

Service

Excerpts from *Paradise of the Spirit: Service*
By His Grace Bishop Youanis of Thrice-Blessed Memory

What is Service?

Service is not an art that one can acquire through mere practice, like other types of fine arts. It is not a subjective study in which one can excel by personal effort. It is not a science. It does not start in seminaries, but it starts, rather, in the heart.

Service is a holy love that fills the heart of a person who loves God and has lived with Him, and who has thus tasted how good the Lord is. Therefore, he starts telling others, "Taste and see how good the Lord is." It is a holy love; therefore, it is not limited to a definite place or time. Its message does not end at a specific class or group of people, but it works with power in every place, in suitable as well as unsuitable times, and in all human beings, regardless of race or class.

The goal of service is to let God's love penetrate into every person who is deprived of it. Therefore, it destroys individualism and makes the individual change from loving himself to loving others. It makes him exit from his private sphere and enter into a broader one.

Spiritual Happiness

Service is an important source of happiness. The Lord Jesus Christ defined happiness when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). True happiness lies not in possessing everything for myself, but in sharing with others what I possess. One's happiness is not fulfilled by getting everything he needs, but in letting others share in what he enjoys.

Lakes are divided into two types: salty lakes and fresh water lakes. Salty lakes are closed and water pours into them, without an exit; that is, they receive but do not give. On the other hand, fresh water lakes receive *and* give water; thus their waters are fresh.

Service gives the soul great happiness. The Lord Jesus clarified this when He illustrated Judgment Day by saying, "For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me" (Mt 25:35–36). Happy is the believer who gives spiritual food, rather than physical food. This leads a person to the Living Fountain, from which, when one drinks, he will never thirst again. Happy is the believer who visits someone who is naked and offers him clothes, not to cover his body, but the clothes of righteousness that he lacked because of his sin. Happy is he when he visits someone who is spiritually sick and introduces him to Christ

so He can heal him, like the four friends who brought their paralyzed friend to Christ. Happy is he when he visits someone in prison, held in bitter captivity, to tell him about the One who can liberate him from the dominion of sin. "Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin ... Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (Jn 8:34,36).

The message of the Lord Jesus Christ is: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Lk 4:18). See how beautiful the Lord's comments are. "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). This is the essence of service and its blessings. This is the depth of spiritual happiness.

The Field of Service

"The word of God is not chained" (2 Tim 2:9). Service cannot be restricted. Listen to the apostles Peter and John after the miracle of healing the paralytic and after the chief priests had commanded them not to teach or utter any word about the Lord Christ. They replied courageously, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). In fact, this is the feeling that everyone who has experienced the Lord and tasted His love has. It is impossible not to speak of the things he has seen and heard.

What does the believer see or hear in his fellowship with the Lord? He sees and hears much. He sees what the physical eye cannot see and hears things that cannot be uttered. He has joy and peace that surpass all understanding. Didn't the Lord Jesus Christ say, "He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him ... We will come to him and make Our home with him" (Jn 14:21,23)? Therefore, we find that everyone who is inflamed with the love of God cannot sit quietly or stop serving the souls for whom the Lord died. He says with David, "I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob" (Ps 132:4-5). He keeps searching for a place for the Lord and a dwelling for the God of Jacob in every heart in which the Lord would be pleased to be comfortable.

Truly, the word of God cannot be restricted. Serving the souls whom the Lord loves cannot be restricted. Everyone, whose heart is full of God's love, can always look for opportunities to serve the Lord and His brethren. He serves by his words, his teachings, his writings, his private life, and by his prayers for those whom he serves. He becomes like a magnet, creating an atmosphere around him wherever he goes.

Anyone who does not believe in serving others, by any means, is not a true Christian because he is selfish. In Christianity, there is nothing worse than a Christian

who thinks only of himself, for loving one's neighbor is the fulfillment of the law (see Rom 13:10).

Since service cannot be restricted, it does not mind obstacles, dangers, or even death itself. On the contrary, death multiplies its power and makes its fruits plentiful. We feel this in the lives of those who preached and were "slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held" (Rev 6:9). They were given white clothes and told to rest until their fellow servants were martyred like them. Look at the apostles who went on with their service with exceeding joy after they were persecuted and whipped. Moreover, listen to St. Paul saying, "And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:22–24).

Our Lord Jesus Christ was sent by God. "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (Jn 20:21). He did not come to be served, but to serve. His last commandment while He was on earth was concerning service and mission: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15). Since that time, He has been commanding men, women, and young people to preach and declare His holy name and love to all people. He who refuses to obey God's voice to fulfill his duty in serving others and who does not share in extending the kingdom of God on earth is denying himself the great work for which the Lord Jesus Christ came.

The Blessings of Service

The New Testament has blessed service as well as the servant, and has made him a means to bring hearts close to God, renew souls, and attract them to the kingdom of God. Didn't the Lord Jesus bless the peacemakers, calling them sons of God? They make peace between man and his Creator. The Son of God came to fulfill this great act. When we participate with Him, that is, when we serve to bring souls close to God, we deserve to be called the sons of God. St. Paul clarified this when he said, "God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation ... We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:18,20). Service is a great work by which we reconcile people to their Creator. We continue the work that the Lord Jesus Christ began, and we fulfill His good will for the salvation of all people. "It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Mt 18:14).

St. Paul explained the greatness of this service when he said, “For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building” (1 Cor 3:9). Do you see the beauty of the phrase, *God’s fellow workers*? There are many comforting meditations in these words. They show how honorable the message is which the servant of the Word of God has to fulfill. He works with God personally. What an honor! It guarantees a carefree life for the servant who works *with God*. The servant is not responsible for the service; God is. The servant only works *with God*.

A servant is extremely blessed in his service. This greatness is derived from our Lord Jesus Christ Himself: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). Therefore, the Lord has rewarded His faithful servants with great honor in heaven and on earth. He said, “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor” (Jn 12:26). Daniel the prophet said, “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Dan 12:3). When St. Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea and taken to Felix the governor, he “reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, [and] Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you’” (Acts 24:25). The judge trembled in front of the prisoner! Also, Emperor Falnez trembled in front of St. Basil the Great and almost fell to the ground before him, but St. Basil helped him up.

