

## How, then, do we find spiritual/mental health?

Again a disclaimer: I am not a mental health professional. I fully realize and have witnessed mental health situations with individuals spiral out of control so as to need professional/medical intervention.

Again, the Passions & Therapeutic Virtues:

<u>Passions</u>	<u>Virtues</u>
Self-love	Love of Neighbor
Knowledge	Prudence/Discernment
Gluttony	Temperance
Lust	Continenence & Chastity
Avarice or Greed	Almsgiving & Non-possessiveness
Sadness	Mourning Compunction & Joy
Slothfulness	Labor
Anger	Gentleness Patience
Fear & faintheartedness	Courage and Fear of God
Vainglory and Pride	Humility

Unfortunately, we cannot always identify what is ailing us, and do not always believe, even if we can identify the passion, that the exercise of virtue will be the cure.

Fr. Stanley Harakas (former professor of Ethics at Holy Cross Greek Seminary, Boston)

At the heart of the Eastern Orthodox Christian approach to mental health is the understanding of human wholesomeness in the doctrine of *theosis*. True and full human well-being is the consequence of our proper relationship with God. Mental health is one dimension of this total relationship. Since no individual human being perfectly achieves this relationship, it may be noted that, just as we are all in some measure "less than fully human," in the same manner we are all in some measure lacking in full mental health. The Orthodox concept of repentance or *metanoia* implies a change of mind, a transfiguration and transformation of the human mind. What is significant is that the teaching of the spiritual Fathers of the Eastern Church emphasizes the need for constant repentance on the part of every human being in the direction of his human goal and destiny.

### **Our first line of offense:**

#### **Sacramental Therapies**

"It is fundamentally in the sacraments that we come into an ontological relationship with Christ Himself, by the energy of the Holy Spirit invoked in the sacraments by the Church, and with the aid of the visible signs constituting the sacramental rites."

**Baptism** is the first and most basic of the sacraments, since through it man is incorporated into Christ in the Church and receives from the Spirit what His saving work has given to mankind.

a) shown to be a remedy

b) baptized person dies with Christ so as to rise with Him and live the new life that His resurrection has procured for mankind.

“Freed from sin and illumined by the Holy Spirit, man is healed from the erroneous and delirious knowledge produced by the passions, and acquires a new knowledge, in accordance with God and genuine.”

**Christmation** is inseparable from Baptism.

“Through it, the baptized receives from the Holy Spirit the necessary energy for making the grace received at baptism bear fruit, as well as the strength to develop actively the spiritual gifts given to him.”

**Confession** allows the sins committed after baptism to be forgiven and the penitent to be reconciled to the Church.

“By confessing his spiritual illnesses, the penitent causes them to depart from him. He objectifies them and stops identifying himself with them; he sunders the links that united him to them and bound him to them in a state of estrangement.”

“The tradition sees in the confessor a physician and in his words a remedy, particularly at this stage of confession when the priest pours forth his spiritual advice to the person who has just admitted his faults.”

The **Eucharist** appears as the greatest of the sacraments.

“It is truly the mystery that recapitulates the totality of the divine dispensation, and one receives in this sacrament no longer the gifts of the Spirit, however abundant they be—as in the other sacraments—but the Benefactor Himself, the treasure containing all the fullness of the graces.”

“St. Nicholas Cabasilas describes the Eucharist as the only cure for our natures' ills. He further states that we must take recourse to this remedy not once, but continually...the physician must continually lavish us with his care so as to heal us.”

**Holy Unction**, also called the sacrament of the holy oil, is specifically intended for the sick.”

First part, the office of consolation for the person who is to receive the sacrament.

Second part centers on the blessing of the holy oil that is to be used for the anointing.

Third part is the actual anointing.

## **Subjective Conditions for Healing and Health**

1. The Will to be healed
2. the remedy of Faith
3. the remedy of Repentance
4. the remedy of Prayer
5. the remedy of the commandments
6. the remedy of hope

## **Inner Conversion**

It is one thing, and of course very important, to be/become a member of the Orthodox Church. Some come by birth, some convert later in life.

But in either case, this is only the beginning.

Now we will move on to the implementation of Therapy

not one sided

though we have prayer and the sacraments, we must use our will personally as well

“The conversion of man's powers, faculties, energies and motions, by which the transition from the sickness of the passions to the health of the virtues is brought about, is accomplished in two simultaneous movements:

turning them away from evil

turning them towards spiritual realities and inserting them into the reality of God

this *Praxis* need be simultaneous

this is to counteract the twofold movement of sin

turning away from God

turning towards carnal realities

not to crucify the passions and flesh to kill them, but to reject every wicked desire and action.

The virtues cannot appear as long as the passions occupy their place and cover them up.

**Again, the virtues are man's natural state, the passions are an unnatural state.**

To shun evil and do good takes the synergy of human effort and divine grace.

In accordance with the Fathers, there are four basic principles in this “war”

1. one must begin by fighting the basest passions, the ones most linked to the world and the body, thus gluttony and lust

2. adhere to the following order: gluttony, lust, love of money, anger, sadness, slothfulness, vainglory, pride

3. acknowledge that these eight principle vices do not affect everyone the same way

4. the three fundamental passions are gluttony, love of money and vainglory.

**St John Cassian:**

“Practical perfection exists in a twofold form. Its first mode is that of knowing the nature of all the vices and the method of remedying them. The second is that of discerning the sequence of the virtues and forming our mind by their perfection.”

**Implementation of the Generic Virtues**

Temperance

Courage

Prudence

“The healing of the soul's desiderative part begins to occur with the virtue of temperance or self-control, that of the irascible part with the virtue of courage, and that of the rational part with the virtue of prudence. The Fathers often add to these three generic virtues a fourth, namely righteousness, which 'produces a certain harmony and symphony among the various parts of the soul.’”

**Temperance**

(desiderative means “having, expressing, or relating to desire)

**St. Basil the Great** calls temperance “the beginning of the spiritual life.”

“characterized by the inhibition of carnal, impassioned and sensual desires, and by the corresponding abstention from the pleasures linked to them.”

“The body's passionate desires are essentially those concerning nutrition and sexuality, to which are respectively related the passions of gluttony and lust, which the Fathers call 'the passions of the body.'”

### **not only bodily**

**St John Chrysostom:** “Temperance consists in not allowing oneself to be carried away by any passion.”

also abstaining from every unreasonable pleasure, i.e. sensual pleasures naturally linked to passionate desires.

So includes fantasies—vigilance over the soul as well as the body.

Not to renounce every delight; to abstain from sensual pleasures is to not have pleasure as the goal in using things

The first goal of temperance is to master desire, to regain possession of it, to submit it to reason, to subordinate it, and restore it to order.

Temperance frees desire so as to re-orient it and channel it definitively towards God and the delight in spiritual good things, in which delight God causes the man who unites himself to Him to participate.

**Clement of Alexandria:** “Temperance is only virtuous inasmuch as it is inspired by love of God.”

**St Maximus the Confessor:** “If you keep your body free from disease and sensual pleasure it will help you to serve what is more noble.”

Temperance is one of the basic remedies to the passionate love of self.

I want, I feel, I, I, I

both therapeutic and preventative

**St Basil the Great:** “Temperance frees us since it is at once medicine and power.”

“Temperance contributes to man's introduction to spiritual knowledge because it purifies the desiderative power of the passions that have darkened the intellect.”

“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”

By purifying man, temperance makes him worthy to approach God and to unite himself to Him. It contributes to making man in the end a partaker of the divine life and rendering him incorruptible in the likeness of the incorruptible God.”

### **Courage**

(irascible means having or showing a tendency to be easily angered)

“we use it to fight for the fulfillment of the desires of the flesh and the acquisition and preservation of sensual pleasure, to facilitate the exercise of the passions, and to satisfy self-love.”  
needs to be redirected to fighting evil in all forms.

**St John Cassian:** “We can recognize that the instinct for anger is beneficial to us, in that we may be enraged at our own vices and mistakes and be all the more zealous for virtue and spiritual learning.”

Most commonly, the Unseen Warfare: “the interior struggle against the thoughts inspired by demons—a battle against the temptations.”

It takes courage because it is a real battle and sin has rendered us soft, more willing to surrender and/or flee the fight.

We must fight against the devil for the acquisition of virtue.

This calls for controlled use of the incensive power, just anger.

“Be angry, but sin not.” Ps 4.4

**St. Maximus:** “According to nature, anger is courage.”

What does not kill us will make us stronger.

### **Prudence**

means the ability to govern and discipline oneself by the use of reason

“If he wishes to advance along the path of spiritual conversion, which consists in turning away from evil and doing good, he must again be able to distinguish the two clearly and without being deceived.”

first, distinguish between good and evil

advanced, what comes from God and what from the demons (Satan).

**St John Cassian:** “Prudence sees and casts light on all a person's thoughts and actions and discerns everything that must be done.”

“Prudence is the great strategist of the battle man must inevitably fight in *praxis* against the devil and demons.”

### **Not only but also**

“at heart is also the discernment of the modes of these attacks (which can be both complex and quite varied) and the foiling of the demons' ruses—something possible only with the sure knowledge of God's will indicating the true good to man.”

Also affirms and encourages the other powers of the soul to submit to the rational part in the battle that must be fought against the demons and passions.

“In this activity, its primary activity is to guard the irascible power.”

“Finally, prudence has the function of governing the soul's different powers and/or reordering them by having them work according to their true nature.”

Therapeutic Role of the Spiritual Father

The Manifestation of Thoughts

The Fight against Thoughts

Bodily Asceticism

Marcus Geromes M.Div, LMFT (graduate of Holy Cross, Boston)

Anxiety and anxiety related disorders account for nearly a third of what Americans spend on mental health annually, or \$42 billion per year. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, roughly 40 million Americans or 18% of the population suffer from anxiety and anxiety related disorders and, of those people, nearly half experience depression in conjunction with anxiety.

With these statistics in mind, it's fair to assume that Orthodox Christians are also grappling with the effects of anxiety in their lives and are wrestling with how to work through the discomfort of this emotion.

Genetics, environment, and trauma can all contribute to anxiety, so it's a complex experience that takes a multi-faceted approach when working to reduce symptoms. Anxiety is what psychologist Chip Dodd refers to as an "impaired emotion," stemming from fear, which has a future-oriented component to it. Often with anxiety we try to control or establish an illusion of control around issues that may cause us distress, even though we may have very little control in reality. This worry can become problematic to the individual or family when it becomes a baseline state of being or what psychologists refer to as "homeostasis."

Anxiety comes in two predominant forms. Though it gets a lot of bad press, the first type is vitally important for our survival.

"Acute anxiety" is one of the body's best survival tools and helps us to respond quickly when we are in imminent danger. Our body's sympathetic nervous system sends information to the parts of the brain that make us react to protect ourselves, to quickly get out of harm's way, or to be still. This is known as the "fight, flight, or faint response." This present-focused form of anxiety resolves itself quickly as the threat passes, and can be understood as the body's way of energizing you to keep yourself safe.

Conversely, "generalized anxiety" or "chronic anxiety" is the type of anxiety that stays with us even in the absence of an immediate threat. This second type of anxiety can cause intrusive and ruminating thoughts, restlessness, insomnia, and headaches, among others symptoms. There are many reasons for this type of anxiety, both genetic and environmental, but it is this chronic type that causes disruptions in the quality of our life and causes us to lose our overall sense of peace and stillness or "hesychia."

"Generalized anxiety" is predominantly treated with medication, therapy, exercise, or some combination of all three. As Orthodox Christians we have additional tools at our disposal. Our liturgical experience, the regular participation in the Sacramental life of the Church, and a community of believers with whom we can draw strength each provides us with resource for moving toward stillness of mind and body. In fact, in some cases, we can see interesting parallels between clinical techniques and the ascetic experience of the Church.

The preferred therapeutic model for anxiety reduction is "Cognitive Behavioral Therapy," a method which began to develop in the 1950s and focuses on the link between our thoughts and how we feel and ultimately behave. The wisdom of the Church, as reflected in both our Scriptural and Patristic Tradition, has a remarkably similar prescription for the reduction of chronic worry.

In Philippians 4:6-8, St. Paul writes, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy, meditate on these things."

Not only is St. Paul advocating that we rely on God rather than retreating to our own illusions of control, but he exhorts us to focus on those things which are truly beautiful. By training our minds to focus on content that brings us joy, we begin to indirectly influence the emotions that cause us distress.

Additionally, modern psychology has established a link between gratitude and the reduction of depression and anxiety. A daily practice of gratitude, which is a focus on our gifts rather than a

comparison of what others do or don't have, is also something that St. Paul prescribes in the passage quoted above. Recall that he advises us to approach God in everything with thanksgiving.

Elder Thaddeus's famous work, "Our Thoughts Determine our Lives," also identifies cultivating positive thoughts like gratitude, rather than negative thoughts, as a way through which we enter into greater levels of hesychia. He writes, "Our life depends on the kind of thoughts we nurture. If our thoughts are peaceful, calm, meek, and kind, then that is what our life is like. If our attention is turned to the circumstances in which we live, we are drawn into a whirlpool of thoughts and can have neither peace nor tranquility." Modern research indicates that **our brains simply do a poor job of multi-tasking**. So, as we train our minds to practice gratitude, we simultaneously lose focus of those things which bring us anxiety.

Additionally, recent clinical studies have shown that, **in as little as eight weeks, we can change brain structures through the practice of a regular prayer rule**. The amygdala is a primitive structure in the brain integral to the fight, flight, or faint response; it causes us to be reactive rather than responsive. As we engage in our prayer rule and enter into the beautiful and mystical reality of our Orthodox services, we are literally changing the structure of our brains, thereby opening ourselves to a more peaceful experience of daily life.

**Met. Anthony Krapovitski:**

"If we were to follow up all the errors of the West, both those which entered into its teaching of the faith as well as those inherent in its morals ... we would see that they all are rooted in a misunderstanding of Christianity as the *podvig* of the gradual self-perfection of the individual."

"Christianity is an ascetic religion, Christianity is a teaching about the gradual extirpation of the passions, about the means and conditions of the gradual acquisition of virtues; these conditions are internal, consisting of *podvig*, and given from without, consisting of our dogmatic beliefs and grace-giving sacraments which have only one purpose: to heal human sinfulness and lead us to perfection.

**St. Justin Popovich**

It is now high time—the twelfth hour—time for our Church representatives to cease being nothing but the servants of nationalism and for them to become bishops and priests of the One, Holy Catholic, and Apostolic Church. The mission of the Church, given by Christ and put into practice by the Holy Fathers, is this: that in the soul of our people be planted and cultivated a sense and awareness that every member of the Orthodox Church is a Catholic Person, a person who is for ever and ever, and is God-human; that each person is Christ's, and is therefore a brother to every human being, a ministering servant to all men and all created things. This is the Christ-given objective of the Church. Any other is not an objective of Christ but of the Antichrist. For our local Church to be the Church of Christ, the Church Catholic, this objective must be brought about continuously among our people. And yet what are the means of accomplishing this God-human objective? Once again, the means are themselves God-human because a God-human objective can only be brought about exclusively by God-human means, never by human ones or by any others. It is on this point that the Church differs radically from anything which is human or of this earth.

These means are none other than the God-human ascetic exertions and virtues. And these can be successfully practiced only by God-human, Christ-bearing ascetics. God-human virtues exist in an organic kinship. Each has its source in the other and they bring one another to completion.

First among the ascetic virtues is the effort of faith: The souls of our people must pass through, and constantly be passing through, this exertion; meaning that these souls may then be given up to Christ as having no reservations and being without compromises; having extended down to the God-human depths and ascended to the God-human heights. It is essential to create in our people the sense that the faith of Christ is a virtue beyond nationhood, being œcumenical and catholic, trinitarian; and that for someone to believe in Christ entails their waiting on Christ, and only on Christ, with every event of their lives.

The second ascetic virtue is the God-human virtue of prayer and fasting: This being a virtue which must become the way of life of our Orthodox people, becoming the souls of their souls, because prayer and fasting are the all-powerful, Christ-given means of purging not only the human personhood but also society, the people, and the human race at large, of every defilement. It is prayer and fasting which are able to cleanse our people's souls from our defilements and sinning (Mt. 17:19-21; Lk. 9:17-29). The souls of our people must fall in step with the orthodox life of prayer. Prayer and fasting are not to be performed merely for the individual, or for one people, but for everyone and everything ("in all and for all"), for friends and enemies, for those who persecute us and those who put us to death, because that is how Christians are to be distinguished from the Gentiles (Mt. 5: 44-45).

The third God-human virtue is that of love: That love which knows no bounds, which does not question who is worthy and who is not, but loves them all; loving friends and enemies, loving sinners and evildoers, without however loving their sins and their crimes. It blesses the accursed, as the sun does, it shines both on the evil and the good (Matt. 5: 44-46). This God-human love must be cultivated in our people because its catholic character is what sets it apart from other self-proclaimed and relative loves: from that of the pharisaic sort, the humanist, the altruistic, the nationalist, and likewise from animal love. The love of Christ is all-embracing love, always. By prayer it is acquired because it is a gift of Christ. Now the Orthodox heart prays with intensity: Lord of love, this love of Thine for everyone and for all things—give it to me!

The fourth ascetic virtue is the God-human virtue of meekness and humility. Only he who is meek at heart can appease fierce hearts that are in uproar: only he who is lowly in heart can humble proud and haughty souls. To be "showing all meekness unto all men" (Tit. 3:2). But a person becomes truly meek and humble when he turns his heart of hearts into the Lord Jesus, humble and meek, He being the only true "meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29). The soul of the person must be rendered meek by Christ's meekness. Every person must learn to pray: Meek, gentle Lord, assuage my fierce soul! The Lord humbled himself with the greatest humility—he was incarnate and became a man. Should you be of Christ, then humble yourself as a worm: embed your flesh in the pain of all who are in pain, of everyone sorrowing and in grief; in the trial of everyone who, impassioned, is thus tormented; and in the trauma of every animal and bird. Humble yourself lower than them all: be all things to all men, but be of Christ and according to Christ. When you are by yourself, then pray: O humble Lord, by your humility, humble me!

The fifth ascetic virtue is the God-human virtue of patience and humility: Which is to say, to endure ill-use, not to render evil for evil, to forgive in total compassion all assault, slander and hurt. This is what it is to be of Christ: to feel yourself perpetually crucified to the world, persecuted by it, violated and spat upon. The world will not tolerate Christ-bearing men just as it would not tolerate Christ.



Martyrdom is the state in which a Christian brings forth fruit. This must be imparted to our people. For the Orthodox, martyrdom is purification. Being Christian does not simply mean to bear suffering cheerfully, but to pardon in compassion those who cause it, to pray to God for them as did Christ and the archdeacon Stephen. And so, pray: Long-suffering Lord, give me forbearance, make me magnanimous and meek!

The ascetics are Orthodoxy's only missionaries. Asceticism is her only missionary school. Orthodoxy is ascetic effort and it is life, and it is thus by effort and by life that her mission is broadcast and brought about. The development of asceticism...this ought to be the inward mission of our Church amongst our people. The parish must become an ascetic focal point. But this can only be achieved by an ascetic priest. Prayer and fasting, the Church-oriented life of the parish, a life of liturgy: Orthodoxy holds these as the primary ways of effecting rebirth in its people. The parish, the parish community, must be regenerated and in Christ-like and brotherly love must minister humbly to Him and to all people, meek and lowly and in a spirit of sacrifice and self-denial. And such service must be imbued and nourished by prayers and the liturgical life. This much is groundwork and indispensable. But to this end there exists one prerequisite: that our bishops, priests, and our monks become ascetics themselves. That this might be, then: Let us beseech the Lord.

Ultimately, we have to choose, not just once, but a multitude of times every day. Will we give in to the passions or will we pursue virtue. Alone, we will invariably fail.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. *Ephesians 2:8*”

Example of New Year's Day

We have a church cleaning day scheduled for Jan. 1. Is this for me drudgery or an opportunity? Should I stay home and snack continuously as I watch football on tv in my warm living room in my comfortable chair?

Or should I participate in the grace-filled action of preparing the Holy Temple for the Mystical Nativity of Christ the (My) Saviour, in the company of my fellow strugglers?

Is this really an imposition on my time, or a “duty,” or is it a wonderful opportunity for healing?

**Chrysostom:** “There is no sin from which one cannot be purified by almsgiving and which it cannot destroy. Every sin is below it, and **it is the sovereign remedy for every wound.**”