

Spiritual Practices for Priestly Health
A Talk by Metropolitan Tikhon
Pastoral Conference of the Diocese of the South
Nicholasville, Kentucky
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**Your Eminence, Archbishop Alexander,
Your Grace, Bishop Gerasim,
Very Reverend and Reverend clergy and matushki,**

Christ is in our midst!

~~I am very pleased~~ **It's a joy to be with you for these days of your pastoral conference here in Lexington. This is my first visit to the Diocese of the South since the election and enthronement of His Grace Bishop Gerasim on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul in 2021 so I am grateful to have the opportunity to make pilgrimage once more to the southern parts of the Orthodox Church in America. It has also been ten years since I last joined the clergy of the Diocese of the South for this the annual pastoral conference that was held at Saint Mary of Egypt in Atlanta. I am grateful to His Eminence Archbishop Alexander for the kind invitation to be with you this week year and honored to have the opportunity offer a few words. Most importantly, and I look forward it is refreshing for me to spend time in some time with you, to get caught up with many of my fellow clergy whom I have known for many years and perhaps have not seen since your seminary days. all (or should I finally, it is certainly a great comfort say, y'all?) and to be the recipient of enjoying some of your famous the celebrated southern hospitality, a taste of which y-** ~~I have already received a taste of that~~

hospitality yesterday in the warm choral welcome I received at the airport yesterday from a large delegation from the Saint Athanasius parish. I offer my thanks to Fr. Justin, Matushka Tamara, and all in the local community here for serving as such warm and welcoming hosts. I should add that my comments here are not at all influenced by the tasting tour in the tour of the Lexington Distillery, though I did use up all four of my tokens. the fraternal meal afterwards, and the welcome reception. **I pray that my brief words here can, can contribute in some small, repay this hospitality and serve as my contribution for way to the spirit of brotherhood that I have already encountered/witnessed last evening at the reception among the clergy and their families of this diocese.**

It is precisely because I value the importance of clergy brotherhood and the health of our clergy that was offered a few possible topics to address and I chose as my topic today “Spiritual Practices for Priestly Health.” in part because, aCs most of you know, clergy health is a key component emphasis of my vision for the Orthodox Church in America b. But I also chose this topic because it is also one a topic that is personally meaningful to me and and, I suspect, relevant to all clergy regardless of how far along they have travelled in their pastoral ministries or how smooth or difficult the path may have been in the past or may be in the future. Priestly health is something that requires our persistent attention and no small degree of labor. In other words, clergy health is not a luxury for us but rather a necessity if we hope to fulfill, and excel in, our pastoral work.

There is no doubt that there are others who have a role in helping us attain or maintain our health as clergy: the Holy Synod, our diocesan bishop, our parish councils, our brother clergy, our friends, and our families. In addition, there are countless resources, from the legitimate to the fraudulent, that are available to assist human beings attain health, whether ~~that~~ this be physical, mental, financial, or spiritual health. The multiplicity of such resources can sometimes be paralyzing and **the priestly vocation is one that requires ~~some~~ a lot of discernment in order to fruitfully make use of the resources we have available to usadaptation. Certainly, priests are human beings like any other, and as such, ought to be able to benefit from all the resources for health that are available. And yet, the priesthood is a special ~~gift~~ calling that ~~must~~ needs to be nurtured in particular ways, especially in our often confusing modern context.**

Today, I would like to offer some reflections on how we, as ~~priests~~clergy, can exercise the discernment to responsibly make use of the spiritual practices and resources that are available to us. Rather than simply listing such practices and resources and ~~telling you to make use of them~~to “do this” or “don’t do that,”; I will rather **focus on a select few of ~~them~~areas and reflect on ~~the manner in which we might make use of those spiritual tools~~how these might be incorporated into our live. None of these will be unfamiliar to you, of course, but if you are like me, we always long for that moment of clarity when the familiar, that is, what we know we should do, suddenly makes sense for us.**

I think that perhaps our greatest challenge as clergy is that we spend our days, weeks, and years laboring to guide, teach, and lead others towards health That is, how can we best strive to attain health of body, mind, and spirit but at the same time question how far along we have gone along that path ourselves. For this reason, I say “strive” in a very deliberate way because **one of the first most important principles** that I believe for us as clergy should is to adopt an attitude is one of balance. Saint Paul says “All things are permitted to me but not all things are beneficial”, a phrase that is applied in many contexts of Church life but .The phrase has some a particular application to the topic of clergy health to us as clergy. Our whole life is focused on preaching the perfection of the Gospel, maintaining the good order of the liturgical services, discerning the canonical, theological, or pastoral implications of the actions, words, and thoughts of our parishioners. How much time do we take in assessing our own health? Our own state?

This is very difficult to do because our first inclination is to care for others. But we cannot care for others if we are not, at the same time and to the same degree, striving to care for ourselves. The challenge in finding a balanced way to do this is not only that our Orthodox faith and tradition set a very high bar for us, but in our own contemporary, in the sense that our culture sometimes is one that often imposes certain an even more unattainable bar requirements for achieving success in any area: “Just do this and you will be successful”; “follow these practices and you will lose weight like magic;” “read these books and you will find inner peace,.” “Hit like and subscribe to my YouTube channel

and your will be unendingly entertained.” It seems to me that, rather than frantically following after the latest trend, we might benefit more from a deliberate and prayerful process of ~~suspect that people will exert more energy in trying to follow such approaches than in discerning~~ discernment in establishing **what might actually be of benefit to them**us. In other words, to try ~~As such, I believe it is important for us to find the correct balance, to determine, in the spirit of Saint Paul, what is beneficial to~~ **me**us.

At the outset, it is important to remember that ~~the balance to be struck~~ such balance may not be the same in every context, or at every stage of our pastoral ministry. Some of you may be familiar with Marie Kondo, known in some circles as the “queen of clean,” who has gained some notoriety in the past few years through her advocacy of tidying up and throwing clutter out. I can’t say that I am conversant with her methods but I do know that she has advocated for the daily discarding of unnecessary clutter in peoples’~~their~~ houses and lives, keeping only those things that speak to their hearts. It is certainly a noble endeavor and one that might well be heeded by clergy, who ought to keep decorous homes and maintain their altars in an orderly and dignified manner, in conformity with their oath of ordination.

Nevertheless, just recently, Ms. Kondo has determined that, after having three children, she no longer feels the urgency of maintain such a strict order. During a recent webinar she said “My home is messy, but the way I am spending my time is the right way for me at this time at this stage of my life. Up until

now, I was a professional tidier, so I did my best to keep my home tidy at all times. I have kind of given up on that in a good way for me. Now I realize what is important to me is enjoying spending time with my children at home.”¹

~~I mention this simply because Ms. Kondo’s announcement apparently cause quite a stir in social media circles, driven especially from a vocal by a large contingent of people of people who that felt betrayed or misled by this change in direction. It appears that many devotees of Ms. Kondo who had, in fact, successfully implemented her philosophy in their own lives and now felt abandoned by her. I am not here to debate the relative merits of Mary Kondo’s system. I merely present it as an example of what we human beings, and in a very particular way, we clergy tend to do rather frequently, which is to. And what we tend to do is precisely what Marie Kondo’s followers did: latch on to a system or method, persevere in that system or method for a substantial amount of some time, but and then abandon that approach out of frustration become frustrated when that system no longer works for us or we get tired of it. (or when the author of that system changes his approach).~~

So what changes? Why is it so difficult to do those things that we know we ought to do? It seems to me that, in order to find the balance that might bring us back to the path of health, it is important to focus on the attitude that we bring to all of our activities, the disposition of our heart as we engage in our ministries and strive to fulfill our

¹ Marie Kondo Has “Kind of Given Up on Tidying Up”: “My Home is Messy”, by Zach Sharf, Variety (online edition), January 27, 2023

responsibilities towards God, our flocks, and our families. The right attitude, the correct disposition of the heart, can make all the difference in how fruitful our ministries will be and this will be reflected ~~successful we are~~ **in our personal prayer, our fasting, ~~in~~ our physical activity, our ability to ~~in~~ resting, and in our celebration of the divine services. It is these five particular areas ~~spiritual practices~~ that I would like to speak about with you today, sharing my own thoughts, and perhaps generating a helpful discussion afterwards. ~~Again, I am not~~ Unlike Marie Kondo, or any of the multitude of self-help superstars, -and I am not here to advocate for a particular system or method of attaining clergy health. Neither am I presenting you with the definitive list of spiritual practices that will lead to health. Ultimately, our health – physical, mental, spiritual – is a gift from God but one towards which, nevertheless, we are called to exercise good stewardship and that stewardship takes many forms. -**

Personal Prayer

I begin with personal prayer because this is an area that, I suspect, all of us know we need to improve on. It is a topic that, like all of the topics I will speak about, causes no small amount of anxiety or ~~self-judgment~~ condemnation since we call others to daily prayers, prayers in the morning, prayers in the evening, and yet we often fail ourselves often fail to consistently fulfill even as basic simple rule of prayer, or at least believe that we are doing it badly. I ~~mention this not to cause you further anxiety or self-judgment~~ but rather to

~~remind you that~~ We should first remember that prayer is something that is difficult to attain, in a fact that is attested to by, ~~the great~~
~~volume~~ voluminous of literature in the Church devoted to the practice and nurturing of ~~the encouragement of~~ **prayer** is a sign that, indeed, ~~prayer is something difficult to attain.~~ **We are always in need of encouragement to pray, even as we encourage others to pray** precisely because prayer is hard. -

We also know that, in our Orthodox tradition, there are many levels of prayer, from the basic reading of the written daily prayers to the highest levels of the Jesus Prayer where the Holy Spirit himself is praying in our heart. I am in no position to speak to you ~~to speak~~ of the latter (and if I were to speak of the highest levels of the prayer of the heart, it would surely indicate that, in fact, I had not attained that state). ~~But What~~ I can remind you ~~of~~, as I remind myself, ~~is~~ of a principle that is often found in the patristic literature, particularly in the monastic tradition. And this is the reminder-principle that one ought to expend the most energy towards prayer and the ascetic life in one's youth so that one might ~~rely on~~ reap the fruit of that youthful zeal when one gets old and tired, as most of inevitably do. -

This may not seem like very spiritual advice, but I think it is, in fact, genuinely beneficial advice, advice that recognizes the reality of the aging process and, at the same time, the unceasing activity of the grace of God. Indeed, why should I be the one who can adequately judge the effectiveness of my own life of prayer?

And yet, that is often what we do. We lamento: lamenting that we don't have the energy to wake up early to do our prayers; we rue our, ~~or staying~~ stay up late watching YouTube videos; we, ~~or~~ bemoan our unwillingness to turn ~~turn~~ off the television, etc. The list goes on. Perhaps we ought to be encouraged by remember calling to mind the zeal of our youth rather than lamenting the laziness of our old age and sinking further into inactivity.

And so, for the younger priests here I would say: certainly, put more energy into your personal prayers, making sure to leave room for those prayers. In other words, do not direct all of your physical and spiritual energy towards the work of the Church – as important and indispensable as this is – but save some energy for your own prayer corner. And for those here who are older, I would say: certainly, strive to maintain a daily rule of prayer, but if you fall short, or even fall very short, do not despair but remember the zeal of your youth, and offer that as your prayer offering to the Lord.

Finally, we should remember that we have the help of the prayers of the saints. Those prayers offered by Saint Basil the Great, Saint Anthony the Great, Saint Seraphim of Sarov, Saint Silouan the Athonite, and countless others, are still active and effectual because they were offered not just in their historical context but were offered for the whole world and for all the ages, including our own. It should be a source of encouragement for us to know that our own weak, inconsistent, and short prayers are joined in a very real way to the prayers of these champions of prayer.

Fasting

From prayer, I now move to fasting. I suspect that most of us have been in situations where a number of us, as clergy, are gathered for a meal on a Friday night and someone asks makes the following proposition: “It’s after Vespers, right, so this is this technically Saturday and therefore we can eat meat?” Then follows either an awkward pauses silence, as everyone tries to establish in his own mind whether the pious answer or the gluttonous answer is the correct one in this case, or a lengthy discussion on the merits of the pious answer or the gluttonous answer to the question ensues. This is what I call “navigating the treacherous waters of the spiritual life discipline” and it is something that takes place whether we live in a monastery or not in almost every possible context of our churchly existence but perhaps no more clearly than with fasting. We are coming up on the season of Great Lent where all the rules and guidelines for fasting will take center stage. When they do, they have the potential either to bolster our life of prayer or to cause tension within our families and communities.

If you will allow me, I will take an example from a monastic context. In the monastic life, for example as we know, it is traditional to fast abstain from meat at all times. But there is also an unwritten rule that if a monastic is served meat, he should eat it because the law rule of love is higher than the law of fasting. When is it right to exercise the first law rule? When is it right to exercise the second? Consider

~~the following story from the desert fathers, which might shed some light on such~~illustrates the dilemmas:

"It happened that several fathers went to the house of a friend of Christ, and among them was Abba Poemen. During the meal, meat was served and everyone ate except Abba Poemen. The other fathers knew his discretion and they were surprised that he did not eat the meat. When they got up, they said to him: "You are Poemen, and yet you behaved like this?" [in other words - you know better than everyone else that you should eat what is placed in front of you] The Elder answered: "Forgive me, my fathers, you have eaten and no one is shocked, but if I had eaten, since many brothers come to me, they would have suffered harm, for they would have said, Poemen has eaten meat, why should we not eat it ourselves?" So they admired his discernment."²

~~We see how important it is to use~~It is this same discernment that we are called to exercise especially when we begin to speak about rules. It is important to preserve love, and to remain free, of course, but we need to do this with care, because love can easily turn to self-love and freedom can easily turn to self-will. Our measure needs to be Christ, which measure we find when we see is determined by how faithfully we are following the commandments. It is in community – in an actual encounter with other people and in other varied circumstances – that we are able to find that measure. Abba Poemen needed to care not only for his host and the brothers that were with him, but also the brothers who were not with him at the time, yet looked to him for guidance.

²Ward, Benedicta, *The Desert Christian: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1975), p. 190.

If we want our fasting to contribute to our overall health, we should strive for such discernment in our practice of

abstention, remember While there are certainly physical health benefits to fasting, the greater health benefit is the attaining of this discernment. Sometimes breaking the fast is not a sin; sometimes not breaking the fast is a sin. But sometimes things are just as we would expect, and keeping the fast is the right way. Our holy tradition, our life in Christ, is full of such paradoxes. It is often difficult to grasp this on a conceptual level, that we follow the rules so that we might be free of the rules. What does that mean? How do I apply such a principle in my life? How does fasting help me to be a healthy priest?

Ultimately, our fasting contributes to our health when our heart and our soul are refreshed by being drawn to prayer. If we focus so much on the rules of fasting, we forget that the purpose of fasting is ultimately to help us pray more effectively or to prepare us for something greater, such as the celebration of the divine liturgy and the partaking of the precious body and blood of Our Lord.

~~Sometimes that while breaking the fast is not a sin; sometimes not breaking the fast is a sin. Or the converse could be the case. But sometimes things are just as we would expect, and keeping the fast is the right way. Our holy tradition, our life in Christ, The Orthodox Church is full of such paradoxes. It is often sometimes difficult to grasp this on a conceptual level, that such concepts as that fact that we follow the rules so that we might be free of the rules. What does that mean? How do I apply such a principle in my life? How does fasting help me to be a healthy priest?~~

~~While there are certainly physical health benefits to some fasting practices, there are also health concerns that arise with fasting without discernment. But I would argue that the greater benefit to fasting (and likewise the potential greatest harm from fasting) is when our heart and our soul is either refreshed by being drawn to prayer or darkened by the extinguishing of our desire for prayer through our practice of fasting. If we focus so much on the rules of fasting, we forget that the purpose of fasting is ultimately to help us pray more effectively or to prepare us for something greater, such as the celebration of the divine liturgy and the partaking of the precious body and blood of Our Lord.~~

Exercise

From prayer and fasting, I would like now to move to physical exercise and nutrition. I have regularly spoken, most recently at the All-American Council in Baltimore last July, of the efforts that I have undertaken over the past two years to monitor my own physical health. It seems to me that all of us have the sense that human beings are generally less active than they were compared to previous eras when farming, hunting, and other physical labor were the lot of most people, even clergy. Today, our lifestyle is such that physical labor is less a part of our daily existence while, at the same time, our appetite for good or unhealthy food has not diminished.

If I may, I will offer some practical suggestions based on my own experience of dealing with food and exercise. Once again, these suggestions

may not work for you but I offer them nonetheless as one example of what may be helpful.

The first is the importance of taking the decision to actively monitor one's food intact and begin exercising. I recall very clearly the moment when I weighed myself and said: "I have crossed the limit of what is healthy." I can share that this was when I crossed the line from 230 lbs to 231 lbs.

The second is to establish a method of accountability with someone else. In my case, this took the form of the hiring of a nutritionist, whom I contacted by email the very day that I reached the above mentioned weight. In this case, the accountability started immediately because as soon as I reached out to make an appointment, I had the thought: at least, I can still enjoy a few more decadent meals before she answers my request for appointment. But that hope was dashed when the nutritionist called me back that very afternoon and we made an appointment for the next day.

Since that time, now close to two years ago, I have checked-in on a weekly basis with my nutritionist, providing her with a log of my daily food intake and noting my weight at the end of that week. So my third point is to persevere in whatever practice you choose to adopt – but to persevere with hope, not out of mere obligation.

The accountability is reinforced because it costs me \$72 a session with my nutritionist (that is, close to \$300 a month) but this is important because it makes it less likely that I will cheat on my weekly reports – in other words, it's an investment that keep me honest.

Along with food monitoring, I also have tried to keep an exercise regime, primarily walking but also the HASfit system.

2-3 miles of hiking 3-5 times a week

Rest

All of us, as clergy, need to take a break. While our work as priests is inspiring, uplifting, and life-giving, it is often intense, stressful, and draining. It can often seem to be interminable and to offer no respite.

On top of that, we come now to the season of Great Lent where we are asked to dedicate all our remaining energy to extra services, unending prostrations, and rigorous fasting. In all this ascetical striving, it is good to remember that there is an asceticism of rest and retreat. Retreat need not be taken as a defeat in the military sense of a platoon of soldiers retreating in the face of more powerful enemies. Rather rest is something that is necessary for our spiritual well-being. During the Six Psalms at matins, we hear the words of the Psalmist: *I lay down and slept. I awoke, for the Lord will help me.* Sometimes we can more directly receive God's help, not when we are charging at **hHim, but rather when we pull back and allow him to visit us.**

So rest is an ascetical exercise as we hear in the following well-known passage from the sayings of Abba Anthony the Great:

A hunter in the desert saw Abba Anthony enjoying himself with the brethren and he was shocked. Wanting to show him that it was necessary sometimes to meet the needs of the brethren, the old man said to him, "Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it." So he did. The old man then said, "Shoot another," and he did so. Then the old man said, "Shoot yet again," and the hunter replied "If I bend my bow so much I will break it." Then the old man said to him, "It is the same with the work of God. If we stretch the brethren beyond measure they will soon break. Sometimes it is necessary to come down to meet their needs." When he heard these words the hunter was pierced by compunction and, greatly edified by the old man, he went away. As for the brethren, they went home strengthened. (Saying 13)

To live in community, as we do as clergy, one has to know when to pull the bow and shoot, and when to relax the bow and rest. The realities of life, the passions of others, and our own passions make this challenging. But again, it is often in the midst of those very challenges that we find discernment and even grace. We cannot discern when to be alert and when to relax if we don't have a handle on how we approach our life in Christ.

The present structure of modern living does not provide a real opportunity for true rest. Even the very sound good advice—for example, that ~~that~~ priests ought to take a day off each week, and or commit to actually taking e-a two-week vacation each year—, is foiled by the realities of our contemporary culture. It cannot be

considered a true “day off” if you check your email, even once in the morning, “just to finish up some bit of church business.”

We should also remember that our faith includes the venerable tradition of a day of rest, not merely a human tradition, but in fact a divine institution from the creation of the world to the great Sabbath Day on which the Lord rested. How many of us actually rest on either Saturday or Sunday? Certainly the celebration of the divine services are the sacred work that we must engage in. But how much do we also give in to the prevailing culture’s urge to make those very days, the sacred “weekend” of the world, a time of even more activity? The post-liturgical nap that most of us enjoy may, in fact be, a sacred way of maintaining our health.

So I would strongly advocate for making time to rest, and for ensuring that such rest is legitimate rest, not the half-hearted rest of aimlessly scrolling through social media posts.

Give example of France

~~I would also argue that a day off in which one~~

~~Have to know the limits~~

~~Just sit and be with your wife and kids~~

~~Tensions~~

The Divine Services

I have left the divine services for last because I believe that they are the greatest source of health for us as clergy. This is something that each of us understands existentially from our own experience of standing at the altar. Even in the midst of the most painful of times, even when we are most exhausted, or beaten down, we seem to always regain our strength, maintain peace, re-establish balance, and feel healthy, when we are serving the divine services. At the same time, when we are outside of the services, we are quick to imagine that we would be better off serving less, that services should be the first thing to cut from our busy lives, they sometimes turn into the one thing that we are most likely to abandon when intellectually placed in—as we consider our contrast with our own sense of exhaustion, the weight of our pastoral cares, or the multitude of distractions that swirl around us.

So here I would offer just a simple recommendation with respect to our health as clergy: make the serving of the divine services your highest priority. I do not say: serve only services and neglect everything else. Rather, I say: make the serving of the divine services your highest priority and from that effort will flow the grace necessary to fulfill all your other responsibilities with grace. And by responsibilities, I am not limiting myself only to the things that you must do as shepherds of your flocks, but I include the responsibility you have to find time to pray in your prayer corner, to rest your mind and to exercise your body, and

in general to discern those activities (or that inactivity) that will most benefit your health.

In contrast to such tempting thoughts, our holy tradition confirms the existential importance of the divine services for the clergy. In a sense, our entire reason for being comes to down to our service at the altar. In numerous Byzantine sources, both for monastic and secular clergy, we find instructions that the clergy celebrate the divine liturgy at least four times a week—Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday—in addition to any feast days. These medieval standards, even if they are impossible for us to achieve, should serve as a reminder that the divine services are the source of our strength, the source of our identity.

But we need not look only to the Middle Ages. A saint of recent times, Venerable James (Iakovos) of Euboea, was called to re-establish the life of a monastery that had fallen on hard times. One of his first decisions was to institute the practice of daily divine liturgies, though he was the only hieromonk. Of course he was tempted to set aside the practice out of exhaustion, but he would say that, every morning after liturgy, he felt refreshed, as if he had the strength of a lion. We all know from experience the strength that we also draw from the holy services. We must be realistic, and yet the reality is, serving the divine services is our highest calling; and also, the services are the fountain from which all of our other activities flow.

So here I would offer just a simple recommendation with respect to our health as clergy: make the serving of the divine services your highest priority. I do not say: serve only services and neglect everything else. Rather, I say: make the serving of the

divine services your highest priority and from that effort will flow the grace necessary to fulfill all your other responsibilities with grace. And by responsibilities, I am not limiting myself only to the things that you must do as shepherds of your flocks, but I include the responsibility you have to find time to pray in your prayer corner, to rest your mind and to exercise your body, and in general to discern those activities (or that inactivity) that will most benefit your health.

~~{I think some of what you found below can be used somehow but I haven't figured out exactly how}~~

~~According to Stefanos Alexopoulos, in the "Cathedral" use of Constantinople, the Presanctified was celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year, the Wednesday and Friday of Cheesefare, on Holy Friday, and on September 14th, the Exaltation of the Cross.~~

~~St. Nicephorus the Confessor, Canon 32 Monks must fast on Wednesday and Friday of Cheese Week; and after the presanctified liturgy is dismissed, they must eat cheese wherever it is available or on the market, or, in other words, wherever it can be had, in refutation of the heresy of the Jacobites and of that of the Tetradites.~~

~~Trullo Canon 52 On all days of the holy fast of Lent, except on the Sabbath, the Lord's day and the holy day of the Annunciation, the Liturgy of the Presanctified is to be said.~~

~~JMM: But note that the Typicon as we have received it still allows for no liturgy at all on Annunciation, if the rector desires. But what is non-negotiable is that the brethren must be given fish. Doubtless, this tension—should there be a liturgy on Annunciation, or not?—at least partially explains the Fifth Saturday, the Saturday of the Akathist, which is largely a sort of "second Annunciation" but on an unambiguously liturgical day.~~

Also note that what Trullo 52 implies—pre-sanctified liturgy on all weekdays of Lent, not just Wednesday, Friday, 5th Thursday, and feasts—was in fact the Studite practice, which survived some places in Russia until the 20th century. For example, there were presanctified liturgies every day during Lent at Kiev Caves Lavra, except the first and second days of the fast, until 1930. (Some Studite family typica, as well as the Cathedral use, even had presanctified on the first two days of the fast.)

Typikon of the Monastery of the Mother of God "Full of Grace (Keecharitomene)" But the holy and divine liturgy must be celebrated each Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and during the feasts. Moreover it must take place during the fasts, as the synaxarion prescribes.

Rule for the Hospital of Pantoerator Monastery: Each week four liturgies will be celebrated in the hospital, on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday for the glorification of Our Lord and in our memory, excluding the feasts of Our Lord and other significant ones which occur during the week.

CONCLUDING ADVICE

I would like to conclude by returning once again to the question of paradox, which I have touched on briefly here and there above. Most of us cannot claim to have experienced the fullness of majesty and beauty of our life in the Church. Very few saints even bother to explain that beauty and majesty because their words would not convey the depth of the mystery. There are some contemporary monastics who, I believe for the sake of the rest of us, try to articulate this mystery, but even then, we are not left with much for our rational mind to hold on-to. Take, for example, the following words from Archimandrite Vasileios of

Iviron Monastery, speaking about the mystery of the monastic life:

In monasticism, opposites constantly work together in concelebration; contrary tendencies come together. Out of deadness is born life, and out of mourning, rejoicing. A monastery, like a garden, is a burial ground of dead seeds from which a new life blossoms. The whole atmosphere of the monks' worship and vigil, in their singing and in the content of their hymns, is a plaintive lament and a shout of triumph. United together as these two realities are – the anguish of pain and the shout of joy – they paralyse you and rouse you to a dance of strange rejoicing while your inward parts are still convulsed with lamentation and mourning. And you dare to go forth into the festivities (into the Bridal Chamber which is the Passion of the Lord) because you are invited by Him who knows your frailties. And at the same time you know that this action of yours does not wound anyone who is sorrowful or lonely, but is a hope for all who wait and have not heard the invitation to enter into the joy of the Lord.³

Such words have no meaning for those who have not at least begun to live the Christian life (let alone the monastic life) and yet, for those of us who at least long to understand what it means to enter into the Bridal Chamber which is~~and~~ the Passion of Christ, they confirm for us the reality of that mystery, give us hope that some have entered this realm of experience, and give us the courage to take our own feeble steps in that direction.

I would encourage all of us as clergy to be mindful of this paradox in the various aspects of your priestly ministries:

³ Archimandrite Vasileios, *Beauty and Hesychia in Athonite Life*, Alexander Press, 1996, page 26.

Be hopeful in your health activities by maintaining a daily life of prayer but without

Be distinct in your health activities by: keeping fast days as fast days and feast days as feast days. But be ready to be humbled – not depressed -- when you fail, and grown in discernment as you navigate the various purposes of fasting.

Be consistent in your health activities but don't agonize over occasional lapses in that consistency.

Be realistic in your health activities. If you are young, take advantage of your zeal and energy to establish good habits of prayer, fasting, rest, liturgical service, and pastoral outreach. If you are old, don't despair over your present state of exhaustion or feel that you are failing to achieve previous levels of spiritual activity or even physical activity. Rather, try to realistically assess what you can do today.

Finally, seek help in establishing and assessing your health activities. Much of the work to attain spiritual health is rooted in personal investment. But we are social creatures and there is great benefit, especially for clergy, to join forces in maintaining a healthy regimen. This is perhaps one of the greatest benefit of the clergy peer learning groups. But such mutual support

need not be limited to one sort of formal channel. This is the purpose of gatherings such as the one we are pariticipating in today.

As such, I welcome any questions or discussion on what I have shared with you today.

Thank you.