuing all people and all things in the light of God." (p.81, 3)

May our great God bless and guide our Lenten journey to the foot of the cross.