

Worshipping God in Spirit and Truth

1- Objectives

- ❖ To worship God from our hearts, not only through rituals.
- ❖ To dig in ourselves and search our soul to know how we worship the Lord.

2- References

- ❖ The story of the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-40)
- ❖ “Many Years with People’s Question” Vol. 2, HH Pope Shenouda

3- Scriptural Verse

- ❖ “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24)

4- Lesson Guidelines

- ❖ In John 4:4-26, we see how our Lord was penetrating deep into the heart of the Samaritan woman to do some soul searching. We also see her trying to fool him into thinking that she is a God-fearing, devout worshipper. These examples reflect something that is common to all of us, that we can hide our true selves behind religious practices while our hearts are far from being spiritual (Matthew 23:27).

How can we differentiate spiritual practices and worshipping in spirit?

- ❖ The Samaritan woman underwent a transformation in her life when she met with the Lord Jesus Christ. If I am truly worshipping God then I too will notice growth in my life, I will begin to see some habits die, my heart will grow and my selfishness will begin to go away.
- ❖ Spiritual worship involves a change and growth in life because it involves:
 - Constantly looking inside our hearts to repair any defect. This goes beyond stopping a bad habit while growing in good deeds. A monk asked another monk if he reply to someone cursing him; The monk said no, so the other monk said then you are not a real monk, a real monk would respond by blessing the one who cursed him.
 - Interacting with God at a much deeper level to seek His will for our life. The gangsters were praying for God to help them carry out what they wanted and not what God wanted. Many times we do the same holding onto what we think is best for us.
 - The desire to know and the growth in the knowledge of God. The Samaritan woman never mentioned whom the Jews or the Samaritans worshipped. She never mentions God. Our knowledge of God should not be stagnant; we should feel a growth in our relationship with Him or will be like walking away from Him.
- ❖ The realization that God is not interested in external practices as much as He is interested in our hearts no matter how unhealthy they may be. Sometimes we avoid worshipping God as we may feel not worthy. We should understand that God wants us to approach Him regardless of being worthy or not. This will allow Him to work in our lives.
- ❖ Spiritual worship requires a degree of humility and a contrite heart that remembers its weakness and seeks God’s help; while worldly worship involves pride and self-satisfaction.

- ❖ Spiritual worship involves worshipping God His way, not ours. If we worship God for a personal reason or feeling, then we are really worshipping ourselves.
- ❖ Our worship should be steadfast regardless of how we feel. Once a saint said, “It’s not how you feel while you pray but how you feel after you pray” as you may feel great during prayer and then come out still angry, unforgiving ... and the opposite is also true.
- ❖ Another aspect of worldly worship is to hang onto a worldly goal, not a means to the goal. The Samaritan woman was proud of a worldly mountain! She believed that Mount Gerazim was: 1- Where the Garden of Eden was and where Adam was created. 2- That Abraham met Melchizedek there. 3- That Isaac was offered in the same area and 4- That Jacob (the well) had some ties to the area as well; but the Lord Jesus Christ told her that this is just a worldly place, it has no bearing on the state of the heart that worships God.

What external practices do we do unconsciously?

- ❖ Many times we fast all the fasts just to be fasting like everyone else but no change happens to us during the fast.
- ❖ We may go to every Sunday Liturgy but feel the same way before and after the Liturgy without ever truly comprehending that Our Lord is right there on the altar wanting to be with us.
- ❖ It requires effort to live beyond merely conducting external practices and living a true spiritual life.
- ❖ Saint John Chrysostom said: “Christ here declares nothing else than His incorporeality; Now the service of what is incorporeal must be of the same character, and must be offered by that in us which is incorporeal, that is, the soul and purity of mind ... Sacrifice then, not sheep and calves, but dedicate thyself to the Lord. Make of thyself a holocaust; this is to offer a living sacrifice. You must worship ‘in truth’; as former things were types, such as circumcision, and whole burnt offerings, and victims, and incense, they now no longer exist, but all is ‘truth’.”

Some advices to help worshipping in truth

- ❖ Know your beloved God through constant prayers and Bible readings. When we know God, we love Him and worship Him “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). “Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge” (Jeremiah 10:14).
- ❖ Have a regular prayer with the Agpeya, even if you don’t feel any good while praying it, because it will teach you how to stand and pray and most probably you will pray from your heart after finishing it.
- ❖ Make prostrations as much as you can during your prayers, especially in your youth as the fathers say “prostration is the best way to keep you from distraction”.
- ❖ Come early to the church to enjoy the readings, considering them a special message to you from God as St. Anthony did.
- ❖ Try to close your eyes in the Liturgy and think about what you say; don’t say it just with your mouth from your memory; renew the words of the Liturgies in your heart to get something new each time: “The Lord’s mercies are new every morning” (Lamentation 3:22-23)

- ❖ Examine yourself daily and see regularly your father of confession and make sure to declare all your thoughts and ask for his guidance.
- ❖ Pray constantly to the Lord that He may grant you to worship Him according to His will and accept Him happily to be the director of your life. Pray with St. Mary saying, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1: 38).
- ❖ Good deeds are very important as a means of worship, like being merciful, kind and generous in giving to everyone, especially to the needy as it reveals how close your heart is to God Who said in Matthew 25:40 “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me”. St. James also said, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

5- Discussion Points

- ❖ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD_Zo7vNF5Q

What are all three men doing? The fact that they are praying gives you a sense that they are pious, God-fearing people. But, what are they asking for? What does it reflect about the states of their heart?

The pirates of Spain, Italy and Greece used to loot and steal with no sense of shame while still carrying out their prayers and observing all of the church’s feasts.

6- Conclusion

- ❖ “If you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:13-14).
- ❖ “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

7- Activities / Workshop

- ❖ Form groups to discuss the worshipping of St. Peter and the apostles before and after receiving the Holy Spirit to point out the characteristics of a spiritual ministry by giving them verses from their attitudes to compare. Examples: denying vs. boldly preaching; persecuting people vs. praying for them day and night (St. Paul); confused vs. teachers of the truth, etc.