

Don't Turn Back (Protopresbyter Themistoklis Mourtzanos)

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‘You’ve ascended the ladder of renunciation; don’t turn back’ (Saint John of the Ladder). How many times, in the course of marriage or family life, are we troubled by the thought that perhaps we married the wrong person. Our mind goes to other loves and we invent scenarios in which we’d have been happier with someone else or with other choices. We wonder whether we’ve made mistakes in the way we’ve brought up the children, if we should have done things differently, if we gave them as much time as we should have, listened to them enough, if we were too lenient or too strict. We have the same concerns regarding our professional choices, the way we’ve handled our money, how we did at school or university, issues where we were called upon to make decisions which had consequences. And these thoughts torment us.



In our spiritual tradition we come across the phrase: Don't turn back'. This isn't an incitement to avoid self-criticism. It's a recommendation that we shouldn't allow our brain to dwell on what can't be changed, on what we've left behind, on what belongs to yesterday. It's an invitation to transcend the thought that's saddening us concerning what's irreversible, and a decision to get down to business in the conditions of the times as they are, in our today and tomorrow. Faith, like philosophy, is a continuous recollection of death, not as a cause of worry or sorrow, but as a wake-up call for what we can be doing. It's a constant reminder of Him Whom we need in order to stand up to life's challenges. To correct the mistakes which can be rectified. We should choose love where once our criterion was only ourselves. We should give and not be satisfied with just taking.

Don't turn back. The road ahead of us is important. Instead of judging and rejecting our spouse, ask to make a fresh start. Instead of dwelling on the memories of our mistakes and passions, let's wake up and choose the struggle for repentance, which isn't rummaging around the things of yesterday, but the beginning of a new life. And let our emergence from the past be practical. A smile surprises. A heart-felt apology moves. A word of thanks brightens a relationship. And, in particular, 'I'm working hard to do my best' galvanizes the course of our life in all areas.

Psychotherapy invites us to revisit yesterday in order to rectify today. To see the memories that are troubling us, to externalize them, rationalize them and not allow them to lurk any further in our psyche. But this step is incomplete if the return to yesterday is undertaken so that we can justify ourselves. Unless it includes

forgiveness for what we've lost, for what we haven't experienced, for all those who've wronged us. It's not enough to understand your past if your soul doesn't want to turn to the future. 'Don't turn back' means, that, with faith in Christ, you won't see the things that are troubling you as a land-mine for today and tomorrow, but as wounds of humility. Then you can engage in prayer in renunciation of the will, and let the bad thoughts die.

Source: themistoklismourtzanos.blogspot.com