

**Spirituality has to do with our experiencing of God and with the transformation of our consciousness and our lives as outcomes of that experience**

- Richard O'Brien,  
in *Catholicism*, p. 1058

Michael Downey's Current Trends Understanding Christian Spirituality published in **SPIRITUALITY TODAY** Fall 1991, Vol.43 No. 3, pp. 271-280 write a very technical but accurate definition of Christian spirituality saying,

*"Christian spirituality" refers to both a lived experience and an academic discipline. In the first instance, the term describes the whole of the Christian's life as this is oriented to self-transcending knowledge, freedom, and love in light of the ultimate values and highest ideals perceived and pursued in the mystery of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit in the church, the community of disciples. That is to say, spirituality is concerned with everything that constitutes Christian experience, specifically the perception and pursuit of the highest ideal or goal of Christian life, e.g., an ever more intense union with God disclosed in Christ through life in the Spirit. At a second level, Christian spirituality is an academic discipline, increasingly interdisciplinary in nature, that attempts to study religious experience and to promote its development and maturation.*

The Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut defines the Vestry retreat as a...

*...retreat that helps us become open to God's presence among us for refreshment and renewal, and/or for the discernment of God's desires for us and our parishes. Normally they take place away from the parish with a qualified leader, and over a full weekend--although they may be of shorter or longer duration.*

Your Parish Vestry will be taking their annual retreat at Richmond Hill January 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> for the purposes of discerning God's call to mission and ministry in 2009. This call to mission and ministry begins with an understanding of God calls to each of us as spiritual beings in relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

The duties and responsibilities of your Vestry to care for the parish must be grounded in the commitment of each Vestry member to grow spiritually and to seek and discern God's will and purpose in all things. The retreat will be a "time apart" to renew our understanding of Christian Spirituality and the methods of spiritual growth and maturation. These methods, some new some old, will be regularly employed by the Vestry throughout the year as tools for personal growth and to inform deliberations concerning our parish life.

Please pray by name for your Vestry on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> and throughout the year that they may continue to grow and serve God through the Holy Spirit.

Your Vestry for 2009 are:

Don Lafoon	Ed Hall Jr.	Irene Hollins
Sally Montgomery	Patti Jackson	Eric Knopf
Jayne Newman	John Messere	Rick Benson

Please also pray for your Parish Treasurer and Pledge Secretary:

Lynne Read	Lyn Knopf
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St. Seraphim, born in 1759 in Kursk, Russia is the best known of the Orthodox saints of modern times. St. Seraphim of Sarov, at the age of ten he was miraculously healed of a serious affliction and devoted his life to God through the reading of Scripture and other basic Christian literature. He developed a deep desire for spiritual connectedness to God and he began to serve God in the monastic calling. He writes in reference to spiritual growth:

## **GOD**

God is a fire that warms and kindles the heart and inward parts. And so, if we feel in our hearts coldness, which is from the devil,--for the devil is cold--then let us call upon the Lord and He will come and warm our hearts with perfect love not only for Him, but for our neighbor as well. And from the presence of warmth the coldness of the hater of good will be driven away.

A man becomes perfect in the sight of God to the extent that he follows in His footsteps; in the true age God will reveal His face to him. For the righteous, to the degree that they enter into contemplation of Him, behold His image as in a mirror; but there they will behold the revelation of Truth.

## **FAITH**

Before anything else one must believe in God, "*that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*" (Hebrews 11:6).

Faith, according to the teaching of St. Antioch, is the beginning of our union with God. One who truly believes is a stone in the temple of God; he is prepared for the edifice of God the Father, raised to the heights by the power of Jesus Christ, that is, of the Cross, with the aid of ropes, that is, the grace of the Holy Spirit.

## **FEAR OF GOD**

A man who has taken upon himself to travel the path of internal mindfulness must have above all the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom.

Reverent carefulness is necessary here because this sea--that is, the heart, with its thoughts and desires, which one must cleanse by means of mindfulness--is great and vast, "and there are numberless reptiles there" (Ps. 103:25), that is, numerous vain, unjust and impure thoughts generated by evil spirits.

## **PRAYER**

Those who have truly decided to serve the Lord God should practice the remembrance of God and uninterrupted prayer to Jesus Christ, mentally saying: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner.

When the mind and heart are united in prayer and the soul's thoughts are not dispersed, the heart is warmed by spiritual warmth in which the light of Christ shines, making the whole inner man peaceful and joyous.

We should thank the Lord for everything and give ourselves up to His will; we should likewise offer Him all our thoughts and words, and strive to make everything serve only His good pleasure.