The Third Monday of the Great Fast

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"O my soul, abstain from the wickedness of evil; overcome your anger and your outbursts of passion and sin."
Matins for the Third Greatfast Monday: Canon, Ode Nine

Texts similar to this fill the pages of our liturgical prayer during this time of the Holy Great Fast. Over and over, the soul is admonished to forego its evil ways and to return once again as a prodigal to the Father seeking His tender mercies. Have we taken the challenge seriously? Have we really stopped to take a spiritual inventory and to ask: "Am I an angry person? Do things, even little things, that others do annoy me or provoke me to anger?"

How do you begin to get in touch with your anger? First of all, list the names of those persons who truly irritate you; and secondly, list beside each name exactly what that person does to annoy you. The more difficult part now is to accept the fact that the outer enemies that you see in others are really a reflection of your own inner enemies, sometimes referred to as our shadow. These unconscious projections onto others occur over a span of time when something you can't face about yourself is unconsciously repressed. Later, they appear again but in only more negative ways, such as angry outbursts or even in subtle forms of hostility.

Once we can face our anger, we beg the loving Father to help us accept it, confront it, and to take responsibility for the pain and hurts which accompany it. Saint John Climacus offers us an even bolder challenge. He says that "The first step toward freedom from anger is to keep the lips silent when the heart is stirred; the next, to keep thoughts silent when the soul is upset; the last, to be totally calm when unclean winds are blowing."

Being quite aware of our humanness though, Saint John Chrysostom reminds us that many things throughout our day can distract us from dealing with our anger. This causes the anger to smolder. As the night draws on, we are to be reconciled, putting out the flame while it is still fresh. For should night overtake it, the day that follows will not be able to put out the evil that has been added to it in the night, eventually erupting into a blaze of anger or rage.

Each evening in our Byzantine Catholic Church we are offered the opportunity to come to that reconciliation through the evening service of Vespers. We beg the Lord to heal the hurts of the day and to renew relationships with those persons on whom my projections fell. We gradually move then to that state of transparency through which the Light of Christ shines forth. Today at Vespers we sing: "Let us love the fast of spirit, which by the Spirit weakens the most violent passions...." May this be our prayer for the day as well.

SCRIPTURE READINGS: Isaiah 8:13 - 9:7
Genesis 6:9-22
Proverbs 8:1-21