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Spirituality Class - teaching since 1994

More and more I'm amazed that even though there is a great continuity among the saints' lives, there is also great diversity.

The saints of one place and time can look quite different from saints of another place and time.

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This presentation is based on a question that my friends and I have been living with for a few years now.

What might Orthodox Life look like here and now?

This is a crucially important question for us.

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My reflection is going to be divided into three parts:

1) What is the Orthodox Life?

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2) What are the advantages and challenges of our "Internet Age"?

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3) What are some techniques that might help us to live The Orthodox Life in the Internet Age

I want this to be a lively 2 hours, so there are going to be moments of discussion and sharing.

Introduce yourself to the people around you.

Find a couple of people that you've met for the first time today.

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Discuss the question for a few minutes:

What is "Orthodox Life"?

Use the flipchart and collect suggestions.

1) Life

- a. life is dynamic, always in motion, always changing & adapting, vital
 - because of dynamism, we are constantly moving from, through, and to
- b. life has been entrusted to us
 - in many and significant ways, *we are in control*
 - if not in all events, in particular events (free will)
 - even in events we can't control, we can control our *response*
- c. life is communal: both personal and social
 - we do not -can not- live alone
 - we receive from others
 - we give to others
 - we live among different communities
 - diverse social/human communities
 - communities of the larger creation (seen & unseen; mundane & spiritual)
 - divine community
- d. life is multi-dimensional
 - family / extended family / work / church / friends
 - intellectual / emotional / physical / psychological
 - where you're coming from / where you're at now / where you're going

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- e. life is complicated – life is sometimes messy

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2) Orthodox

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St. Gregory of Nyssa - Definition of a Christian

They say that a certain showman in the city of Alexandria, having trained a monkey to dance with some grace, and having dressed him in a dancer's mask and a costume suitable for the occasion, and having surrounded him with a chorus, gained fame by the monkey's twisting himself in time with the music and concealing his nature in every way by what he was doing and what he appeared to be. While the audience was enthralled by the novelty of the spectacle, one of the clever persons present, by means of a trick, showed those watching the performance that the dancer was a monkey. When everyone was crying out and applauding the gesticulations of the monkey, who was moving rhythmically with the music, they say that he threw onto the dancing place some of the sweetmeats which arouse the greediness of such animals; whereupon the monkey, without a moment's delay, when he saw the almonds scattered in front of the chorus, forgetting the dancing and the applause and the elaborate costume, ran after them and grabbed what he found in the palms of his hands. And in order that the mask would not get in the way of his mouth, he energetically thrust aside the disguise with his nails and immediately evoked a laugh from the spectators in place of the praise and admiration, as he emerged ugly and ridiculous from the shreds of the mask. Therefore, just as the assumed form was not

sufficient for that creature to be considered a man, once his nature was disclosed in the incident of the almonds, so those individuals not truly shaping their own natures by faith will easily be disclosed in the toils of the devil as being something other than what they are called. For, instead of a fig or an almond or some such thing, vanity and love of honor and love of gain and love of pleasure, and whatever else the evil assembly of the devil places before greedy men instead of sweetmeats, easily bring to light *the ape-like souls who, through pretense and imitation, play the role of the Christian and then remove the mask of moderation or meekness or some other virtue in a moment of personal crisis*. It is necessary, therefore, for us to understand what the name 'Christian' means, for then, perhaps, we will become what the term implies and not be shown up by the one who perceives what is hidden, namely, that we have disguised ourselves by mere assent and by the pretense of the name alone when we are actually something contrary to what we appear to be.

This holds true for being Orthodox - we must BE Orthodox... not simply act like we're Orthodox

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- a. life within the Church
- b. life focused on Christ
- c. life of doxology

notice - we are not alone... Orthodox Life is a social existence

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- d. life oriented toward Paradise

Sant' Apollinare in Classe - Ravenna - 6th C

notice - we are not going to be alone in Paradise, it will be a social existence

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Eschaton - End Times - Fullness of Time

- many people think of judgement, hellfire and damnation
- that may be *one* way of looking at it, but the positive is another

St. Ephraim the Syrian (4th C) - Hymns on Paradise 7

Weary not, my brothers and sisters,
nor suppose that your struggle will last long,
or that your resurrection is far off.

For our death is already behind us,
and our resurrection before us.

Bear up, O life of mourning,
so that you may attain to Paradise:

Its dew will wash off your squalor,
while what it exudes will render you fragrant.
Its support will afford you rest from your toil,
its crown will give you comfort.
It will offer you fruits in your hunger,
fruits that purify those who partake of them.
In your thirst it will provide for you a celestial elixer,
one that makes wise those who drink of it.

There is no blemish in those in Paradise,
for they are without wickedness.
No anger is in them,
for they have no firey temper.
No mocking scorn is in them,
for they are without guile.
They do not race to do harm –
and so themselves be harmed.
They show no hatred there,
for they are without envy.
They pronounce no judgment there,
for there no oppression exists.

People behold themselves in glory
and wonder at themselves,
discovering where they are.
The nature of their bodies,
once troubled and troublesome,
is now tranquil and quiet,
Resplendent from without in beauty,
and from within with purity;
The body in evident ways,
the soul in hidden ways.

In Paradise the cripples
who had never walked
leap around;
the deformed
who had never even crawled
fly about through the air;
the eyes of the blind and deaf,
who had yearned from the womb
hungering for the light which they had failed to see,
now rejoice to behold
the beauty of Paradise,
and the mighty sound of its harps

gives comfort to their ears.

There is a hopeful joy that is an element of the Orthodox Life.

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St. Nicholas Cabasilas is a little-known person who can help us greatly.

St. Nicholas Cabasilas helps us understand one way that *this life* connects to the *eschatological life* in Paradise.

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If the life to come were to admit those who lack the faculties and senses necessary for it, it would avail nothing for their happiness, but they would be dead and miserable living in that blessed and immortal world.

The reason is that the light would appear and the sun shine with its pure rays with no eye having been formed to see it. The Spirit's fragrance would be abundantly diffused and pervading all, but one would not know it without already having the sense of smell.

It is *this life* which is the workshop for all these things.

When a person has been shaped and formed here, s/he is thus born perfect into that perfect world which does not grow old.

Foetis image - we develop the ability (virtues) here that will be needed to enjoy life there. We sense a bit of what life in Paradise is like in this life.

KEY: It is in this life that we grow into people who will be able to enjoy the eternal life in Paradise.

The Orthodox Life is absolutely focused on Eschatological life.

But we must think about *another* important element of the Orthodox Life.

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A Fiddler on the Roof. Sounds crazy, no? But here in our little village . . . you might say every one of us is a Fiddler on the Roof... trying to scratch out a simple, pleasant tune... without breaking his neck! It isn't easy. You may ask: why do we stay up there if it's so dangerous? We stay because it is our *home*. And how do we keep our balance? *That* I can tell you... in one word:

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TRADITION!

Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years.

Because of our traditions, every one of us knows who he is and what God expects him to do.

FROM THE AUDIENCE: What are some of the important Traditions within the Orthodox Life?

How do we “arrange” these traditions? – Discuss

When the discussion moves to big-T and little-t traditions, move on to...

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Core and peripheral traditions.

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Summary of what “The Orthodox Life” is.

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Now... find a few new people to converse with and discuss: What is “the Internet World”?

Use the flipchart to collect suggestions.

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Characteristics of “The Internet World”

Connected 24/7

Focus on information

Information that we choose for ourselves - loss of other perspectives

Immediate access to everything

We’re fooled into thinking everything’s important

Blogging, vlogging, yelping - we overestimate the importance of our ideas

It affects our ability to concentrate

We buy online, send messages online, read the newspaper online - we lose touch with the physical

It’s easy to get distracted and overwhelmed.

So.... Next question - HOW do we live the Orthodox Life in the Internet World?

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Remember our call and our vocation.

<read> (quoting Lev 11.44f; 19.2; 20.7)

Because we are called to be holy “be holy yourselves in all your conduct.”

This is a command: “You *shall* be holy.”

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This is *why* we were created. - to be an instrument fit for the glory of God.

It’s very important to understand this. To understand our purpose. Our goal. Our assignment.

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Because if we don’t understand our assignment, we are going to be in a world of hurt.

<read>

A simple misunderstanding can cause us to waste a lot of valuable time...

... in extreme circumstances it may cause us to waste a lifetime

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An elder said...

There’s kind of a jarring juxtaposition between the facebook image and the image of the skulls.
One is *very* transitory, the other *very* permanent.

That’s one of the ways that we need to live an Orthodox Life in the Internet World.

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BE AWARE OF TIME.

O God and Master, who are holy and inscrutable! You commanded light to shine forth in the darkness! . . . Make us children of light and day, heirs of the good things of eternity. (Orthros, Prayer 4)

Now that we have come to the setting of the sun and have seen the evening lights, we sing to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... (Phos hilaron)

All times are appropriate for prayer - <read> - we should reflect on Christ at every hour.

This is one of the challenges of the Internet World - too many distractions.

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So many things clamoring for our attention. We start to lose sense of what's truly important.

Only one thing is needed.

St. Nicholas Cabasilas - "It is most important, therefore, that those who live in Christ should keep the soul uncorrupted by worldly cares. Even if something enters the mind which seems to be important, it should not turn aside its reasoning. . . For even though many virtuous people have had to be busied with affairs because they were in charge of cities and estates, yet for that there were no more occupied with anxious cares, nor was their reason turned aside from its established course.

In any work that they perform . . . they always have some knowledge of the goal of their occupation, for they pray that the end of their labors may be that which pleases God.

The goal of their occupation. Remember St. Basil? Our goal in all things is to glory God.

This is a natural control to the excesses of living in the Internet World.

St. Nicholas Cabasilas knows that people in different walks of life need different virtues. "No one would claim that the same virtues are needed by those who govern the state and those who live as private citizens, or by those who have made no further vow to God after the baptismal washing and those who live the monastic life and have taken vows of virginity and poverty and thus own neither property nor their own selves."

And so he provides simple spiritual advice that

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Simple advice - the heart should always be filled with good thoughts

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Are our opinions so necessary?

Is our news so important?

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We need to be silent. <read>

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<read>

OK... so... how can *we* apply these principals in our lives? Discuss.

How can we keep a rule of silence in the Internet World?

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Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

How do we praise the Lord?

St. Nicholas Cabasilas - It belongs to good people to desire the good of all people and to rejoice at their prosperity.

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<read>

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Rejoice in the Lord Always.