

To speak as Saint Theophan does of standing before God “with the mind in the heart”, means that we are to worship Him with the totality of our human personhood. The rational faculties are in no way rejected, for we are rational creatures— and therefore our worship should be “reasonable worship” (Rom 12:1). Likewise our emotions and affections are not to be excluded from our worship, for they too are a part of our personhood.

“With the mind in the heart”. In this “total act of worship,” then, we are to stand before God with the entire person: with the conscious mind certainly, but also with the aspects of our inner self that reaches out into the unconscious, and so also our physical and material constitution, our body. All these have their part to play in our prayer.

“The flesh is so transformed,” writes Saint Gregory Palamas; “it is exalted with the soul, communes together with the soul in the Divine, and itself likewise becomes the possession and dwelling place of God.

The LENTEN RETREAT will be April 13th
[Please plan ahead](#)

THE NEXT MONTHLY RETREAT IS MARCH 9th 10:00 AM

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ORTHODOX OBLATES
OF
SAINT BENEDICT
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This meditation is taken from "THE INNER KINGDOM" by H.E. Archbishop KALLISTOS WARE. (With apologies for any editing).

THE THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

"The principal thing", state Saint Theophan the Recluse, "is to stand before God with the mind in the heart, and to go on standing before Him unceasingly day and night, until the end of life."

In this concise yet far-seeing definition of worship, Saint Theophan underlines three things:

- first, the basic essence of worship: it is *to stand before God*;
- second, the faculties with which the human person offers worship: *with the mind in the heart*;
- third, the time when worship is appropriate: *unceasingly day and night, until the end of life*.

Stand before God

First then, to worship or to pray is to stand before God.

To pray is not necessarily to ask God for something; it need not even employ words, for the deepest and most powerful of all prayers is simply to wait upon God in silence. But whether we are worshipping with words, through symbolic and sacramental actions, or in silence, always our underlying attitude is the same: we Are standing before God.

To stand before God: this implies that worship is an encounter, a meeting between persons. The purpose of worship is not to arouse emotions and to produce appropriate moral attitudes, but to enter into a personal relationship with God the Holy Trinity. "As a friend talking with a friend," writes Saint Symeon the New Theologian, "we speak with God, and with boldness we stand before the face of Him who dwells in the light unapproachable." Here Saint Symeon briefly indicates the two poles of Christian worship, the two contrasting aspects of this personal relationship: God "dwells in light unapproachable", yet we humans beings are able to draw near "with

boldness" and to speak with Him "as a friend speaking with a friend." God is beyond all being, infinitely remote, unknowable, "the Wholly Other." But this transcendent God is the same God of personal love, uniquely close, around and within us, "everywhere present and filling all things" (Orthodox prayer to the Holy Spirit).

In worship, then, the Christian stands before God with a double attitude, conscious of "the nearness yet the otherness of the Eternal," to use the phrase of the Anglican writer Evelyn Underhill. As he or she prays, the worshiper feels both the mercy and the judgment of God, both His goodness and His severity (Ps 100 [101]: 1; Rom 11:22). To the end of our earthly life we stand always between assurance and awe———.

Again and again in the liturgical text of the Christian Church, East and West, these contrasted feelings of hope and fear, of confidence and awe, are set side by side. In a pre-communion prayer attributed to Saint Symeon the New Theologian, we use the words:

*Rejoicing at once and trembling,
I who am straw receive the Fire
And, strange wonder!*

*I am ineffably refreshed
As the bush of old
Which burned yet was not consumed.*

"Rejoicing at once and trembling": should be our attitude as we stand before God. Our worship should be marked by a vivid sense of reverence and compunction, for it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31); and equally by a feeling of homeliness and affectionate simplicity, for this living God is our brother and our friend. As we worship, we are both slaves before the throne of The King of heaven, and children who are happy to be in their Father's house. Both of these feelings simultaneously should characterize our worship if we are to stand aright in the divine presence.