



KYPIAKH

A BRIEF SERMON



«I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet» (Rev. 1:10)

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Men of Yearning

"Men of yearning... do not cease crying out to the Lord for us"
(doxasticon of the stichera, Small Vespers)

My beloved, our holy Church instructs us. Out of all the places of learning, out of all the schools, it is the most brilliant. It doesn't teach its own lessons, but whatever our Lord Jesus Christ taught.

Christianity, however, isn't only a fine theory, it's also superb practice; it's not just illumined words, it's also a great and important undertaking. And just as our Lord Jesus Christ practiced what He preached —i.e. He enforced it— in the same way **the Church**, which continues the work of the Lord, **practices what it teaches**.

Who puts it into practice? The Church's chosen children. And who are the chosen children? The saints. The saints are champions of the spirit. And when we speak of saints, let's not just think of those who went to Katounakia on Mt. Athos and prayed all night using the prayer rope, and made the mountain a radar field of wireless communication, becoming united with the Eternal One. Without doubt, they're also saints, we don't deny it. But according to the Gospel, according to the spirit of the Gospel, the saints are also those who remain here in the world, in the arena of life's harsh struggles, who believe in the Lord, strive, struggle and labour to do good, and who rise unto holiness with the grace of God. These are the saints.

Saints don't come from just one class of people or one profession. **Saintliness is the plant that thrives in every class of people**. Saints, as the synaxarion of the Orthodox Church proves, have stemmed from all classes and all professions. Would you like me to mention some specific examples? The patron saint of postmen, for example, is St. Zenon; of farmers is St.

Tryphon; of shepherds is St. Spyridon; of carpenters is St. Joseph the Betrothed; of soldiers are the 40 Holy Martyrs of Sebaste; of army officers are St. Demetri, St. George and others. We even have patron saints for kings — St. Constantine and his mother, Helen.

And for the learned, (those people who teach and study at the different education centres of every level) who are the patron saints? These are the saints that we celebrate today, the Three Hierarchs: St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory Nazianzen (or St. Gregory the Theologian) and St. John Chrysostom. This gives rise to the question: why did the Church and our Greek race choose these saints as patron saints of education and learning? The answer is in one of the hymns of their small vespers service. The Church, referring to the Three Hierarchs, says "Men of yearning... do not cease crying out to the Lord for us" (dox. Stich.).

Let's analyse this phrase: **what does men of yearning mean?**

Each person, my beloved, has desires. **God**, who destined man for a lofty purpose, **implanted his soul with lofty desires** and inclinations. The holy prophets such as Daniel were called *Men of desires* (Dan. 9:23, 10:11). What desires did they have? If you have such holy desires, my brethren, my children, I will bow down and prostrate before you. If you don't have such holy desires, but you have the desires of crows and vultures and beasts; an inferior level of desires, then you are pitiful; you are no longer a human being, but an animal that satisfies only its base impulses.

God has provided man with great and holy

desires. In other words, I'd say that he has **three great yearnings**. The first is the desire for knowledge, the second is the desire for good works and the third is the desire or yearning for virtue or holiness. Allow me to briefly analyze these three desires, which burn in the hearts of every person.

✓The first is the **desire for knowledge**. Even the ancient philosophers said that it is in man's nature to desire knowledge. This desire is inbred. Take, for instance, a small child. As soon as it opens its eyes and starts to understand things, when it's 3 or 4 years old, it's all questions. It constantly asks, what is this? What is that? It explores, to get to know the world. Its grandmother, mother, primary school teacher, high-school teacher and later the wise university lecturers, answer its questions. And when the youth is not satisfied by this, it leaves its homeland, flies overseas and goes to renowned universities where famous scientists teach. And does it eventually find what it seeks? No. And then Socrates can finally provide him with the answer, "One thing I know – that I don't know anything."

But no matter how much people study, the knowledge that they will acquire —whether theological, scientific or philosophic— is but one drop in the boundless ocean of knowledge.

✓The second desire, which I consider superior, is the **desire for action**. To fill your head with data, to make it an encyclopaedia and to be a bearer of knowledge isn't enough. You need to put your knowledge into practice; you need to use what you learn. Alexander the Great was of the same mind. He didn't want to simply learn wisdom from his teacher, Aristotle; he wanted to put into practice what he learned – to implement it.

✓And the third desire is the **yearning for virtue, or holiness**. This is the most superior of all the desires. It leads a person to achieve his goal of eternity, heavenly bliss. The desire for virtue makes a sinful person realize his passions, his weaknesses and faults. It attracts him to the light and to the pinnacle of purity. He chooses to muster his abilities and with Christ's help makes a huge effort to escape from the traps of the base desires. Finally it grants him great wings, so that he can reach the level which his soul desires.

The Three Hierarchs that we celebrate today, possessed those three desires, my beloved. This

is why **we rightly hymn them as men of yearning**.

They had the desire for knowledge. They even **studied** the secular works of the gentiles, who weren't Christians. Back then, only a few people knew the ancient classical authors like they did. Studying them, they learnt the ancient language, rhetoric, foreign sciences - they acquired encyclopaedical knowledge. But more than anything they deeply studied and learnt the Holy Scriptures by heart —the Old and New Testament— as well as the Apostolic Fathers and the Apologetic Fathers.

However they didn't limit themselves to dry knowledge. Their Christian love cultivated the desire to put what they learnt into practice. They weren't simply theoretical teachers; **they wanted to put into practice what they had studied**. They were dynamic people. They defended the rights of the poor against the almighty leaders and the wealthy; they protected the weak widows and orphans, creating soup-kitchens for the hungry; they built hospitals, sanitariums for lepers, nursing homes and orphanages in a time when government welfare didn't exist. They preached, they taught, they wrote, they rushed to fulfill every need.

The Three Hierarchs, as true philosophers, had as their **sole purpose** in learning and studying, and in their daily actions, **to imitate Christ** – not to take advantage of people but to sacrifice themselves for them, to gain holiness and perfection.

And finally, speaking especially to the youth, I say: Imitate the Three Hierarchs. Acquire a yearning for knowledge, study. If you seek to learn for the sole purpose of becoming rich, that's called fornication. Obtain knowledge, but in addition, arm yourselves with love. **Love Christian virtue, holiness**.

Your homeland has a need of your knowledge, your works, your virtuous way of life. **Shine like the stars** in the dark firmament of the world. Out of your generation will arise brilliant teachers, learned professors, incorrupt magistrates, honourable businessmen, pioneering scientists, courageous army officers, pious priests, inspired hierarchs – whatever is eminent and holy will arise out of your generation. And our country, having such offspring, addresses you and says, "Rejoice, Greek youth, you men of yearning." Amen.

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