

Holy Desires

February 27, 2011

Overview

- Usual understanding of “desires”
- The passions
- The passions and fasting
- The Lord’s desires
- What our desires say about us
- What are some holy desires?
- How can we attain them?

Usual Reaction

- Often think of desires negatively:
 - Desires of the flesh
 - Desires for vengeance
 - “to wish or long for; crave; want”

The Passions

- An unholy passion: “any powerful or compelling emotion or feeling”
 - Peter of Damascus: 298 passions
 - Harshness, trickery, malice, perversity, mindlessness, licentiousness, enticement, dullness, lack of understanding, etc.
- Traditionally, though, unholy passions (or deadly sins) are identified as:

1. Gluttony	5. Dejection
2. Lust	6. Despair
3. Greed	7. Pride
4. Anger	8. Vainglory

The Passions

- Passions are the emotions that control us.
- They include sexual desire, anger, envy, desire for material goods, rejection, fear and love to name a few.
- They are all desires that cannot be satisfied.
 - We can never gain all the material goodies we desire.
 - We will never gain all the recognition we feel we deserve.
 - We will always have a desire for tasty food, even after we fulfill it.
- Passions are an expression of our ego-centeredness.
- They are all about ourselves and what we want for our own pleasure and gratification.
- In reality, our passions are futile attempts to satisfy our spiritual longing by this world's means and are doomed to failure.

The Passions and Fasting

- St. Paul tells us, “And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:24)
- This is the struggle: “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.” (James 1:14)
- One of the main goals of fasting
 - An exercise in controlling the passions

Desires are not always bad

- **Desire to help, to serve, to love, etc.**
 - “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13)
- **Desire to do what is good and pleasing in the Lord’s sight**
 - “that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10)
- **Desire to better ourselves and to grow**
 - “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby”
- **The Lord grants the desires of our hearts**
 - “Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4)

The Lord Himself, too, Desires

- “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4)
- “Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord GOD, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23)
- “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Pet 3:9)
- “Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer’” (Luke 22:15)
- “I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:49-50)

What our Desires say about us

- “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21)
- St. Augustine said that the quality of a man is determined by the quality of his loves
- What we desire becomes our object of worship
- If not God, then we fall into idolatry
- We cannot fool God:
 - “Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me” (Isaiah 29:13)

What, then, are our Desires?

- Are they desires of unholy passions?
- Are they holy desires?

About Holy Desires

- St. Gregory declares that “all holy desires heighten in intensity with the delay of fulfillment, and desire which fades with delay was never holy desire at all.”
- St. Augustine explains that “the entire life of a good Christian is nothing less than holy desire.”

What are Holy Desires?

- Those things which draw us near to God and fulfill His purpose:
 1. Desire for intimacy with the Lord
 2. Desire for Prayer
 3. Desire for the Salvation of Every Soul
 4. Desire for the Church
 5. Desire to see others grow and even surpass us

1. Intimacy with the Lord

- “We know of no other way by which to keep the love of the world out of our hearts, than to keep in our hearts the love of God”
- Easy for us to overlook; absolutely necessary
- This one holy desire gives birth to all other holy desires
- St. Augustine: “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You”

1. Intimacy with the Lord

“Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours” –St. Augustine

1. Intimacy with the Lord

- King David's experience:
 - “O, God You are my God, early I seek You, my soul thirsts for You” (Ps 63:1).
 - “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, or the living God” (Ps 42:1).
 - “I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul shall be satisfied as with the marrow and fatness” (Ps 63:4, 5)

1. Intimacy with the Lord

- Gives birth to other holy desires:
 - Prayer
 - Word of God
 - Communion
 - Repentance
 - Thanksgiving
 - Praising

2. Desire for Prayer

- “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- Heart to heart connection we have with the Lord
- It is through it that His image is stamped on our hearts and we become transformed into His likeness

2. Desire for Prayer

“So important is it, that one might say, almost, that desire is an absolute essential of prayer. Desire precedes prayer, accompanies it, is followed by it. Desire goes before prayer, and by it, created and intensified. Prayer is the oral expression of desire. If prayer is asking God for something, then prayer must be expressed. Prayer comes out into the open. Desire is silent. Prayer is heard; desire, unheard. The deeper the desire, the stronger the prayer. Without desire, prayer is a meaningless mumble of words. Such perfunctory, formal praying, with no heart, no feeling, no real desire accompanying it, is to be shunned like a pestilence. Its exercise is a waste of precious time, and from it, no real blessing accrues. And yet even if it be discovered that desire is honestly absent, we should pray, anyway.”

3. Desire for the Church

- “One thing I have desire of the Lord, that I will seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple” (Ps 27).
- “How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints For the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm 84:1-2).
- “Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They will still be praising You” (Psalm 84:4).
- “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psalm 84:10).
- “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the LORD’” (Psalm 122:1).

4. Salvation of Every Soul

- What is the purpose of our service? Why the labor and struggle?
- Is our role as servants limited to the church grounds and church functions?
- How interested am I in sharing the message of the Gospel with any and everyone willing to hear?
- “For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh” (Romans 9:3)
- “to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22)
- “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4)

5. Seeing others grow and surpass us

- The feeling of parents; lacking envy
- Joy of seeing the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of others
- Never taking credit to ourselves, but always giving God the glory

How do we attain Holy Desires?

- Our first problem is dealing with what we expose ourselves to: GIGO
- Going to the White House
- What we need is HIHO
- “Praise the Lord O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For He has strengthened the bars of your gates” (Psalm 147:12-13).

How do we attain Holy Desires?

- The effect of Holy Scriptures:
 - “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3).
- Flee from our weaknesses:
 - Whether friends, places, etc.; we must eliminate opportunities for temptation
- Learning humility
 - Avoid feeling we are stronger than the opportunity for temptation
 - St. Anthony: “I am weaker than your weakest.”

How do we attain Holy Desires?

- The example of Lot:
 - “Who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds” (2 Peter 2:7-8)
 - Often enjoying the pleasures of the world results in torturing our souls
 - Lot’s daughters
- The goal and power of fasting

Review

- Usual understanding of “desires”
- The passions
- The passions and fasting
- The Lord’s desires
- What our desires say about us
- What are some holy desires?
- How can we attain them?