

Our understanding of Time according to the Orthodox Christian Faith



Each day God gives us a precious gift: 1440 minutes of life. He offers us the freedom to do whatever we wish with this precious and sacred time. As Christians, however, we must ask ourselves, “What are we doing to use this time wisely? Are we being good ‘stewards’ or ministers of this great gift of time? What are we filling our minds and lives with each day, and what are we cultivating within our spirit?”

We, as young Orthodox Christians, are called to cultivate something holy, pure and Christ-centred within our hearts, through prayer, spiritual reading, fellowship and healthy conversations, yet also in our actions and in our friendships. Let us use our time wisely, cultivating the soil of our soul, and allowing the seeds of God to take root, to become a strong plant, and to bear rich and plentiful fruit in our lives, glorifying His name.

What are the common traps or hurdles we stumble across in our daily lives as we try to make good use of our time? Perhaps following a failure, a fall or a sin we may want to simply give up, however let us not forget that each challenge or difficulty can be used as an opportunity to be forgiven, renewed and transformed in Him. We often have the tendency to also think ‘everyone else is doing the same thing,’ whether that be laughing along-with the bully at school, or partaking or encouraging idle talk and poisonous gossip. We may even waste our time seeing our neighbour as a threat, always being on the defence, perhaps desiring to ‘pay people back’ for what they have done to us, with an unhealthily competitive spirit. Finally, we may try to put off changing our way of life, claiming we can make a new start in a weeks time, or at new year. Today, the present moment of our lives, offers this appropriate calling for improvement and fundamentally for our

repentance before God.

Time, for the Christian, is used and cultivated with discernment. Solomon, for example says (Eccles 3:7) 'there is a time to keep silent and a time to speak.' St Basil the Great states: "There is still time for endurance, time for patience, time for healing, time for change. Have you slipped? Rise up!"

Dear brothers and sisters, time is, thus, truly a gift and opportunity for repentance; an opportunity to live self-sacrificially according to the will of the source of life and time, the lover of humankind. 'I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.' (2 Cor 6:2) Though we live within time and within this world we are called 'not to be of this world' and live within the eternal realm and reality of the Church; what we refer to as 'Kairos.'

'He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.' (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Within the life of the Church we overcome both time and space limitations. Just as in the Divine liturgy (as the Kingdom of God and heavenly banquet on earth) we overcome linear time and space, so also do the icons, hymns, the colours and our worship in general, depict and reflect this reality to us, of 'Kairos.' The various feasts, services and icons form an integrated and holistic unity to be contemplated upon by us, the faithful, and venerated in the ever present. Hence our hymns are chanted in the present tense:

'Christ is born! Christ is Risen! This is the day of salvation.'

When Jesus came into this world, it was a fulfillment of promises past, a bridge built, between the sacred and the secular. It was an intersection of the holy will of God and the worldly ways of the human being. We are called to live in this perfect and eternal 'moment' of the incarnation all the days of our lives, leading to our own eternity with our God, Who surpasses all time and limitations. St John the Baptist tells us in Mark 1:15 that 'time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.' This heavenly 'kairos' pierced its way into creation, slicing through 'chronos' (the time of this world) through the incarnation of Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Within the life of the Church, moments of 'Kairos,' of sacred and eternal time, allow us to get a glimpse of the 'other realm,' the divine and sacred life, and therefore experience, a foretaste of God's eternity and love. We are called in this way to live and experience His eternity here and now, primarily through our participation in the body and blood of Christ, but also through our actions, our relationships and

our way of life in general.

‘Let us who mystically represent the cherubim, and who sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity, now lay aside all earthly cares. That we may receive the King of All, Who comes invisibly upborne by the angelic hosts.’ (A prayer recited by the priest or Bishop during the ‘Cherubic Hymn’ prior to the ‘Great Entrance and chanted by the choir)

Let us find such time, in our public worship and within our own personal program, for this sacred time: for God to lift us up out of the cares and challenges of this world, albeit for a while, transporting us to the heavenly realm. This ‘realm’ can be tangible and experienced within our hearts and through our Christ-centred acts. Let us accept Christ’s invitation and delve into our hearts, leaving behind the self-centred sins and cares of the world, seeking His righteousness, His forgiveness and His glory, which are never-ending.

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