

Coming to Spiritual and Emotional Maturity

by Father Joshua Makoul

RECENTLY IN THE GOSPEL READING WE HEARD OF THE PARABLE OF THE SERVANT WHO WAS FORGIVEN BY HIS MASTER BUT THEN AS SOON AS HE WAS FORGIVEN HE WENT OUT AND PUNISHED THOSE WHO WERE IN DEBT TO HIM. RATHER THAN RECEIVE THE FORGIVENESS OF HIS MASTER WITH HUMILITY HE REACTED WITH EMBARRASSMENT AND ANGER. HOWEVER CLEARLY THE SERVANT DIDN'T THINK. HE DIDN'T CATCH HIMSELF. HE HAD NO SELF-AWARENESS OR INSIGHT TO REALIZE HIS HYPOCRISY, BUT THEN AGAIN PERHAPS HE DID REALIZE THE HYPOCRISY BUT JUST DIDN'T CARE. EITHER SCENARIO IS SAD AND DISTURBING AND EXAMPLES OF HOW LOW OUR HUMANITY CAN FALL. DO WE CATCH OURSELVES? OR DO WE GO THROUGH OUR LIFE ON "AUTO-PILOT", REACTING WITHOUT THINKING AND BRUISING OTHER PEOPLE LEFT AND RIGHT BECAUSE OF OUR OWN BLINDNESS THAT RESULTS FROM LACK OF THINKING THINGS THROUGH, POOR INSIGHT, ARROGANCE, REFUSAL TO BE WRONG (PRIDE), AND LACK OF SELF-AWARENESS?

No doubt all of us have heard the following words exclaimed "What were you thinking!" or "people just don't think anymore!". Perhaps we have been on the receiving end of those words. Our ability to think things through should never be taken for granted and perhaps there are few abilities more valuable for our spiritual and emotional well-being. Many would state that peoples' ability to engage in critical thinking is becoming less and less in today's world. Without checking to see if there are studies to prove this trend we are left to speculation. Perhaps there is some truth to the claim that people today want to think less and just act more. The mental health field has been claiming for some time that in our society we are becoming less adept at managing our emotions and being able to sit with negative emotions. Our tendency today is to avoid, suppress, act out, self-medicate, and even blame others by displacing or projecting our feelings onto others. We are too quick to believe our impulsive thinking and feeling and too quick to dismiss what is reality. Patience is indeed a virtue but it is a rarity in our times. In our age of instant gratification which is reinforced with the speed of our smart phones, computers, and text messages combined with the extra pressures and expectations that come with being able to get so much done in a short time, the art of being patient is being lost and even being looked negatively upon.

For many of us thinking is just too threatening. If we think then we feel. Many today don't want to feel. If we stop, don't react, think things through, take time and allow ourselves to look within objectively we may see things or come to certain truths that cause conflict or incongruence, such as perhaps realizing we were wrong or perhaps we were not the victim, or perhaps things were not as they seemed. How we respond to these situations defines our spiritual and emotional maturity. Indeed, there are many who are emotionally and spiritually immature despite their physical age or education. Most people have something called the "inner child", that part of us that is still emotionally stuck back at an earlier time

of our life, usually due to painful experiences or unmet needs as a child. If we suspect this to be the case, then we need to go back and identify and tend to what unmet needs occurred at that time of life and address those needs now, to help that part of our self that is stuck to catch up to our present physical age. To do so does wonders for our ability to not react impulsively, to be patient, and to think things through.

The ability to be patient, to stop and think, to analyze and assess a situation before reacting, to being completely open to being wrong and learning from it (not being threatened by it), to being able to identify what other truths there might be to a situation, to be able to come to the often painful and humbling realization that perhaps we were the problem and not the other, and to adjust our behavior accordingly, is perhaps the most critical ability to have for our own salvation and spiritual growth. It is the defining characteristic of spiritual and emotional maturity and good health. It is a gift but it can be learned. This ability is driven and fueled by two virtues and they are love and humility. If we truly love and if we pursue humility then we will be patient, we will be cautious, we will think things through rather than risk hurting another, we will embrace apologizing and learning from our mistakes so as to not keep contributing to the fallenness of this world.

As we begin the new church year, let each of us make the commitment to ourselves, to each other, to our church, and to our God to apply the process and steps just discussed that are becoming a rarity in our world but an essential ingredient for spiritual and emotional maturity and our salvation.