

Orthodox FAQ on Anxiety

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What is anxiety from an Eastern Orthodox perspective?

Anxiety is seen as a spiritual struggle, often linked to a lack of trust in God's provision (as in Matthew 6:24-34). The struggle is centered in one's inner thought life and is viewed as having a relationship with the sinful passion of Fear. The effects of Anxiety branch out to the emotions and even physical sensations (like panic). Ultimately, the antidote to Anxiety is healing the passion with corrective Fear of God. The Church encourages prayer, fasting, and participation in the Mysteries to find peace from inner torments.

How can prayer help with anxiety?

Prayer is a powerful way of life in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Like breathing sustains us through the day, we should also "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) lest we suffocate on the cares of this life. The prayer of the heart centers one's life on God in Christ: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner." Prayer humbly seeks His guidance and comfort in times of distress. "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

What role do the Sacraments play in managing anxiety?

The Sacraments or Mysteries, especially Confession and Holy Communion, are vital in the healing process, which is the salvation of man. Confession helps combat harmful thought patterns and behaviors and renews the healing Grace of Baptism. Holy Communion, being Christ's very life, cures the harmful effects of Fear as "the medicine of immortality" (St. Ignatius Letter to the Ephesians, 20). The Mysteries offer spiritual renewal and a deeper connection with God,

which will alleviate anxiety. Partaking of them is essential during the struggle toward greater faithfulness in the face of Anxiety.

Can fasting help reduce anxiety?

Fasting is not just about abstaining from food but really about spiritual discipline. It helps to cultivate self-control, humility, and reliance on God, which can significantly reduce Anxiety. Remember, Anxiety is often linked to a hidden lack of reliance on God or unrecognized Fear.

What are some practical steps for managing anxiety?

In addition to spiritual practices, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, seeking professional counseling, and engaging in family and community support are practical steps that are not incompatible with an Orthodox Christian way of life. There is a lot out there in social media and professional mental health about how to deal with anxiety, and not all of it is sound. Discernment is needed. The struggler should consult with loving and trusted guides, such as friends, parents, and clergy. This guards against a counselor or lifestyle change introducing distrust in Christ or resulting in spiritual or physical harm.

How does the Eastern Orthodox Church view mental health professionals?

The Church generally recognizes the important role of mental health professionals in modern society and encourages collaboration between spiritual and psychological care to provide holistic support for people. Anxiety is, at its root, related to spiritual illness with signs, symptoms, and effects in one's body and personality. Mental health professionals are usually not equipped (or not authorized) to address the spiritual need, which is the deepest level of healing of the human person.