

The Mustard Seed

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Priest's Corner Father John Fleser

Prayers for parents and children

Why remain a virgin until marriage? Why lead a moral life? Why keep the marriage bed chaste? Why not experiment with drugs? Why not drink at parties even though I am under age and it is against the law?

These, as well as many other questions, need to be given responses so that our Orthodox, both parents and children, can not only respond with an answer but understand and know why they are living a life according to the teachings of the Church.

This is the first of several articles which will provide a basis upon

"The transgressor, that he may sin, saith to himself, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. For he hath wrought craftiness before Him, lest he should find his iniquity and hate it. The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit, he hath not willed to understand how to do good." (Psalm 35: 1-3)

which each individual can better understand what his faith teaches. It cannot be assumed that because families have attended Church on

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Prayer of Parents for their children and for relatives and friends

O God, our heavenly Father, who lovest mankind, and art most merciful and compassionate, have mercy upon thy servants (*Names of those whom you wish to remember*) for whom I humbly pray thee, and commend to Thy gracious care and protection. Be Thou, O God, their guide and guardian in all their endeavors, lead them in the path of Thy truth, and draw them nearer to Thee, that they may lead a godly and righteous life in Thy love and fear; doing Thy will in all things. Give them grace that they may be temperate, industrious, diligent, devout and charitable. Defend them against the assaults of the enemy, and grant them wisdom and strength to resist all temptation and corruption of this life; and direct them in the way of salvation, for the merits of Thy Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, and the intercessions of His Holy Mother and Thy blessed Saints.

Prayer of a child

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Sunday they will therefore know the answers to the above questions. Nor can it be assumed that our children understand why they should struggle to leave a moral life, a life of purity.

The foundation is Jesus Christ: God who became man and revealed to us the fullness of the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The building blocks are the Theotokos, the Ever-virgin Mary and the saints for their lives demonstrate most vividly that it is possible to live according to the teachings of Christ.

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“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the

good.” (Psalm 35: 1-3)

“Decline from evil and do good, and dwell unto ages of ages. For the Lord loveth judgment, and He will not forsake His holy ones; they shall be kept for ever. But the wicked shall be banished, and the seed of the ungodly shall be utterly destroyed.” (Psalm 36:27-29)

“Blessed are all they that fear the Lord, that walk in His ways. Thou shalt eat the fruit of thy labours; blessed art thou, and well shall it be with thee...Behold, so shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord.” (Psalm 127: 1-2, 5)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16)

“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16)

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any

man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

“Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.” (1 Corinthians 6:16-20)

“...the younger ones must be blameless in all things, especially taking thought of purity and bridling themselves from all evil. It is a fine thing to cut oneself off from the lusts that are in the world, for “every passion of the flesh wages war against the Spirit,” and neither fornicators nor the effeminate nor homosexuals will inherit the Kingdom of God,” nor those who do perverse things. Wherefore it is necessary to refrain from all these things, and be obedient to the presbyters and deacons as unto God and Christ. And the young women must live with blameless and pure conscience.” (*The Letter of Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, to the Philippians*, Library of Christian Classics, Early Christian Fathers, page 131.)

The first article in this series was originally printed in St. Nectarios' Educational Series, No. 56: *The Meaning of Chastity* by Father Michael Azkoul.

“In recent years sex has become a matter of unusual interest. Not that it is a new discovery of our contemporaries. Not that our generation has a special affinity for sex. Not that our generation is particularly lacking in piety., but the approach to it seems to be more “open” than ever before. This may be for good or ill. It depends on the individual. Yet, we do see a great deal of confusion and the underlying Puritan heritage in this country merely adds to the difficulty. We Orthodox, if we are to

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avoid betrayal of our own heritage, must know what the Church's attitude toward sex is.

The Church teaches neither that sex is naturally evil nor that it is "beautiful beyond words." She is committed to neither extreme. Furthermore, She condemns promiscuity, "free love", or any attitude which tends to make what is "natural" necessary. Moreover, there is no double standard of morality, one for men and one for women. Chastity is a moral imperative for all. Sex must be confined to the state of which it was intended, that is, the order of marriage. Outside that divinely established union sexuality is an evil, or as it is called in the Bible, "fornication." As Saint Paul said, "Marriage is honorable and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).

What, then, is the purpose and meaning of sex? It was given to Adam and Eve by God for the increase and multiplication of the race. "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the

*Who has conquered the devil?
He who knows his own weaknesses, passions, and shortcomings*

fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." (Genesis 1:28) Sex, therefore, was and is the principle of life, procreation. Unfortunately, the break with God that our first parents experienced when they disobeyed Him resulted in the perversion of the sexual function. Sexual lust or carnality was born. What had been originally intended for procreation and love was tainted. It became a source of sin, corruption and death. Probably because sex is so essential for the existence of the race did it become a source of great offense.

What is required to avoid the terrible consequences of carnality? Man is much too weak to cure himself. Reason can gain no appreciable control over sin. Where can men and women obtain the strength to offset the perverse power of sexual lust? Man is caught by the Devil.

The only way to escape the wrath of God is the transformation of human nature. But no man can change himself. The purpose in Christ's coming was to effect the needed transformation. He came not to regiment our behavior but to re-create us. "Transformation" means, therefore, "redemption" and "sanctification": to get back from the Devil the body and soul of man (redemption) and to restore the unity which once existed between God and man (sanctification). Sex is necessarily included in this process. Sex must be redeemed and sanctified. The purpose and mean of sex must be regained. Evil must be driven from sex just as it must be ejected from human nature and all human relations. The Sacrament of Matrimony or the "nuptial blessing" was established for that purpose.

What is wrong with "pre-martial" and "extra-martial" sexual engagements? We may ignore the advice of "sex manuals." We all know that the latter is adultery or faithlessness to one with whom we have been sacramentally united. Adultery is a violation of trust and love, it is a succumbing to those very passions that the order of marriage is supposed

So this is what I would say to you and to everyone: never seek to correct each other with anger, but only with humility and sincere love, because one temptation does not cast out an-

to overcome, it is placing sexual lust above the redeeming and sanctifying process. Although most people frown on adultery, they are often tolerant of "the pre-martial affair," especially in the case of the male. But we must keep in mind that God is Redeemer and Sanctifier – including sex. Without this "process" sex is evil, it remains subject to the Devil. Thus, "the pre-marital affair" means scorning the Mystery and taking a privilege which belongs to another order of life (marriage). It is a denial of the purpose of marriage and can do no more than strengthen the control of sexual lust.

The Church teaches, consequently, that in our earthly state, during the "process" of sanctification

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and redemption, chastity is required. It is the great virtue of the interim. Chastity is the permitting of God's Grace to enter our beings to transform the sexual function. To fall to temptation is to fight God, to make His work harder. (However, we must not be misled into thinking that mere abstention is chastity or that fear of humiliation is the assurance of chastity or that all virginity is virtue). Chastity is an attitude, a "state of mind" created in us by the Holy Spirit. It declares itself, as Tertullian said, in the way we act, dress, speak and think. To maintain chastity is a struggle and a challenge. Chastity is a decision and each time we surrender to sexual lust (carnality) we injure the resolution.

Chastity is not first of all for our own sake, as the psychologists say. We are not chaste in order to gain a "good reputation," but that "men may see your good works and glorify your heavenly father." We

Our Father Who art in heaven, bless my father and mother, my guardians, and those who are in authority over me, for their love and tender care for me, and the benefits I receive at their hands. Help me, I pray Thee, to be respectful and obedient to them in all things according to Thy will; and give me Thy grace to perform all my duties carefully and faithfully, to avoid undesirable company and influence, and resist all temptation that may come my way; that I may live a sober, righteous and godly life, ever praising Thee, and glorifying Thy Holy Name. Amen

Prayer before a journey

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, the true and living way, be Thou, O Master, my companion, guide and guardian during my journey; deliver and protect me from all danger, misfortune and temptation that I may be exposed to; that being so defended by Thy divine power, I may have a peaceful and successful journey and arrive safely at my destination. For in Thee I place my trust and hope, and to Thee, with Thy Eternal Father, and All-holy Spirit, I ascribe all praise, honor and glory: now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

Amen.

Prayer in time of trouble

O God, our help and assistance, Who art just and merciful, and who heareth the supplications of Thy people; look down upon me, a miserable sinner, have mercy upon me, and deliver me from this trouble that besets me, for which, I know, I am deservedly suffering. I acknowledge and believe, O Lord, that all trials of this life are given by Thee for our chastisement, when we drift away from Thee, and disobey Thy commandments: deal not with me after my sins, but according to Thy bountiful mercies, for I am the work of Thy hands, and Thou knowest my weakness. Grant me, I beseech Thee, Thy divine helping grace, and endow me with patience and strength to endure my tribulations with complete submission to Thy will. Thou knowest my misery and suffering and to Thee, my only hope and refuge, I flee for relief and comfort: trusting to Thine infinite love and compassion that in due time, when Thou knowest best, Thou will deliver me from this trouble, and turn my distress into comfort, when I shall rejoice in Thy mercy, and exalt and praise Thy holy name, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Thanksgiving after deliverance from trouble

Almighty and merciful God, I most humbly and heartily thank Thy divine majesty for Thy loving kindness and tender mercies, that Thou hast heard my humble prayer, and graciously vouchsafed to deliver me from my trouble and misery. Grant me, I beseech Thee, Thy helping grace, that I may obediently walk in Thy holy commandments, and lead a sober, righteous and godly life, ever remembering Thy mercies, and the blessings Thou hast undeservedly bestowed upon me, that I may continually offer to Thee the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.