

LIFE'S MISTAKES WE CHOOSE TO SANCTIFY

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“Healing”

I am not a mechanism, an assembly or various sections.
And it is not because the mechanism is working wrongly, that I am ill.
I am ill because of wounds to the soul, to the deep emotional self
and the wounds to the soul take a long, long time, only time can help
and patience, and a certain difficult repentance,
long, difficult repentance, realization of life's mistake, and the freeing oneself from the
endless repetition of the mistake
which mankind at large has chosen to sanctify.

— D.H. Lawrence

When I first heard this poem I was struck by the repetition of particular ideas. As Victoria Field, notes in her online blog, “It’s almost as if Lawrence wants to make sure we’ve really heard certain words — mechanism, ill, wounds to the soul, time, difficult repentance, mistake.” No doubt, we all know something about what he is saying— or we will eventually. But what is the “mistake which mankind at large has chosen to sanctify”? She suggests that, “Answers are very dependent on how questions are phrased.”

During Great Lent we are always, particularly this year, exploring the importance not just of answers, but of “well phrased questions.” As part of the Old Testament readings during our first celebration of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, we heard how Adam and Eve, after disobeying God’s commandment not to eat from a particular tree in the Garden, “hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8). Then God called to the man, and said: “Where are you?” (3:9)

“Where are you?” This is the primary question asked of all us throughout our lives, and we will probably respond differently depending on how we find ourselves at particular moments. It, therefore, also intertwines with a similar question like, “How are you?” At times we ask this of each other so casually that we don’t even really listen for a response, nor do we give a serious answer when asked ourselves, perhaps just thinking: It’s too complicated; I really don’t have the time; I don’t trust you enough to get into it; I don’t really know.

Without really understanding for sure what D.H. Lawrence meant by “the mistake which mankind at large has chosen to sanctify”—let’s rephrase it more positively and make the

following affirmations, from the perspective of these two questions examining “where” or “how” we are:

1) The effort to be healed can be difficult, but is worth it. Jesus Christ came preaching the message to “repent” and “change our minds.” He is the “healer of our souls and bodies.” Lawrence affirms that with the “long, difficult repentance” and the “realization of life’s mistake” there can be a “freeing” from its “endless repetition.” We must face the reality of our own actions, but as Fr. Alexander Schmemmann stated, the spiritual consists also “in how each one of us deals with what we’ve been dealt through no choice or fault of our own.”

2) While the interpretation of the events and circumstances that have led to our actions and responses must be our own, we can support and “be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (Romans 1:12). During the first week of Great Lent we read from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book, *Life Together*, written after his experiences of living in an illegal seminary within Nazi Germany between 1935-37. He was killed in a concentration camp on April 9, 1945. He begins and ends his chapter on “Community” with the verse from Psalm 133:1 that we sing as part of each Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts: “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers (and sisters) dwell together in unity.” In an incredibly powerful statement, given his experiences and within the current climate for Christians around the world he stated: “It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians (17).

Let’s not take the “privilege” of being with other Christians for granted. On Forgiveness Sunday we noted the expression used commonly in our worship that we would “commend ourselves, and each other, and all our lives to Christ our God.” During Great Lent, we both “work out our own salvation” through individual prayer and fasting, but also in “life together,” through the challenges and opportunities provided in community with others. Our mutual connection is expressed most clearly during the Liturgy of St. Basil, served on

the Sundays of Great Lent, when after our individual reception of Holy Communion—given to us, by name—we hear: “And unite all of us to one another who become partakers of the one Bread and Cup in the communion of the Holy Spirit.”

So, perhaps the mistake is to assume otherwise: that healing is not possible and that it’s all about us—we fall or are raised up on our own, without reference, the support, or the saving help and love of others.