

Life, Lent and the Pursuit of Εὐδαιμονία*

*(*pronounced— Eudaimo'nia)*

Modern psychologists are just now discovering what the ancient Greek philosophers have always known, happiness is not the same thing as well-being. An article in the Wall Street Journal titled, "Is Happiness Overrated" by Shirley Wang, (3.15.11) writes about the Greek word eudaimonia which was employed by Aristotle when he defined a state of well-being as "having a good indwelling spirit (Encyclopedia Britannica)." Wang writes, "Some of the newest evidence suggests that people who focus on living with a sense of purpose as they age are more likely to remain cognitively intact, have better mental health and even live longer than people who focus on achieving feelings of happiness." It may be a new concept for therapists but for the ancient church, I submit that, Great Lent is the gift of our forefathers who knew that we were created for a purpose and only when human-beings engage in pursuing that purpose will they achieve a state of well-being that is quite frankly, the antithesis of our modern way of thinking about happiness ... Disneyland is not the "Happiest place on earth."

The purpose for which we were all created is the pursuing and working out of one's salvation. "Who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages of time, but now has been made manifest by the appearance of our Savior Jesus Christ, Who brought death to naught indeed and brought to light life and incorruption through the Gospel... (2 Tim. 1:9,10)." Here, we acknowledge with most Christians that Christ has done the work of our salvation on the Cross but the Orthodox add that our response to His death and resurrection is found in the cultivation of virtue, the fruit (Christ cursed a fig tree for its lack of fruit), which living in Christ brings to one's life. Here is some good news, by pursuing the work of the cultivation of virtue (which is the main reason of Great Lent) we achieve well-being ~ eudaimonia. We may possess only one virtue or twenty virtues, it does not matter because whether it is one spark of divine Light or the entire Flame, the Church teaches that virtue is the realization of Christ dwelling in our hearts. Our responsibility is to repent, to obey the gospel, to express our love for God in prayer, to fast and deny the food of this life so that True Life may be experienced as being filled with Christ's Life in the Eucharist. As long as we are engaging in this process of pursuing Christ in us, we enter into a state of well-being because we are engaging in the very purpose for which we were created! The other really good news is that we all share the same purpose, we do not have to engage in a twenty week seminar in order to discover my particular purpose which is so indicative of the individualism that Great Lent seeks to overcome with communion in Christ which the fruit of everyone seeking after the "good indwelling spirit" that comes from pursuing the cultivation of the virtues.