



THE EXODUS AND ITS APPLICATION TODAY:

FREEING OURSELVES FROM THE ENTANGLEMENTS OF THIS WORLD

AND

SEEKING SIMPLICITY IN OUR FAMILY LIFE

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PART 1

*FREEING OURSELVES FROM THE ENTANGLEMENTS
OF THIS WORLD*

They did not keep the covenant of God;
They refused to walk in His law,
And forgot His works
And His wonders that He had shown them.
Marvelous things He did in the sight of their fathers,
In the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.
He divided the sea and caused them to pass through;
And He made the waters stand up like a heap.
In the daytime also He led them with the cloud,
And all the night with a light of fire.
He split the rocks in the wilderness,
And gave them drink in abundance like the depths.
He also brought streams out of the rock,
And caused waters to run down like rivers.
But they sinned even more against Him
By rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness.
And they tested God in their heart
By asking for the food of their fancy.
Yes, they spoke against God:
They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?
Behold, He struck the rock,
So that the waters gushed out,
And the streams overflowed.
Can He give bread also?
Can He provide meat for His people?"
Therefore the Lord heard this and was furious;
So a fire was kindled against Jacob,
And anger also came up against Israel,
Because they did not believe in God,
And did not trust in His salvation.
Yet He had commanded the clouds above,
And opened the doors of heaven,
Had rained down manna on them to eat,
And given them of the bread of heaven.
Men ate angels' food;
He sent them food to the full.

~Psalm 78:10-25



“And the Lord said: ‘I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey... Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.’

But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?’

So He said, ‘I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.’” ~Exodus 3:7-12



Many of us today would agree that the world we live in is becoming progressively hostile towards Christianity and traditional Christian values. This growing hostility is affecting our ability to work; our medical freedom of choice, both for ourselves and for our children; our reproductive choices; and sometimes, even how we, or a loved one, must die. And this growing hostility is increasingly eroding our freedom of conscience and how we are permitted to raise and educate our children. On one hand, we live in a land of abundance, not unlike Ancient Egypt. And yet this abundance is steadily coming at a higher cost, forcing us to become ever more dependant and subservient to a very fallen system. Unlike the ancient Israelites, most of us cannot physically flee our enslavement to this system. Our only real option is to follow the example of Christ and His many saints who lived under similar circumstances. We need to strive for, and guide our children towards, a spiritual exodus, following its path towards spiritual freedom from the worldly entanglements that presently ensnare us.

The Holy Prophet Moses was a prefigurement of Christ, not only as the savior for his people, but also in his suffering of humiliation, insults and derision by the very people he was sacrificing himself to save. He could have lived a life of comfort in Egypt. But out of obedience to God, he chose to give up his own comfort and status for the sake of his people, who were ungrateful and had no appreciation for his sacrifice. *“Without suffering, there is no resurrection, without humiliation, there is no exaltation.”* ~St. Nikolai of Zhicha. This is the path of the Exodus.



“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.’ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask.’ And He said to them, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ They said to Him, ‘Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.’ But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ They said to Him, ‘We are able.’” ~Mark 10:33-40

We live in a time when we must seek sobriety and not a position of entitlement or worldly gain. We must seek to be imitators of Christ, preparing ourselves and our children to humbly and patiently accept being despised and rejected for our beliefs and life choices. Rather than obsess and allow ourselves to get caught up in the politics of the day, we must still our hearts in the silence of an interior desert, focused on our own repentance, prayer, and struggle for righteousness. Our homes need to become a quiet refuge, safe and free from the drama and noise that surrounds us, that desires to distract us, and take our focus off the one thing needful.



“The humility of our Lord Jesus Christ is a matter for as great wonder as are His miracles, together with His Resurrection—that Wonder of wonders, clothing Himself in the cramped human body of a slave, He became the Servant of His servants...

Of all things that there are for a man to learn, humility is the hardest. The Lord Jesus therefore expressed His teaching on humility in the clearest possible terms, both in word and in deed, so that no one could possibly doubt the incalculable and inescapable importance of humility in the act of man’s salvation. This is why He appeared in a mortal human body such as Adam’s, that had become as a punishment for his sinful fall. He, the sinless Lord and Creator of the bright and resplendent cherubim, clothed Himself in the thick coarse garb of a condemned prisoner. Is this not, in itself, a sufficiently clear lesson on the humility that sinful men must learn?” ~St. Nikolai of Zhicha, Homilies, Fifth Sunday of Lent.



St. Anthony the Great said, *“I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world, and I said groaning, “What can get through from such snares?” Then I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Humility.’”*

We live in a time when temptations are so great, oppressing us from every direction, that there is no physical escape and the only path to freedom is to strive for humility. But how do we do this? How do we lead our children towards humility? This is the greatest challenge as a parent. Yet, the Faith has always thrived the most when under persecution, when under purifying trials. Like in ancient Israel, when times are good, it is very easy to become slack and complacent, to take God for granted, and to rely on our own strength and reasoning. Only when times are difficult, are we forced to rely on Christ and recognize our human weakness and inadequacy.

St. John Climacus said: *“The morning light precedes the sun, and the precursor of all humility is meekness. Therefore, let us hear in what order the Light arranges these virtues, for He says: Learn of Me, sun, we must be illumined by the light, and then we can look with a clear gaze at the sun. For it is impossible, absolutely impossible, to gaze upon the sun before we have experienced that light, as the true order of the aforementioned virtues teaches us.”*



St. John Climacus goes on to say: “Meekness is an unchangeable state of mind, which remains the same in honour and dishonour. Meekness consists in praying calmly and sincerely for a neighbor when he causes many turmoils. Meekness is a rock overlooking the sea of anger, which breaks all the waves that dash against it, yet remains completely unmoved.”

It is through the patient endurance of trials that we acquire meekness, leading to humility. The Israelites, during their many trials while on their 40 year journey through the desolate wilderness of Sinai, often forgot the goodness of God and fell into faintheartedness, murmuring, and complaining. When we likewise fail to be meek and fall into these temptations, or see our children fall into them, remembering the goodness of God can help bring us back to repentance. We do this through the reading and singing of Psalms and hymns, reading Holy Scripture and lives of saints, prayer, and helping the less fortunate. It is also helpful to make a memorial of the many blessings God bestows upon us, to help us pass through and endure the trials and periods of spiritual dryness. For God’s providence is guiding us along the way and these trials are only transitory, though necessary for our purification and salvation. Often, divine consolation follows a difficult period of trial, as our heart becomes humbled and softened and open to God’s grace and presence.

“When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What are these stones?’ then you shall let your children know, saying, ‘Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land’; for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever.” ~Joshua 4:20-24



REMEMBERING THE GOODNESS OF GOD THROUGH PSALMS AND HYMNS

“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, and gathered out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city for a dwelling place. Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness.” ~Psalm 107:1-9

“Teach him to sing those psalms which are so full of the love of wisdom... When in these you have led him on from childhood, little by little, you will lead him forward even to higher things. The Psalms contain all things, but the hymns have nothing human. When he has been instructed out of the Psalms, he will then understand that the hymns are even more divine.” ~St. John Chrysostom



REMEMBERING THE GOODNESS OF GOD THROUGH HOLY SCRIPTURE AND LIVES OF SAINTS

“They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” ~Revelation 7:16-17

St. John Chrysostom also instructs: *“The solitaries do not need the consolation and the help of the Holy Scriptures as much as do those who are in the midst of the whirl of a distracting existence... The hermits sit far from the struggle; therefore they are not often wounded. But you stand always in the front rank of battle.”*

And he exhorts: *“Hearken, I entreat you, all who are involved with the things of this life, and procure books that will be medicines for the soul... Get at least from the New Testament, the Acts, and the Gospels, to be your constant teachers.”*

“If we order our lives in this way and diligently study the Scriptures, we will find the lessons to guide us in everything we need!”



REMEMBERING THE GOODNESS OF GOD THROUGH PRAYER

“Here indeed my discourse is for both men and women. Bend your knees, send forth groans, beseech your Master to be merciful. He is more moved by prayers in the night, when you make the time for rest a time for grieving [for your sins]... Do this, you men, and not the women only. Let the house be a Church, consisting of men and women. For do not think that because you are the only man, or because your wife is the only woman there, that this is any hindrance. ‘For where two,’ He says, ‘are gathered in My Name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matt. 18:20). Where Christ is in the midst, there is a great multitude. Where Christ is, angels also must be there, and archangels and the other heavenly powers. So then you are not alone, seeing you have Him Who is Lord of all... Nothing is stronger than one man who lives according to the law of God. If you have children, wake them up also, and let your house altogether become a Church through the night.”

“But if they are young, and cannot endure the watching, let them stay for the first or second prayer, and then send them to rest. Only stir up yourself; establish yourself in the habit. Nothing is better than the storehouse which receives such prayers as these... Believe me, there is no fire as effectual to burn off rust as night prayer to remove the rust of our sins...” ~St. John Chrysostom



But understanding human weakness, St. John Chrysostom also writes: *“I have both before discoursed to you on this, and now repeat it: let us arouse ourselves during the night. And if you do not say many prayers, say one with real attentiveness, and it is enough—I ask no more; and if not at midnight, at any rate at the first light of dawn.”*

“Thus I would have you always [to be in prayer]; and if not always, at least very often; and if not very often, at least now and then, at least in the morning, at least in the evening prayers.”

“Let every man and woman among us, whether meeting together at church, or remaining at home, call upon God with much earnestness, and He will doubtless accede to these petitions.”

“Let the boy be trained to pray with much contrition and to keep vigils as much as he is able, and let the stamp of a saintly man be impressed on the boy in every way.”

“But the woman who sits in her house as in some school of true wisdom, and collects her thoughts within herself, will be enabled to devote herself to prayers, and readings, and other heavenly wisdom.”



REMEMBERING THE GOODNESS OF GOD THROUGH THE GIVING OF ALMS

“Many are our debts—not of money, but of sins. Let us then lend Christ our riches, that we may receive pardon of our sins, for He is the One who will judge us. Let us not neglect Him here when He is hungry, that He may ever feed us there. Here let us clothe Him, that He leave us not bare of the safety which is from Him.... If we go to Him in prison, He will free us from our bonds; if we take Him in when He is a stranger, He will not suffer us to be strangers to the Kingdom of Heaven, but will give us a portion in the City which is above; if we visit Him when He is sick, He will quickly deliver us from our infirmities.” ~St. John Chrysostom

“You will not do so much good to the poor as to yourself, when you benefit them.” ~St. John Chrysostom

“If then you would leave your children much wealth, leave them in God’s care. For He Who, without your having done anything, gave you a soul, and formed a body for you, and granted you life, when He sees you displaying such munificence and distributing your goods to Himself [i.e., through giving to the poor] as well as to your children, surely He will open to them every kind of riches. For if Elijah, after having been nourished with a little meal, since he saw that the widow honored him more than her children, made threshing-floors and oil-presses to appear in her little hut, consider what loving care the Lord of Elijah will display! Let us, then, not consider how to leave our children rich, but how to leave them virtuous.” ~St. John Chrysostom



IN CONCLUSION: MAKE THE HOME A CHURCH

“If we seek the things that are perfect, the secondary things will follow. The Lord says, ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ (Matt. 6:33). What sort of person do you think the children of such parents will be?... For generally the children acquire the character of their parents, they are formed in the mold of their parents’ temperament, they love the same things their parents love, they talk in the same fashion, and they work for the same ends.” ~St. John Chrysostom

“The father, if he disciplines himself also, will be far better in teaching the boy these precepts; for, if for no other reason, he will improve himself so as not to spoil the example he sets.” ~St. John Chrysostom

“When you go home from here, lay out with your meal a spiritual meal as well. The father of the family might repeat something of what was said here; his wife could then hear it, the children too could learn something, and even the servants might be instructed. In short, that the household might become a church, so that the devil is driven off and that evil spirit, the enemy of our salvation, takes to flight; the grace of the Holy Spirit would rest there instead, and all peace and harmony would surround the inhabitants.” ~St. John Chrysostom



PART 2

SEEKING SIMPLICITY IN OUR FAMILY LIFE



“Wordly people say, ‘How lucky are the wealthy that live in big and luxurious mansions and have all the comforts and conveniences!’ Blessed, rather, are those who have succeeded in simplifying their lives and freeing themselves from the noose of worldly progress, from the many comforts that cause much discomfort and have rid themselves of the dreadful anxiety of today’s times. If we refuse to simplify our lives, we will suffer. If we live simply, all our anxiety will go away.

At Sinai, a German visitor told a very intelligent Bedouin boy, ‘You are intelligent; you can become literate.’ ‘And then?’ the boy asked. ‘Well, then you will become a car mechanic.’ ‘And then?’ the boy asked again. ‘Then you will open a car shop.’ ‘And then?’ ‘Then you will hire others to work for you; you will have your own staff.’ ‘In other words,’ the boy said, ‘I will start with one headache and then add another and another. Isn’t it better now, with my mind free of worries?’ Most headaches are the result of the thoughts we have about doing this and doing that...But if our minds were engaged with spiritual matters, we would feel divine consolation and would not suffer from headaches.

When I meet with lay people, I stress simplicity. Many of the things they do are unnecessary and only bring anxiety. I speak to them about frugality, austerity and asceticism. I constantly remind them, “If you want to get rid of anxiety, simplify your lives!”

~ St. Paisios of Sinai and Mount Athos, Spiritual Counsels 1, With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man, pgs. 189-190.



“Excellent too, is that simplicity which is in some by nature, yes, and blessed, but not as much as that which is grafted into a guileful soul with toil and sweat. For the former is sheltered and protected from much complexity and passion, but the latter leads to the highest humility and meekness. The former has not much reward, but the latter—surpassing infinite.” ~St. John Climacus

The Bedouin of the Jebeliya Tribe (Arabic for ‘People of the Mountains’) were historically a Christian people who were forcefully converted to Islam at the time of the Islamic invaders. In spite of their change in faith, they have remained close, faithful protectors of St. Catherine’s Monastery and its many dependencies in the region. And until only very recently, they continued to live the nomadic life not unlike the ancient Israelites who passed through the area thousands of years ago.

I have developed a close relationship with a family group within this tribe and I have been deeply impressed by their simplicity and natural virtue. It stands in stark contrast with what we find within our culture, and even within our Orthodox Christian subculture.



From Saint Paisios of Mount Athos, Spiritual Counsels II, Spiritual Awakening, pp. 168-169.

"At Mount Sinai, I was impressed by the Bedouins, who had nothing to offer. But still, they gather some very small stones that are different from the others, or if they find a few leaves in the cracks of the mountain, they gather them and go up and leave them on the rock which Moses struck with his rod and water gushed out. Or the mothers who are nursing their babies go there to drip a few drops of their milk with the thought, 'May God grant me milk to nurse my children.' You can see the gratitude they have. It is not a small matter. And look at us. Those Bedouins will judge us. They leave on the rock little pieces of wood, a few leaves, some bright little stones...Has God any need of these? No, but God helps because He sees the good heart, the virtuous disposition. This is how their good intentions are expressed."

The Bedouin way of life makes it starkly apparent what we in the West have largely lost. And that is simplicity, day-to-day trust in God's providence, as well as humble acceptance of suffering if that is God's will. They have an incredible amount of love within their family, that extends even towards us outsiders, and a strong sense of community with their extended family and greater tribe. The love the husband has towards his wife and vice-versa is perceptibly deep. He is grateful to God for her and feels she is more precious than any money to him. He fully realizes many people, who are far more wealthy than himself, are unhappy in their family life, while he is extremely happy and grateful for what he has. The vast majority of marriages that I have observed among the Jebeliya seem close, healthy, and mutually supportive between spouses. And when there is a problem, it is more likely to be patiently endured without excessive complaining. The tenderness and patience the men show towards the children, whether their own or others in the community, is likewise deeply moving.

I truly believe we, Christian as well as non-Christian, have lost something as a result of our crumbling culture and may not even realize it.



When the Israelites left Egypt for the wilderness of Sinai, they left behind security, comfort, known food and water sources, as well as the stimulating sounds and activity of big city life. In spite of being enslaved, having a home and the stability it provided was more comfortable than wandering in the wilderness with very little and completely helpless to the elements. They found themselves stripped bare, with few comforts at all, with no security outside of God, with no sure sources of food or water, and no distractions to take their minds off of their many sorrows and hardships.

But slowly, slowly, they learned to live without. Yet, meekness was not a virtue that came easily to them. Complaining and murmuring continued to be an ongoing temptation that did not readily go away. It was by far, the biggest challenge for them to overcome. We too, have grown spoiled by our comfort and having our physical needs immediately met. We do not realize just how spoiled we are until we meet another culture that does not have ready access to such material wealth. And we do not see just how far more similar we are to the ancient Israelites than we might be willing to acknowledge, when we must give up these comforts and material abundance.

On one hand, compared to us, the Bedouin have very little. But on the other, they are content. They generally do not complain. Their physical needs are well met, they have adequate sustenance, and their psychological and emotional needs are met far better within their community than a typical westerner ever experiences within his or her community. Ultimately, I personally strongly believe it is best to seek God first to have our emotional and psychological needs met, because even the best of communities can fail us at times and we need to be able to maintain some level of emotional detachment and objectivity. Yet it is good to observe just how far our own culture has fallen, how damaging it has become to us psychologically without us even realizing it, and what a traditional culture, closer to what God intended, is able to provide.



The Orthodox Christian Faith provides the path of asceticism to help us curb our selfish tendencies and to periodically deny ourselves the pleasures of this life, in imitation of the Exodus. The life of the desert fathers is the most dramatic example of putting aside all earthly comforts and cares for the sake of living singularly for Christ. The simplicity and virtue achieved through Orthodox asceticism, not being a product of culture, but the fruit of faith and toil, is far superior, is the offspring of the indwelling of grace, and carries the promise of an eternal reward.

But learning from more traditional cultures such as the Jebeliya, and incorporating some aspects of their way of life, which is healthier than our own, can help us create a healthier Orthodox subculture and prepare us to more readily accept the loss of worldly comforts and security, if we find ourselves needing to give up those things for the sake of our Faith or as the result of other cataclysmic events.

IMITATING A TRADITIONAL TRIBAL COMMUNITY: LIVING CLOSER TO ONE ANOTHER

Church life is our tribal community and identity. The difficult reality for us in the west is that many of us live a good distance from our church community and are relatively cut-off outside of services. As a result, we more often find ourselves relying on technology to feel more connected. Making this change in our lifestyle can bring huge rewards both for the adults in the family, but most especially, for the children. The difference this provides, even within a non-Christian culture, is astounding.



Tribal life is quite different from modern western life. It is an intimate part of a Bedouin's identity and an extended family. Everyone knows everyone and has a personal interest and investment in each other's well-being. There are no strangers within a tribal community. There are more successful and less successful families within the community. The more successful do seem to want to employ and help the less successful. Altruism is an integral part of tribal life.

Though under tremendous amount of pressure from the rapidly modernizing world around them, the Bedouin still cling to their ancient values of God and family before worldly gain and success. The women are bright and talented and yet they choose to remain home to care for their families. And they work from home to help their families financially, continuing traditional Bedouin arts to do so. The community is very tight and the women frequently gather in each others' houses to talk, prepare food, eat, and embroider together while the children play, do homework, or learn traditional skills at the side of their mothers.

Because the community is safe, children have tremendous freedom to play outside, at each others homes, and even after dark. Though technology is creeping into their life, particularly cell phones, it does not consume anywhere near their time and attention as it does within our culture, because their social needs are not met through it. The children spend most of their time outdoors in wholesome, face-to-face play with their relatives and friends.



IMITATING A TRADITIONAL TRIBAL COMMUNITY: THE COMMON MEAL

"Today, we have so little consideration for our fellow human beings. In the old days, because food would spoil after a day, people would think of those who were poor. 'It is better to give it to a poor person than throw it away,' they reasoned... I remember whenever we had a good yield of vegetables and fruit, we always shared it with our neighbours. What else were we supposed to do with all the excess produce? It would spoil anyway. Now that we have refrigerators, people think, 'Why share it with others? We'll put it in the refrigerator and keep it for ourselves.'"

~St. Paisios of Sinai and Mount Athos.

The Bedouin typically eat very simple, yet very wholesome, nourishing meals. They always eat together, with their meal open to whomever may come by. Meat or fresh fish is a luxury, usually reserved for special occasions or feasts. Many of their fresh vegetables are grown within the community as well as the occasional lamb, goat, or poultry they consume.

Meals and tea time are a time for social bonding among family members and those visiting the household. They are inexpensive and simple to prepare, but meet the needs of those who consume them. Typically, someone will be cutting and cleaning vegetables outside, next to other women who are embroidering or doing other handiwork. A woman rarely works in isolation.



IMITATING A TRADITIONAL TRIBAL COMMUNITY: SELF RELIANCE

The Jebeliya are unique among the Arab Bedouin of the Middle East because of their heavy dependency of gardening. Most Bedouin, historically, are nomadic, as the Jebeliya have been too, guiding their flocks of sheep and goats to fresh pastures. But the Jebeliya also learned from the Byzantine monks how to tend to gardens for food production. And now they are caretakers of most of the gardens and orchards surrounding the ancient but now unoccupied hermitages in the region.

During Egypt's multiple crises, drying up the tourism which the Bedouin heavily depend on economically, they survived through their many gardens. Even village dwellers have garden plots high up in the mountains where they grow both food for their family and to sell, and fodder for their livestock. During the growing season, they often pack up their family and livestock and head for the mountains to tend to their gardens and live traditionally, as they did before they were settled into houses. And they send their livestock out to pasture, watched by an elderly grandmother, while they work in their gardens. Many Jebeliya also keep bees, which is a premium product because of the unique floral flavor and fragrance of the mountains of Sinai. A significant portion of the Bedouin diet comes from the work of their own hands or the work of others within their immediate community. This provides resilience in times of economic difficulty.



IMITATING A TRADITIONAL TRIBAL COMMUNITY: SOCIAL BONDING THROUGH COMMON PLAY

The most common form of play today in the west involves computer games. But among the Bedouin, men play with men through playing soccer in the evening and having spontaneous camel races. They will also take their families and neighborhood children on spontaneous hikes to the back country. Women tend to bond through shared creative work more than play. But they can become quite lively and excited in their discussion while they work. Children's play often involve animals, particularly donkeys. They use their donkeys to haul items for the adults. But when they are finished, they will race them together with other children into town. In the way a bicycle might be a western child's favorite means of transportation, a donkey is the favorite among the Bedouin children. The pride of adult manhood, is not ownership of a car, which is rare among the Bedouin, but ownership of a family camel. A young boy prepares for that privilege of adulthood, first, through the care of a donkey.

"An excess of modern conveniences is making our lives inconvenient. Machines have multiplied, and so have distractions; and they in turn, have made man a machine. All kinds of machines and inventions are controlling our lives. This is why human hearts are also turning into steel. The availability of so many comforts has made cultivating a conscience in people difficult. In the old days, we used to work with animals, and this made us more compassionate. If you overloaded an animal and the poor thing knelt down from the weight, you felt bad for it. When it was hungry and looked at you imploringly, it would break your heart...Today people own all kinds of devices made of steel, and, unfortunately, this is also what has become of our hearts." ~St. Paisios of Sinai and Mount Athos, Spiritual Counsels 1, With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man.



IMITATING A TRADITIONAL TRIBAL COMMUNITY: “SLOWLY, SLOWLY” LIVING LIFE WITHOUT HASTE

“People are always in a hurry, rushing from one place to another. Now they must be here, the next hour they must be there, then somewhere else and so on.” ~St. Paisios of Sinai and Mount Athos.

Westerners, used to having schedules to keep, can become frustrated with the Bedouin, with what they interpret as a poor work ethic. But the Bedouin people are historically desert nomads. They are used to living in harmony with the day and season, and adjust their work schedule accordingly. It is a strategy of survival that has become deeply embedded into their culture.

But it is a strategy that can reveal to us the benefits of ‘slowing down,’ of not always living under the pressure to perform. The Bedouin do not want to live under a western schedule. They love the freedom their way of life provides them. They may never earn large sums of money through hard work like a westerner. But they earn enough to feed and clothe their families and they have peace.

“In the past, life was peaceful, and so people, too, were peaceful, and had the endurance it takes to be patient. Today haste has invaded the world, and we have become impatient...Nowadays, young people have lost their zest for life. You ask them, ‘What will give you peace?’ ‘Nothing,’ they reply. They are young and strong but nothing pleases them! What has happened to us? We believe that we will correct God with our inventions.” ~St. Paisios of Sinai and Mount Athos.



AVOID ANXIETY BY SIMPLIFYING YOUR LIFE

“The more people distance themselves from a natural, simple life and embrace luxury, the more they suffer from anxiety. And the farther they go from God, the less comfort and rest they can find in anything they do. This is why people are so restless...The result of worldly pleasures and self-indulgence is worldly anxiety. This anxiety accompanies the (superficial) education people receive today, and every day it drives hundreds of people (including young children) to psychoanalysis and psychiatrists...When we grasp the deeper meaning of the true life, anxiety falls away, and divine consolation comes and we are healed...When we see a person who has everything but is still worried, anxious and sad, it is because God is missing from his life. In the end, wealth also leads to suffering, since human beings can never be satisfied by material goods. There is a double affliction.” ~St. Paisios of Sinai and Mount Athos, Spiritual Counsels 1, With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man.



IN CONCLUSION

“When I say that someone has caught the Eastern spirit and abandoned the European, I mean that he has left behind logic, rationalism, and has instead taken hold of simplicity and piety because that is the Orthodox spirit within which Christ rests, simplicity and piety. Today, even spiritual people are often lacking in simplicity, the sacred simplicity that comforts the soul. If we do not renounce the secular spirit and do not adapt to the simple way—in other words, if we do not stop being preoccupied with how others see us, or with what they say about us—we will never experience kinship with God and the saints. But for this to happen we need to move to the spiritual realm. The more we live with simplicity, especially in a coenobium (living a common life), the fewer the ‘bumps’ from our passions, and the smoother we become. Otherwise, we end up creating a fake person. This is why we must always strive to get rid of the secular ‘carnival’, and become angels!” ~St. Paisios of Sinai and Mount Athos, Spiritual Counsels 1, With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man.

As the secular world becomes increasingly at odds with our Orthodox Faith, we will need to accept the consequences of holding fast to what we know as true. Then we will begin a spiritual exodus. We prepare for this exodus not through stockpiling, not through obsessing over the ‘signs of the times,’ but through remembering the Goodness of God: through turning our home into a Church, a house of prayer, of spiritual hymns, of spiritual reading, and of the giving of alms; through learning to humbly and meekly accept trials and sorrows as a necessary part of our salvation, without complaining or murmuring; through drawing closer to our Church community, while appreciating the simpler things in life with our family and fellow Orthodox Christians; and to take hold of ‘simplicity and piety’. We need to work to separate ourselves from the dominant culture around us, creating and strengthening our own Orthodox subculture, in order to achieve the ‘simplicity’ we so desperately lack in modern western life.



A FINAL PRAYER:

“By His death, He gave His life ‘a ransom for many.’ He does not say “for all,” but “for many,” which means that there are some who will not accept His love, or value His sacrifice. His loving service led to suffering and death, for he who serves from love, and not just from a sense of duty, will not shrink from death... As the Lord was victorious at the end of His short earthly life, so shall He be the Victor at the end of the whole, long history of the world. The army of His saved and glorified followers will be incomparably greater than that of His opponents—the friends of the devil and enemies of God. Oh, may we be found in the army of the saved and glorified! Oh, may the Lord Jesus be merciful to us in the Last Day, when the earthly sun will be darkened, never to shine again! O most sweet and life-giving Lord, forgive us our sins before the coming of that Day! Reject all our works as unclean and worthless, and save us in that measureless mercy by which Thou didst come on earth to save us, unworthy though we are. To Thee be glory, O great and wondrous Lord, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit—the Trinity consubstantial and undivided, now and forever, through all time and all eternity. Amen.” ~St. Nikolai of Zhicha, Homilies, Fifth Sunday of Lent.

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