

Spiritual Understanding: Where Do You Stand?

Yet among the perfected we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age...But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification.(1 Cor. 2:6-7)

St. John Chrysostom comments and says:

Darkness seems more suitable than light to those that are diseased in the eyesight: wherefore they prefer a darkened room. This is also the case with the wisdom which is spiritual. As the wisdom which is of God seemed to be foolishness unto those without the Spirit...

The Tradition of the Church identifies three types of people and gives them names appropriate to their understanding:

- The Natural (1 Cor. 2:14)
- The Carnal (1 Cor. 3:10)
- The Spiritual (1 Cor. 2:15)

The *natural man* is outside the Christian faith. He follows and lives his life by the philosophies of the world. The philosophies of today are varied, yet all possess the common theme of a denial of God.

When the *natural person* encounters the Orthodox Church, he begins to feel like the person described by Chrysostom. His *sight is diseased*, thus he prefers darkness. As the Church seeks obedience to Christ's revealed way of living, it is understood as foolishness. Often we attempt to illumine such a person by *instructing* him in the *Way of Christ*. The fault of attempting to convert by persuasion is that the object is one's mind and not the soul.

The disease is being *Spiritless*, and the cure is its reception. One can begin to fast and pray that the natural person may become open to receiving God's Holy Spirit. We must have the Holy Spirit ourselves if we are to be used effectively by God.

The actual receiving of the Holy Spirit has been formalized as something the Church bestows. Through the mystery of *Chrismation* (the anointing with oil blessed by the patriarch), one becomes fully a Christian.

The *carnal person* is one who lives *in* the Church yet is not living *in* the Spirit but after the flesh. The signs that accompany such people are easy to identify:

For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men? (1 Cor. 3:3)

To the people of Galatia St. Paul was even more specific:

Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, impurity, dissension, party spirit, envy,

drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-20)

A *carnal Christian* may seem to be a contradiction in terms, yet this is precisely the situation because people have *free will*. Christians living in the same community throughout history have experienced strife and division because virtue is a gift that requires diligence, attention, and keen sense of Christian consciousness to be realized (Chrysostom).

One of the responsibilities of a parish priest is to equip the faithful to strive for virtue by uniting *personal freedom* with God's *Holy will*. The Holy will of God is what the Church teaches through its Sacred Traditions.

The *spiritual person* is easy to identify by the signs that accompany him or her: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is not law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22-3)*

The actions of someone living *in the Spirit* are oftentimes the least attended to by people living in the Church. What are the actions of these people?

- Attending liturgy on time. We are the body of Christ; as such, we are called to *assemble as a family* to accomplish this task.
- *Preparation* for Holy Communion. A consciousness of guarding one's heart during the week ought to prevail.
- Attending *Bible Study*. Are we prepared when asked to give an account of the hope that is within us? By studying scripture we are strengthened in our hope.
- Developing a discipline of *prayer*. Daily, we ought to rise with Christ and seek His holy will for our lives.
- *Obeying* the Traditions of our Church.
- Not engaging in relations outside of a marital union.
- Having marriages blessed by the Church.
- Fasting every Wednesday and Friday from at least meat.
- The practice of confession.
- Obtaining a Divorce from the church.
- Being supportive of the ministries of Assumption by spreading the good things that we are doing.
- Being a *Steward* who gives of time, talent and finances until it hurts.

In Christ's Love,
+ Fr. Andrew