

Answers to Questions and Reflections Volume 4 Spirituality

The Orthodox Faith Series by Father Thomas Hopko

Chapter 1: Orthodox Spirituality

1. “Thy will be done.” (*For reflection: Is it possible to be “spiritual but not religious?”*)
2. They do not do right, and they do not love their brother—meaning all people.
3. The acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God.
4. Because our human being and life are naturally positive and good, evil and sin are not normal for us. So it is a contradiction to be both human and a sinner.
5. Satan is the Adversary who disguises himself as an angel of light. (*For reflection: The word “disguise” reminds us that Satan is always lying, hiding himself, pretending—nothing he does is straightforward.*)
6. The word world can refer to God’s good creation, which His Son came to save. It can also refer to the world as the place of temptation and sin, in rebellion against its Creator. The word flesh can refer to the positive character of created being, and to Christ becoming part of it in His incarnation, as in John’s Gospel: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. But it can also have the negative meaning of a godless and unspiritual existence.
7. He is referring to every human being, especially those who are not formally part of the Church.
8. It enables a person to make suffering and death an act of victory and life.

Chapter 2: The Beatitudes

1. Violation of the spiritual attitude of being “poor in spirit” is the source of all sorrows. To be poor in spirit is to be wholly set free from the sinful lusts of this world.
2. He compares it to mourning and grief, which have within them joy and gladness. If we mourn and grieve for our sins and for the sinful world (not morbidly or hopelessly) that godly grief will bring us to repentance, salvation and joy.
3. To be merciful means to refuse to condemn, to be compassionate and sympathetic toward those caught in sin, and to forgive. This is not the same as being tolerant of sin and foolishness in ourselves or others.
4. The persecuted person must genuinely forgive those who persecute. Persecution “for righteousness’ sake” is always “without cause”, as Psalm 69: 4 says.

Chapter 3: The Virtues

1. The virtues are for everyone, not just Christians. They are things that all people desire and seek, as creatures made by God.
2. No. It is the refusal, either conscious or unconscious, to acknowledge God with honor and thanksgiving.
3. The “noonday demon” is the demon of despondency. *(For reflection: That two great teachers of the Church could describe despondency so vividly, as they do here, tells us that they, like many of us, must have been familiar with this destructive emotion. The remedies Fr. Thomas writes about—taken from the teachings of the Fathers—are worth discussing, since they are things we don’t always talk about.)*
4. They exchange the truth about God for a lie, which leads them to worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator.
5. Hypocrisy. *(For reflection: This answer might surprise some people. What does it mean “not to say or do anything that would lead people to have a false impression of [oneself] or of anyone or anything”? How do we do it, living in a world in which the appearance of things is considered to be so important?)*
6. They show it by humility—by caring for the lowliest and worst of sinners, and for the birds, the grass, and all the “least important” things and beings.
7. Patience is a virtue that comes through our willingness to “stay on the cross” and do God’s will no matter what. It cannot come through an effort of our own will power alone.
8. Each of us has a unique life, mission and vocation from God, which no one else can fulfill. Working in faith to accomplish this, without fear and without envying anyone else’s life, is the way to joy, wisdom and peace.
9. Passionlessness is spiritual mastery over the lusts of the mind and flesh.
10. Because even the things that are evil—and they do exist—can be vehicles for spiritual growth and for our salvation. They are not stronger than God, and His tender care is over all.

Chapter 4: The Greatest Virtue is Love

1. All three.
2. The only way in which it is appropriate for us to hate ourselves is in despising and putting off our “old nature with its evil practices” so that we can “put on the new nature which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its Creator.”

3. Jesus Christ calls us not only to love, which was already commanded in the Old Testament law, but to love as Christ Himself loves. Christian love must be totally self-emptying, as Christ's love is.

Chapter 5: Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving

1. St. Nilus says that if we ask for something we want and God grants it, we will then be distressed because we haven't left it to God to give what He knows is needed.
2. It means that God is everywhere and over all things.
3. It's daring and dangerous because it means we must follow wherever it leads, as Christ did. Also, the devil will fiercely tempt anyone who truly tries to live according to God's will.
4. No, we are only tempted by our own desires.
5. Intercessory prayers, for the salvation of others.
6. Because doing so would tempt us to believe that God hears our prayers according to how well we've said them, rather than simply through His great mercy. Therefore, we should just forge ahead in our prayers.
7. We can say the prayer constantly, whatever we are doing, without any particular bodily postures or breathing techniques.
8. The model is the Book of Revelation.
9. *Lectio divina* is slow and attentive reading of the Bible or possibly other writings, for the purpose of communion with God.
10. He says that even if a person doesn't know how to pray but does seek God, that person is already the dwelling place of God.
11. Yes. According to St. Abba Dorotheus, if when we fast we think we're achieving something virtuous, we are foolish. It leads us to look down on others and think we are "something great"—just the opposite of the attitude we should have.
12. A rich person will want to keep them and gather even more, and this delight in riches "chokes the word of God, and so it proves unfruitful."

Chapter 6: Sexuality, Marriage and Family

1. They are holy and pure within the communion of marriage, ideally of one woman and one man forever.

2. Yes. Both married and single people can serve God and live the spiritual life.
3. The sexual act is satisfying when it is the expression of the couple's total union, each living completely for the good of the other.
4. Honoring, respecting and loving our parents enables us to serve God, who is the "Father of all."

Chapter 7: Sickness, Suffering and Death

1. The greatest witness is sickness endured with faith and love.
2. Jesus knew the glory of paradise and the perfect love of God. All this was given to human beings, and the greatest agony Christ suffered was to see the gift scorned and rejected in His own person.
3. His death is the only one that is completely voluntary. *(For reflection: Christianity is based on the willingness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to live with us and die for us. This is unique to the Christian faith—no other faith teaches that God would do this amazing thing for His creatures, out of completely self-emptying love for them.)*

Chapter 8: The Kingdom of Heaven

1. We will be judged solely on the basis of how we have served Him by serving others, including the "least" among us.
2. It is God's glorious love, which will be revealed to everyone at the end of the ages.