

Lesson 17

Big Questions: How can I get the training I need to love my neighbor?

Key Points

Teachers should understand these few, key points before the lesson, and students should take these points away from the class.

- A. If we want to truly love God and serve our neighbor, the Orthodox tradition recommends that we submit ourselves to the training of *ascetic* practices.
- B. *Asceticism* (from Greek work *ascesis*, literally meaning “exercise”) Asceticism is when someone voluntarily gives up certain comforts or pleasures in order to come into contact with something greater (i.e. the love and grace of God). A denial of certain things in order to achieve something greater is necessary in all of our undertakings, whether it be with our studies, music or athletics
- C. The goal of asceticism is to love as God loves, even to the point of loving our enemies or a stranger.

Review

Ask students:

1. What did we learn last class? Review your notes and rewrite a key point or takeaway that you found significant. If you were absent, your job is to review the student guide from last class and then ask your fellow students questions about the points they're about to share.

Give them 3 or so minutes to review and write, then ask them:

- Share what you've written (go around the room systematically to get feedback)
- Then ask students who were absent last class: do you have any questions they have about their points? Students may not be able to answer their questions, and that's okay. You can affirm the question, and if it's easy to answer yourself, do so. And if not, say “We'll hold on to that question to see if it's answered in any of the future classes.”

Finally, review any key points from last class that were missed, especially if they are really important for this upcoming lesson.

Opening Reflection

Say something like:

- In previous lessons in this unit, we discussed two problems that an Orthodox Christian living in today's secular world encounters:
 - First, the tendency to forget about God because we separate our faith from our everyday activities.
 - The second is a tendency to do good things out of obligation or pride rather than a love for God.
- Today, we're going to look at some solutions to these problems, tools that our Church offers to cultivate a true love for God.

- Does anyone want to take a stab at defining the word “Asceticism?” (write word for students)
- Asceticism is when someone voluntarily gives up certain comforts or pleasures in order to come into contact with something greater.

Preparation for Video Clip

- As we listen to Dr. Papanikolaou’s lecture, take notes in your Student Guide. He’s going to answer the question: How do I get the training I need to love my neighbor? How is asceticism related to love of neighbor?

Reflection on Video

2. What’s the goal of asceticism?
 - i. In a word: Love! To learn to love as God loves, to be able to love the stranger
3. What does it mean to love as God loves?
4. Who can practice asceticism and when can it happen?
 - i. Anyone can practice asceticism every moment of every day. It’s not just for monks!

Closing Reflection

5. What, if anything, strikes you as important about the notion of asceticism?
6. In what way do you see it as being an important corrective to elements of our American culture today?
7. Do you feel attached to anything? (Clarification question: Do you feel attached to any *thing (i.e. object), person, idea(s), or place?*). How could practicing detachment help you love as God loves?
8. Any further thoughts?

Close with any of the key points that they might not have addressed in their own sharing/discussion.

At this point, you may choose to hand out the “Key Points” summary page for this lesson.