

Spiritual Examination for Clergy and Church Workers

[It would be most beneficial to answer these questions in writing and to share your candid responses with your confessor and/or spiritual guide.]

1. Do I pray regularly every day? How do I do it? Do I need to make changes? If I do not pray regularly, what should I do? Do I have someone with whom I share my prayer life, and my spiritual life generally? Am I ready to take counsel and direction in this area, and in all areas of my spiritual life?

The saints tell us that prayer is the foundation of everything and the proof of everything. If we are not faithful in our prayer, we will not be faithful or fruitful in anything. The saints also tell us that a person who has himself as a spiritual guide has chosen a fool, no matter how smart or learned he or she may be. They also tell us that the cause of every person's failings and sins is to be "self-directed" and to live in spiritual isolation.

2. Do I read Scripture regularly, a little every day? If not, am I prepared to make a modest rule to discipline myself to do so? What will that rule be?

The saints tell us that reading the Bible, especially the NT writings and the Psalms, is our spiritual food. If we do not partake of this food we become sick and weak, and we spiritually die. Indeed, we commit spiritual suicide. The saints also tell us that if we are not firmly grounded in Holy Scripture we will misunderstand and distort the writings of the saints, fathers, canons, councils and spiritual writers.

3. Do I fast regularly? Do I overeat and/or overdrink? Am I addicted to food? Drink? Tobacco? Medications? Drugs? "Church things"? Internet Surfing? Computer Activities? Should I review my behavior with a "laundry list" of questions, and consult professionals about possible compulsions and addictions? Do I take care of my health? Do I exercise regularly? Do I get regular checkups? Do I do what I know I should do? If not, why not?

The saints tell us that if our stomach is filled with food and drink (not to speak of drugs and alcohol), and if we are addicted or enslaved to anything at all, we are sure to have hard hearts, stiff necks, babbling mouths, itching ears, roving eyes, whirling thoughts and irrational minds. We will be incapable of fulfilling our relationships and performing our duties properly. We will surely be unable to do our church work effectively. We should use a "laundry list" to identify possible addictions and get ourselves into a recovery group when we test positive.

4. Do I confess my sins regularly? Do I have a confessor? Do I confess completely and fully, without “editorializing” or “rationalizing” my irrational and sinful behaviors? Is there a person, or perhaps 2 or 3 people, who know everything about me (my thoughts, words, deeds, desires, dreams, fantasies, obsessions, family history, relation to parents, spouse, children, etc.) to whom I consider myself wholly accountable as a human being and a Christian?

The saints teach us that there is nothing that brings humility, the “mother of all virtues” more powerfully and directly than candid confession of sins to a spiritual father/mother/friend, and “opening one’s thoughts” to a trusted person. And there is nothing that the demons love more than for us to refuse to acknowledge our thoughts and actions to another person, and to seclude ourselves in spiritual isolation..

5. Do I participate regularly in liturgical worship and Holy Communion? Do I prepare properly for partaking of Holy Communion? Do I read at least some prayers before receiving Holy Communion? Is there anything that needs attention in this part of my Christian life?

The saints teach us that regular, heartfelt and responsible participation in the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion is an essential element of Christian life. Without it, we have betrayed our Baptism and Chrismation and denied our Lord.

6. Do I practice silence before God’s face and in His presence everyday, at least for 10 or 15 minutes? How do I assess the essential element of “silence” in my human and Christian life? Do I need to do anything about learning to be interiorly and externally silent?

The saints teach us that we cannot be human, let alone Christian, unless we purposefully practice silence. They say that our daily silence should be at least a half hour (saying this before TV, Radio, Computers, Ipods, CDs, etc. even existed!). They say that if we are especially busy and engaged in especially responsible church work, our “silent times” should be longer since “they who cannot be silent must never speak because they will have nothing to say.”

7. Do I do “acts of mercy” for others? Do I sacrifice money to the needy and time to philanthropic activities, without drawing attention to myself? Do I spend time with others who may benefit from my presence? Do I practice what I preach in this regard? What should I do about this essential element in my Christian life?

The saints tell us that we feed the hungry and serve the needy now, or we serve the demons and feed the fires of hell forever. They say that active love for God in love for others is everything, even more than prophecies, casting out demons and performing miracles (and doing church work) in Christ's name, all of which may be done by "evildoers" whom the Lord does "not know." (Matthew 7:21-23)

8. Do I have sexual issues? Fornication? Adultery? Masturbation? Homosexual acts? Am I caught by Internet porn or other types of pornography? Do I need to participate in a Sexual Addiction recovery group, and/or get counseling for certain deviant and unchaste sexual behaviors?

The saints teach us that if we are enslaved even in the smallest way to the lusts of the flesh, our hearts become darkened, our minds cannot operate properly, our entire life goes out of control, and we become crazy. We cannot be engaged fruitfully in church work if we are regularly "acting out sexually" in a perverse and impure manner.

9. Do I gossip, quarrel, shame or embarrass others? Do I lie or deceive? Do I show off in conversations? Do I insist on making my point in discussions? Is what I say always true, kind and necessary? Do I listen when others speak? Do I give them the benefit of the doubt? Do I build on their good points? What do I need to change and correct in regards to my speaking and listening?

Christ himself teaches us that we will answer for every vain and careless word that we say; not just every untrue, judgmental, mean, cruel, shaming and embarrassing word, but every empty, unnecessary, barren and unfruitful word. For by our words we will be justified and by our words we will be condemned. (Matthew 12:33-36)

10. Do I do my church work seriously and responsibly? Do I do the difficult and boring things first? Do I do what I must, and not merely what I like? Do I engage conflicts and painful issues directly, patiently, courageously, humbly and meekly? Do I prepare myself carefully and diligently for my duties, meetings, assignments, obligations? What do I need to change, correct and improve in my church work?

The saints often quote the words of the Prophet Jeremiah: "Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord negligently." (Hebrew Jeremiah 48:10, Greek LXX 31:10)