

“THE EYE IS THE LAMP OF THE BODY”

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Let's take a look at these words of the Lord from the Sermon on the Mount: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness” (Mt. 6:22-23).

The eye — this is the organ by which we perceive the world around us. Much in our lives depends not so much on the events which take place, but on how we perceive them. If glass is clean and transparent, the rays of the sun penetrate into a building without hindrance; the less transparent the glass, the darker it is in a room, and even on a sunny day it is gloomy in the house. It is the same with us: if our spiritual eye is darkened, then we are unable to perceive God's light, we are unable to see God in the darkness of our souls.

In addition, with a darkened eye we are unable to adequately perceive the visible world. It seems that the Lord brings our attention to things which are insignificant and that we ordinarily would not notice. “Look at the birds of the air,” — He says, — “they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them...Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin...” (Mt. 6:26-28). Lilies bloom for only a few days, then they perish and dry up, but when they are in bloom, their beauty surpasses the beauty of the garments worn by kings.

The Lord cares not only about birds and flowers, but also about each one of us. Sometimes it seems to us that God cares for us poorly, and it is precisely because of this that we are unable to accept with piety and joy the world around us. Our soul is filled with fear and worry for the future and we neglect the present. The most valuable moment is the present, because what has occurred with us in the past is already gone, and that which awaits us in the future has not yet happened. Often we are prisoners of the past or the future, and we forget about the many blessings and good things which surround us in the present. We live as if we were only writing our life as a “rough draft” instead of actually living it, always waiting to see first what tomorrow or the day after tomorrow will bring before we finally start living for today. So we can actually spend our whole life not waiting for anything, because if we do not know now how to notice the blessings that the Lord sends us through our encounter with people, as well as the blessings we receive through the world around us, such as by the birds in the air and the lilies in the fields, if we are focused only on the negative sides of life, then we will never experience the joy of the here and now, no matter what tomorrow may bring. Many people are like the rich man in the Lord's parable who says: “I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.’” But the Lord said to him: “Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (Lk. 12:16-21). The Lord tells us: it is necessary to accumulate not earthly wealth but the wealth of the Kingdom of God: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Mt. 6:33). The Lord will not leave us without daily bread, even if from time to time we have to live in difficulties and sometimes under desperate circumstances. If God feeds the birds in the air, then He will also feed us; if He clothes the lilies of the field, then He will clothe us as well. We must learn to be satisfied with a little, and rejoice in what we have, instead of waiting for what has not been given to us or what we may never receive, no matter how long we wait.

The Lord reveals this perspective when He says: “If your eye is clean, then your entire body will be full of light.” In Slavonic and in Greek it is expressed like this: “If your eye is *simple*, then your body will be full of light.” It is necessary to treat life in a more simple way, with trust in God, not ignoring and passing by even the most seemingly insignificant things in life, to wonder at the wisdom of God, which is manifest even in the flowers, the trees and in nature. This book of nature is open to all of us.

Once, Egyptian philosophers came to St. Anthony the Great, an Egyptian hermit of the IV century, and asked him, "How is it possible to live in the desert without any books?" The hermit answered: "The book which I am constantly reading is about the wonders of God which are found in nature. Observing nature I come into contact with the living God." Many of us now have the chance during the summer to spend time in nature. Some go away on vacation, for at least a few days, tearing themselves away from the clutches of city life. Let us rejoice in these moments. If we cleanse our spiritual eye and learn to accept with gratitude and joy everything that God gives us, then with a grateful heart we will express all of this as praise and glorification of God. We will then learn what *is* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, we will understand who *are* the "pure in heart" who "will see God" (Mt. 5:8). For God can be seen only when our spiritual eye is pure and when we are accustomed to seeing God even in the most insignificant things. Let us rejoice in encountering God every minute, not only tomorrow, but today as well, not only in the past or in the future, but in the present time, right now.

Translated from the Russian by Archpriest Peter Olsen