

Defending the Faith



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March 2018

The Three Rs: Reading, Reconnecting and Reflecting

Great Lent has begun. For the Greek Orthodox, this generally means fasting for 40 days and the 7 days of Holy Week. Many participate in the Lenten fast in diverse ways, doing what they feel they can to make this a time of preparation for celebrating the resurrection on Easter. Some give up certain types of food, others give up T.V. or Facebook, and yet others prepare by increasing their time of prayer and almsgiving. For the Orthodox, this is not a time of gloominess or sadness. It is a time of joy in anticipation of the glorious resurrection and thankfulness for God's mercy. The purpose of fasting is to discipline our body by bringing it under subjection to our will. This is a way for us to practice the disciplining of our minds, as we bring it under subjection to God's will. The most significant purpose of Great Lent is to spiritually strengthen us and to develop a more intimate relationship to God.

Cultivating our spiritual growth aids us in meeting the challenges of our everyday lives. It teaches us how to enhance the joy and peace in our lives. We can do this by practicing what I call the three Rs: reading, reconnecting and reflecting. During lent we should spend more time reading the Bible, reconnecting with God through prayer, and reflecting on Christ, as well as our own weaknesses.

Reading the Bible gives us a foundation from which we can begin. It reminds us what it means to be a Christian and allows us to understand God through Christ. No matter how often we read a passage, new insights will be gleaned each time. This is because our own spiritual development changes as we are confronted by new challenges in life or as we gain greater understanding. We build upon what we have learned in the past, allowing us to mature in the faith. As we mature, we again ready ourselves for new insights or a deeper understanding of our faith.

Prayer can be practiced through reading prayers of the church, praying for our loved ones or just by talking to God. You can dedicate a specific time of your day or you can talk to God in your car or while you work. One crucial component to include in our prayer time is listening. God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. When God speaks to us, His messages are filled with love, wisdom and truth. He teaches us, guides us and comforts us. Listening to God is crucial in developing our spiritual growth.

Reflecting on Christ means we contemplate His sacrifice for us and His love for us. We remind ourselves that He is God who became man to die for us. We remember that He came into an evil world and lived a perfect life full of love, grace and truth. We consider His teachings, His miracles, and

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His suffering for us. We remember all the blessings He has bestowed upon us and are thankful. But we also reflect on our own weaknesses. This begins by remembering our sins and repenting. This is a process we prefer to avoid. However, reflecting on our sins and weaknesses allows us the opportunity to learn from our mistakes. It provides an occasion to ask God to guide us in overcoming these frailties. It allows us to learn how to love God and others more perfectly. After all, Christ gave us only two commandments: *“Love the Lord*



your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22: 37-40). Our life's purpose as Christians is to love. We must not allow ourselves to rationalize our sins or offer excuses when we do not act in love?

For example, many of us struggle with anger at one time or another. The Bible teaches us that it is acceptable to be angry, but we should not sin out of anger. The key issue is how do we respond when we are angry. There are two reasons for anger, righteous anger for being treated unjustly or anger motivated by pride. We can be angry when someone has treated us unjustly or has sinned against us. This can be considered righteous anger, but we should reflect on whether we have caused the behavior because of our own sin. In other words, we have no right to be angry at someone who might have reacted to our own hurtful words or actions. We may also become angry toward someone who has insulted us and therefore wounded our pride. In these cases, we should always remain humble and practice self-control.



Once upon a time, there was a peaceful driver, who found himself in traffic on the 405 freeway. As Mr. Peaceful was motoring along, an impatient driver swerved in front of him and nearly caused a collision. Mr. Peaceful became angry, especially since he had to slam on his brakes to avoid an accident. However, he realized that he was safe and decided to pray for Ms. Impatient, who may yet cause a collision and hurt herself or someone else. Mr. Peaceful continued driving along calmly, safe and sound. However, Ms. Impatient was soon cut-off by a more aggressive motorist. She became so angry. She was not going to be outdone.

Ms. Impatient decided to teach that motorist a lesson, so she sped up and swerved around Mr. Aggressive and purposely came so close, she nearly collided with his little sports car. Mr. Aggressive had to slam on his brakes, causing the car behind him to crash right into him. Fortunately, God saw what was happening and sent His angels to prevent anyone from dying, but Mr. Aggressive suffered various injuries, including broken ribs and was rushed to the hospital. Mr. Aggressive should not be

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(cont'd)

too angry because his actions caused Ms. Impatient to become angry, but Ms. Impatient allowed her anger to cause an accident. She saw what happened in her rearview mirror and felt bad for her poor behavior. Mr. Aggressive, on the other hand, would love to find Ms. Impatient and teach her a lesson. Both Ms. Impatient and Mr. Aggressive suffered from an inflated sense of pride, which led them to poor choices, but at least Ms. Impatient recognized her sin and repented and wished she had stopped to help.

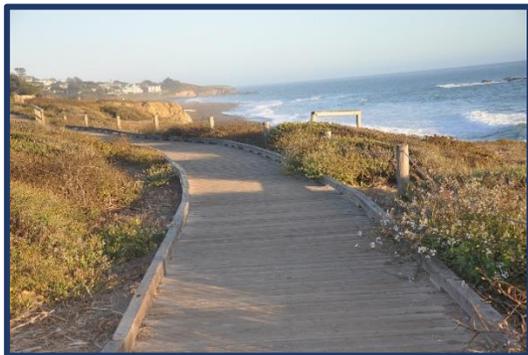
When we acknowledge our sins, we can grow from the experience. Mr. Peaceful did not allow another's actions to affect his peace and joy. He forgave Ms. Impatient and was therefore able to remain peaceful by keeping his conscience pure. By reflecting on her actions, Ms. Impatient learned from her mistake and will probably drive more respectfully in the future. Mr. Aggressive, on the other hand, will most likely find himself in a similar situation in the future. I pray that God watches over him and keeps him safe.

Remember the three Rs during Great Lent. Spend more time reading the Bible, reconnecting with God through prayer and reflecting on Christ, as well as on your sins and weaknesses. During this Lenten period, may God perform a great work in all of our hearts to allow us to grow spiritually, to love more perfectly and to develop our relationship with Him more intimately.

Helen Kamenos
Readers' Favorite Author

Announcing....

"A Journey Toward Perfection" Book Club on Facebook



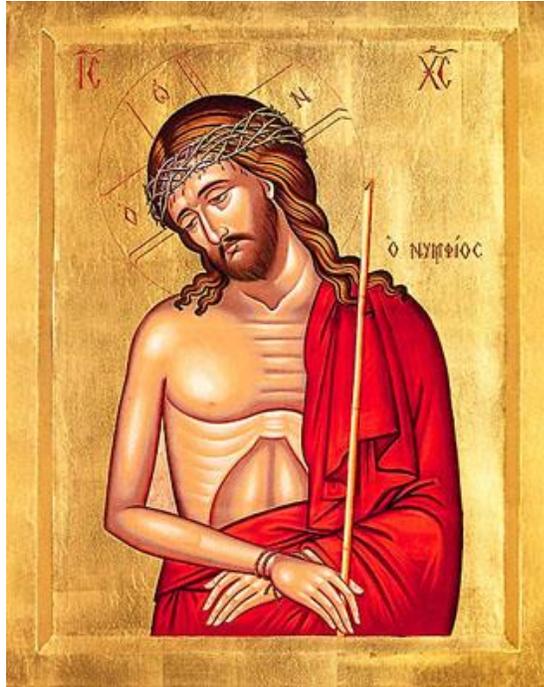
I have received feedback from many of you who have requested a forum to discuss my book, *A Journey Toward Perfection*. I have recently launched an online Book Club on Facebook in response to your requests. **"A Journey Toward Perfection" Book Club** is an opportunity to learn more about our Christian faith from one another. It is a place where we can discuss issues, ask questions and share thoughts about our journey through life as Christians as discussed in the book.

It is a friendly forum meant to engage others in a meaningful conversation. We can delve into questions, such as how the Beatitudes can guide our lives, how can we meet the challenges of everyday life, how can we develop a real relationship with Christ, how can we become more Christ-like or how can we interpret Christ's instruction to "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Is this even possible? Join our group today and begin the conversation at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1951037488480944/about/>

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The Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life
Take from me the spirit of laziness
Faint-heartedness, lust for power and idle talk.

But give rather to me, your servant,
The spirit of chastity,
Humility, patience, and love.

Yes, O Lord and King
Grant me to see my own faults
And not to judge my brothers and sisters;

For You are blessed unto the ages and ages.
Amen.

The Jesus Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

A Hymn from the Holy Friday Morning Service

As soldiers mocked at the foot of Your Precious Cross, the ranks of angels were amazed. For You Who painted the earth with flowers, wore a wreath of insult; the One who clothed the firmament in clouds, wore a mantle of mockery. Thus, did Your compassion and great mercy manifest in Your dispensation, O Christ. Glory to you.

A Hymn from the Resurrection Service

Be astonished and in awe, you heavens, and let the earth's foundation quake; for behold, the One who dwells in the heavens is reckoned among the dead and is a lodger in a small tomb. You youths, bless Him; you priests, praise Him; and you people, exalt Him to the ages...

Mother, it is of my own will that the earth covers me, but the gatekeepers of Hades shudder seeing me clothed in a robe stained with the blood of vengeance. For as God, having vanquished the enemies on the Cross, I will rise anew and magnify you.

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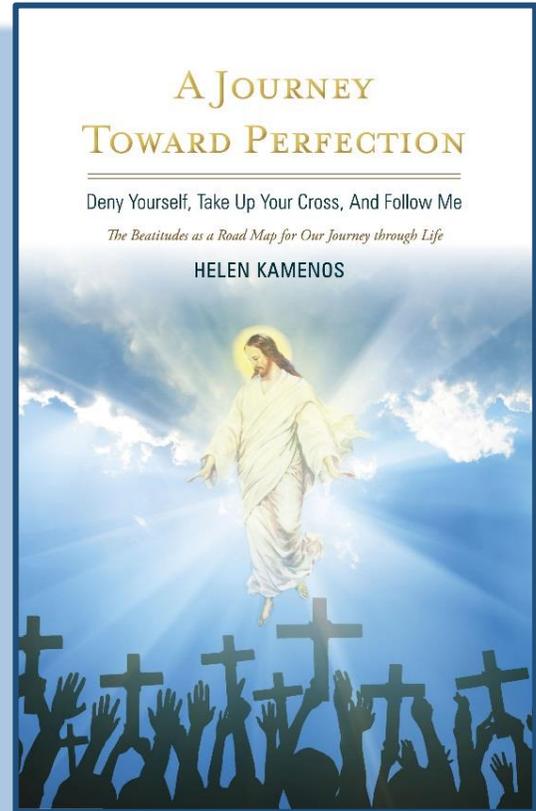
A Journey Toward Perfection

The Beatitudes from Matthew 5:

- ³ Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ⁴ Blessed *are* those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.
- ⁵ Blessed *are* the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.
- ⁶ Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness,
For they shall be filled.
- ⁷ Blessed *are* the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.
- ⁸ Blessed *are* the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.
- ⁹ Blessed *are* the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.
- ¹⁰ Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for
righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

A *Journey Toward Perfection* reveals a path toward developing an intimate experiential relationship with God. It is a perfect in-depth Lenten study of the attributes recorded in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5. These are the attributes God bestowed upon us when He created us in His image. God created us to love. These are the traits necessary to love others as God loves us. These characteristics are central to our Christian spiritual growth. Discover how these attributes can sustain you through the many trials and tribulations of your life. Comprehend how love truly conquers all. Experience God's true presence in your life.



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Forward this to your family and friends, so they can sign up, too!