

Unseen Warfare: The Spiritual Combat and Path to Paradise of Lorenzo Scupoli

St. Theophan the Recluse



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From the edited text of St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite and St. Theophan the Recluse

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Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 1: WHAT DEFINES CHRISTIAN PERFECTION? THE WARFARE REQUIRED TO OBTAIN IT. FOUR THINGS NECESSARY TO SUCCEED IN THIS

All of us desire, and are ordered to be perfect. The Lord directs us saying, "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). St. Paul also exhorts us saying, "In evil be babes, and in understanding become perfect" (1 Cor 14:20). In another spot he states, "Be perfect and complete in the will of God" (Col 4:12), and also, "Let us become perfect" (Heb 6:1). In the Old Testament the same commandment is found. So God tells Israel in Deuteronomy: "You will be perfect with the Lord your God" (Deu 18:13) David also advises his son Solomon, "And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father, and minister to him with a perfect heart and a willing mind" (1 Chr 28:9). With all these things we cannot help but see that God requires the completeness of perfection from Christians, that is that we must be perfect in every virtue.

However if you, dear reader beloved of Christ, desire to achieve such lofty heights, you should first learn what Christian perfection is made up of. Because if you do not know this, you might turn away from the correct path, and wander in a completely wrong direction, all the while supposing that you are making progress in the path of perfection.

I will declare to you plainly, the highest and most perfect matter one hopes to attain is to draw near to God, and abide as one with Him.

There are many people who state that Christian perfection is a matter of fasting, vigils, prostrations, sleeping the ground and other ascetical

efforts of the body. Still others claim that it involves saying numerous prayers at home and going to long Church services. There are still others who suppose that our perfection is made up entirely of mental prayer, seclusion, solitude and stillness. However most people restrict perfection to closely keeping all the rules and precepts spelled out in the law, not giving in to excess or lack, but keeping to the golden mean. But all these virtues, in and of themselves do not make up the Christian perfection we seek, but are merely methods for obtaining it.

Undoubtedly whatever they do is an important means to attain a life of Christian perfection. We see many righteous people, who perform these virtues as they ought, to obtain strength and power to fight against their sinful and wicked nature and to achieve, by these exercises, the fortitude to stand up against the temptations and allurements of our three principle foes: the flesh, the world and the devil. By these methods to achieve the spiritual foundation, so important to all God's servants, and in particular to novices. They do fasting, to tame their wild flesh. They keep vigils to make their inner mind more acute. They sleep on the ground, for fear they end up soft from sleep. They hold their tongues with silence and seclude themselves to keep from the smallest allurements which might offend the Most-Holy God. They say their prayers, go to Church services and do other such practices of devotion, in order to keep their mind on heavenly matters. They read about the life and the passion of our Lord, solely for the aim of understanding more plainly their own shortcomings and the love of God, to learn and also to have the desire to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, carrying their cross with self-restraint, and making their love of God increasingly zealous along with their disdain of themselves. Still, these identical virtues may be more harmful than their neglect, for those who understand them as singly important in their life and make them their hope, although not from their

nature, because they are virtuous and holy, but by the error of those who employ them in a way that they should not be used, that is to say, when they attend only to the outward exercise of such virtues, and allow their heart to be moved by their own desires and by the will of the devil. Because the latter, noticing that they have departed from the right way, happily keeps from meddling in their physical works and even permits them to increase their labors, in accord with their own vain thoughts. Feeling with this particular spiritual motions and comforts, such people start to think they have attained the rank of angels and suppose that God is there, present with them. At certain times, caught up in their meditation of some heavenly, abstract things, they suppose they have transcended this material world and have been raptured into the third heaven.

But anybody can see just how obviously sinful such people act and how far they really are from genuine perfection, if they examine their character. In general they always want to be preferred over others. They enjoy living in accord with their own desires and they are ever obstinate in what they decide to do. They are blind with respect to everything concerning themselves, but they examine clearly and intrusively into the words and deeds of others. If someone else is held in high regard by others, they cannot accept it and become clearly hostile toward them. If someone interferes with their devout occupations and ascetical labors, particularly around others (God forbid!), they instantly become angry, boiling over with fury and they become rather unlike their normal selves.

If God sends them afflictions and illness, with the aim of bringing them to a self-awareness and guiding them to the way of true perfection, or permits them to be afflicted, by which He regularly tries His genuine servants, this trial instantly demonstrates what is concealed in their hearts,

and how profoundly they are defiled by pride. For whatever trouble might disturb them, they refuse to lower their necks to take on the yoke of the will of God, and to trust His just and hidden judgments. They have no desire to follow the example of our Lord Jesus, the Son of God, Who humbled Himself and suffered on account of us, and they reject humility, to deem themselves the most base of all beasts, and to look upon those that afflict them as good friends, the instruments of a heavenly bounty shown to them, and those that can aid their salvation.

So it is plain that they are in great peril. Their inmost eye, which is their mind, is obscured in darkness, and they behold themselves with this and see poorly. Supposing their outward devout works are good, they believe that they have attained perfection already and, inflating themselves, start to pass judgment on others. After this happens it is not possible for anyone to change such people, except with God's intervention. A clear sinner will turn to good more readily than a hidden one, concealed under a robe of manifest virtues.

Having now demonstrated that a spiritual life and perfection itself is not merely made up of these manifest virtues, that we have mentioned, you should understand that it consists solely in drawing near to God and being united with Him, as was stated at the start of this work. In addition to this is joined a heartfelt understanding of the righteousness and majesty of God, along with an understanding of our own worthlessness and our predisposition to all evils; love of God and disdain of ourselves; submission not just to God but also to all creation, on account of our love of God; complete renunciation of our will and obedience to God's will; but also our desire for all these things and its performance with a pure heart to God's

glory, from an absolute desire to gratify God and only because He desires it and because we love Him and labor for Him.

This is the law of love, written by God's finger on the hearts of His genuine servants. This is the giving up of ourselves that God requires of us. This is the sacred yoke of Jesus Christ and His light burden. This is the subjection of our will to the will of God, that our Savior and Master requires of us from His word and from His example. Because has not our Master and Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, told us to say while praying to the Father in heaven: "Our Father ... Your will be done on earth, as in heaven" ([Matt 6:10](#))? Did He not cry out just before His passion, "Not my will, but yours be done." ([Luke 22:42](#)) Did He not declare, concerning His whole life: "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the the will of Him Who sent me" ([John 6:38](#))?

Do you understand now what all this means, my brother? I assume that you show your eagerness and desire to attain the height of such perfection. Glory to your zeal! However ready yourself for work, sweat and toil from your very first steps on the way. You need to sacrifice all things to God and perform only His will. But you will encounter in yourself as many different desires as you have talents and wills, all of which struggle for being satisfied, without regard for what agrees with God's will. So, to attain your sought after goal, it is necessary first of all to suppress your own desires and in the end to quench and destroy them completely. And to succeed in this goal, you should always oppose any evil in yourself and compel yourself towards what is righteous. Put another way, you should ever struggle against yourself and all that indulges your own will, that encourages and supports it. So then, ready yourself for this fight and warfare and understand that the crown [i.e. the attainment of your goal] is granted to no

one else save to the courageous among fighters and wrestlers. However if this is the most difficult of all battles, because in warring against ourselves it is within ourselves that we encounter opposition, victory is the most wonderful of all, and, the principle thing, it is most gratifying to God. Because if encouraged by zeal, you are victorious and destroy your wild lusts and passions, you will gratify God more, and you will work for Him more magnificently than if you scourge yourself until you issue blood or tire yourself out with fasting more than any elderly desert hermit. For even if you redeem hundreds of Christian slaves from the unbelievers and liberate them, it will not save you, if you continue to be a slave to your passions. And no matter what work you perform, however wonderful, and with whatever labor and sacrifice you might achieve it, it will not guide you toward your goal, if you do not pay attention to your passions, allowing them the liberty to live and work in you.

Lastly, after understanding what makes up Christian perfection and understanding that to attain it you must fight an never-ending bitter war with yourself, if you truly want to win this unseen warfare and merit a crown, you should plant in your heart these four inclinations and spiritual works, arming yourself with unseen weapons. These most reliable and unconquerable weapons are: (1) never depend on yourself; (2) carry always in your heart a perfect and bold trust only in God; (3) always struggle; and (d) keep steadfast in prayer.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 2: THAT ONE SHOULD NEVER HAVE FAITH IN ONESELF.

It is required in our warfare, dear brother, that we not rely on ourselves. Without this, truly you will not only fail to obtain the sought after victory, but you will be incapable of resisting the slightest assault of your foe. Etch this deep in your mind and heart. From the first sin of our forefather, in spite of our weakening spiritual and virtuous abilities, we often highly esteem ourselves. Even though our daily experience proves the untruthfulness of his opinion, in our puzzling self-delusion we do not stop believing that we are certainly not unimportant. But this spiritual sickness, which is so difficult to see and recognize, is more distasteful to God than everything else in us, as being the primary offspring of our self-love and the root of all our desires and failures and evil-doing. It shuts the door of our mind or spirit, by which Divine grace alone can come in, and provides this grace no entrance to abide in us. And thus it leaves. Because how is grace, which aids and enlightens, able to enter that person, who supposes that he is great, that he understands all things and requires no help beyond himself? May God keep us from this sickness and desire of Lucifer! God harshly reproves those who are afflicted with this vice of vainglory and self-regard declaring by the prophet, "Woe to those that are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight" ([Isa 5:21](#)) The apostles also says, "Do not be wise in your estimation" ([Rom 12:16](#)).

Even though God hates this evil arrogance in us, there is nothing more He loves to see in us than a genuine understanding of our nothingness and a steadfast confidence that any goodness we might have in us has its source in

Him alone, for He is the root of all goodness, and nothing genuinely good can ever be from ourselves, whether that be a virtuous thought or a good deed. So He is careful to plant this divine seed in the hearts of His most beloved friends, encouraging them not to highly esteem themselves and not to depend on themselves. At times He does this with grace and inner illumination, and at other times by external strokes and affliction. At other times He does this with unanticipated and nearly unbeatable temptations. While at other times using other means that we cannot always understand. But, even though expecting no virtue from ourselves and not depending on ourselves is the action of God within us, for our part we must make a concentrated effort to obtain this disposition, doing everything we can. And thus, dear brother, I offer here to you four exercises by which, with the assistance of God, you may obtain a distrust of yourself, and learn not to depend on yourself for anything.

(1) Understand your worthlessness and keep in your mind the fact that by yourself you are unable to do anything which would make you worthy of the kingdom of heaven. Hear the testimony of the wise fathers. Peter of Damascus reassures us saying, "there is nothing better than to understand your own feeble nature and ignorance, and there is nothing worse than not to be conscious of them." St. Maximus the Confessor teaches us, "The foundation of each virtue is the understanding of the weakness of human nature." St. John Chrysostom tells us, "Only the one who thinks of himself as being nothing, really understands himself."

(2) Ask for assistance from God with meek and warm prayer, because this is His gift. And if your desire is to obtain it, you should first plant in yourself the assurance that not only have you no such understanding of yourself, but that you are unable to obtain it with your own efforts. Then

boldly standing before God Almighty, in a steadfast belief that from His great compassion He will give you this understanding of yourself at the right time, and in a way that He Himself knows, do not let the smallest doubt creep in that you will obtain it.

(3) Get used to being wary and fearful of your numerous foes whom you are unable to withstand even for a brief period of time. Be afraid of their considerable experience in warring against us; their cleverness and ambushes; their power to take on the guise of angels of light; their innumerable tricks and nets, which they covertly put in the way of your virtuous life.

(4) If you fall into sin, immediately realize your weakness and be conscious of it. Because God permits you to fall with the aim of making you more conscious of your weak nature, in order that you might thus not only learn to hate yourself, but on account of your overwhelming weakness might desire to be scorned by others also. Understand that lacking such desire it is impossible for this helpful self-distrust to be born inside you and really take root. This is the corner-stone and start of genuine humility, because it is founded on the understanding, through experience, of your impotence and undependability.

From there, each one of us can see how important is it for someone, who wants to share in divine light, to understand himself and how the mercy of God usually leads the haughty and independent to this understanding by their failures, rightly permitting them to descend into the sin from which they suppose they can defend themselves, in order to make them take note of their weakness and stop them from depending foolishly on themselves in this or anything else.

This means, even though very powerful, is not without its risks and God does not use it always, but only when all other methods we have spoken of, which are more simple and natural, fail to lead one to self-awareness. Only at this point does He finally let one descend into sin, great or small, in accord with the measure of his haughtiness, pride and self-dependence. Thus where prideful, self-dependence is lacking, helpful failings do not happen. So if you do fall, move quickly in your mind to meek self-awareness and a dim view of yourself and beseech God through persistent prayer to grant you a true light, in order to understand your worthlessness and to establish a distrust in your heart, for fear you again stumble with worse and more damaging sin. I should add that not just when someone falls into a sin, but also when he is disturbed by some misfortune, affliction or grief, and in particular a worrisome and drawn out bodily illness, he must perceive that he endures this so as to obtain self-awareness, that is, the understanding of his weakness, and to be humble. With this goal God permits us to be afflicted by all types of temptations from the devil, men and from our depraved nature. St. Paul perceived this end in the temptations he endured in Asia, when he stated, "But we had the death sentence in ourselves, that we should not rely on ourselves, but in God who raises from the dead.' (2 Cor 1:9)

And I will subjoin something else: if one wants to understand his infirmity from the experience of his life, he should, not necessarily for many days, but just for a single day, note his thoughts, words and deeds, that is to say, what he thought, said and did. He will no doubt discover that the majority of his thoughts, speech and acts were sinful, wrong, silly and evil. This test will make him know in reality how discordant and feeble he is. And should he desire earnestly to better himself, this knowledge will

make him feel how fool-hearty it is to believe anything virtuous will come from himself, and not to trust in himself.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 3: HOPING IN, AND HAVING CONFIDENCE IN GOD ALONE.

Even though, as we have mentioned, it is essential not to depend on our own strength in this unseen battle, however, if we simply surrender all hope of betterment and fall into despair without having found support, we are sure to take flight suddenly from the battle and we will be defeated by our foes and taken prisoner. So, along with full renunciation of ourselves "we should sow in our heart complete trust and confidence in God and full confidence in Him. Put another way, we should feel with all our heart that we can depend on no one but God, and that from Him alone, we can expect all good things, all manner of assistance, and success. Because we are nothing, we should expect nothing from ourselves, save falls and missteps, which make us give up all hope in ourselves. By contrast, we are sure always to be successful with God, if we equip our heart with a living trust in God and a steadfast certainty that we will obtain His aid. As it says in the psalm, "In him my heart trusts and I am helped' (Ps. 28:7).

These thoughts will aid you to have this hope and thus to receive help:

(1) Look for help from God, Who is all-powerful and can do whatever He wills, and so can also aid us.

(2) Look for help from God, Who is all-knowing and wise, knowing everything perfectly, and thus understanding exactly what is the best thing for the salvation of each person.

(3) Look for help from God, Whose goodness is infinite and Who draws near to us with indescribable love, being ever prepared each hour and moment to grant us the help we require for total success in the spiritual battle which happens within us, as soon as we flee with steadfast trust into the protection of His embrace.

But how can it be that our good Shepherd, Who for three years sought the sheep which had wandered amiss, crying out so loudly that His throat was parched, and following roads so worn and full of thorns that He shed every drop of His blood and delivered His very life. How can it be, I say again, that now, if His sheep should follow after him, turning to Him with love and calling out to Him for help with hope, He would decline to cast His eyes on the sheep that had gone astray. How could He not take it into His divine embrace and, put it among the angels of heaven, and prepare a welcoming banquet for it? If our God never stops carefully and lovingly looking for the blind and deaf sinner, (as the woman did looking for the coin in the Gospels), how is one to imagine He would now forsake him when, as a lost sheep, he calls out for the Shepherd? Yet who will ever trust that God, Who, according to Revelation, always stands at the door of the heart of a man, and knocks, desiring to enter and dine with him ([Rev 3:20](#)), and grant His gifts to him, would not trust that this very same God would continue to be deaf and decline to enter if a man opens the door of his heart and summons Him?

(4) The fourth means of keeping a lively faith in God and of obtaining His ready assistance is to go over in our mind all the times His divine aid quickly came in Holy Writ. These many examples demonstrate clearly to us that no one who trusts in God, was ever abandon. "Consider the ancient

generations and see," says Sirach, the wise, "who ever trusted in the Lord and was put to shame?" (Sir 2:10)

Equipped with these four weapons, go into war with courage, dear brother, and fight carefully with the complete confidence that success will be given to you. Because with their assistance you will surely attain perfect trust in God, and that trust will never fail to draw God's assistance and grant you unbeatable power. In the end, these two will deeply root in you a complete distrust of yourself. I pass over no opportunity in this chapter to remind you to not trust yourself, because I do not know of anyone who does not need to be reminded of this. Self-regard is so rooted in us and so strongly established, causing us to suppose that we are a somebody, somebody not insignificant. It ever hides in our heart as an small and barely perceptible motion, even when we are quite confident that we do mistrust ourselves, and are, by contrast filled with an absolute faith in God alone. To keep from this self-conceited notion of the heart and to conduct ourselves without any independence, guided only by your faith in God, be careful to constantly keep a disposition in which your thoughts and feelings of inadequacy always come before you when you meditate on God's all powerful nature, and allow them to come before all your activities.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 4: HOW TO PERCEIVE IF SOMEONE ACTS WITHOUT SELF-DEPENDENCE AND WITH PERFECT FAITH IN GOD

It happens many times that self-dependent people suppose that they have no self-dependence at all, but rather place all their trust in God and rest boldly alone in Him. However in reality it is not the case. They can see it for themselves, if they discern by what is within them and what happens to them if they stumble. If when they mourn at their failings, rebuking themselves for it, they think, "If I do this and that, the effects of my failure will be wiped clean and everything will be fine again." This is a true sign that prior to the fall they relied on themselves, rather than God. And the more down-cast and dejected their state, the more it demonstrates that they overly trusted in themselves and not enough in God. So the grief caused by their fall is not mitigated by any solace. If someone does not depend on himself but places his trust in God, his fall is not a great surprise and he is not overwhelmed with too much sorrow, because he understands that it is the consequence of his own shortcomings, and, most of all, the weakness of his faith in God. Thus his fall increases his mistrust in himself and forces him to try harder to augment and deepen his humble trust in God. Also, despising the loathsome passions which resulted in his fall, he thereafter suffers calmly his penitence for having wronged God. Armed now with further trust in God, he thus pursues his foes boldly, even to death.

I would like people to consider what I have discoursed on above, because even though they suppose themselves to be virtuous and spiritual,

when they fall into sin, they are overwhelmed with sorrow and cannot find peace anywhere. Worn out by this sorrow and turmoil, which they endure for no other cause but self-regard, they flee, again compelled by self-regard, to their spiritual father, to free themselves of this weight. But they should have done this straightaway after the fall and for no other cause than from wanting to cleanse as quickly as possible the dirt of sin which offended God, and obtain new strength to struggle with themselves by means of the holy sacrament of confession and repentance.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 5: CONCERNING THE FALSE OPINION OF THOSE WHO CONSIDER EXCESSIVE SORROW A VIRTUE

It is a mistake to consider as a virtue the excessive sorrow which one feels after sinning, not understanding that it is the result of pride and holding oneself in high regard, based on relying too much on themselves. Because by supposing that they are important they do too much, hoping to handle it themselves. When their fall demonstrates how feeble they are, they are perplexed, like one who has encountered something unexpected, and they are thrown into confusion and become faint-hearted. Because they see, fallen and lying on the ground, that idol of themselves, on which they had placed all their hopes. This never happens with a humble person who only trusts in God, for he expects nothing good will come from himself. So, when he falls into sin, he too feels the burden of it and is sorrowful but he does not descend into grief nor is he puzzled, because he knows that what happened, happened because of his own shortcomings. To endure a fall is nothing unanticipated or novel for him.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 6: SOME SIGNS CONCERNING THE LIMITS OF MISTRUST IN ONESELF AND ABSOLUTE TRUST IN GOD.

Because all the strength through which our our foes are conquered is born in us from lack of trust in ourselves and from faith in God. Dear brother you are required to obtain an exact understanding of this, so that you ever have this strength and that you keep it with the help of God. Understand then, and never forget, that all our talents and good characteristics, natural or obtained through effort, and all the gifts freely granted to us, our understanding of Holy Writ, the fact that we have labored a long-time for God and are now experienced, and even all these things together will not enable us to correctly do the will of God, unless when we do every good work that is well-pleasing to God, and at every suffering we want to avoid, at every cross we have to endure by the will of God, and if, I tell you, on all these and other such occasions a special divine aid does not prompt our heart and does not grant us strength to achieve it, as the Lord stated, "Without me you can do nothing" ([John 15:5](#)). Thus for the rest of our life, each day and moment, we must preserve unaltered in our heart the conviction that on no occasion should we permit ourselves to rely on ourselves.

With respect to faith in God, I will enjoin the following to what was said in the third chapter: understand that nothing is more simple for God than to let you conquer your foes, few or many, old or new, strong or weak. But He has His season and order for things. So if a soul is overwhelmed with sin, and if it is guilty of many infractions in the world, and if it is corrupt beyond understanding, and if, simultaneously, to the measure of its

will and strength, it employs all possible means and labors to be free of sin and turn to the way of righteousness, but cannot become stable in anything good, however slight, and instead, sinks down every further into evil, even if it is all that, it should not weaken its faith in God or forsake Him. It should not give up its spiritual armaments and labors but it must struggle and fight, wrestling with itself and with its foes with all its strength and persevering labors. Understand that in the unseen battle everyone is a loser except the one who never stops fighting and maintains his faith in God, because God never forsakes those who fight in His ranks, even though occasionally He allows them to suffer wounds. Therefore fight, each one of you, and never give ground, because the whole exercise involves unending struggle. God is ever ready with medicines for those knocked own by the foes and with assistance for conquering them, which He gives to His soldiers at the right time, if they look to Him and have steadfast hope in Him. At an hour when they least expect, they will see their haughty foes perish, as it is written, "The strong men of Babylon have stopped fighting" (Jer 51:30).



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 7: CONCERNING HOW WE SHOULD EXERCISE OUR MIND, FOR FEAR IT BE ILL WITH THE SICKNESS OF IGNORANCE

If mistrust in oneself and faith in God, which are so necessary in our spiritual battle, stay alone in us, not merely will we never have success, but we will be overcome by a still greater evil. Because in addition to them and with them we need to perform works of a special type and do exercises for spiritual instruction. The first among these should be exercises of both the mind and the will. The mind must be free from and preserved from a most dangerous ignorance. Ignorance clouds the mind and keeps it from understanding the truth, which is the true aim of its efforts. On account of this it needs to be exercised, to make it clear, and to be able to perceive correctly what we require to make our soul clean of passions and ornamented with virtues.

There are two ways that we can have a clear mind. The first and most needful is prayer, through which we should exhort the Holy Spirit to pour out His heavenly light into our hearts. He will certainly do this, if we seek God alone and sincerely labor to obey His will in all things, freely submitting in everything to the counsel of our experienced spiritual directors and doing nothing before asking them.

The second means of exercising the mind is to ever study all things and probe deeply to have knowledge of them, to see clearly which are good and which are bad. We must judge them, not with the standard of the world or by our senses, but as they are judged by the Holy Spirit, or by means of the God-inspired Scriptures, or by the standards of the holy fathers and

teachers of the church. Because if this examination and deepening of understanding is correct, it will certainly allow us to know with clarity what we should consider, with all our being, worthless and false, all those things which the corrupt world loves and seeks after. We will then especially see that the honors, enjoyments and riches of the world are mere vanity and death for the soul, that the abuse and slander, that the world afflicts us with brings about genuine glory, and that its persecutions bring about joy. For to forgive our enemies and to show goodness to them is genuine generosity and is one of the most important traits of being like God. Also that someone who despises the world demonstrates greater strength than the one who governs the entire world, and that ready obedience is a work, which shows greater courage and fortitude of spirit than conquering great kings and ruling them. Also that meek self-awareness should be sought after over all other forms of knowledge, however great and that to conquer and slay one's own wicked inclinations and passions, however small, is more to be praised, than to conquer many citadels; or to overcome powerful and well-armed armies; or even to work miracles and to resurrect the dead.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 8: CONCERNING HOW WE FORM WRONG JUDGMENTS AND HOW TO FORM RIGHT OPINIONS.

The reason we have ill conceived ideas of those things that we spoke of earlier is that we do not look deeply into them to observe what they are, but develop a like or dislike from the first glance, judging from appearances. These likes and dislikes bias our mind and obscure it. And thus it cannot form a correct judgment of reality. So, dear brother, if you desire freedom from this prejudice of your mind, maintain strict watch over yourself, and when you observe something with your eyes, or if you envision something in your mind, keep a steady grasp on your will and do not permit yourself to form a like or dislike at a first glance for it, but rather study it in a dispassionate way with just your mind. Unhindered by desire, the mind stays in a state that is natural, free and pure, and this allows the truth to penetrate into the depths of the matter, where evil often hides, under a deceitfully attractive exterior and where sometimes good is concealed by an evil countenance. However if your desire comes first and immediately either likes something or is repelled by it, your mind no longer has the ability to know it correctly as it should. Because if this bias, or indeed this passion comes before every judgment, it goes within and becomes a barrier between the mind and that thing, clouding the mind, forcing it to shape its opinion from passion. Simply put, it sees things not according to reality, which strengthens even more its first bias. The further this bias proceeds, or the more it favors or dislikes something, the more it clouds the mind with regards to that thing, until it completely clouds the mind. The passion in relation to this thing comes to its final end, so that it seems to be either the most attractive or the most detestable of all the things he ever encountered.

So it happens that when the rule I mentioned is not followed, namely, when the will is not held in check from developing likes and dislikes before something is correctly examined, then the powers of the soul and mind will never work correctly, submerging one more and more deeply from darkness into darkness, and from sin into sin.

Take heed, dearly beloved, with careful attention and defend yourself from having a preference for something from your desires, prior to studying it properly with the light of knowledge and the righteous word of Holy Writ, with grace and prayer, and the help of your spiritual father. For otherwise you might sin mistaking evil for good, and good for what is in fact evil. This occurs mostly with certain actions, which are good and holy themselves, but which under the circumstances, that is, when performed at the wrong time or place or to an inordinate degree, cause harm to those who perform them. We understand from experience what persecutions are endured by some on account of such noble works.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 9: ABOUT PROTECTING THE MIND FROM AN EXCESS OF USELESS KNOWLEDGE AND IDLE CURIOSITY

In the same way that it is necessary to protect the mind from a lack of knowledge, so it is equally important to preserve it from the contrary, that is, from knowing too much and from curiosity. Because if we fill it up with a certain amount of information, and thoughts, not leaving the useless ones which are inappropriate and hurtful, we deny it its force, so it is no longer capable of understanding exactly what is fitting for our betterment and ultimate perfection. So in regard to the understanding of things of the earth, which is not required, even if it is allowed, your intelligence should be like one already dead. Constantly keep your mind inside yourself, with as much concentration as you can, and keep it void of worldly thoughts.

Let stories about the past and news go right past you, and allow all the changes going on in the world and among the nations be as if they were not there. If someone bears you news, ignore it and turn it from your heart and mind. Hear what St. Basil said, "Let hearing worldly news be like bitter food to you, but let the words of the saints be like honeycombs." Hear David as well, "The proud have dug pits for me, which are not after your law" ([Ps 119:85](#)). Love hearing only spiritual and divine matters and studying them, and desire to know nothing of the world except our Lord, Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," ([1 Cor 2:2](#)) except His life and death and those things He requires of you. In acting this way, you will conduct yourself in a manner well-pleasing to God, Who elects and loves those who love Him and attempt to follow His will.

Every other line of reasoning is the progeny and food of pride and vanity. These are the fishing-nets and bonds of the devil. He sees the strength and determination of will of those who take heed to the spiritual life, and are eager to overcome their minds through such curiosity, to gain mastery over their thoughts and desires. On account of this, he is hesitant to propose to them ideas that are high, subtle and staggering, particularly to those who are bright and quick to make guesses. Drawn to the pleasure of having such elevated thoughts they forget to guard the purity of their heart and to take heed to having a low regard of themselves and to practice genuine self-mortification. So they are caught up in the shackles of pride and self-conceit. They idolize their mind and so little by little, without perceiving it, they come to the opinion that they no longer require the counsel of others, for they are used to, in every case, to rush to the idol of their own knowledge and discretion.

This is a most dangerous thing and not easily fixed. A prideful mind is much worse than a prideful will. Because a prideful will, which is unseen to the mind, can often be fixed by making it submit to a good yoke. However when the mind is steadfastly set on the self-dependent idea that its own opinion is better than everyone else, who is able to cure it? Will it obey someone, if it is sure that the opinions of others are worse than its own? Who will cure the will of someone when the eye of the soul and mind that helps one to see and redress willful pride, is blinded with pride? Then all is a mess inside, and there is no room for nor is there a person who can apply a healing balm. On account of this you must hurry to fight against this evil pride of the mind, before it goes deep into the marrow of your bones. Hold steadfast against it. Restrict your mental activity and submit your judgments to those of others. Become a fool for God's love, if you want to be wiser

than Solomon, "If anyone among you appears to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, in order that he may become wise" (1 Cor 3:18).



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 10: THE METHOD OF DISCIPLINING ONE'S WILL TO HAVE ONLY ONE GOAL IN EVERYTHING, WHICH IS, TO EXTERNALLY AND INTERNALLY PLEASE GOD.

Beyond training your mind to learn, you must also keep your will under control, in order that it not be given to your own wishes, but rather to guide it to be perfectly joined to God's will. Also keep it steadfastly rooted in your mind, that it is not sufficient for you merely to wish and seek to be pleasing to God, always and in all things. You need to desire it as if God Himself were moving you, and for one aim, to please Him with a pure heart. To be steadfastly planted in this goal, we must endure a much more harsh contest with our human nature than in anything we have spoken of above. Because our nature is so used to pleasing itself, that it looks for its own comfort and ease in everything, even the most just and spiritual, and secretly with lust feeds on it as if it were nourishment. And thus when we see we can do some spiritual good, we straightaway desire it and with haste rush to it, yet not as peopled moved by God's will, nor for the sole aim of satisfying Him, but for the comfort and delight which is innate in us, when we wish and look for what God desires of us. This delusion is hidden, the higher and the more spiritual our desires. This is why I speak of not being satisfied with desiring God's will, but we must want it in the way He wants it, when He wants it and for the reason and the aim that He wants. The apostle teaches us to test what is God's will, that it is not just good, but also acceptable to Him and perfect in every respect. He states, "Be not conformed to the world, but be transformed with the renewing of your mind, that you might prove what is the good, and acceptable, and complete, will of God" ([Rom. 12:2](#)). Because if our works

are defective, even to some small degree, or if we do things without our whole will and ability, it is plain that it is, imperfect. This should guide you to understanding that even when we want God Himself and look for Him, even this desire and seeking can have some things lacking, and might be mixed with some pampering to our self-regard and pride, for we might have in our view more of our own self-regard than God's will, and so something instead for ourselves than for God. And yet He deems those works acceptable, which are done only for His glory and He wants us to love only Him, yearning and laboring for Him alone.

So, dear brother, if you want to keep yourself from various hidden obstacles on the way to perfection, if you want to be steadfastly grounded with such a disposition as to want and to perform all things only because God wants it, eager only to gratify and glorify Him and to labor for Him only, because He wants to be the start and end of every deed and thought of ours, act in the following way:

When some work is set before you, which is agreement with God's will, or is good simply by itself, do not straightway bend your will to it and do not want it, without first lifting your mind up to God, in order that it be clear that it is the complete will of God that you also should want to do such things and if they would be well-pleasing to God. And when you put together your thoughts, in such a manner, that your will is ordered by God's will, then desire it and make it happen. But let this be done only because God wants it, and only on account of pleasing Him and solely for His glory. In the same manner, when you want to withdraw from something not in line with the will of God, or something which is not good, do not at once pull back from it, but first set your mind on God's will and be sure that it is the complete will of God that you should pull back from it in order to please

Him. Because the self-regard of our nature is quite subtle and there are not many who can discern it. Because it normally only seeks its own benefit, though at the same time its outward acts are such that it appears to us that we have only the goal of pleasing God, even though in reality this is not the case.

So it happens many times that in reality we desire or do not desire something for ourselves, for our own regard, and yet we suppose that we desire it simply to satisfy God. The only means of keeping from this self-deception is a pure heart, which means forsaking the old Adam and clothing oneself with a new man. This is the goal and aim of the full unseen warfare. If you would like to learn the art of doing this, then take heed. When you begin to do anything you need to, as far as you are able, to divest yourself of all your desires and have no regard for doing something or pulling back from it, until you understand that the sole thing which moves and pulls you to it is the understanding of the will of God. If you are unable to see God working in you in all your actions, either external or more importantly, internally (i.e. those of your soul) then be content with all sincerity to keep nothing but the good-will of God in mind. We might have a genuine feeling of God working in us to do something either by a divine understanding or enlightenment, whereby the will of God is uncovered to spotless hearts through meditation, or by a divine inspiration, or some inner message, or by some other working of divine grace that acts in a pure heart. Examples of this would be a life-giving warmth, unutterable joy, jumping of the spirit, being given to tenderness, genuine tears, a love of God and other such blessed feelings of love toward God. These come about not from our own will but from God, not through our own working but passively. Such feelings act as assurances that what we are pursuing fits with the will of God. But before all else we should speak to God with the most warm and

pure prayer, beseeching Him with all care. We should do this many times, to illumine the darkness in us and to teach us. We should pray three times say the great fathers Barsanuphius and John, and then we should do as your heart is given to. But you should not forget that every decision, which is borne in you from such spiritual stirrings as we have spoken of, must be confirmed by the counsel and judgment of an experienced person.

With regard to matters that take a long time, or which are constant, we must set in our heart a steadfast resolve to do them only to be well-pleasing to God. And this is not just at the start, when we do them, but later as well this determination should be renewed often, right to the end. Because if you fall short in doing this, you will be in danger of becoming caught up in a self-regard that is so natural for us. This inclination to please ourselves rather than God, with time often succeeds in moving us imperceptibly from our first good plan by altering our original goals. Thus, St. Gregory of Sinai said, "Take heed, to the resolve of your will, look to which direction it is given. If it is toward God, or for the goodness of the thing itself or for your soul's benefit, in order that you sit silently sing Psalms, pray or do some other good works, for fear you might be imperceptibly robbed."

And so if one does not take heed to himself, he might start some work with the sole aim of pleasing the Lord, but after awhile, little by little, he may bring in something of self-regard. In this he finds that his own wants are satisfied, to such a degree that God's will becomes neglected. Then he gets so caught up in the enjoyment of the work, that if God were to impair this work, either by a sickness, or from a temptation by means of other people or demons, he becomes full of anger, casting blame on another for having disrupted his beloved labor. He may even grumbling against God.

This is a genuine sign that the inclination of his heart is not from God, but has grown up from the rotten polluted root of self-regard.

One who is moved to doing something solely by the understanding of the will of God and a desire to satisfy Him, never will favor one thing over another, even if one is great and elevated, while the other is small and insignificant. Rather he has his own will equally split between them, so long as they are well-pleasing to God. Thus if he does something important or insignificant, he stays peaceful and happy. Because he has only one will and goal, excluding everything else, which is to please God at all times, and in everything he does, either in life or death. The apostles says the same, "We labor so that, whether present or absent, we might be accepted by Him" (1 Cor 5:9). So then, dearly beloved, always take heed to yourself. Be composed within and work with all your power to direct every one of your activities to this one goal. If you are given to do something from an inner tug to get away from the torture of hell or to inherit heaven, here also you can angle, mentally, your work to the same final goal of pleasing God by complying with His will. Because it the will of God that you should be heaven-bound and that you not end up in hell.

No one can fully understand how powerful is the motive of pleasing God in our spiritual life. Because even if some occupation is rather unimportant, if it performed with the sole aim of glorifying and pleasing God, it becomes to God's eyes infinitely more precious than many other heroic deeds, done without such a goal. So God is more pleased to observe you giving a small coin to a beggar, merely with the intent of pleasing His noble divinity, than if you divest yourself of all your goods for some other aim, even if you are doing it to get divine blessings, even though such an intention is good and expedient.

Such an inner work, which you must effect in everything you do, namely the task of focusing your thoughts, feelings and deeds solely to please God, will appear difficult initially, but later on it will become easy, if, at first you regularly exercise yourself in such a spiritual labor, and secondly, if you regularly stay warm in longing for God, sighing after Him with a yearning of your heart, as if it were the only perfect righteous thing, commendable for being sought after, served and loved before all else. The more frequently this search for endless good in God is exercised in our mind and the more profoundly it goes into the heart, the more often and warm will be the deeds of our will which I have related, and the faster and easier will we make a habit of doing all only for the love of the Lord. This being driven by our desire to satisfy Him, for He is indeed, the most worthy of all love.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 11: MENTAL NOTES THAT DRIVE OUR WILL TOWARDS PLEASING GOD IN EVERYTHING WE DO.

So that you might move your will more readily to this single desire, in all things to please God and to only labor for His greater glory, remind yourself frequently, that He has granted many of your favors in the past and He has demonstrated to you His love. He fashioned you from nothing in His own image and likeness, and has created all other creatures to be your servants. He has saved you from the devil's slavery, sending down, to redeem you, not an angel, but His Only-begotten Son. Your price was not perishable gold or silver, but His priceless blood and most grievous and degrading death. After having done all these things He preserves you at each hour and moment from your foes. He fights your battles for you by means of His divine grace. In His spotless sacrament He readies the Body and Blood of His most beloved Son for your food and your protection.

All these things are a sign of God's overwhelming favor and love for you. It is a favor so great that it is unthinkable how the great Lord of Sabaoth could grant favours such as these to our insignificant worthlessness. Consider from this what glory and honor we should offer to the endless Majesty of Him, Who did such glorious things for us. If we are unable to help ourselves giving thanks, honor and devoted obedience to kings of the world for their favors, how much more, infinitely more, should we useless ones offer to the all powerful Lord of Sabaoth, Who loves us and grants us favors beyond number. Yet more than everything we have

mentioned, always keep in your mind the understanding that the greatness of God is by itself worthy every honor, adoration and full ministry to Him.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 12: CONCERNING THE MANY DESIRES AND INCLINATIONS PRESENT IN PEOPLE AND THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THEM.

Understand that in this invisible war, two wills are in us fighting against each other. The one is part of the intellectual portion of our soul and so is known as the intelligent will. This is the higher one. The other is part of the sensory perception, and so it is known as the sensory will. This is the lower one. The lower is often called the foolish, fleshly, passionate will. The higher is ever desiring nothing but righteousness, the lower nothing except wickedness. Each happens independently, so that a good desire is not thought to be good, nor a wicked one as evil. The understanding depends on the bent of our will. So when our will moves us to a good desire, it is deemed to be in our favor. However when we are moved to an wicked desire, it is counted against us. These two desires follow one after another. When a good desire happens, an evil desire straightaway contradicts it. And when a wicked desire happens, a good desire quickly comes against it. Our will is at liberty to follow either one, and whatever desire our will moves toward, it is victorious in this matter. All of our invisible spiritual war consists of this. Its goal should be never to allow our will to be moved to the desire of the lower, fleshly and passionate will, but ever to follow after the intelligent higher will. Because this is God's will, to follow after the natural law of our existence. "Fear God, and observe his precepts because this is the entire responsibility of someone" (Ecc 12:13) says the preacher. Each one of these desires pulls our will to itself and wants to subdue it. Smother the lower will and move yourself to the higher and victory will be yours. However if you dismiss high higher

will and elect the lower, and you will be overcome. St. Paul writes concerning this, "I find then the law that, to me, while I desire to do good, evil is present within me. For I delight in God's law after the inward person, but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members" ([Rom 7:21](#)). And he grants to all the rule: "Walk according to the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of your body" ([Gal 5:16](#)). And this cannot be done with fight with the body.

A great effort and toil needs to be practiced to begin with those who, before making up their mind to change their carnal life to a virtuous one and to be given over to the law of love and sincere ministry of God, had ensnared themselves in evil customs by often satisfying their fleshly will. Even though the needs of their intelligent will, which they would like to follow, stand beside their free will and are encouraged by God, still on the other side there are the desires of the fleshly will, to which they continue to feel a certain draw. Going against the first, these desires drag it to their side with the same amount of force as an ox is pulled by its yoke. Only the grace of God gives them the strength to stay steadfast in the judgment they have made. Long resistance and not giving in to them takes away from the strength of fleshly desires, but this does not conclude the contest.

Thus let none imagine themselves achieving a genuine Christian character and righteousness, and of laboring for God as he ought, if he does not have the desire to push himself to give up and overcome all the fleshly impulses of the fleshly will, either great or small, which he previously was used to happily satisfying. The main cause for why so few people achieve Christian perfection is their unwillingness, from self-pity, to compel themselves to deny to themselves everything. However if, having

conquered large passionate leanings, they do not want, then, to force themselves to overcome smaller ones, which appear insignificant, then, because these smaller movements are the result of the greater, by satisfying them they certainly nourish the latter, and thus push them to continue to abide and work in the heart, despite the fact they cease showing themselves on a larger scale. Thus the heart continues to be full of passion and impurities, and most of all, bound by self-gratification and self-pity which ever make any exercise to please God of questionable worth.

For instance, there are people who keep from taking the goods of others, but are greatly devoted to their own possessions. These people, not only put too much faith in what they own, they also are often slow to give alms. There are some who do not look to be honored through evil means, but they do not regard them as nothing. Sometimes they even accept them, if the honor can be made to look as if they are against their will. Still others practice long fasts as prescribed in the rules, but do not keep from gratifying their desire to fill their gut and to eat good food, which destroys the value of the fast. There are still others who live chastely, but maintain their relationships with people they like. They even enjoy it, not wanting to understand that, with this behavior they construct a great barrier to spiritual perfection and union with God.

I will subjoin to this those that neglect the defects in their disposition. Even though such defects are not dependent on a self-regard, still it makes one guilty if, noticing how much these defects trouble their spiritual life, he does not bother to fully destroy them, but rather attempt to keep them within innocuous limits, even though this could be done with God's graceful help, careful attention to oneself and enthusiasm. Such faults would be: indifference, a quick temper, and being too sensitive. This brings about

poorly thought-out quick words and motions; severity and argumentativeness, stubbornness and the like. All such natural defects should be amended, by lessening excess. For others they may be corrected by adding to what is wanting, and by changing such defects into their corresponding good traits. Because no natural trait, regardless of how brutal and stubborn it is, is able to stand up against the will if, equipped with God's grace, it opposes it with all carefulness and assiduity. And thus it happens that some do good works, but these works are imperfect, weak, mingled with various passions, which rule in the world. And thus such people do not make any progress on the road to salvation, but rather turn about in a circle, and many times even go backward and fall yet again into their previous sins. This demonstrates that even from the first their love for a genuine life in Christ was not altogether sincere, and that they lacked the necessary feeling of thanks to God, Who saved them from the devil's power. For they were imperfect in their choice to labor only for Him and to satisfy Him. As a consequence such people forever stay untrained in righteousness. They are blind and cannot see the dangerous ground on which they stand, supposing that their position is steadfast and that nothing is threatening them. On account of all this, my dear brother in Christ, I entreat you to love the hard labor and heavy burden which will surely come with our invisible warfare, if you want to be victorious. The wise Sirach advises the same thing, "Hate not hard work" ([Ecc 7:15](#)). Because this is the corner-stone of the entire inner battle. The more you enjoy this difficult work, or this merciless pushing of yourself, the more quickly and fully will your conquest be over yourself and what is in yourself, which opposes the greater good. And by this you will be full of every virtue, and the peace of God will abide in you.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 13: ABOUT HOW TO FIGHT WITH THE MINDLESS SENSORY WILL, AND ABOUT THE TRAINING REQUIRED FOR THE WILL TO HAVE EXPERIENCE IN VIRTUES

Each time your will is pulled on two sides, the one being the mindless sensory will and the other the will of God, speaking in your conscience, each of them looking to overcome the other, you must, if you are truly seeking virtue, use fitting methods on your end to help God's will in conquering. To this end, you should do the following:

(1) The moment you feel the movements of the lower, sensory, passionate will, you need to straightaway use all possible efforts to fight against them and to not let your will incline to them, however small. Crush them; sever them; drive them off by a concentrated effort of will.

(2) To accomplish this more readily, and with a better outcome, hurry to kindle in yourself a complete hatred to such movements, as to your foes, who look to steal and bring to ruin your soul. Be indignant with them.

(3) However, do not forget to petition our Lord Jesus Christ, our Helper in all that we do, looking for His help and defense, and for the support of your will, because without Him we cannot be victorious.

(4) If you honestly practice these three inner works, in your soul, they will never fail to overcome your evil desires. However this would only mean pushing the foes away. If your desire is to strike right at their heart, then if it is possible, immediately do something exactly opposite to the

proposal of the passionate movement and, if you can, commit yourself to do so always. This final exercise will finally liberate you from the constant attacks you encounter. I will show this with an example. Suppose someone has offended you in either a great or small matter, and this has caused you to be irritated, and has suggested that you strike back. Take heed to yourself and hurry to understand that these motions are set on bending you toward vice. So have the composure of a soldier on the defensive and: (1) Stop such motions, do not allow them to go any deeper inside you and in no way allow your will to be involved as if they were correct. This will require you fighting against them. (2) If they still continue to be within sight, be ready for a new assault. So ready a hatred against them, as against your foes, and be upset with them for your own protection, until you can say honestly, "I detest lying" (Ps 119:169). Or, "I hate such things with perfect hatred. I consider them my foes" (Ps 139:22). This will be a significant strike against them, and they will fall back, but not disappear. Next (3) Summon the Lord: "Hasten, O God, to save me. Hasten to assist me, Lord" (Ps 70:1). And do not stop saying this, until not a single part of the enemy motions remains and there is peace in your soul. (4) Once you have restored the peace in your soul, do to your foe something which would demonstrate your compassionate and peaceful character toward him. This could be a kind word, some well-timed favor, and so forth. This would involve following David's advice, "Depart from evil, and do righteousness" (Ps 34:14). Such deeds lead to achieving the regular practice of the virtue which is contrary to the passionate motion which disturbed you. And this practice strikes them to the heart and slays them. Attempt to accompany such deeds with an inner conviction, which would cause such passionate movements to be impossible in the future. For example, in the previously mentioned example, think of yourself as worthy of every slander and make yourself

open to all forms of insult. Welcome such slander and be willing to accept them joyfully as the most helpful medicine. For other cases, attempt to bring about in yourself similar feelings. This would require pushing the passion from your heart and exchanging it for the corresponding opposite virtue, which is the goal of unseen war. I will show you how this works, in a way that is fitting for all occasions, in agreement with the teaching of the holy fathers. Our soul possesses three parts, or faculties, the intellectual, the will and the sensory. Because of their pollution, the three powers beget three types of ill-thoughts and motions. The intellectual begets blasphemous and complaining thoughts about God. It will forget God, be ignorant of heavenly things, and have poor judgment. The power of the will begets pleasure-loving thoughts, thoughts concerning vainglory, avarice, and all their consequences, which are part of self-indulgence. The faculty of will begets thoughts of anger, malice, envy, revenge, boasting, and more generally all wicked thoughts. You should conquer all such thoughts and movements through the methods spoken of above, attempting on all occasions to excite within your heart good feelings which are in opposition to them. So rather than lack of faith, trust in God; exchange complaints for a thankful attitude toward God for all things; exchange forgetfulness of God for an ever profound remembrance of the all-present and all-mighty God; exchange ignorance for a mental study of all soul-saving truths that make up the Christian faith; exchange poor judgment for the ability to discern between good and evil; exchange blasphemous thoughts for praise of God. In the same manner, exchange pleasure-loving for abstinence, fasts and self-mortification; exchange vainglory for a humble nature and a desire to be unknown; exchange avarice for being content with but a little and a love of poverty; exchange indignation for meekness; exchange hatred for love; envy for happiness at the success of others; revenge for a peaceful forgiving

heart; boasting for compassion; malice for love. Generally, with St. Maximus, I will summarize all these things with the following propositions: ornament your mind with being ever attentive to God in prayer and an understanding of heavenly truths; the will with complete self-renunciation; the sensory faculty with love. If you do these things, then I am confident the light within your mind will never go dim and no evil thoughts will find a home in you. If you are pro-active in forming such good thoughts and character in yourself, in the morning, evening and throughout the day, the unseen enemies will never draw near to you. Because then you will be like a general, who ever surveys his battalion and keeps them battle ready. The enemies of such a general will know that an attack will be unsuccessful. Give your attention most clearly to the last point, the actions which are opposite to those carnal thoughts and to setting up emotions and inclinations that are opposite to the passions. But only this way can you uproot the passionate desires that abide in you and come to a more secure state. For as long as the roots of the passionate desires abide in you, they will ever bring out their children and so cloud the face of virtues, and sometimes fully cover and cast them away. In cases such as this we are in danger of regressing to our former sinful state and bringing to ruin the fruits of our efforts.

So understand that this final means should be exercised not just once, but many times, regularly, until you destroy and disorganize the passionate habit which you war against. Because this habit has taken hold of your heart by repetition of particular deeds, which have been gratifying the passions abiding in your heart. Opposing them in the heart is not sufficient to loosen or destroy this power, you need to use means which are opposite to your former habits, that is, acts which oppose the passionate desire, destroying it. Their constant use will exile the habit of the passion, killing the root which

feeds it and will plant in the heart the opposite virtue and the good practice of the opposite action. Also I will not waste many words on this topic, for it is clear. To obtain good habits one must do a larger number of good works, than the evil ones which establish those bad habits. Because bad habits will take root much more readily for they are helped by the sin abiding in us, which is, self-indulgence. So, no matter how hard it might appear to you, do such labors, that are in opposition to your passions, for your desire to do good is still feeble, and on account of the resistance of your self-indulgent passions, you need never forsake them, but you need to force yourself in every possible way to exercise them always. Regardless of how imperfect they may seem initially, they will still maintain your firmness and courage in war, and make a road to victory.

I will subjoin yet one more thing. Stay vigilant and, focus your attention within yourself, battle with courage. And do not only wage the war against the powerful and strong, but upon the small and weak motions of your passions. Because the small ones will pave the way for the great, particularly when they become a regular habit. Experience many times has confirmed that when someone does not pay attention to fighting off small passions, he is quickly overcome by the mightier ones, and he is given to sudden, unforeseen assaults from the foe. These are so sudden that he cannot win the fight and his fall is more lamentable than former ones.

I also remind you that you should sever and kill all passionate attachments to things which, even though they are allowed, are not required. As soon as you perceive that they weaken the force of your desire to do good or take attention away from yourself and disorganize the well ordered structure of your life. Such examples would be, taking walks, going to parties, conversations, new friends, meals, sleep and others things like

these. You will profit from this, by exercising yourself to master everything else as well. You will be strong and more skilled at fighting with temptations and you will keep from many great traps of the devil. For he knows how to cast his nets on these seemingly harmless paths. And I promise you, your work will gain the favor of God.

So, my dearly beloved, if you take my advice and practice such holy deeds with care, then rest assured in a short period of time you will be successful and you will be spiritual both in truth and deed, rather than deceitfully and merely in name. However understand that to go against yourself and to force yourself is here an unchangeable ordinance, which forbids all gratifying of yourself even in the spiritual life. If you bring into it, or choose only such works which are pleasing to you, even if they are part of the correct spiritual order of things, you will bring to ruin your labors. You will toil, but rather than real fruit, you will yield a infertile flower, and you will not be well established in any spiritual things. You will appear to possess something spiritual, but in reality it will not be the case. Because all truly spiritual matters come from the grace of Holy Spirit. This grace comes only to those who have crucified themselves with suffering and self-deprivations, with no self-pity, and so have become one with our Lord and Savior, Who was crucified for us.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 14: WHAT YOU MUST DO WHEN THE LOFTIER INTELLIGENT WILL IS OVERCOME BY THE LOWER WILL AND BY FOES.

Should you feel a powerful upsurging of sin such that resistance seems impossible and employing zeal against it will only exhaust you, be careful, dear brother. Do not give up the fight, but be vigilant and stand steadfast. It is the schemes of the foe, who, with the idea that resistance is futile, works to cut asunder your steadfast resolve and to make you put down your weapons in order to compel you to surrender. Force your mind to see this ploy of the foe more clearly and do not give it ground. Because so long as your own will does not bend toward this passionate feeling you are still ranked among the winners, that is, those that fight and slay the foe, even if your inclination has already sided with the passion. There is nothing that can compel your will or that can steal away your victory and conquer your will, no matter how stubborn and harsh a battle is waged against you by the foes of your salvation. God gave to our will such strength, that even if all of one's faculties, the entire world and all the devils fought against him with weapons and assaulted him, they could not force it. It is ever free to desire or not desire what they suggest or ask for. However, for this reason his will is responsible, and liable to judgment. Be sure to remember this, no matter how faint you might feel, there is no excuse for favoring a passion. Your mind will tell you the same thing. So the more powerful the assault the more powerful the resistance you need to give to oppose it. Never give up this resolution, On such occasions repeat the words from one of our generals: "Watch, stand firm, be like men, and be strong" (1 Cor 16:13).

So maintaining your will steadfast against the rising of sin and set upon by the requirements of the higher will, employ your spiritual arms, one after another. Your main weapon is prayer. Have it as your inspiration and say: "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war should rise against me, even then I will be confident" ([Ps 27:1](#)). "For I will not trust in my bow, neither will my sword save me. In God we have made our boast all day long. We will give thanks to your name forever" ([Ps 44:6](#)). Do not fear with their fear. Do not be afraid. Make holy the Lord of hosts, and let him be your fear. Let him be your dread. And he will be a sanctuary. Gird yourselves round about, and you will be shattered in pieces. Take counsel together, and it will come to nothing. Speak a word, and it will not stand up, because God is with us" ([Isa 7:10](#)).

Being encouraged in this way, do what a soldier would do in war when he is troubled by his foe. He retreats a little, to find better ground and to see more plainly how it is best to send his arrow into the heart of the enemy. You also, gather your thoughts, and establish in your mind the feeling of your worthlessness and of your impotence to accomplish by yourself what this time requires, entreat God with Whom everything is possible, beseeching His aid against the assault of the passions with warm faithful tears, saying, "Arise to our aid, and redeem us for the sake of Your mercy" ([Ps 44:26](#)). Fight my Jesus with those that war against me. Take up your shield and stand up to help me. Let them be confused and put to shame, that seek for my soul. Let them be turned back and put to shame, that seek my hurt" ([Ps 35:1](#)). "Holy Virgin, do not allow me to give in to my foes and be overcome by them. O my guardian angel, use your wings to cover me against the darts of my foe, and with your sword cut them off from me."

Endure in these entreaties and aid will soon arrive. Also, keep a fixed focus on yourself. The enemy understands the power of such entreaties to God and quickly moves to obstruct them, or ruin them by suggesting complaints that are against God for letting such attacks happen and such danger of falling assault you. By these means the foe works to hinder or cease your entreaties to God and make you undeserving of the help of God. Once you perceive such an impious urge, quickly move to establish again the genuine faith that God cannot be tempted with evil, nor does he tempt anyone. Instead all are tempted, when they are drawn away by their own evil desires. (James 1:13) Then study carefully your former works, feelings and thoughts, and you will discover that they gave birth to the inner storm, which put you in such a dangerous spot. The foe will slander God, and cover up your own failings. With faith you need to justify God in yourself and, through your reasoning, throw away the flattering cloak, that your foe has covered you with. You need to get rid of the burden of heedlessness and self-pleasure. Repent, and confess your sins to God and go back to the entreaties we have spoken of before, for these will bring back God's aid, for He is always ready to provide help, particularly at such moments.

Following this, when the tempest inside you has abated, the battle should move ahead in accord with the normal rules of unseen war, which were already partly covered before.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 15: WAR MUST BE FOUGHT ENDLESSLY AND WITH COURAGE.

If you would like to achieve a quick and easy victory, dear brother, you must fight endlessly and with courage against all your passions. You must particularly fight against self-regard, and foolish self-attachment, which shows itself in self-indulgence and self-pity. Because it is the root of every passion and it cannot be subjugated except through ceaseless self-inflicted suffering and through self-mortification, privations, slander, and affliction by the world and by worldly people. A failure to see the need of this merciless disposition toward yourself has ever been, and always will be the source of our failure to gain spiritual victories, our imperfection and self-doubt.

Thus this spiritual war of ours needs to be ceaseless, and should be performed vigilantly with courage in the soul. This can be done easily if you look for such gifts from God. So go into the fight without any reservation. If you are visited by a disturbing thought of the disdain which your foes harbor against you, and about the numberless armies of devils, meditate on the infinitely higher power of God and His profound love for you, in addition to the innumerable greater armies of heavenly angels and the saints' prayers. They all war in secret for us and with us in opposition to our foes. As it is written, "The Lord will war against Amalek forever" ([Exo 17:16](#)). How often weak women and little children were encouraged to fight with the thought of this strong and always ready aid. And they were victorious over the wisdom of the entire world, all the schemes of the devil and the hatred of hell.

Thus you should never be afraid, if you are flooded with thoughts that trouble you, that your foe is too powerful for you, and that his assaults are unending, that this war will span your lifetime, and that you are unable to keep from endless falls. Understand that our foes, using all their schemes, are in the hands of our supreme Commander, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is for His honor and glory that you are fighting this battle. Because He leads you into the battle and He will surely not allow your foes to use force of arms against you and to let you be conquered, if you do not go over to their side willingly. He will fight on your behalf and will save you from your foes, when He wants and as He wants. As it is written, "The Lord your God walks in the camp, to save you, and to deliver your foes before you" ([Deut 23:14](#)).

If the Lord tarries in giving you a complete victory over your foes and delays it until the final days of your life, you should understand that He does this to help you, so long as you do not withdraw or stop struggling. Should you be wounded in the fight, do not abandon your weapons and flee. Retain but one thing, a resolve to fight with all courage and zeal for the fight cannot be avoided. No one can flee from this war, whether in life or death. And the one who does not fight to conquer his passions and his foes will undoubtedly be taken captive, here or there, and he will suffer death. It is good to keep in mind the intent which God desires us to stay in his state of warfare. His intent is the following: in past times, when God led Israel into the promised land, He did not command them to destroy everybody living there, but rather he left five foreign nations hostile to Israel. He did this first to test the elect to see how steadfastly they trusted in Him and how faithfully they kept His commandments. Second, to teach His people how to fight ([Judges 3:1](#)). In the same manner, He does not bring to naught our passions immediately, but rather leaves them there within us, allowing them

to war against us until our end. He does this with the same intent, to prove our love and obedience for Him, and to exercise us in spiritual battles. The blessed Theodorite goes into this in more detail. He tells us that God does this with the following intent: (1) to stop us from becoming careless and to make us vigilant, diligent and heedful; (2) to keep present in our mind that our foe is always prepared to attack us, for fear we discover ourselves surrounded by our foes and overcome by passions; (3) in order that we always resort to God, seeking His aid; (4) in order that we not be proud, but should think humble thoughts of ourselves; (5) in order that we learn to disdain with our entire heart the passions and foes, who ceaselessly assault us, to test if we will steadfastly keep, to the end, the honor of God with love and faith; (6) to encourage us to more strictly keep the commandments of God, in order that we not disregard the smallest one of them; (7) to learn from our experience the enormous value of virtue and thus to never give in to, or abandon it, and fall into sin; (8) to gain greater crowns by ceaseless war; (9) that we might glorify God and put to shame the devil with our endurance to the very end; (10) to become used to the battle of life and not to fear it even at the very hour of our death, when we must suffer the worst of all assaults.

So, because we are ever surrounded by so many of our foes who are full of bitter hatred, we should expect no peace or rest from them. There will be no end to assaults. We must be ready for their full attack at any time, and when it happens we must straightaway fight the enemy courageously. Of course it would have been best if we had not first opened the doors of our mind and allowed our foes and passions to go into our heart and soul. However because they have already found a way into us, we cannot be heedless, but we must equip ourselves against them to push them out. They

are without shame and obstinate and they will not leave us unless we force them out.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 16: HOW A SOLDIER OF CHRIST SHOULD PREPARE HIMSELF FOR WAR IN THE MORNING

The moment you wake up in the morning, spend some time in prayer saying: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me. Then your first activity should be to close yourself up in your own heart, as if you are readying yourself in an arena. Once established there, bring to mind the feelings that your foe is stirring up against you. Stir yourself up against such in a steadfast determination to overcome them or die, yet never give in. Understand also that on your right hand there sits, unseen, your supreme Commander, our Lord Jesus Christ, with His Most-Holy Mother and an army of heavenly angels, with Archangel Michael at the fore-front, prepared to help you. So be courageous and confident.

Behold, the prince of Hades, the devil, sets himself against you with his army of devils and starts to fan the flames of passion, trying to convince you with a range of promises that flatter your self-pleasure, to stop fighting against that passion and to give in to it, reassuring you that submission would be easier and better, yet you must take heed to yourself, and hear from the right side the cautionary and uplifting voice of your guardian angel who speaks on behalf of those standing on your right. He will surely tell you, "You are now confronted with a fight against your passion and your other foes. Do not be afraid. Do not allow this fear to make you withdraw from the battlefield. Because our Lord Jesus Christ, the supreme Commander, is close at a hand. You are surrounded by the generals and centurions of His heavenly armies and the full hosts of heavenly angels. They are prepared to fight with you against your foes and to stop them from

conquering you, as was promised, "The Lord will fight for you" ([Exo 14:14](#)). So then, be steadfast, forcing yourself to not give one bit of ground and work as hard as possible to resist the temptation which has attacked you, saying from the depth of your heart, "Do not deliver me over to the will of my enemies" ([Ps 24:12](#)). Entreat your Lord, the Holy Virgin Mary, and all the angels and saints. Assistance will come for you, and you will be successful, because it is written, "I write to you, young men, for you have overcome the evil one" ([1 John 2:18](#)). You might be weak and crippled by bad habits, while at the same time your foes are strong and many, but a more robust help is prepared for you from Him, Who had fashioned and redeemed you. God your Defender is infinitely stronger than everyone else in this war. As it is written, "The Lord is strong and powerful, the Lord is powerful in battle" ([Ps 24:8](#)). Also His will to deliver you is more than the desire of your foes to bring you to ruin. So battle and never grow tired of the toil of this war. Because victory is won through these labors, by compelling yourself, cruelly pulling yourself from bad habits in spite of the pain, and so a great reward is attained, with which you may purchase the Kingdom of Heaven and your soul may be forever joined with God.

So each morning start with God's name in your fight with your foes. Be armed with a mistrust of yourself and a bold hope in God. Use prayer and be unyielding in forcing yourself to labor in spiritual works. Above all else be equipped with mental prayer in your heart: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Borne in the heart as a double-edged sword, this fearful name cuts down devils and passions, and pushes them off. This is why John of the Ladder states, "Flog the enemies with the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." We will go over in more detail this prayer in another chapter. So, I say again, with these armaments strike at your foe, that passion and the bad habit which attacks you in the correct order which was described in chapter

13. That is to first oppose the passion. Next, hate it. Last of all, exercise the virtue that is the opposite of it, in a prayerful state. If you do these things, your struggles will be well-pleasing to your God, Who, along with the church in heaven, stands by you unseen, and observes your contest.

Such battles are very difficult and laborious. However do not be troubled, nor stumble at your task, keeping in mind that it is your task to labor and to be well-pleasing to God. And also, as we mentioned before, such a conflict cannot be avoided if we want to live, because when we stop struggling we will immediately die. Do not allow your foe to beguile you with the suggestion, "Relax, but for a single hour." Fine, only for an hour. What happens? If you give up your life in God, and deliver yourself over to the world and its pleasures you become a rebel against God. That is a horrible thing even for single moment in time, let alone for an entire hour. And will it be only for an hour? Is it not more likely that you will pass hour upon hour in this impious life, and then days and years? Even if the Lord were to pity you and grant you more time, to free yourself from this devilish net and to arouse yourself from your sinful sleep, you will then have to go back to exactly the same conflict, from which you fled to the pleasurable, easy life. The only difference is that the struggle will be infinitely harder, more painful and what is more, less successful.

However if the Lord delivers you into the hands of your foes and your own desires, what then? I will not go over this again save to say: remember because who is there who does not understand it? After a lifetime spent in painful bonds of wicked passions, at times drunk with pleasures, but ever lacking true joy, the hour of death will come suddenly. It will be a horrible painful state for your soul, which even God's word could never describe, but only said, "then they will call out to the mountains, 'Fall upon us.'" (

Rev 6:16) This cry starting at the moment of death, will endlessly go on after death, until the world's end, and it will be heard at the final judgment, and then in vain. So do not be so heedless as to throw yourself aimlessly into the everlasting torture of hell, just to avoid the struggle of the moment and the toil of spiritual exercise. If you are head-strong and cautious, it is more profitable for you to endure the momentary labors and toils of spiritual fighting in order to be victorious over your enemies, and to obtain a crown and be joined with God here and afterward in the Kingdom of Heaven.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 17: THE ORDER IN WHICH YOU SHOULD FIGHT WITH YOUR PASSIONS.

It would be quite helpful for you, my dear brother, to have the correct order in which you should combat your passion, so it is not done haphazardly, as some do, often failing, and sometimes hurting themselves. The order in which you must combat your foes and fight with your evil desires and passions, is the following: be attentive in your heart and carefully study what thoughts, movements and passionate attachments it is occupied with, and which passion is strongest and rules most furiously in you. Then take up arms and fight with this passion first. Focus all your attention on it, except when a different passion rises within you. Then you should deal with that one without tarrying and push it off, after which you should once again turn your armaments against your principle passion, which regularly shows its authority over you. Because as in all battles, so in our invisible warfare, we must struggle first with what is fighting with us at present.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 18: THE METHOD TO FIGHT SUDDEN IMPULSIVE PASSIONS.

If my dear beloved, you are not as of yet used to sudden passionate impulses which are brought about by jibes or other such conflicts, I council you to do the following: every morning when you are at home, go over in your mind all the occasions you might encounter during the day, both good and bad, and imagine the passionate feelings, lusts and annoyances they might evoke. Then ready yourself beforehand as to how to silence them from the start, without letting them develop. If you do this, never again will you be taken in an unexpected way by a passionate motion, but you will ever be prepared to fight them, without the trouble of anger or lust. The examination of what might occur should be exercised especially when you need to leave and visit places where you are sure to encounter other people, who can either attract you or bother you. By being ready, you will readily evade them. If a sudden passionate wave comes about, it will roll past your head or will break upon you as if against a rock, rather than carrying you along with it as an unstable boat. May David, the holy prophet, convict you about this in terms of anger, when he states, "I hastened, and did not tarry from keeping your commandments" ([Ps 119:60](#)).

Yet this preparing is not everything. Passion might still be excited, and quite suddenly. In such a case act in the following way: the moment you feel the passion, either of lust or annoyance, move quickly to curtail it by the effort of your will. Go deep into your heart with your mind, and try, in every way possible not to allow the passion to go into your heart. Watch

carefully to keep the heart from being annoyed by what annoys or attracts it. But if either one or the other occurs quite suddenly in your heart, then start first by trying to stop it from coming forth. Do not show it either with a word, glance or gesture.

Also, force your mind and heart to be lifted up to the high God and having given yourself a clear mind and the feeling of the limitless love of God and of His absolute truth, attempt by this to push out the passion and to replace it with the opposite good. If it is an issue of meeting with someone, it might be hard to do all this completely and successfully. Still do not forsake your virtuous intention and attempt to do what you are able. Even if your attempt is unsuccessful, you will accomplish your end when the meeting that brings about your passion is finished. But be careful not to demonstrate the passion that has arisen within you. This exertion will hinder its development. Once you are at liberty from the influx of evil impulses, move quickly to go into your heart and work to cast out the snake which made its way there.

The best and most powerful defense against a sudden swelling of passions is to remove all the causes which create such motions. The causes are from two elements: likes and dislikes. If you, dearly beloved, are captured by a fondness for somebody, or with an attachment to something, great or small, it is natural that if you come across them and see them offended or hurt, or someone wants to lure them from you or steal them, then you suddenly become upset, sorrowful, and annoyed and rise up against those who do it. So if you would like to be at liberty from such sudden troubles, take heed to uproot from your heart this evil attraction or attachment. The more it has gone, the more diligently you will have to work to achieve a stable mind and correct disposition to such things or people.

Because the stronger your attachment or attraction, the more readily the passions will arise.

Similarly, if you have a strong dislike of someone or thing, it is just as natural for anger or hatred to arise suddenly when you meet them, particularly if you hear of someone praising them. So if you want to keep a peaceful heart, force yourself to smother these ill-feelings, and later to destroy them. You will be aided in this by the following thoughts (for people) that they also are God's creation, made, as you are in His image and by the All-mighty hand of the living God. They are also redeemed and renewed with the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are also your brother and sisters, and it is wrong that you should hate them in your mind, as was said, "You will not hate your brother in your heart" ([Lev 19:17](#)). You should remember in particular, that supposing they are worthy of disdain, if you devise a friendship and love for them, by doing so, you will be likening yourself to God, Who cares for His entire creation and hates none of it. Just as the Solomon the Wise says when praising the Lord, "You love all things that are, and hate nothing which you have made. Because never would you have made anything, if you had hated it" ([Wis 11:24](#)). With respect to sin, "He makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" ([Matt 5:45](#)).



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 19: STRUGGLING AGAINST CARNAL PASSIONS.

In fighting against carnal passions, my dear brother, a different plan should be employed than is used in fighting against others. If you would like to move ahead in the correct order, know that you should do one particular thing before you are tested by these passions, another during the temptation itself and something else when it is finished.

Prior to the temptation, you should attend to the causes, which regularly give birth to the temptation or which bring about passion. The rule here is to use every possible means to keep from all occasions, which might disturb the peace of your body, particularly when meeting others of the opposite sex. If you are compelled to speak with such a one, let the conversation be quick, and keep both modesty and a harshness in your countenance. Your words should be friendly, yet reserved, not forthcoming.

"Never trust your enemy" ([Ecc 12:10](#)). the wise Sirach says. Thus never trust your body. Because as iron generates rust so the corrupt nature of the body generates evil motions of lust. "Because as iron rusts, so also does his evil deeds" ([Ecc 12:10](#)). I say again, do not trust yourself in regard to this, even if you have stopped having such urges of the flesh. Because this three times cursed evil often achieves in a single hour what has not happened for years and ever makes ready an attack quietly. Understand that the more the flesh feigns being your friend and gives no sign of a problem, the more hurt it affects later one, often dealing a death blow.

Everyone should fear those of the opposite sex. Communion with such is supposed to be good in ordinary dealings, either on account of the fact

that they are related or because they are pious and righteous, or since they have been good to you and you feel pressed to give thanks to them as frequently as you can. You should be afraid of this, for without fear and carefulness, such interactions are always mingled with the deadly sensory lust which will slowly and imperceptibly slip into the soul to its full depth and so it will cloud the mind such that, once infected, it starts to ignore all the dangerous sources of sin, like passionate looks, sweet words from both sides, alluring movements and poses of the body and even pressing together hands. And so in the end he gives in to the sin and to other traps set by the devil, from which one is never able to get completely free.

Thus, my dear brother, run away from this fire, because you are the gunpowder. Never allow yourself to think in your pride that you are wet gunpowder, damp with the water of an upright and steadfast will. No, no! It is better to think that you are so dry that you will catch fire the moment you are touched by the flame. Never allow the steadfastness of your determination to die rather than to offend God through sin. Because, even though it can be supposed that this determination makes your gunpowder wet, regular interactions and sitting alone together will eventually dry out the moisture of your upright will through carnal fire, and you will not notice how you are becoming set aflame with carnal love to such a degree, that you will stop being embarrassed by others and you will cease to fear God. You will even give no thought to honor, life or torments of hell in your desire to sin. Thus avoid it in every way you can:

(1) Interactions with those who will be a temptation for you, if you truly want to escape the snare of sin and the paying of its wages, which is the death of the soul. The wise Solomon refers to a man as wise, who is afraid of the causes of sin, and he names as foolish the one who being self-

dependent, self-assuredly disregards avoiding them, declaring, "A wise man fears and goes away from evil, but the fool rages, and is self-confident" ([Prov 14:16](#)). Did not the apostle highlight this when he counseled the Corinthians to "flee from fornication" ([1 Cor 6:18](#)).

(2) Run away from being idle or lazy. Be vigilant, in everything examining your thoughts closely and intelligently order and do the duties required by your position.

(3) Never be disobedient to your spiritual fathers, but willing obey them in all things, putting into practice their commands quickly. Do this in particular with those that can instruct you to be humble and to go against your own desires.

(4) Never permit yourself to judge your neighbor. Do not judge or condemn anyone, especially on account of the carnal sin which we are currently discoursing about. If someone has obviously fallen into it. Have pity on them. Do not be angry with them or deride them, but may their example humble you, knowing all too well that you are also weak and easily given to sin like dust upon the road. Tell yourself, "He fell today, and I tomorrow." Understand that if you blame quickly and spurn others, God will give a grievous punishment to you by allowing you to fall into the same sin that you blamed others for. "Do not judge, so that you are not judged" ([Matt 7:1](#)). You will be condemned to the same punishment, so as to learn from it the pernicious nature of your haughtiness and being so humbled, to look for a cure from the evils of pride and fornication. For even if God in His mercy shields you from a fall and you kept your mind chaste, you should still stop faulting others. Rather than depending on yourself, be yet more afraid and do not depend on your own faithfulness.

(5) Take heed and watch yourself. If you have acquired some grace from God, or you find yourself in a healthy spiritual disposition, do not let your pride entertain false illusions concerning yourself, supposing that you are somebody and that your foes would never dare to assault you since you hate them to such a degree that you would straightaway repel them, if they were so bold as to draw near you. The moment you think this way, you will fall as readily as a leaf in autumn.

These are things you should do before carnal passion tempts you. When the temptations come, do the following: move quickly to find the source of the attack and immediately sweep it from you. This underlying cause might be internal or external. Examples of external causes are: unruly eyes, sweet words, songs that enliven your ears with their sound or words, fine clothing manufactured with soft material, well-scented perfume, unruly behavior and speech, physical touching and pressing together of hands, dancing and other such things. There are a number of remedies for these things: mean clothing, the desire not to look, hear, smell, say or touch something with might bring about a disgraceful movement, and avoiding all interaction with those of the opposite gender, as was stated earlier. Inner causes are, bodily comfort, when all carnal desires are satisfied; and disgraceful thoughts, which either come about by themselves or with memories of visible things, or those which are incited by wicked spirits. With respect to the physical life, it should be hardened with fasts, vigils, rough sleeping, and numerous bowings and prostrations to wear out the body, and with a number of other voluntary self-mortifications, as prescribed by our wise and skilled holy fathers. The remedy to oppose thoughts, no matter where they come from, is to do a variety of spiritual exercises, consistent with your current disposition, such as, reading good,

holy books. In particular St. Ephrem the Syrian, St. John Climacus, the Philokalia and others of a similar nature, pious meditations and prayer.

When disgraceful thoughts start to attack you, pray in this way, straightaway lift up your mind to our Lord, Who was crucified on our behalf, and invoke Him from the depth of your heart: "My Lord Jesus. My most sweet Jesus. Quickly come to assist me and do not allow my foe to trap me." Concurrently hold fast to the mental, and physical, if there is one close by, life-giving cross on which your Lord was crucified. Frequently kiss His wounds and tell Him with love, "Most beautiful, holy, spotless wounds. Wound my poor and unchaste heart and let me not offend or disgrace You by my impurity." When disgraceful bodily thoughts of lust increase in you, your meditations should not be aimed directly at them, even though there are many who counsel this. Do not try to picture in your mind the impurity and disgrace of the sins of carnal lust, nor the lamentation of your conscience which comes after them, nor the defilement of your chasteness, nor your loss of honor, and other such things. I advise you not to try to ponder these matters, because such reflections are not always a good way of conquering carnal lusts and may only strengthen the assaults, that then lead to a fall. Because even though your mind dwells on lust and mentally rebukes it, the mind will dwell on what is present, and the heart will become attracted. Thus it is not a surprise that as the mind is abundantly pouring out harsh rebukes against these things, the heart delights in them and assents to them, which is an inner fall. No, it is important to ponder subjects that would ward off these disgraceful things and distract you from them. Such things should, by their very nature, have a sobering effect on your heart. Examples of such subjects would be the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was incarnate for us, the coming

hour of our death, the fearful day of our judgment and different aspects of being tortured in hell.

If, as many times occurs, disgraceful thoughts should continue despite this, and they should assail you with a particular violence, do not be afraid, nor stop meditating as we have mentioned, and do not try a frontal assault on them to reveal their disgraceful nature. Keep away from this, but persist in directing your mind on the sober, fear-inducing subjects mentioned before, without worrying about the disgraceful thoughts, as if they did not belong to you. Understand that there is no better way of pushing them off than ignoring them. As many times as possible, stop your meditation with this or some other similar prayer, "Save me, my Creator and my Savior, from my foes, for the glory of your passion and your boundless mercy." End your meditation with a prayer that is similar. Be careful not to let your mind's eye dwell on this carnal impurity, because merely visualizing is hazardous. Do not stop to entertain these temptations to find out if you had assented to them. Even though such an examination might seem good, in reality it is a ploy of the devil, who works this way to weigh you down, to throw you into despair, or to make you linger on such thoughts as much as possible, so as to push you into a sinful deed.

Rather than such examinations of the thoughts which bother you, go, confess everything in detail to your spiritual father, and then be untroubled in both your heart and mind, with any questions, satisfied with the counsel of your spiritual father. But you must disclose everything to him, which has upset your mind in connection with this temptation, hiding nothing. And do not let your tongue be silenced on account of disgrace, but humble yourself. Because if, to achieve victory, we require great humility in every fight with our foes, how much more during the carnal battles? Because in this case the

temptation itself comes from pride or from a punishment for it. So St. John Climacus tells us that he who falls into fornication or another carnal sin, had before fallen into pride. And so his fall was granted in order to humble him. "Where there is a fall, there pride dwelt before. Because pride comes before the fall." ([Prov 16:18](#)) And also "The chastisement for the proud is a fall." When wanton thoughts are finally conquered and temptations stop, you need to do the following: regardless of how much you are sure that you are now at liberty from carnal assaults, and regardless of how sure you are about yourself, take heed to keep your mind away from things and people, who are the root cause of temptations. Do not give into the urge to see them, with the excuse that they are your kinsfolk, or that they are pious and help you. Discipline yourself with the understanding that this also is a sinful allurements of our defiled nature and a net from our deceptive foe, the devil, who disguises himself in the form of an angel of light to banish us into the darkness which St. Paul speaks of. ([2 Cor 11:14](#))



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 20: ABOUT CONQUERING CARELESSNESS.

To keep from falling into the ruinous evil of carelessness, which will halt your advancement toward perfection and deliver you over into the hands of your foes, you must run from all forms of curiosity such as: trying to discover what is here or there, idle walks, vain babbling or staring around you. These are all forms of cleaving to earthly things, and random actions of "doing what I feel like," which is completely out of touch with your position. Rather you should compel yourself to follow, voluntarily and hastily after any good counsel and command from your instructors and spiritual father, doing everything whenever and where-ever they think best.

Never tarry in performing any work which you need to do, because the first delay will only lead to a longer one. And the second will lead to a third, which is ever-longer, and so forth. So work starts late and is not performed in its correct time-frame, or else it is given up altogether, as a tiresome matter. Once having sampled the ease of inaction, you start to prefer it to action. In gratifying this desire, you will bit by bit develop a habit of idleness and laziness, which is a passion in and of itself. It can grip you so much that you will be unable to even see how dangerous and unlawful it is. Only maybe when you grow tired of your idleness, and again long to be employed in your labors. Then, embarrassed, you will see how heedless you have been and how many important deeds you have left undone, on account of the vain, "doing whatever you want."

Although it is barely noticeable initially, this carelessness diffuses into everything and it not merely poisons your will, but it plants in it a disdain of

all forms of spiritual labor and obedience. It also dulls the mind, and hinders it from perceiving the foolishness and falsity of the reasonings which advocate this inclination of your will, because it blocks the mind from showing the consciousness a healthy reasoning, which would enable the slothful will to do the required work as fast and diligently as it can, without postponing it until another time. Because it is not sufficient to do your work with haste. Each item has to be finished in its correct order and time, as nature requires. It also needs to be done with careful attention to make it as perfect as it can be. Hear what is written, "Cursed is the one that does the work of the Lord negligently" ([Jer 48:10](#)). And you bring about this catastrophe since you are too sluggish to think about the importance of the work before you, because this thought would compel you to do it when it was due and with such determination that it would exile all thoughts of the possible hardships, which idleness prompts so as to turn you away.

Let the determination never depart from your mind that a single elevation of your thoughts to God, or a humble prostration to His glory and honor is worth infinitely more than all the wealth of the world. Each time we cast aside carelessness and compel ourselves to do the diligent labors we should, heavenly angels ready a crown for us of magnificent victory. By contrast, God not only has no crown for those that are heedless, but bit by bit He takes the gifts back that He had given us for our former hard work in His service, and in the end will take away from us the Kingdom of Heaven if we persist in being careless, as He related in the parable about the guests summoned to the supper, who all were too negligent to come. "Because I tell you, that none of those who were invited will taste of my supper" ([Luke 14:24](#)). Such is the portion of those that are heedless. Yet for those who are hard-working and who compel themselves without any self-regard into all good deeds, the Lord increases His blessed graces in this life, and

readies an everlasting life of bliss in His heavenly abodes. As He states, "the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent seize it by force" (Matt 11:12). If a wicked thought comes to tempt you and throw you into carelessness, and suggests the work required to obtain the virtue you so desire and love is overly long and difficult, that your foes are powerful and many, while you are frail and alone, that you need to do many things, and do great works to achieve your goal. I tell you that if the thought of carelessness suggests these things to you, take no heed to it. Rather, look at the issue like this: certainly you need to labor, but not too much. You must do work, but it is quite small and does not last so long. You will encounter foes, but rather than many there will be but one. And even though he is too powerful to fight you alone, yet you are infinitely mightier than your foe, because you are ever able to invoke God's assistance in exchange for your faith in Him. If you maintain this disposition, carelessness will start to withdraw from you and rather, under the sway of good thoughts and emotions, there will slowly come to you a hard-working zeal with which you will do all things, holding sway over your soul and body. In relation to prayer do the same thing. Take for example the exercise of some holy service which requires an hour of steadfast prayer, which appears toilsome to your idleness. Then beginning this work, do not suppose that you should stand for an hour, but suppose that it will last but for fifteen minutes. By these means, the fifteen minutes of praying will pass unnoticed. So tell yourself, "Let us stand for a second fifteen minutes. It is not much, as you can see." Then continue for the third and fourth parts of the hour, and you will finish your labor of prayer, without perceiving any privation. If during this process you feel that it too heavy and gets in the way of your praying, cease saying prayers for a time and then, after a short time, continue again and complete what you neglected earlier.

The same thing should be done with regards to manual labor and your obedience. At times your chores might appear too numerous and you become troubled and you are ready to forsake them. Cease from considering their number. Rather compel yourself to start the task closest at hand and do it with devotion, as if the other ones were not there, and you will be free from anxiety. Next, do the same with the other jobs, and you will complete all of them peacefully, without any anxiety.

If you conduct yourself this way in all things, and understand that, if you do not hearken to reason and do not try to conquer the feeling of difficulty, which your foes offer you in your labors, then carelessness will in the end overcome you. Then it will seem to you as if you were bearing a mountain upon your shoulders. Not just when you need to deal with some imminent work, but even those that are far removed, you will be overburdened and tortured by it, as a slave-dog without hope of liberty. So, even during the hours of rest, you will find no repose, and you will feel overwhelmed with work, even when you are not doing anything. So understand dear child, that this sickness of idleness and carelessness slowly undercuts with its venom not just the early small roots from which good habits might grow, but also those which formerly were deeply rooted in you and act as a corner-stone for your entire virtuous life. Like a worm that slowly eats away at the tree roots, so carelessness, if it endures, imperceptibly brings to ruin the nerves of the spiritual life. By it the devil is able to cast his nets and lay the traps of temptations and works particularly hard and with cunning against those who are ardent in the spiritual life. For he knows that a sluggish and heedless person readily gives in to his passions and falls. As it is written, "The soul of the lazy desires, and yet has nothing" ([Prov 13:4](#)). So always be vigilant, pray and be careful with all virtuous things, as is fitting for a brave soldier. "The soul of the hard-

worker will be made fat" ([Prov 13:4](#)). Be not one who sits with folded hands, delaying to sew your wedding garments at the time when it is the hour to meet the bridegroom, Christ our Lord, in festive attire. Tell yourself each day that now matters are in our hands but tomorrow it will be in God's hands. He who granted you this morning has not obligated Himself with a vow to grant you the evening as well. Do not listen to the devil when he whispers in your ear, give it to me now, and tomorrow you will give to God. No. Use all the time of your life to please God. Retain in your mind the thought that after this present hour you may not be granted another, and that you will need to give a careful account of each minute of this hour. Recall also that the time you retain in your hands is immeasurably valuable, and if you throw it away, then the hour will come upon you when you will look for it and not find it. Regard a day as lost, even if you did good deeds, if you have not worked to surmount your evil habits and desires. To conclude my teaching on this matter, I will repeat the commandment of the apostle: "Always fight the good fight" ([1 Tim 6:12](#)). Because a single hard-working hour has many times gained heaven and one hour of carelessness has lost it. Be diligent if you want to show God your steadfast faith in your salvation. "The one that puts his faith in the Lord will be made fat" ([Prov 28:25](#)).



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 21: ABOUT CONTROLLING AND CORRECTLY USING THE SENSES.

Those who are eager to be virtuous, must meditate profoundly and always labor to strictly control and give the right direction to their five external sense: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Our heart ever desires and yearns after pleasures. It will discover them with the inner order of things, by preserving and bearing Him, in Whose image and likeness man was created. For it is He Who is the the root of all comforts. However in our fall, we forsook God, favoring ourselves, and so we lost also our foothold within ourselves, and we fell into the carnal delights. So we went outside of ourselves and started to look for delights and pleasures there. Our senses are our leaders and guides in this. By them the soul goes without and samples the things from the senses. Then it enjoys the things which please the sense. And from these it fashions a circle of pleasures and enjoyments, whose delight it deems to be its sole aim. Thus the order of things has inverted. Rather than having God within, the heart looks for comfort without and is happy with them.

Those who hearkened to God's voice saying, "repent" become repentant and gave themselves a law for reordering things according to the first order, which is, of returning from outside to inside, and from inside to God. This is done so that they might live in Him and through Him and to have this as their primary good, carrying inside themselves the source of every delight. Even though the first step in this reordering is a steadfast purpose, it is not accomplished immediately. One who has set about this purpose is faced with a considerable labor in toiling with his previous

custom of comforting and pampering himself, until they fall off and are exchanged for others, in accord with his new manner of life. Here it is most important to control and use the outward senses appropriately.

Every sense possesses its own panorama of subjects, agreeable and disagreeable. The soul takes joy in agreeable matters and, becoming used to them, gains a lust to have them. By this way every sense introduces to the soul many lusts or inclinations and lustful attachments. These all are secretly concealed in the soul and remain silent, when there is nothing to excite them. But at times they are excited with thoughts about the objects of these desires, but the principle and most compelling reason for their excitement is when these objects are physically present and perceived by the sense. For example, a desire for them comes suddenly for a man who has not as of yet determined to fight against it, bringing about sin, and sin when it is complete, brings death" (James 1:15). The words of the prophet are then fulfilled with regard to such a one, "Death is come up to our windows" (Jer 9:21). That is to say, into the senses which are windows for the soul and intercourse with the outside world. In the one, who has allowed it to come in, it brings about a fight, but not without a possible fall. Because one should make himself an unchangeable law to regulate and use his senses so that no sensory lusts become stimulated, save mere impressions, which hinder them and stimulate the opposite feelings.

For you see, my dear brother, the danger your sense can put you in. Take heed to yourself and learn to obstruct it. Attempt, with every possible means, to stop your senses from floating here and there wheresoever they choose, and do not let them rest on sensory delights, but rather the opposite, guiding them to the good, or salutary, or necessary. If until now your sense occasionally broke free and fled to sensory delights, "from henceforth

attempt to restrain them and return them from such allurements. Regulate them well, in order that wherever they were formerly enslaved by empty and dangerous delights, they now should obtain useful impressions from everything, and present these to the soul, giving birth to various "spiritual thoughts" in the soul. Such impressions will gather into the soul and with lofty wings of mental meditation, they will lift it up to the vision and worship of God. As St. Augustine says, "As many creatures are present in the world who speak with upright people, and even though their language is unintelligible, it is still completely effective for such are readily heard and known. From this they produce holy thoughts and are given to a zealous love of God."

You also can do so in the following manner. At the time your outer senses are shown some physical object, which they see or hear, smell, taste, or touch, divide into your mind which one it is, sensory and material, which comes from the creative Holy Spirit. Ponder how it is impossible for its essence and all that it contains to come from within itself, but that instead it is God's work, Whose unseen power grants it its essence, its virtuous nature, beauty and wise form. This power to act upon others and this ability to accept influences from them, and all good that is there in it. Then move such thoughts to every other visible thing, and gladden your heart that God alone is the source of all such diverse, wondrous perfections which are seen in His creation. For He contains every possible perfection, and these perfections, seen in His creation, are nothing other than a feeble reflection and shadow of the endless perfections of God. Bring about in your mind such notions when looking upon any creature, and you will become used to seeing visible things, without your consideration resting only on their external form, but instead penetrating inside them to their divine nature, and their invisible beauty, so shown to the mind. If you do these things, the

external end of things, pleasing to your own senses will elude your gaze and feelings, leaving behind no trace, and merely their inner form will leave its impression on your mind, summoning up spiritual meditations and moving you to thank the Lord.

So, gazing at the four elements of fire, air, water and earth, and pondering their being, power and works, you will be filled with a wondrous spiritual happiness and you will praise the great Fashioner Who has created them. "Great God, infinite Power and marvelous in deed, I delight that You alone are the source of the essence, power and work of all creation." Gazing up into the sky and the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon and stars, and pondering that they receive their luminosity from God, you will declare, "O Light most luminous of all stars, from which every light came to be, both physical and spiritual. O wondrous Light, the first delight of angels and joy of the blessed, with which the eyes of the cherubim are intent on in endless meditation and amazement, to which every material light is as the most profound darkness. I give praise and glory to You, O True Light, which enlightens all that come into the world. Grant that I might always see You in my mind, in a way that makes my heart exult with joy." In the same manner, when gazing upon the trees, grasses and all the other plants, and pondering in your mind how they grow, live, eat and reproduce, and that their very existence comes not from themselves but rather from the Spirit of Creation, Whom you cannot see, but Who alone enlivens them, you exclaim then, "Here is the genuine Life, with, from and by Whom all have their being, are fed and increase. O life-providing joy of my heart. In the same manner, gazing upon the senseless beasts you are able to soar aloft with your mind to God, Who granted them their sense and the ability to move from one place to another. And say, "O first Mover of all, Who setting all in motion,

but Yourself remaining at rest, I rejoice and am filled with joy at Your unchangeable nature."

When you see yourself and other people and ponder that you have been granted a high rank, for you alone of all creatures have intelligence, and so you are the connection between the physical and unseen creatures. So raise yourself to exult your God and Fashioner and declare, "O eternal Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, blessed are You forever! How wonderfully I need to always give You thanks, not just because You have made me from the earth and have anointed me as King over all creation; not just because You have honored my nature with Your image, with intelligence, speech and life; but more than all else because You have bestowed on me the power of my own free-will, by the virtues to resemble You. And by this I hope one day to possess You in me and delight forever in You."

I will now discuss each of the five senses individually, and I tell you, beholding the beauty and the comeliness of creatures, divide in your mind what you behold from the spiritual meaning of it, that is, what is unseen. Reflect that the manifest beauty is the work of the unseen, most beautiful creative Spirit, with Whom is the source of all physical beauty. Then, being filled with joy, declare, "O rich rivers flowing from an uncreated fount! O life-giving rain taken from the endless sea of all goodness! How I exult in my inner heart, when I ponder on the indescribable beauty of my Creator, the source of all beauty! O the spiritual sweetness that fills me, when I think of the beauty of my God, Who is indescribable and incomprehensible, and the source of all beauty!" If you hear a sweet sounding voice or a symphony of voices, set your mind on God, and say, "Symphony of symphonies, O my Lord. I exult in Your limitless perfection, all blending together in You in

transubstantial harmony. And these sounds are a reflection of the hosts of heavenly angels, and the innumerable beasts here below. This is the full harmony, which is perfect beyond understanding." And also, "O my Lord, when will the time come when the ears of my heart will hear Your sweet voice telling me, 'My peace I give you, peace from your passions.' Because sweet is your voice," which the bride sings in Solomon's Song of Songs. (Cant 2:14)

If perchance you smell a sweet smelling perfume or fragrant flowers, bear your thoughts from this material scent to the hidden scent from the Holy Spirit which says, "O the smell of the all-sweet Flower, and never-ending Ointment, Which was poured out for all God's creation, as the Canticles say, "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily from the valleys" (Cant 2:1). And also, "Your name is like perfume poured out" (Cat 1:3). O all-pervading source of sweet smells, abundantly breathing Your divine breath on everything, from the highest and spotless angels to the lowest animals, washing everything in Your fragrance. So Isaac, having smelled his son Jacob said, "Behold, the smell of my son is as the smell of the field which the Lord has blessed." (Gen 27:27)

Also, when you eat or drink, ponder on the fact that it is God, Who supplies a pleasing taste to all good food. So, rejoicing in Him alone, let us say, "Rejoice, my soul, because, even though you cannot find joy or comfort in anything that is outside of God, you can know Him and hold on to Him, and you can discover all enjoyments in Him alone. As David summons us saying, "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps 34:8). This is the truth to which Solomon bears witness saying, "His fruit was sweet to my mouth" (Cant 2:3). Likewise, when you you move your hands to do some task, remember that God gave you the ability to do it, for He is the

source of all motion, and that you are nothing more than a living instrument in the palm of His hand. Lifting up your thoughts to Him say, "O God, Most High, Lord of everything, what bliss at the thought that without You there is nothing I can do, and You are the first and foremost mover of all motion."

If you see goodness in others, or wisdom, or truth, or any other virtue, distinguish between the seen and unseen. Then say to your God, "O endless treasure-house of every virtue. How wondrous is my delight to see and know that all good things come only from You, and that in comparison to Your divine perfection everything that is good from us is nothing. I thank You, my God, for this and for all the other good things that You do for my neighbor. But also recall, O great Benefactor, my own poor estate and how much I fall short in all the virtues."

Generally, each time you notice in God's creation something pleasant and attractive, do not allow your mind to be fixed on it only, but passing by it, move your thoughts to God and say, "O my God, if Your creation is so full of beauty and pleasures how much more full of beauty, and joy are You, O Creator of all."

If you maintain this exercise, my dearly beloved, then, with your five sense, you will learn knowledge from God, by ever raising your mental faculties from creation to Creator. Then the essence and form of everything created will be a Theology book for you, and while abiding in this sensory world, you will partake in the knowledge which belongs to the world beyond this world. Because truly the entire world and all creation is nothing but an organ, in which, under what is visible, there is the unseen presence of the Architect and Artist, the Creator of all, either acting out or showing His art visibly, showing His unseen and spiritual works and perfections in the

manifest, seen only by the sight of rational creation. So the wise Solomon declares, "For from the greatness of the beauty of created things, mankind forms the corresponding image of their Maker" ([Wis 13:5](#)). And St. Paul also tells us, " For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity" ([Rom 1:20](#)). In God's world all creation is wisely made, and is set on one side, while on the other is humanity, granted the power of intelligence, so that they might meditate on creation and beholding boundless wisdom in it might rise to the understanding of the Word, which precedes time, by Whom "all things were made" ([John 1:8](#)). So from actions we can see the One Who acts. And thus we must judge well, finding faith in those things He has made, seeing in creation its Creator.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

**CHAPTER 22: THE SAME SENSORY OBJECTS WE SPOKE
OF EARLIER CAN BE USED FOR CONTROLLING OUR
SENSES, IF WE MOVE FROM THEM TO PONDER THE
INCARNATION OF GOD THE WORD, AND THE MYSTERIES
OF HIS LIFE, PASSION AND DEATH.**

I demonstrated earlier how from sensory things we can lift our mind to meditate on God Himself. Now we focus on another method of elevating your mind from sensory things to the divine, that is, to pass from a sensory reflection to pondering the incarnation of the Word and the mysteries of His life, passion and death. Every sensory object in this world can be an occasion for such meditation, if, when looking upon them, you move your mind as we related above. For the idea that the all-powerful God is the initial cause of their being and everything within them, authorities, perfections, movements, rank among other beings, and if you then ponder how great and limitless is the goodness of that same God, being the only cause of all created things, He willed to abase Himself to become man, to suffer and die for us, permitting the very work of His hands to rise up against Him and put Him to death on cross.

So, whenever you see, hear, or touch any sort of weapon, rope, pillar, thorn, nail or other such items, ponder in your mind how all these once were instruments to torture your Lord. When you come across houses in a low estate, and those who live in them, bring to mind the cave and manger which your Lord was born in. When you behold the falling of the rain, recall the drops of blood and sweat which fell from the holy body of the most sweet Jesus Christ, moistening the ground in Gethsemane. When you

see the ocean and the ship sailing across it, recall how your God walked upon the water and, standing within a boat, taught the multitude. Upon seeing rocks, call to mind the rocks which were split in two when our Lord died. Let the earth you walk on bring to mind the earth, which followed the Passion.

The sun should call to mind the darkness which covered the earth then. Water should bring to mind the water mixed with blood, which flowed out of the side of the Lord, when pierced by the soldier after His death upon the cross. When you drink of wine or something else, bring to mind the vinegar and gall, which they offered to the Lord on the cross.

Upon dressing, recall that the Eternal Word had human flesh as a garment, so that you might be clothed with His divinity. When you see yourself clothed, recall Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who allowed Himself to be stripped, scourged and crucified for you. If a voice should appear sweet to you, transport this sense of attraction to your Savior, Whose lips poured forth grace and sweetness, as we hear sung in the psalm: "Grace is poured forth from your lips" (Ps. 45:2). On account of the sweetness of His tongue, the multitude was always following Him, hesitant to cease from listening to Him, as St. Luke tells us, "The people hung on every word that He said" (Luke 19:47). When you hear the shouts and grumbling of a crowd, recall the unruly cry of the Jews, "Take him away, and crucify him," (John 19:15) which troubled the ears of the Lord. When you behold a beautiful face, recall that He, Who was "more beautiful than the children of men. " (Ps 45:2), Jesus Christ our Lord, was crucified for love of you, "hated and rejected by men, a man of suffering and acquainted with disease" (Isa 53:3). Each time the clock strikes, recall the great sorrow which filled our Lord Jesus Christ's heart, when in Gethsemane He was

anxious about the coming passion and death. Or suppose you hear the sound of the hammer which resounded as our Lord was nailed to the cross. Generally, every time some sorrowful event happens in your life or in someone else's, keep in mind that all affliction and sorrow that we experience is nothing when compared to the painful, torturous wounds that our Lord suffered during His passion for our salvation.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 23: HOW TO TURN SENSORY IMPRESSIONS INTO HELPFUL LESSONS.

When you see things that are beautiful to the eye and to be valued on earth, consider that they are as nothing, only dust, in comparison to the beauties and treasures of heaven, which you will surely obtain after you die, if you give up the entire world.

When you look at the sun, consider that your soul is even more beautiful and luminous, if it full of the grace of its Maker. But if it is not, it is more dark and horrible than the outer darkness.

When you turn your eyes up to heaven, elevate the eyes of your soul to the highest heavens and hold to it with your mind, for it is the heavenly abode made ready for you, if your life here on earth is without sin and holy.

Upon hearing the songs of birds in the trees during spring, or when you hear some other sweet singing, elevate your mind to the most sweet songs in paradise and meditate on how the heavens ever echo with Halleluias and with other angelic praise. Pray that God allow you to always sing His glories, among the company of those heavenly spirits, concerning which Revelation speaks, "After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation, power, and glory belong to our God." (Rev 19:1) Should you feel yourself attracted by the beauty of another, bear in mind that under this beautiful exterior there hides the snake of hell, prepared to kill you, or at very least to wound you, and tell it, "Accursed snake! You stand here as a thief, looking to consume me! But a vain attempt, because God will help me." Then

turning yourself to God, tell Him, "Blessed are You, my God, Who has revealed to us our hidden foes and has not given us up as prey to their teeth" (Ps 124:6). In such a way take comfort in His crucified wounds, consecrating yourself to them and pondering on how much our Lord endured with His holy flesh in order to liberate you from sin and to implant in you a hatred of carnal desires.

I will speak to you of yet another weapon to resist the allurement of physical beauty, that is, when you fall into it, move quickly to lower your mind into the profound thought of what this creature, so alluring to you now, will become after it dies? A rank corpse full of worms.

Whenever you are walking somewhere, consider with each step that each stride brings you closer to the grave. Seeing the birds flying in the air, or rivers with rapidly flowing waters, ponder that your life goes by yet faster, quickening to its conclusion.

When strong winds are blowing, the sky is thick with black clouds, and you hear the loud thunderclaps and see the flashes of lightening, recall the fearful day of judgment and then fall to your knees, bow before your Lord and God and pray that He give you more time and grace to ready yourself to stand then without shame in the presence of His fearful majesty.

When certain troubles attack you, do not neglect to supply your mind with edifying thoughts concerning them, but more than this, lift up your mind to meditate on the will of God ruling everything. Then work to establish yourself with the assurance that it is profitable for your salvation, that the loving wisdom and righteous will of God has favorably ordered that you endure what you suffer now and to the degree that you suffer it. And so rejoice that God demonstrates His love for you in such conditions and gives

you the opportunity to show how willingly and determinedly you subject yourself to His will in everything He elects to send you. Tell Him from your heart, "This is God's will fulfilled in me, because in His love for me He has ordered before time began that I should endure this turmoil, or loss or grief or injustice. May the name of our most merciful Savior be blessed."

When a favorable thought enters your mind, turn to God and, perceiving that it was given by Him, give Him thanks. When you are studying the word of God, keep in mind that God is present, secretly, under each word, and take these words as if they came from His divine mouth. When the sun rules the sky, and you see darkness drawing near and hiding its light, as during an eclipse, be sorrowful and pray to God not to allow you to fall into the outer darkness.

When you look upon the cross, recall that it is the standard of our spiritual combat, and that it has unconquerable power, which if you turn yourself away from it, you will be saved from the hands of our foes, but that if you stay under it, you will attain heaven and enter it in victory and glory.

Upon seeing an icon of our most holy mother of God, turn your heart toward her, for she is the queen of heaven. Give thanks to her that she has demonstrated such willingness to submit herself to God's will, giving birth, suckling and raising the Savior of the world to be a spotless defender and helper in our invisible combat.

Use the icons of the saints to bring to mind just how many intercessors you have that can always pray for you before God, and how many companions you have fighting on your side in your never-ending war. Such saints have courageously battled these same enemies throughout the course of their lives and have conquered them. They have shown you the art of

fighting battles. If, using their help, you are vigilant in fighting your wars, you, like them, will be crowned with victory in the ever-lasting heavenly glory.

If you see a church, among your other pious thoughts, recall also that your soul is a temple of God also. As was written, "You are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor 6:16). So you need to keep it spotless and pure.

Each time you hear the church bells, recall the greeting of the Archangel to the Mother of God, "Hail, you that are highly favored." Dwell on the following thoughts and emotions: thank God for sending from heaven to earth such good news, through which the work of your salvation started. Exult with the Holy Virgin in the unearthly greatness to which she was elevated for Her profound humility. Along with her and the archangel Gabriel, worship the heavenly Fruit which was then conceived in Her ever holy womb. It will be good for you to repeat this glorying many times during the course of the day, along with feelings I have related. Have it be a steadfast rule to repeat it as many as three times a day, morning, midday and in the evening.

In summary I offer you the following counsel: be ever vigilant with regard to your senses and never let the impressions you receive by them stimulate and feed your passions. Rather, employ your senses in a way such as not to deviate the slightest from your resolve to gratify God always and in all things, and to be lead solely by His will. To accomplish this, in addition to moving your mind from sensory things to spiritual, as we have spoken of, it is handy to employ the small rule referred to in the initial chapters, not to be suddenly drawn by anything or suddenly repulsed by anything, but through strict and firm reasoning to discern, in each case, the

proper attitude to be used for the impression accepted by the senses, so that it conform to God's will, which we know by His commandments.

I will also include, that even though I have described various methods for turning senses into items of spiritual benefit, it does not imply that you should regularly exercise them. No, what you should do regularly is to gather your mind into your heart and stay there with the Lord, having Him then as a Teacher and Guide in your battle with your foes and passions, either by direct inner fighting, or with the regular exercise of the virtues that oppose them. What I have related was said merely with the intent that you should understand these methods and employ them when required. Just the same, it is undoubtedly very handy, in our battle, to cloak all sensory matters with a spiritual covering.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 24: SOME GENERAL LESSONS ABOUT EMPLOYING YOUR SENSES.

Now it remains for me to give the overall rules concerning the use of the outer senses, to hinder the impressions they convey from destroying our moral and spiritual order of things. So take heed.

(1) More than anything my brother, keep a firm grasp on those evil and quick evil robbers, your eyes, and never let them be curious as they gaze upon the faces of women, if they are fair or not, or at men, particularly the ones that are young and beardless. Also do not allow them to gaze at naked bodies, not merely those of others, but your own as well. Because such curiosity and passionate glances might easily bring forth in your heart the lust of adultery, which carries guilt. As the Lord states, "Whoever looks at a woman to lust upon her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt 5:28). Also a wise man wrote, "Gazing begets desire." Solomon also advises us against being allured by the eyes and wounded by a desire for beauty, "Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her take you with her eyelids" (Prov 6:25). Here are some examples of the evil ends of lustful looks: sons of God, descendants from Seth and Enoch were captivated by Cain's daughters (Gen 4:1); Shechem, the son of Hamor, the Hivite, beheld Dinah, Jacob's daughter and took her; Samson was attracted to the beauty of Delilah (Judges 16:1); David fell by gazing upon Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:1); two of the elders, who were judges of the people, were drunk with the beauty of Susanna (Dan 13:1) Take heed also not to look too attentively at luxurious food and drinks, recalling our mother Eve, who gazed with lustful eyes upon the fruit on the forbidden tree in the

garden of Eden. For she lusted after it, plucked and ate and thus brought death upon herself and all her offspring. Do not look enviously at fair clothing made of glittering silver and gold, for fear vanity and avarice enter into your soul from your eyes. Pray as David did, "Turn my eyes away from seeing vanity" (Ps 119:37). I generally advise to take heed not to look at dancing, feasts, quarrels, idle gossip and other such unprofitable and disgraceful things, loved by the vain world and disallowed by God's law. Run away and shut your eyes to all these things, for fear you fill your heart with passion and your mind with disgraceful images, and stimulate in yourself a revolt and war against yourself, and thus break your advancement in your struggle against your passions. Instead love to visit churches and to gaze upon the holy icons, books, tombs, graveyards and other such sacred items, the mere sight of which will have a beneficial effect on your soul.

(2) Guard your ears also. First, do not let yourself hear disgraceful and passionate words, songs or music, which fill up the soul with ideas, and make it remiss, fanning the fire, in your heart, of carnal lust. Second, do not listen to loud, joking speech, vain stories and ideas. But if by chance you do happen to hear them, do not delight or give in to them. It is unfitting for Christians to enjoy such talking, which delights only those sinful people of whom St. Paul said, "And they will turn their ears away from the truth, and will be turned to idle tales" (2 Tim 4:4). Third, do not enjoy hearing gossip or criticism, or slander, which some spread about their brothers. You should either make them stop, or withdraw yourself, so you cannot hear them. Because St. Basil the Great deems such as worthy of excommunication along with those who listen to their speech without attempting to stop them. Fourth, do not listen to useless, vain speech, which most world-loving people spend their time employing. Do not enjoy it. Because the law states,

"You will not give a false report" ([Exo 23:1](#)). Solomon also says, "Keep far from me vain speech and lies" ([Prov 30:8](#)). The Lord said as well, "But I tell you, that each idle word that men will speak, they will give an account of on judgment day" ([Matt 12:36](#)).

Fifth, take heed to hearing things which might hurt your soul, among which is the praise of flattery. As Isaiah says, "My people, those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths" ([Isa 3:12](#)). Instead love hearing divine words, holy songs, psalms and everything good, holy, wise and beneficial for your soul. In particular love to hear rebukes and reviling, targeted at you.

(3) Preserve your nose from smelling expensive perfumes, which might stimulate carnal ideas and impulses. Do not apply them to yourself nor breathe them in beyond reason. All this is fitting for loose women, but not for men who desire wisdom, because it weakens the soul's health and stimulates carnal desires, which might lead to a fall. Thus the warnings of the prophet are fulfilled for men, who employ such perfumes. "Woe to those who anoint themselves with the chief perfumes" ([Amos 6:1](#)). And "It will happen that rather than a sweet smell there will be a foul odor" ([Isa 3:24](#)).

(4) Defend your mouth and stomach, for fear they are taken prisoner by a variety of sweet and fattening foods and tasty drinks. Because the effort to get all you require for such delights of the table can lead you to lies, guile and even robbery or other evil works. For when you start to enjoy them, then they can hurl you down into the depth of those carnal lusts, which usually act beneath your belly. Then you will be subject to the the prophecy of Amos, "Woe to them that eat the lambs from the flock, and the calves from the midst of the stall, which drink wine in bowls" ([Amos 6:4](#)).

(5) Take heed to gripping of your hands, squeezing and holding a body, not just another's, man or woman, old or young, but also your own. Unless it is completely necessary, do not touch particular parts. The more unrestrained the touching, the more sharp and keen the carnal stimulation of lust, and the more free their attraction to the sinful act itself. All the other senses support that lustful motion, and in some way move such a one to commit the sin. But when a man comes to the point of touching what he ought not touch, then it is already quite hard for him to withdraw from the sinful deed.

With regard to temptations of touch take heed to hats, clothing and shoes, especially with regard to them being soft, multi-colored, shiny or expensive. All such things are effeminate and not suitable for men. Rather dress with respect and humbly, fulfilling the need to protect your body from the cold during the winter and from the heat during the summer. Do this for fear you hear the words spoken to the rich man clothed in purple and fine garments, "Remember that you in your lifetime received good things" ([Luke 16:25](#)). And also for fear of the Prophet Ezekiel's threat, "Then all the princes of the sea will come down from their thrones, and lay aside their robes, and strip off their embroidered garments" ([Eze 26:16](#)).

In the same category are all the other pleasures of the flesh, such as, many baths, beautiful homes, plush carpets, expensive furniture, soft beds and idling on them. Take heed to all such things, for it is a danger to your chastity and is the source of stimulation of impure motions and carnal lusts, for fear you inherit the end which the Prophet Amos warns against, "Who to those that lie on beds of ivory, and stretch out themselves on their couches" ([Amos 6:1](#)). All these matters I have spoken of is the dust which the snake, the tempter, was condemned to consume. All these things are food for our

carnal passions to feed upon. And you must not lightly esteem such things. Rather you should arm yourself bravely against them and do not allow them to enter your soul or heart by the senses, I promise you, you will readily sap the strength of the devil and the passions, for you will have deprived them of the very food which they use to flourish in you. Thus in a short time you will overcome them in the unseen war.

In the book of Job it is written, "the old lion dies for lack of prey" ([Job 4:11](#)). This lion is a symbol of the devil, our ever-present foe, who flees from the one who gives him no food for he has severed and stifled all his passionate impulses, stimulated by the impressions from our outer senses. As a particular monk Jobius in the books of the patriarch Photius tells us, the devil is like an ant-lion because he ever initiates one's ruin by initially bearing him into minor sins, just as an ant is very small. Then, after becoming used to small sins, he moves him to the greater ones. So also the devil initially appears weak and small like an ant, and later he seems like a strong giant, a great lion.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 25: CONCERNING CONTROLLING YOUR TONGUE.

The most important thing of all is to tame our tongue. The heart moves the tongue. What fills the heart comes pouring out through the tongue. And by contrast, when a feeling is poured from the heart by the tongue, it becomes emboldened and well-rooted in the heart. So the tongue is one of the main factors in erecting our inner nature.

Healthy feelings are quiet. The feelings which look for expression in speech are usually self-flattering, for they look to express what gratifies our self-love and can show us, as we suppose, in the best possible light. Verbosity usually comes from vainglory, which makes us suppose that we understand a great deal and that our opinion on the matter of converse is the most pleasing. So we have an inescapable impulse to talk with a stream of words, and with much repetition, and to give our opinion to the souls of other people. And so we force ourselves on them as undesired teachers and at times even imagining making students of those who know the subject more than the teacher. This is in regard to cases where the topics of conversation are worth attention. However in the majority of cases verbosity usually means idle chatter, and then there are no words to state the many evils which come from this evil habit. Generally, verbosity opens up the door to the soul, and the pious warmth in the heart immediately escapes. Idle chatter does the same thing, but all the more so. Verbosity takes attention away from oneself, exposing the heart. Then the normal passions and lusts creep in, at times with such success that by the end of the idle chatter the heart has not only agreed to, but has settled to do various

passionate works. Idle chatter is the door to slander, spreading ill-reports, opinions and ends up the sower of quarrels. It quenches the desire for mental work and almost always acts as a cover for a lack of understanding. When verbose discussion is finished, and the fog of self-comfort leaves, there is always a feeling of laziness and disappointment left behind. Is this not evidence of a soul that feels it has been robbed?

Wanting to demonstrate how hard it is for a verbose person to keep from saying something hurtful, sinful or wrong, the apostle James said that only the perfect can truly restrain the tongue to its proper limits: "Anyone who does not stumble in word is a perfect person, able to bridle the whole body also" ([James 3:2](#)). Once the tongue starts to speak for its own enjoyment, it runs along with its words like an unbridled horse, and utters not just the good and decorous, but the evil and hurtful also. On account of this the apostle refers to it as, "a restless evil, full of deadly poison" ([James 3:8](#)). And long before him Solomon also said, "In the speaking of many words there is no lack of sin" ([Prov 10:19](#)). Generally, let us say, like Ecclesiastes, that a verbose person demonstrates his own foolishness, because as a rule, "a fool is full of words" ([Ecc 10:14](#)).

Do not extend your conversation with anybody, who does not listen to you with a sound heart, for fear you exhaust him and make yourself detestable. As it is written, "He that uses a multitude of words will be hated" (Ecc 20:8). Take heed to speaking in a harsh or haughty tone, because they are highly annoying and they will make people suspect that you are vain and that you have a high opinion of yourself. Never talk about yourself, your business or your relatives, save when it is required, and then as well keep it short and say as little as you can. When you see others speaking too much about themselves, force yourself not to copy them, even

if their speech seems humble. With regard to your neighbor and his business, do not shun discussing them, but be as short as possible, even when you need to say things for his benefit.

When you discuss a topic, try to follow the rule of St. Thalassius who said, "Of the five tones used when speaking with others, fearlessly use three with discrimination; infrequently use the fourth and do not use the fifth at all." There is one writer who believes the first three are "yes", "no" and "certainly"; the fourth he understands as pertaining to doubtful things and the fifth is those things which one is completely ignorant of. Stated another way, about things you are sure are true or false, or obvious, speak with authority. Those things for which you are doubtful it is better to say nothing, but when required, admit they are uncertain and keep your judgment to yourself. Of things you know nothing about say nothing. There is another who says, "we had five types of speech: the vocative, used to invoke someone; the interrogative, which is used when we ask a question; the solicitous, which is used when we seek something; the defining, when we give an opinion about something; the ordering, which is used when we forcefully give a command. You should use the first three as much as you like, the fourth rarely and the fifth never.

When you speak about God use all possible honor, particularly concerning His love and righteousness, but also be fearful for fear you commit a sin by saying something that is not true, which will confuse the innocent hearts of those listening. So instead listen to others about this topic, gathering in their words in the inner treasure-chest of your heart.

If the conversation concerns other things, only allow the sound of the voice to come into your ear, but do not let the thought come into your mind,

which should stay steadfastly directed on God. Even when listening to a speaker it is necessary, in order to know what he is speaking about and to give a good answer, do not forget, that while listening and speaking, you need to lift your mind's eye up high to where your God is, contemplating His majesty and recalling that He never neglects you and looks upon you with either approbation or disapproval, depending on what the disposition of your heart is, and what is in your words, motions and deeds. When you need to speak, before you say what is in your heart and allow it to pass out of your mouth, study it carefully, and you will find many things which ought not to pass your lips. Understand that many things, which seem good to say, are often better left buried in the grave of silence. At times you will come to understand this, when the conversation has finished. Silence is a powerful force in our invisible war and a steadfast sign of achieving victory. Silence is beloved of him, who does not depend on himself but relies only on God. It is the protector of divine prayer and a wondrous helper in the exercise of the virtues. In addition it is a mark of spiritual wisdom. As St. Isaac said, "Guard your tongue to elevate your mind to God, and it also grants great secret power to do manifest works, performed by the body. If silence is exercised with understanding, it can also enlighten in secret works." In a different spot he praises it saying, "If you stack up on one side of a set of scales all the deeds required by an ascetic life, and on the other side silence, you will discover that the latter tips the scales. We have been given much good advise, but if one adopts silence, to follow them will be redundant." In still another spot he refers to silence as "the mystery of the coming life, while words are the agents of this world." St. Barsanuphius sets it higher than preaching God's word, stating, "If you are about to preach, understand that silence is more worthy of amazement and glory." So, even though one holds his tongue since he has no answer," another

keeps quiet, understanding his time" (Ecc 20:6). Still another for some other cause, "for human glory, or from zeal of silence, or since he communes with God secretly in his heart and has no desire for the focus of his mind to be distracted." It should be said generally that one who keeps silence, is found to be wise and of a sound mind. (Ecc 20:5) I will point out to you that the most direct way to achieve the habit of silence is to attempt this practice and the exercise of it will teach you how to use it. To retain your enthusiasm for this labor, meditate as much as possible on the ill-effects of idle chatter and on the healthy effects of wise silence. When you come to sample the good fruit of silence, you will no longer require any instruction on it.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 26: ON CORRECTING YOUR IMAGINATION AND YOUR MEMORY.

Having finished discoursing on controlling the outer sense, we should now discourse on controlling your imagination and memory, for in the opinion of the majority of philosophers, imagination and memory are simply perceiving imprints left by our senses, that is, things we have seen heard, smelt, touched and tasted. It should be said that imagination and memory are in general a single inner sense which "sees" and recalls everything, that the outer five senses have experienced at some point before. In a way the external senses are like a stamp, while your imagination is the imprint of that stamp.

Both imagination and memory have been granted to us so we can make use of them when our external senses are at rest and we do not have in front of us the sensory objects, which have gone past our senses and have left their imprint on our imagination and memory. Because we cannot ever have in front of us the things we have seen, heard, smelt, tasted and touched, we must bring them into our mind through our imagination and memory, where they were imprinted, and by such means we can study them as if they were really there in front of us.

As an example: you once visited Smyrna, and then departed so that you could no longer see it with your eyes. And yet whenever you like, you can "see" Smyrna with your internal senses, which are your imagination and memory, and then you can see it once again as it really is, both in dimensions and arrangement. Although your soul does not leave you and go

into Smyrna, as some fools suppose, it only means that you see the imprint of Smyrna's image.

This seeing of past sensory perceptions troubles those who want to ever remain with God. Because it takes away their attention from God and bears it away to empty, sinful things, thus troubling the good arrangement of our inner being. We endure this not just when we are awake, but in our dreams as well. Such an impression often lingers for many days.

Because imagination is a force lacking reason and simply works mechanically, keeping to the laws which govern images, while pure freedom is the image of the spiritual life, it makes sense that its activity is not compared with this latter life. Thus I am compelled to give you some counsel on this matter.

(1) Understand that God is beyond every sense, sensory object, shape, color, bound, and place. He completely lacks form and image and, while existing in everything, He is above everything. So He is beyond all imagination. "No image can be admitted with regard to God, because He is beyond every mind." So it follows, then, that imagination is the force of the soul such that, by its very being, it has no ability to enter into the sphere of union with God.

(2) Understand also that Lucifer, who is the first among the angels, also was from of old beyond all silly imagination, shape, color or another sense, for he was a mind without form. Yet he allowed imagination to have free rein and he filled his mind with images in which he was equal with God, and thus he fell from this formless and passionless state of mind into a many-formed, complex and crude imagination, as numerous theologians have stated, and so from a formless and passionless angel he became a

devil, a being in some way material, multiform and governed by passions. As he became such, so did his servants as well, all the other demons. St. Gregory of Sinai says, "Once they were also minds, but having fallen from the bodiless beauty, each obtained a certain material crudeness, receiving flesh depending on the level and type of deeds they had wrought. For example, like man, they lost the delights of the heavenly angels, and having lost heavenly bliss, so like us, they started to find pleasures upon the earth, when they gained forms and obtained the practice of material goods." On account of this the holy fathers refer to the devil as a painter, a multiform snake, a feeder on the dust of the passions, a creator of fantasies, and other similar names. God's word represents him in the form of a dragon, with a tail, ribs, neck, eyes, nose, jaw, lips, skin and other similar parts. One may read of these things in Job ([Job 40:1](#)) ([Job 41:1](#)). You should understand from this, my beloved, that because multiform fantasies are an invention and work of the devil, it is quite easy for him to bring about our ruin. The holy fathers well called this a bridge, on which the murderous demons come into the soul, mix with it and turn in into a hive of bees, an abode for the terrible, wicked and impious thoughts and every form of impurity of body and soul.

(3) You should know that according to the great theologian St. Maximus, Adam, the first man, was also made by God lacking imagination. His mind was spotless and free from all images. It worked as a mind and so formed no image from his senses or from sensory images. He made no use of this lower part of imagination. He did not see in his mind the form, dimensions, or color of things. Yet with thought, the high power of the soul, he meditated purely, immaterially and spiritually just on pure ideas. However the devil, the killer of humanity, having fallen himself by imagining equality with God, brought into the mind of Adam that he was

also equal with God and these imaginations led to the fall of Adam. On account of this he was cast out of his formless, spotless and imageless life, which was like the angels. And he fell into this complex sensory, multiform life which is full of images and fantasies, a senseless animal state. Because to be immersed in images or to live within them and under their sway is character of senseless beasts, and not of reason endowed creatures.

Once man fell into such a state, who knows what passions, evil dispositions and errors he was then led into by his fantasies. He put various deceptions into moral doctrines, corrupt teachings into physics, senseless and wrong dogmas and tales into theology. There are many philosophers of old and more recently, who wish to speak about God and the divine mysteries, matters which are inaccessible to the imagination, because it must be the work of the most lofty part of the soul, the mind to have drawn near this work without first purifying their mind from passionate shapes and images about sensory matters, and so to have discovered lies rather than truth. What is particularly annoying, their soul and heart have welcomed these lies and they hold fast them, as if truth expressing reality. So, rather than theologians, they have become tale spinners "having given themselves," according to the Apostle, "over to a depraved mind" ([Rom 1:28](#)).

And so, my brother, if you earnestly desire to be liberated from such mistakes and passions, if you look to escape the many nets and schemes of the devil; if you yearn to be united with God and receive heavenly light and truth, go bravely into war with your mind and fight with your full strength, to divest your mind of all images, colors and forms, and generally all images and memories from the senses, either good or bad. Because all these things obscure the light and pure state of your mind, and is a roughening of

its spiritual state, making the mind passionate. Because almost no passion, either of the soul or body, can draw near to the mind except by picturing sensory objects. So work to keep your mind free of colors, images, forms, so that it is pure, just as God made it.

Yet you can attain this only if you turn your mind back to itself, captivating it in the restricted place of your heart and the entire inner person, and teaching it regularly to remain there inside, either in secret prayer, saying in your mind, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, " or fixing your attention on yourself and examining yourself. But above all, meditate on God and finding your rest in Him. When a snake must throw off its old skin, it pushes its way laboriously through a narrow opening, as scientist tell us. So also the mind, will force its way through the constricted passage of the heart and mental prayer in the heart. For then it sheds its clothing of imagining sensory objects and the harmful sensory impression and it becomes, spotless, bright and ready for union with God, by means of the likeness to Him, which it thus obtains. Again, the more narrow the pipe through which water flows, the more difficult it is for it to push forward and the more quickly it rises. The same way, the more the mind is constricted by hidden exercises in the heart through attention to itself, the finer and stronger it becomes. And thus, rising on high, it is thus more difficult to access by the passions, and all imaginative thoughts, not just sensory but mental as well, for all such things stay outside being unable to enter. I will provide another example, even more relevant. When rays of sunshine are scattered in the air, and they are not bound to each other, they are not as bright and hot as when they are magnified with a lens on a particular point. Then they affect a blinding light and a heat that can burn. So also the mind when it magnifies its attention on the center of the heart

with practice, it can become bright and hot. In this state it casts away the darkness of passions and destroys all passionate images and motions.

This is the principle and main method for controlling the images and memory of your mind, which you, being self-disciplined need to exercise regularly. Through this means, not only will you correct these powers in the soul, but will erase from it all old impressions and images of sensory objects, which stimulate and feed the passions. However the more powerful and successful the method, the harder the method is, which generally means nowadays there are fewer people who would like to use it. I would dare say, there are few who trust its power, particularly among the wise and teachers, not just from the laity but from the clergy also, not wanting to trust the teachings of the Holy Spirit and many holy fathers, who speak of this method in the holy book, the Philokalia. This book is more valuable than any gem, and those men are rightly kept from the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which some unlettered men achieve. Because, by the words of our Savior, "God has hidden these things from the wise and the prudent, and has revealed them to babes" ([Luke 10:21](#)). Because those who have no faith in the power of this inner work and do not do it, they can never see how helpful it is. As the prophet said, "If you will not believe, certainly you will not be established" ([Isa 7:9](#)). When you perceive that your mind is growing tired and no longer can stay in the heart with this prayer of the mind and the heart, then use the next method, which is, let it go forth and enjoy freedom with divine and spiritual meditations, both those which are suggested by Holy Writ and those which are inspired by God's creation. Spiritual meditations like this are good for the mind because they are subtle and formless, and they do not get caught up in external matters. By contrast, they satisfy within certain bounds its thirst for unimpeded motion in their sphere. And so they prepare the mind by their atmosphere to come back

quickly to the heart and to unite with God by immersion with an inner remembering of Him only. On account of this St. Maximus said, "Acts by themselves cannot remove passions from the mind, save it is given to various spiritual meditations. But take heed to abiding just on the material side of God's created works, animate or inanimate, while you are under the sway of passions. Because, St. Maximus tells us that in such a case the mind is not yet liberated from passionately looking upon sensory things, and thus, rather than passing from them to the spiritual and immaterial ideas hidden in them, it will be drawn only by their external beauty and form and delighting in this they can receive incorrect lessons from them, in addition to passionate attachments, a dangerous trap that has ensnared many philosophers. Otherwise use the third way to provide relaxation and rest to your mind, that is, ponder the mysteries of the Lord's life and passion: His nativity in a cave, circumcision, presentation to God in the temple, baptism in the Jordan, forty-day fast in the desert, preaching the Good News, His many miracles, transfiguration on Mount Tabor, washing the feet of the disciples and giving them His Mysteries at the Last Supper, betrayal, passion, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and ascension. In addition there are the many tortures of the martyrs and ascetical works of the ancient holy fathers.

In the same way, to make your heart remorseful and repentant, you should think of the horrible hour of death, the fearful day of judgment, the different forms of everlasting torture, the oceans of everlasting fire, the dark dungeons of hell, the gloominess of Tartarus, the undying worms, a life with demons. Mediate also on the peace and unutterable joys of the righteous, on the Kingdom of Heaven, everlasting glory, and endless bliss, the voice of those who are feasting, a perfect union with God, eternal friendship and communion with all the angels and saints.

If, my dear brother, you imprint such thoughts and forms on your imagination, you will not just liberate yourself from bad memories and thoughts, but you will obtain great praise on judgment day for your efforts. Just as St. Basil the Great foretells in his chapter on virginity, saying "Each man, while in the flesh, is as a painter who paints an image in a hidden place. When he has completed his painting, he brings it forth and displays it. He is commended by the on-lookers if he has chosen an appropriate subject and painted it with skill. He is criticized if the subject is poorly chosen or painted. In a similar way every man, when he is delivered to judgment by God after death, will be lauded and loved by God, the angels and the saints, if he has painted his mind and imaginations with light-giving, heavenly, spiritual images and forms. However he will be condemned and disgraced if he has filled his mind with lustful, disgraceful and ignoble images. St. Gregory of Salonika shows his astonishment at how sensory objects affecting the soul by imagination bring either mental illumination, leading to a life of everlasting bliss, or of mental darkness, leading to hell.

Realize though that I do not mean by these things that you must be constantly preoccupied with such mental thoughts alone. I merely mean that you should employ them sometimes, until your mind, being tired of being held captive in the heart, becomes rested. Once it is at peace, return it again to the heart and compel it to stay there without having any fantasies or images in a genuine remembrance of God. Because just as all shell creatures find their rest nowhere else save their shells, which like a house, is their abode, so also the mind will only find its peace in the heart and in the inner person, where it is sheltered as if in a castle. And so it can successfully wage war with its thoughts, foes and passions, being hidden there, inside, even though most do not realize it.

The fact that passions and thoughts are hidden inside us, in the heart, and come out from there to war against us, is not my own idea. Hear what the Lord says, "Because from the heart proceed wicked thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, robbery, false witness, blasphemy, these are the things which corrupt a man" ([Matt 15:19](#)). And also that our foes, the demons, conceal themselves close to the heart is not something I came up with, so teach the holy fathers. St. Diadoch is the most clear among them, when he states that before holy baptism Divine grace pushes a man to the good from outside, while Satan hides in the deep reaches of the heart and soul. Yet after someone has been baptized, the demon will hover outside the heart, while grace comes within. And even after baptism our foes are allowed to penetrate to the depths of our bodies and to reach into the very depths of our flesh and to attain as it were the surface of our heart, to test our determination. From there they defile the mind with carnal lusts. St. Gregory the Theologian teaches the same thing, giving an explanation as to what the Lord said about the unclean spirit who leaves a man, and then comes back again, making the man's last state worse than it was at first" ([Matt 12:43](#)). St. Gregory notes that the same thing happens with the baptized if they take heed to stay in their heart. "The unclean spirit," he states, "exiled with baptism, and not wanting to be homeless, looks for rest, roaming here and there. But finding no home, he comes back to the house from where he fled, because he is shameless. If he discovers that the baptized person has Christ established and abiding in his heart, in the place from where he was cast out, he cannot enter and again is turned back. However if he discovers that his former place is empty, and unoccupied because of a lack of attention to God and the memory of Him, he comes to him quickly, with greater animosity than before. And the final state of that person is worse than before. I have deliberately made this discourse long to

encourage you, more forcefully, to ever stay in your heart with our Lord and Savior in your memory and with prayer to Him, if you would like to always be successful in tumultuous battles with thoughts and passionate motions, which attack the heart. If you are present with the Lord your foe will not be so bold to draw near.

But most importantly I tell you, stay diligent and do not allow your imagination and memory to recall things you have seen, heard, smelt, touched and tasted before, particularly if there was something disgraceful or improper in them. It is this that most importantly makes up our war, and is harder and more persistent than fighting with the senses. Each person who wages this war understands this from experience. It is easily managed to not accept some temptation by a particular sense. However it is quite difficult to keep control of your imagination and memory, once it has accepted a sensory image. For instance, to see or not to see a face, or to look at it passionately or not, is not so hard and does not take a great deal of effort. However after you have seen it, and looked at it passionately, to do away with the memory of a face already seen is difficult, and takes a great deal of effort. The enemy can toy with your soul like a ball, casting your attention from memory to memory, stirring up desires and underlying passions, and thus ever keeping you in a passionate state. So I tell you, be alert and above all, take heed to your imagination and memory.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 27: A SOLDIER OF CHRIST SHOULD EMPLOY EVERY POSSIBLE MEANS TO NOT WORRY OR ALLOW HIS HEART TO BE DISTURBED IF HE DESIRES TO CONQUER HIS FOES.

While it is an absolute requirement of each Christian to restore peace that has been lost in his heart, so it is required that he not permit accidental occurrences in life to trouble his peace. By this I mean sickness, wounds, death in the family, wars, fires, unexpected joys, fears and grief, memories of previous sins and everything which disturbs the heart. It is absolutely required in such instances that one not permit himself to be anxious, for having given in to them, one loses himself and the ability to understand things clearly and to perceive the best way to conduct himself, each of these allows the foe the ability to disturb someone yet more and push him to take a step, that is hard or almost impossible to fix.

I do not want to tell you that you should not permit sorrow, because this is not within our capability, to not allow sorrow to possess our heart and trouble it. Keep it out of the bounds of your heart and move quickly to soften and hold it back, in order that it might not hinder you from thinking and acting well. With the help of God this is within your ability, if religious and moral feelings and inclinations are strong within us.

Each trial has its own unique characteristics and requires its own medicine, but I refer to them now generally, looking to their common ability to disturb the soul, and keeping in mind a remedy for them. This general remedy is faith in the good Providence of things, which orders the

course of our life with all its accidents, for the benefit of all, and a peaceful concord with the will of God, in agreement with which we call out from the depth of our heart, "Let the will of God be done. According to the will of the Lord, let it be done, for our benefit.

This goodness is expressed and felt differently by each person. One comes to realize that this goodness of God brings me to repentance. Another person feels, it is on account of my sins that the Lord delivered me over to this trial, to cleanse me of them. I am doing God's penance. A third supposes, the Lord is testing me, to see if I truly minister to Him. A fourth, who looks from without at someone who is afflicted might suppose that God's works might be made manifest in him. However such a charge can be taken seriously when the trial is finished, and when the assistance of God is clear in the afflicted soul. Of the four, only the first three feelings should be allowed. Regardless of which of them is employed by the heart, each has the ability to still the storm of sorrow and bring about peace and good-will in the heart.

So here is the general way to make peace in the heart, when some tribulation attempts to trouble it, with every bit of your strength make steadfast your faith in the good nature of the Providence of God toward you and restore your soul to a devoted subjection to the will of God. Then bring into the heart the thoughts referred to above and exhort it to suppose that the trouble you are suffering now is either a way through which the Lord tempts you, or it is a cleansing penance He lays upon you, or that He so pushes you to repent, either generally or particularly through some connection with a wrong deed of yours, which was forgotten. Once the heart starts to possess such a feeling, the pain straightaway goes away and these other feelings can come in as well. Altogether these will very quickly

confirm such peace and good-will in you that you cannot help but cry, "Blessed is the name of the Lord forever." In the disturbed heart these feelings are like oil on the waves of the sea. The waves are stilled and then there is a great peace. Thus peace is brought into the heart, to whatever measure it is disturbed. However if through a long effort on your part and with many spiritual works you plant these feelings in your heart, in order that it is constantly filled with them, then no trial will ever bother you, because this disposition will effectively stop them. Understand that the feeling of sadness will still attack you. It will come, but it will retreat just as quickly, like waves in the face of a mighty cliff.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 28: WHAT WE SHOULD DO WHEN WE ARE WOUNDED IN A STRUGGLE.

If by chance you are wounded by giving in to some sin on account of your weakness, or by some errant nature of your character, and by this I mean pardonable sins, like improper words, losing your temper, evil thoughts which flash into your heard, an improper desire which has suddenly come up, etc., never lose heart and fall into pointless distress. Most importantly do not dwell on yourself saying, "How could I allow such a thing to happen?" These are the words of pride. Be humble, and lift your eyes to the Lord, saying "O Lord, what more could be expected of me, imperfect and feeble as I am." So give thanks to Him that the matter has not gone any further, saying, "O Lord, had it not been for Your endless mercy, I would not have ceased even there, but would surely have fallen into a much worse affair."

Having such feelings and being aware of yourself you should not allow the self-indulgent and careless thought that because you are what you are, you are allowed to act wrongly. No, despite the fact that you are weak and imperfect, you will be charged as guilty for all your misdeeds. Because you possess a will, all that comes from you is subject to it, and thus all things are counted to your credit and all bad things to your loss. So, aware of your general evil state, tell yourself that you are guilty also in the particular evil, into which you have fallen at that moment. Judge yourself and condemn yourself, you and only you. Never look around to see who you can blame. And do not look around you as if the circumstance was the cause of your win. Your evil alone is at fault, so blame yourself.

And do not copy those who claim, "Yes I have done such and such, but what is the problem?" No, having perceived your blameworthy behavior, rebuke yourself and make yourself come before the unavoidable justice of God. Move quickly to warm your repentant feelings, that is to say, sorrow and remorse, not on account of your own loss to sin, but on account of the sin with which you have offended God, Who has been so merciful in summoning you to repent, in forgiveness of your old sins, in allowing you to take part in the grace of the Mysteries, and in leading you and protecting you as you advance on the correct path. The more profound the contrition, the better. Yet however profound the contrition, never allow any doubt concerning forgiveness. Forgiveness is been fully prepared and the account of all our sins has been torn to shreds on the cross. Yet repentance and remorse are expected of everyone, before the penitent can share in the power of the Crucifixion for the redemption of the world's sins. Having believed in this, fall down, in body and soul and cry out: "O God, have mercy on me, according to Your loving-kindness" ([Ps. 51:1](#)). Never stop crying thus, until you feel within a merging together of guilt and forgiveness.

Such grace will come down in the end on every penitent. Yet it should be accompanied with a vow, not to partake in the future, and to strictly guard and defend oneself from all future falls, either great or small, along with the fervent prayer for a helping grace in this service. After a recent experience with the volatility of one's abilities and efforts, the heart will of course call out to God on its own, "O God, create in me a clean heart, and renew an upright spirit within me... Restore me again to the Joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your spirit" ([Ps 51:1](#)).

All these things: self-condemnation, remorse, a hopeful prayer to be forgiven, the inspiring conviction to guard oneself in the future, a prayer to receive help and the gift of grace in this undertaking, you should do each time you sin with your eyes, ears, tongue, mind or with your feelings. Do not for a moment let sin stay within your heart unconfessed before the Lord and uncleansed with sincere repentance in His sight. Again you fall down, and again you should do the same thing. As many times as you sin, cleanse yourself each time in the presence of the Lord. If you can, tell all such things in the evening to your spiritual father. But if it is impossible that evening, tell him when the opportunity arises. A confession of everything to a spiritual father is most helpful in our spiritual war.

Nothing overcomes the treacherous foe and his schemes more efficiently than this mode of action. On account of this the foe works to hinder it through all possible ways, both inward and outward. This inward he hinders with thoughts and emotions, while the outward with deceptive chance meetings and happenstances. What exactly these hindrances are you will discover for yourself when you do this labor. I will say but one thing, the foe works hard to propose that you should not begin the work of inner sanctification right away when the sin is perceived. Instead he suggests you should wait a little longer, not a full day, or hour, but just a little longer. However as soon as you consent to this, he brings about another sin. After a sin with the tongue he brings about a sin with the eye and then another sense. And so you delay the cleansing of this next sin, for it is required that you cleanse yourself of the first one, first. And so in this manner, the postponing continues, for an entire day and one sin after another fills the soul. By night-time, which should be a time for purification through repentance, nothing is clearly perceived by the soul, because it is full of noise, turmoil and the dark of many sins which were allowed. The soul then

is then like a pair of eyes full of dust or muddied water. Because nothing can be perceived clearly, the labor of repentance is given up, and the soul is left full of dirty mud. This results in an imperfect evening prayer and evil dreams. So never put off inner cleansing for a moment, as soon as you are aware of something wrong within. Another common suggestion from the devil is not to relate to your spiritual father what has occurred. Never listen to this voice and work against it by telling him everything. Because just as this confession is beneficial, so also, even more so, does injury come from hiding what has happened to us.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 29: THE WAY THE BATTLE IS UNDERTAKEN BY THE DEVIL IN SPIRITUAL WAR AGAINST ALL AND HOW HE ENTICES PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT INNER DISPOSITIONS.

Understand, my dearly beloved, that the devil is only concerned with the destruction of all. However he does not employ the same means of warfare on each. To aid you in understanding this more clearly, I will relate to you five inner states and the scheming which goes with it. I will also describe the round-about approaches and allurements of the foe. These states are the following: some continue being slaves of sin, giving no thought to being liberated. Others, even though they think about freedom and want it, they do nothing to attain it. There are also those who, once freed from the bonds of sin and having achieved some virtues, again descend into vice with a yet worse moral condition.

In a self-deluded state these people suppose that, despite everything, they are still progressing toward perfection. Others carelessly give-up the way of righteousness, while still others change the virtue they have into a means for harming themselves. The foe uses his influence on each in agreement with the inclination of their character.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 30: HOW THE DEVIL KEEPS SINNERS SLAVES TO SIN.

When the devil retains one as a slave to sin, he is careful to darken him even more with spiritual blindness, expelling every good thought from him, which could help him to understand the harm of his current manner of life. He not only casts away such thoughts, which could bring one to repentance and turn such a one to the way of uprightness, but in place of them he inserts wicked ones, while offering opportunities for committing whichever sin he is most accustomed to, and tempting him to fall into it or some other terrible sin as frequently as possible. So the poor sinner ends up ever more blind and in the dark. This darkness enforces the habit and the ever present impulse to continue sinning. Being led from his sinful deeds to still greater blindness, and then from blindness to yet more sins, the miserable wretch spins around in this vortex and will continue to do so until death takes him, unless there is some special heavenly grace sent to rescue him.

If one discovers that he is in this terrible state and wants to be liberated from it, then, as soon as a righteous thought or even suggestion comes to him, summoning him to leave the darkness for the light and to go from vice to virtue, he should straightaway, without postponing, accept it. He should give it his entire attention; set his will upon it and exercise it with all possible care, calling out from his heart to the beneficent bestower of all good things, "Help me, O Lord God, hasten, and do not let me wander any more in this darkness of sin." He should never grow tired of calling upon God with these or similar words. Also let him look for help in the world,

going to those who are able to give good counsel on how better to be liberated from the sinful bonds of slavery that hold him fast. If he is unable to do it right then, as soon as the opportunity presents itself, he should do so, while always appealing to the Lord Jesus, Who was crucified on behalf of us, and to His Holy Mother, the spotless virgin, asking them to have mercy and not to deny him their ready assistance. He should understand that overcoming the foe lies not in tarrying, but a readiness to follow correctly.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 31: THE WAY IN WHICH OUR FOE KEEPS IN HIS NETS THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND THEIR DANGEROUS POSITION AND WANT TO BE FREE FROM IT, BUT MAKES NO EFFORT. ALSO THE REASON WHY OUR INTENTIONS ARE OFTEN NOT ACCOMPLISHED.

Those who have come to understand how perilous and wicked the life they lead is, the devil manages to keep under his sway, primarily by following the simple, yet powerful proposal of, "a bit later, and yet later. Tomorrow." The miserable sinner, deceived by the pretext of a good purpose which goes along with this proposal decides, "Truly tomorrow. Today I will complete what I need to do, and then, unburdened from all responsibility, I will place myself in the hands of Divine grace and I will follow unhesitatingly the spiritual way. Today I will do this or that, and then tomorrow I will repent." This is the devil's net, my dear brother, which he employs to catch many. By it he holds the entire world in his hands. The reason this net so readily entangles us is our carelessness and blindness. Nothing but lack of diligence and blindness can justify why, when our entire salvation and all God's glory are at risk, we fail to straightaway use the easiest and more simple, yet most powerful weapon, which is, to tell ourselves with determination, "This very moment, I will begin a spiritual life, and not later on. I will repent now, rather than tomorrow. This present moment is in my hand, while tomorrow is in God's hands. If God will grant me tomorrow and there after, can I be confident that I, tomorrow, will have the same good intention goading me to amend my ways?" Plus, how mindless it is when a steadfast remedy is available for healing my sickness, to state, "Wait, allow me to be sick a little bit longer." And yet the person

who postpones the labor of salvation does just this. And so if you would like to be liberated from the seduction of your foe, and to conquer him, immediately take up this trustworthy weapon, and be obedient immediately to the good thoughts and suggestions that come from the Lord, Who is summoning you to repent. Never permit the smallest tarrying, or allow yourself to say, "I have made a steadfast determination to repent later and I will not forsake this purpose." Do not do this. Such intentions have ever shown themselves to be false. Many who have depended on them have never repented to the end of their life.

(1) The foremost reason is that our determination is not founded on a mistrust of ourselves and a steadfast faith in God. We are not lacking a high regard for ourselves, and the certain outcome of this is always a leaving-taking from us of heavenly aid and our inevitable fall. On account of this the one who promises that, "Tomorrow I will certainly give up the way of vice," will ever encounter the opposite. So rather than rising he falls even worse than he did previously. From this fall is followed fall after fall. God often permits this to occur, so as to bring those who consider themselves independent, to a better understanding of their weak nature and to encourage them to look for divine assistance, giving up and forsaking all faith in themselves, for only the help that comes from God can be trusted. Do you want to understand when your intentions will be steadfast? When you give up all faith in yourself and when every hope is based on humility and a firm faith only in God.

(2) The next reason is that in forming such resolutions we usually have in mind the beauty and brilliance of uprightness, which attract our will, however feeble it might be. And so of course the hard part of virtue eludes our notice. Today this part we do not see, for the beauty of uprightness

powerfully attracts our will. However tomorrow when the normal labors and concerns show themselves, this allurements will not be so powerful, even though we still recall the original ideal. When our desire becomes weak, the will also weakens, and so the hard part of virtue becomes clear and hits us in the eye, because the way of uprightness is hard, and the first step is the hardest. Now let us assume that the one who purposed yesterday to take this way, today actually does so, yet he does not feel any help in carrying out his design. The desire is gone, and the will is weak. There is nothing but hindrances in view, in the normal course of his life, in the normal relationships with others. Thus he decides, "I will wait a little and be strengthened." So he goes on waiting each day, and it is not surprising if he waits his entire life. But had he begun his work yesterday, when the fervent will to change his ways came to him; had he acted immediately in obedience to his will; had he brought into his life something spiritual, today his longing and will would not be so faint as to give up in the face of challenges. There needs to be hindrances. Yet if one had something to lean against, he would have conquered them, even if it was hard. Had he been preoccupied with conquering them, the following day he would not have felt them so strongly, and on the third day even less. So going further he would have become well grounded in the right way.

(3) The third reason is if the good of waking up from the slumber of sin is not put into practice, such a waking up does not readily happen again, and even if it does happen, the effect on the will is not as strong as the first time. The will no longer inclines as quickly toward following after them, and thus even if the determination is there, it lacks energy. So, if someone was able to delay until tomorrow an obedience to a stronger urge and then it has become lost, how much more readily will it happen a second time, and then again a third. And thus it continues, the more obedience to good is

pushed off, the weaker the effect. After awhile they lose their power altogether, coming and going without any effect, and then finally they stop coming at all. Such a one gives himself up to his downfall, his heart becomes hard and he starts to feel repulsed by further virtuous urges. So tarrying becomes a straight way to doom.

I will add as well that postponements happen not just when an inner urge is felt to trade one's ill life for a better one, but also when one already has a good life. Because, when there is a chance to do good and one puts it off until tomorrow or some other unknown time, all the things that were said about the first postponement are applied to the second, leading to the same outcome. Understand that if one misses an opportunity to do good, he not merely denies himself the fruit of the virtuous act he may have done, but in addition he displeases God. God sends him someone in need, and he tells him, "Depart from here!" Even though he merely says this to another it is the same as if he were saying it to God, Who sent him. God will give him another helper, however the one who refused him will have to give an answer for his conduct.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 32: CONCERNING THE SCHEMES OF OUR FOE AGAINST THOSE WHO HAVE EMBARKED ON THE CORRECT PATH.

Let us suppose that someone has overcome the initial two hindrances, and is taken with a desire to be at liberty from the chains of sin and has started to labor for it without tarrying. But even here the foe does not leave him be. Rather he alters his strategy, although not his ill-intent hoping to make such a one stumble on a stone of temptation and bring him to perdition. The holy fathers describe the condition of such a one as being under fire from everywhere: above and below, left and right, front and rear. From all sides the darts are shot toward him. Darts from above are proposals for great spiritual works, beyond his ability. Darts from below are ideas to lessen or give up such efforts from self-pity and carelessness. Darts from the right are when in connection with some proper labors, the foe leads the man into temptation and the perils of a fall. Arrows from the left are when the foe shows him some real temptations and entices him to sin. Arrows from in front are when the foes tempt and trouble a man with thoughts of the things to come. Arrows from behind are when they allure him with memories about past accomplishments and circumstances. All of these alluring thoughts assault the soul, from within or without. From within with fantasy images from impressions in the mind, or by wicked suggestions implanted in the heart, along with the regular urges of passion. From without by impressions obtained by the external senses in an endless flow, as we have mentioned before. But our foes have help in our previous vices and our nature polluted by the fall. Possessing so many ways of hurting us, the foe is never at a loss with an initial failure, and regularly puts

into practice now one, now another means of tripping up or misleading the servants of Christ, who escape his grasp.

After one has determined to give up his mistaken ways and truly does give them up, the primary task of the foe is to make way for an unimpeded strategy against him. He is successful in this by giving the man the idea, who has ventured along the correct path, that he should work alone, and not seek advice or counsel from the guides of the virtuous life, who are ever attached to the Church. One who follows their counsel and checks all his deeds, inner and outer, against the good advise of his teachers, the priests present in their parishes for laymen, and experienced abbots in monasteries, the foe cannot draw near. Whatever he might pose, the skillful eye will immediately see where he is going and will caution his student. By such means all his schemes are overcome. However if someone turns from his guides, the foe will straightaway confound him and lead him off. There are many things, which do not appear evil, and these he poses. The naive novice goes after them and falls into a trap, where he is exposed to many perils or is brought to ruin.

The next ploy of our foe is leave the novice without any advise, and without help. One who has determined to get rid of counsel in his life, when left alone soon comes to the notion that external assistance is not necessary for a virtuous manner of life. However our foe speeds up his coming to this conception by hiding himself and keeping from assaulting the novice, who, feeling at liberty, starts to suppose that his good state is the fruit of his own labors, and so he takes his rest, all the while saying his prayers about help coming from above, speaking them through his teeth, a useless formula or repetition. Help is not looked for and it does not come. And so the novice is abandoned to his own means. And such a one is easy prey for our foe.

The outcome of this self-delusion is, usually, that people take overly burdensome tasks which are premature and outside of their abilities. The great energy from this self-independence gives them first of all the strength to continue such labors for awhile. Then after a period of time their strength is exhausted and they can hardly find enough strength to make the most simple efforts, and then they give up altogether. There are others, that are so caught up in their self-will and reach such a high point of self-independence that they cease from thinking anything is possible. In such a fervent state they take terrible measures, casting themselves into dry wells, jumping from cliffs where their cave lies, ceasing to eat, and so forth. All these things are organized by our foe, undiscerned by the one being tempted.

Another consequence of being self-deluded is attributing one's success to oneself, and granting oneself the authority to give special indulgences. There is form of delusion which, when a new matter is introduced into life, as for example when someone repents, it makes days pass like months, and weeks as years. So if someone has made some efforts in a new manner of life, our foe easily puts into his head the thought, "I have labored so hard, fasted so long, performed so many vigils and so forth, that it is time to rest." "Take a rest," the foe suggests, "give some repose to your body, a bit of distraction is needed." Once the naive novice gives in to this, indulgence comes upon indulgence, until the entire order of his virtuous life is troubled, and he falls back into the life he had given up and starts to live again carelessly, and never sets to work again.

These temptations to keep away from the counsel of others, to attribute success to oneself, to undergo extreme works or to grant oneself indulgences, are a trick of the devil and not just at the start of a virtuous life, he also uses such ideas throughout its course. Thus you can see how

necessary it is for you to perform all your deeds with good counsel, and never to attribute any success, however slight, to your own achievements or zeal, and to keep from all extremes and indulgences and to live a life which, even though full of energy, ever follows the order once formed by the examples of the saints before you, and by the good counsel of wise men, who are alive now.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 33: THE MEANS USED BY OUR FOE TO REDIRECT PEOPLE FROM VIRTUOUS WORKS AND RUINS THEM.

The schemes of our foe, pointed out above, make a mess of the entire virtuous life of someone. If one fights against them and follows the correct path, our foe comes up with other schemes and stumbling blocks. In such a case, he does not labor against the entire life of someone, but works occasionally against each work a good Christian sets out to accomplish in accord with the will of God. From the time we open our eyes each morning until we fall asleep until the time we close them again at night we are encircled by a steady stream of activities, which come one after the next and leave no time free, save that always keep our focus on ourselves and are not idle and careless. Also not just in the exercise of lifting up our heart to God with prayer; not just the requirements of conversing with others with truth and with love; not just the effort to attain the correct balance between body and soul in works and with self-mortification; but also with the everyday business of life which every layperson should be directed to attaining salvation, and exercised with close attention, and discretion. God assists those who display their enthusiasm to do everything correctly, by sending His grace to them, and giving them prayers of saints and angels for protection. However our foe is never asleep. In all that we do he works to confuse the smooth way of our labors and to mislead us from good to wrong deeds. He either moves quickly to stop us doing them, or when started, he works to hinder our advancement. If he has failed in doing this, he works to make their outcome worthless. Or he may,

having suffered a setback, plot to deny them of any value in God's eyes, by stirring up vanity or pride.

St. John Climacus discusses this saying, "In all our labors to please God, the devils dig three pits for us. First, they attempt to hinder our good aim. Second if they have been defeated the first time, they attempt to make our labor not from God. When these robbers fail in this ploy as well, then they move silently into the soul and flatter us with suggestions that we should please God in all our works. This initial temptation is opposed by a strong enthusiasm and thoughts of death. The second by means of obedience and humbling oneself. The third by constantly reproving oneself. "It was too grievous for me, until I entered the sanctuary of God" ([Ps 73:16](#)). When a divine fire comes to our sanctuary, bad habits no longer have sway with us because "our God is a consuming fire" ([Heb 12:29](#)). He consumes all motions of lust and bad habits, all hardness and dark either in or out, seen or thought.

No pen is able to fully relate what all this means. Keep attention fixed on yourself and retain but one goal in your mind, to be well-pleasing to God with everything, great and small. Then life will teach you to perceive plainly and to see through the schemes of our foe. Still, I will give you two or three examples of the disorder, which our foes bears into our soul to ruin our good work, if this work needs to endure for a time.

For instance, if a sick person is predisposed to suffer his sickness with a good disposition and does so, the foe, understanding that he will become practiced in the virtue of patience, looks to interrupt this good character. With this in mind, he starts to bring to his mind the many good works he might have done if his state had been different, and looks to persuade him

that if he was in better health, he could have done much more for glory of God, bringing much benefit to himself and to others. He could have gone to church, talked with others, been better read, been able to teach his brothers, and so forth. Should he notice that such ideas are received readily, and our foe presents them to the mind of the man more and more frequently, embellishing and increasing them. He turns them into feelings, desires and impulses which lead to actions showing just how successful these or other such labors could have been, and by arousing remorse such a one is bound hand and foot through his sickness. And bit by bit, after much repetition of such inner thoughts and motions in the soul, remorse is changed gradually into dissatisfaction. So the previous virtuous patience is troubled and rather than being a medicine sent from God and an opportunity to exercise the virtue of long-suffering, the sickness offers itself as a matter working against the labor of salvation. So the desire to be liberated becomes unruly, even though it still has the intention of being at liberty to do good works and to be well-pleasing to God. Have led someone thus far, the foe strips his heart and mind of the good aim, for which he wants to get better, leaving him only with the desire to be in good health, pushing him to look with annoyance at his sickness, not as hindrance in doing good, but as something bad in itself. From impatience, not held in check by good thoughts he starts to complain. And so the sick person loses the peace he enjoyed through patience. However our foe is delighted that he has been able to trouble him. In just the same manner, the foe troubles a poor man who suffers his misfortune with patience, depicting all the good works he could have done if he were rich.

In the same manner, our foe frequently disturbs those who try to employ obedience, either in monastic setting or residing with a spiritual elder, persuading them that while they persist in leading this mode of life,

they will be slow in achieving their sought after perfection, and stirring in them a desire to become a hermit in the wilderness. These suggestions are many times obeyed, but having received their desire to reside among men, they give themselves up to a careless life and so they lose what they had obtained with great effort in their previous obedient life. The opposite also occurs, when our foe is successful in driving away men from their seclusion, by persuading them that they are utterly alone providing no benefit to themselves or others. However in a monastery beneficial works would flow throughout the day and night in an endless stream. Yet when someone hears this suggestion and goes into a monastery, he is not able to do the helpful things he wanted to do, and soon loses what he had achieved in the wilderness and in the end has nothing.

There are many similar cases, when our foe is successful in leading men away from one type of work, tempting them with yet another, with the excuse that it is more profitable, and so confuses them all.

Someone who has wise counselors to discourse with and who obeys their guidance with humility, easily is saved from all temptations. However if for some reason someone does not have this blessing, let him be attentive and learn to discern between good and evil by Christian principles, on which the lives of all of us should be established. If our circumstances, which appear to hinder our liberty to do good works, are not from our will, but instead come from God, accept them humbly and do not hear any suggestions, which would make you leave this humble state. When God sends to you such conditions, He hopes for nothing more from you than that you act as the opportunity requires, within the boundaries it sets. If you are ill or poor, suffer it willingly. God asks nothing more than you suffer willing. Suffering with a good heart, you will be ever engaged in good

works. If you suffer with a good heart, then, when God looks at you He will discover that you are conducting yourself well. This is better than those who enjoy a sound body and yet their good conduct is spotty. Thus if you want to change your state you seek to change from better to worse.

However if you discover yourself in a situation, which appears to constrain the range of good works you are able to do, and this situation is from your own will, then, because you have likely chosen it for some reason, stick to this reason, and do not allow your mind to wander away to other possibilities, and rather set your full attention on what you have to do in your state and keep it firmly there, thus peacefully carrying out the works related to it, fully persuaded that if you offer them all to God rather than to your own self-indulgence, the time spent on them will not be lost and God will accept them as a sweet offering. Keep your peace.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 34: THE WAY IN WHICH OUR FOE TURNS THE VIRTUES AGAINST THOSE WHO EMPLOY THEM.

Let us assume that you follow the way of virtue firmly, not turning to the right or left. Do not suppose that our foe will depart from you. No! In the quote from St. John Climacus you heard before that when our foe sees that his attempts to guide you into a wicked life fail, with stealth he follows you and flattering you, he gives you the idea that your life is completely pleasing to God. This is his final temptation. We respond to his flattering words with a high self-regard and complacency, which produces the child of pride. Pride strips our work of all value, even if it is good, and pride makes us repulsive to God. So take heed and cast off all such flattering words of the foe, and do not let them reach your heart, but throw them away the first time they reach your soul's ears.

To keep from falling into this wickedness which threatens you, ever keep your mind present in your heart and always be ready to defend against these darts of our foe. Like a general on the field of battle, choose an advantageous spot and stand there. Fortify that spot and never abandon it, but rather make it into a shelter for yourself from which you can conduct your war. This spot along with its walls and arms, is a complete understanding of your worthlessness, and that you are poor, blind, naked and abounding merely in weakness, faults and acts that are faulty, idiotic, vain and wicked. Once you have established this spot, never allow your mind to wander away from your stronghold and especially keep from returning to your seemingly fruitful fields, which are your good works. If you maintain this discipline, the darts of the foe's flattery will never touch

you, and even should one of them happen to reach you, you will straightaway see it and repel it.

In the same way that soldiers fortified in their stronghold do not stay idle, but either spend time in training, or in repairing and fortifying, so you need to as well, defended in the understanding of your worthlessness, do likewise. To be more exact, act in the following way: No matter how hard you grip onto your mind, it will always wander, and so it is no surprise if as it wanders it should rest upon deeds of yours that seem righteous. Once it rests on them, the foe will straightaway grab it and vex it with self-regard, so that, on coming back home, it will voluntarily put itself on the side of the foe and will attempt to pull you along with it. Once you perceive this happening, recall your mind and tell it, "Hear me, O mind, you keep on telling me that this is a good thing and that it is not bad. Even if that is true, what does that have to do with me? You were going to praise me. So then, sing my praise, I will listen. But understand that justice requires that you only laud me for those things which I did, not those things which were from God and His grace. Praise and thanksgiving are due to their source. Let us study what belongs to us and what is of God. Let us offer to God what is His and keep our own. Then based on what remains, if we have anything, let us judge our value, and laud ourselves for that.

And so, let us start and look at the time prior to our existence. What were we? We were nothing and we could do nothing to merit the Source of life to give us existence. So our being is a free spontaneous gift from God. It is a divine favor and this is the beginning, and by this we accept all the favors which come after, which are given to us in His boundless mercy. So may we offer this up to God. Then we started to live. How did this happen? We do not know. Because for countless years we were not cognizant of our

being. And yet we existed. Then we started to become aware of it, but we could not do anything to support our life. There were other hands that guarded us. These were from us, but they were moved by the Giver of all life. We were raised, taught and put up on our own two feet. None of this was our own doing, so let us put this aside. Then we started to live. But what is there of our own doing? For example our life source and means of survival, these are not of ourselves but are a gift from God.

Full knowledge of God is a gift from Him. Our sense of self is God's gift. A thirst for a heavenly life is God's gift. These three make up our spiritual life, pushing us toward heaven. O mind, you are not my own, but were granted to me by God. The same is true of my abilities; my will, with its energy; my emotions; the power to enjoy life and all of my surroundings; and my body with its requirements and well-being. All such things were granted to me by God. I do not belong to myself but to God. When God granted me my existence he invested me with a variety of energies, freedom and consciousness. He decreed that I govern all things within me, in agreement with the function of all parts of my being. All such things provide no ground for lauding myself, but merely for understanding the weighty requirement which is imposed on us, and the fear involved in answering the question, What have I done with myself? Now let us turn to the manner of life. Within is the life of the body, soul and spirit. Each one requires its own manner of life. All of them are close at hand, and all are a free gift from God. Air, fire, water, and the earth, along with its elements of stones, metals, plants and animals provide for all our food, clothing and housing needs. None of these are made by us but rather are given to us. Each part of our environment which makes up our daily life, the society and governing authority, the handicrafts and the laws governing each section, we find is already made and we only need to assimilate them, rather than

inventing anything. Each person coming to this world inherits these things from his forebears. And from where did our forebears get these things? God sends down people graced with special abilities and they make new inventions which improve life. However if you were to inquire from one of these scientists how he discovered something or other, he would reply, "I do not know, it just popped into my mind and then matured." So it has ever been, and so it will ever be until the conclusion of the world. The means of living are not ours, they are given to us. To an even greater degree is our spiritual, moral and religious life follows this rule. Within our soul God has put the knowledge of Himself, while in our conscience He has placed the knowledge of His will, giving everyone a hope of everlasting bliss. This seed is the life of the spirit. It is sown in each of us and accepted by us the moment God breathes His divine spark of life into us. When each person is born he bears this seed with him and it is in him. Later on the maturation of this seed is determined by the type of people who are around the individual. What a great blessing to be born among others who are truly spiritual. Yet look around. We have knowledge of the only one true God, Who is worshiped as the Trinity. We profess the Son of God, Who was incarnate on account of us and gave us everything we need for our salvation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, whose grace gives life to us and who is present to build up a spiritual life in us. We are planted in God's Church and receive everything that is required for keeping our spiritual life, and we are inspired by the hope of the coming resurrection from the dead and life in the coming world. All these things we have in a pure and unmixed form, and none of these things are our own, rather they are a gift from God. Thus you see how rich are the means which encompass you, helping you to lead a life which should be natural for you in all its fullness. Not a single one of them is a fruit of your own working. All these things are granted to you. You are

summoned to the feast of life, which has already been made ready. If you and I can boast about anything it is merely how we have used it. To have all this in its entirety is our wedding garment. Can we glory in it? Rather, should we not be in awe, for fear the generous banquet Host tell us, "Look at the banquet, and yet where is your wedding garment?"

Let us now examine in more detail this garment. The soul's garment is mostly made up of the moral and religious inclinations and feelings that are rooted within us, rather than only actions. However because they are hidden, they usually are not an opportunity for vanity or pride. But our deeds, are manifest and so quickly become seen, and even though involuntary, they incite egotistic feelings and their outward effect is to move the observance of one's acts to acts of praise, which creates a feeling of pride, which becomes yet more deeply rooted in us. Thus let us study our deeds to see if there is anything there we can really brag about.

Recall that we can only boast about something which is the outcome of our will and is done by us independent of anything else. But note how the things we do come about. How do they start? Particular circumstances happen and result in one action or another. Or perhaps a thought comes to our mind to do something, and then we do it. But the consent is not from us. Obviously the thought to do something is not our own, rather somebody suggests it. So, in such examples, the origin of the idea should not be something worth praise. But how many of our works are like this? If we study them, we will find that nearly all of them begin this way. So there is nothing we can boast about. If we should praise ourselves for something, it should be something we did not need to do, however powerful the outward and inward urge to act is, the decision to do something is dependent on our desire. Yet here again the decision to do something good is not always the

right one. The decision may be right, if it comes about from the understanding that God desires we do something, and from being obedient to His will. But once something alien happens, to please oneself or others, the admirable feature of the decision is tarnished. At times we decide to do something lest others speak ill of us if we do not. At other times, we look for gain or happiness from something, either in the present or in the future, and at times just because we cannot do anything else, that is, we do not want to do it but we do it anyway. Such acts cannot be deemed good acts, even though they seem laudable, they are not truly so before God and our conscience. Let us study how many of our works are like this. Again we must admit nearly all of them. So yet again there is nothing we can brag about.

So on closer examination, our good deeds should not give us license to open our mouths to boast before others or to praise ourselves inwardly. However if we recall all our sinful acts, which are empty, vain, worthless, hurtful, unruly, repulsive to God, of which there are certainly many, then what should we feel? Perhaps one will say, "Weigh each side and judge which is heaviest." Yet here such a procedure is useless. Deeds come from inside. If you do wrong, it appears that our inner disposition is faulty, and it is this inner disposition which makes us worthy before God. If this is not worthy, then the whole person is unworthy.

I will add yet one more thing, all our acts done outwardly, at home, in our community, at work, make up our conduct. If we look around us, we are unable to say that all our conduct is right. We also cannot claim that our inner disposition is good either. The eyes of all put pressure on our intentions. These witnesses compel us not to work the evil which is in our heart. We keep from doing evil, and appear to be good. But if this pressure

was not there our conduct would be very different, and it often is if we are confident that no one else can see us. Sometimes people, when they see that their environment changes they can live more at liberty. Everything that was formerly hidden, for fear of others seeing, bursts forth and someone who was previously a dogooder becomes a drunk, a hedonist, or a thief. All these evil urges were not born then, they were there before, but lacked expression, but now they have free rein and so become visible. Yet even if all these things were just inside, then really the whole person was a drunk, a hedonist, and a thief even though on the surface he appeared not to be so. Diligently look at yourself, maybe you are also part of this rank. If this is true, you do not have any right to be haughty or accept commendation.

In summary, if following all the evidence put down above, you start to frequently examine your life, then, when our foe starts to blow a trumpet of praise in your ears, telling you how wonderful you are, this sound will not find a good reception inside you, filling you with pride, but rather, will be repelled by humble thoughts and feelings concerning yourself.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 35: HELPFUL SIGNS TO OVERCOME THE PASSIONS AND OBTAIN VIRTUES.

Even though I have told you many things about the way you can conquer the passions and obtain virtue, there is still something else which should be said.

The first thing I will tell you brother about obtaining virtues is not to follow the example of people who over a week order their spiritual exercises so that they serve one virtue, then another, and so forth, without examining if they need one or the other in the moment. Do not act like this, but take up weapons in advance against the passion that afflicts you the worst, the one which often overcomes you and is prepared to attack you yet again. War against it with all your strength and work to set yourself up in the virtue that opposes that passion, employing all possible exercises for this end. Because once you are successful in this, then you will bring to life every other virtue and you will possess them as an armor about you, which will defend you from every dart thrown at you by the passions. Naturally our heart has a good disposition. However the passions come and choke them. These passions are not equally strong in everyone, but in one person a passion will be dominate, while in another, a different passion governs the rest. Once you cast away the primary passion, every other one will become weaker and recede. When this happens, the good inclinations, when liberated from their yoke, obtain natural strength and they will stand at the door of your heart, ever prepared to minister to you.

Secondly, do not give any specific time for obtaining virtues, not days, weeks, months or years. You should not tell yourself, "I will work and then

take a break. Then when I have rested I will labor again. There is no rest allowed. Ready yourself for endless toil, with no thought for rest, imitating St. Paul, who said, "I so run, and follow after, that if I might obtain, I push forward to the goal" (1 Cor 9:26). To rest on the road of virtue implies not acquiring new power, but to lose the power one has obtained and to become diminished. This is the same thing as turning back, or bring to ruin what was built with so much labor. When one ceases from working, one supposes that the virtue has already matured to perfection. So then one takes no heed to its shortcomings and neglects opportunities to do good. Do not be like that, but rather be vigilant. Do not close your eyes, or turn back when you encounter such opportunities, but instead, look for them and work for them. Look on such chances with love, especially those that seem difficult. The laboring we do to overcome hindrances in doing good reinforces the habit of virtue and puts down deeper roots into the heart. But avoid, as much as you can, those opportunities, which although they offer the opportunity to show the virtue of chastity, they also threaten to kindle lust. It is best not to allow this fire to draw near to you, for fear you be torched and burnt.

Third, be smart and reasonable in vigils, manual work and so forth. They are necessary. Do not suppose that you can advance in the spiritual life if you lack them. You should be wise in understanding your rank and sticking with it. This rank is the average between pleasuring seeking, self-indulgence and merciless punishment, tiring it without a compelling need. Discover this average through experience in actual work, rather than by theory, and make slow progress your rule, moving up from below. Seek and you will find. With regard to the soul's virtues like love of God, giving up the world, humbling yourself, forsaking passions and vice, having patience and being meek, being peaceable with all, even with those who hate and afflict you, and so forth. Here no certain measure is needed, and their slow

progress to perfection is determined within you. Your work is to constantly and diligently push yourself to every act required by them, and to do it without any delay. In this is all your wisdom and your strength.

Fourth, acting in this way meditate with all the force of your mind, wish with all your desire and seek with all your heart one thing alone, to overcome the passion which you are fighting with at that moment and which is warring against you now, and to establish in its full power the virtue which is the opposite of it, which is currently stifled. This one matter should be for you the entire world, all of both heaven and earth, and all your wealth and your final goal, in the firm conviction that only through this can you be deemed worthy to minister to God. If you eat or fast, labor or rest, being asleep or awake, if you are at home or absent, are concerned with prayer or the business of daily life let all of it be toward this one goal, to be victorious over the passion which has risen up inside of you and to establish the virtue it has cast out. I have mentioned previously your principle passion and here I speak about the passion that is present now within, which may or may not be the principle one. In the unseen warfare, it is at times necessary deal with a group of soldiers under the authority of the chief general, and at other times with one commanded by a normal soldier. This occurs in spiritual warfare as well. The principle passion is not always present. At times it sends its servants, and often one has to deal with them more frequently than the principle passion. But in such instances it is no less important for you to be victorious.

Fifth, be an relentless foe to all pleasures and comforts of the world, which come from self-indulgence and are feeding it. By this you will be subject less often to attacks not just carnally, but in general to all passions, because all of them are rooted in luxury. When luxury is subjugated and

removed, they lose their force, stability and steadfastness, because they have no footing. Do not give in to the idea, "I will enjoy one luxury, taste only one pleasure." Even though it is not a sin in itself, the truth is that it was allowed only to pamper oneself. And during this time of luxury all passions will rise up again and start to squirm like worms when water is poured over them. And it is no surprise if one of them should rise up with such violence that victory over it becomes uncertain and difficult. So never overlook the followings words from Holy Writ, "He that loves life will lose it. And he that hates his life (not giving in to luxury) will keep it forever" (John 12:25). "So, my brothers, we are debtors, not to our flesh, to live according to the flesh. Because if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if you by the Spirit mortify the works of the body, you will live" (Rom 8:12).

Finally, I give you this counsel: it is very helpful, or indeed, completely necessary that you first of all start with a general confession, with attention to the practices and examinations in order that by this your soul should be filled with the steadfast conviction that you stand with God's grace, the sole provider of every spiritual gift, virtue and victory.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 36: ABOUT THE ORDER OF ACHIEVING THE VIRTUES.

A genuine soldier of Christ, filled with a complete desire to be perfect, should put no bounds on his efforts to be successful in everything. But he must be well-tempered and temper any excessive spiritual zeal with good judgment. Especially at the start, such excesses come about suddenly with much vigor and bear us away with great force. However later on they steadily grow more weak, until they disappear, leaving us forsaken in the midst of our travels. Because not merely should external, carnal virtues be obtained step by step, by slowly ascending, as with the rungs of a ladder, but in obtaining virtues of the soul one also should keep a certain order to things, because only then does our small amount become great and continue with us ever more. For example, during the process of obtaining the virtue of long-suffering, it is impossible suddenly to accept injustice, pains and all other trouble, to look for them and take joy in them, even though, it is possible to suffer them patiently when they happen. Because accepting them and taking joy in them are at the highest level of patience, and until you reach them you should journey at the lower state which is, humble self-scorn, in which you deem yourself worthy of every derision, conquering in yourself all feelings of taking revenge, hating even the least idea of revenge, and so forth.

I counsel you, besides, do not set to work at practicing all the virtues, or even a small number of them. Rather first establish yourself in one and then move to the next. In this manner each virtuous habit will become rooted in your soul more easily and more steadfastly. Because when you are

working at one virtue above the others, your mind will be almost completely occupied with this alone, so with your mind joined to the thought of it, it will obtain more readily the skill of finding opportunities and ways of exercising it, while your desire will hold fast to it more easily. All such things will help you greatly in the labor of obtaining virtuous habits, which you will wait in vain for, should you try to obtain them at the same time.

But, because the exercise of any given virtue is ever the same, it follows from the similar nature of this exercise that it steadily becomes less laborious and leads more readily to a second virtue. Because one virtue often brings about another which is like it, and is helped by the fact that when it finds a dwelling in the heart, it moves the heart to accept the similar one by readying it as if it had a seat prepared.

My estimation is true, and we understand from experience that should someone practice a virtue diligently he not merely learns to exercise another virtue, while he gains experience in the first virtue, he stimulates every other virtue as well and augments them all in himself, because they cannot be separated from each other, just as all the rays come from the same heavenly radiance.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 37: THE CHARACTER REQUIRED TO OBTAIN VIRTUES IN GENERAL AND TO EXERCISE THEM.

To obtain virtues one's soul should be full of courage and his will should not be weak and lazy, but steadfast and strong. He should have good understanding of the many hindrances and fights in store and must be prepared to suffer all of them. At the root of such a character should be a firm love of every virtue and a good life and a hot zeal for them. This makes up the driving force which pushes forward one on the hard path of virtue, and as such it should be always kept warm for fear it be weakened, and that all motion grind to a halt. Thus do not disregard keeping your zeal hot for virtue. Set your heart on reflecting on how a virtuous life is well-pleasing to God and how wonderful virtue itself is and how essential and helpful it is for us. Because this is the start and the end of our perfection, in addition to our advancement in it.

Thus, every morning, try with all your might to study and foresee all the circumstances you will likely come across over the day, which might provide an opportunity to do some good deed, and join this to a steadfast resolve to use them. In the evening study yourself to see if your good intentions from the morning were exercised and how they were accomplished. Next morning make the same commitments with a hot zeal to do them diligently.

Attempt to guide all this to the practice of a certain virtue, the normal custom of which you have resolved to obtain presently. Also examples from the saints, prayers, contemplation on the life and death of Christ our Lord and everything else deemed necessary to being successful in virtues and in

the spiritual life should be aimed mainly to the virtue which you are working toward. At the same time, also try to use the chance circumstances of the day, however different, not just to stop them from disturbing your exercise in the certain virtue you are looking to achieve just then, but also to reinforce your habit of it. The limit of this habit should be to attain a state where your virtuous deeds, either external or internal, are done with the same ease as your former habits which were opposed to it, that is, with the readiness with which we do the natural necessities of life, making it part of our nature. And I would call to your mind what was said before, that the more hindrances, either outer or inner, that we encounter in our attempt to obtain a virtue, the quicker and more profoundly it will be planted in our soul, if we work to conquer them with determination and without self-regard.

Certain sayings from Holy Writ, if said out loud or just said interiorly, have an excellent effect to impress in our mind the mental image of the virtue we are looking to attain and to evoke a desire for it in our heart. And how wonderful is aid received from both these from one who labors to achieve virtue. Thus find in Holy Writ suitable texts about the virtue you are looking to obtain and memorize them, so they are ever at hand. Repeat them in your mind as many times as you can, particularly when the opposite passion stirs in you.

For example, when you labor to attain the virtue of long-suffering, you might decide to memorize and repeat the following passages from Holy Writ, "He that is slow to anger has great understanding" ([Prov 14:29](#)). "Your expectation concerning the poor will not fail forever" ([Ps 19:18](#)). "Woe to you that have lost heart" ([Ecc 2:14](#)). "He that is slow to wrath is better than the strong. And the one that governs his spirit is better than the

one that overthrows a city" ([Prov 16:32](#)). "In your long-suffering, possess your souls" ([Luke 21:19](#)). "We should run with patience the race which is set out before us" ([Heb 12:1](#)). "Look, we deem them blessed which endure" ([James 5:2](#)). "Blessed is the one that suffers temptation" ([James 1:12](#)). "Allow patience to have its perfect work" ([James 1:4](#)). "You have need of patience" ([Heb 10:36](#)).

In addition to these you can add your own brief prayers such as the following, "My God! When will my heart finally have patience." "When will I, finally suffer all forms of persecution with an undisturbed heart, so that my God might have joy in me." "O how welcome are such persecutions, which transform me into being more like Jesus, My Lord, Who has suffered on account of me." "O my Jesus, allow me at least to some degree to live undisturbed in the midst of a thousand woes, to the glory of Your name! I will truly be blessed if in the fire of persecutions I will be on fire with the desire to suffer still greater afflictions."

To advance in the virtues, these prayers should be employed as the faithful spirit and piety dictates, in agreement with the virtue you are exercising yourself in. Such brief prayers should be called correctly, in the Prophet's words, "paths to the Lord's altars in the heart" ([Ps 84:5](#)). Such prayers which have their origin in a heart full of faith and hope, ascend to heaven and come to God's ears. These are the "pantings," ([Ps 88:10](#)) which the ever-compassionate Lord does not fail to see. These are the cries which are ever heard and understood by the merciful God. However one should not neglect to add to them two beliefs, which are like wings. The first is, that God delights in seeing us working to achieve virtues, and that, while full of a zealous desire to obtain perfection by them, we look for nothing but to be well-pleasing to God.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 38: ONE SHOULD ALWAYS EXERCISE VIRTUE USING ZEAL

In the labor of obtaining virtues, one must act so as to be constantly, "reaching out to those things which are ahead," (Phil 3:13) if our desire is to achieve our goal quickly and with success. Because once we cease, if only briefly, we immediately fall behind. Because when carelessness and intemperance disrupt our good deeds, the passions, which were subjugated by hard work to obtain virtue, suddenly raise their heads and come alive, by our inclination to sensual pleasure and intemperance, and they bring about unruly inner motions, in particular where our external surroundings lend to it. These inner motions will ever unsettle and weaken our favorable customs, and what is worse, strip us of the gift of grace. Lacking this nothing which is righteous and spiritual can be attained.

You should understand that advancement on the road of the spiritual life is very different than a regular journey on earth. If a traveler were to cease a normal journey, he would lose nothing from the way previously traveled. However if a traveler on the road of virtue were to cease making spiritual progress, he would lose much of the virtue obtained before, as I have said before. In the course of a normal journey, the more the traveler advances, the more weary he becomes. However on the spiritual path the further one goes, "reaching ahead to those things which are before," (Phil 3:13) the more strength and power he gains for his advancement.

The reason is that effort made on the road of virtue steadily weakens the resistance of our carnal nature, which makes the road of virtue difficult and toilsome through its opposition to the spirit. But the higher part where

virtue lives, which is, the spirit, acquires more strength. So the more we are successful in virtue and righteousness, the more the hard toils we encounter become less and less. Also a particular hidden sweetness, from God, flows into our hearts and increases each hour. By this, as we advance with increasing force we ascend readily to each virtue and finally come to the peak of spiritual perfection, where the soul starts to do all good things, no longer compelled forward with effort, not having any taste for it, but with a ready deposition and joy. Because having overcome the passions and given up all that is part of the world, it now abides in God, and there, in the midst of spiritual deeds, it always tastes the sweetness of peace.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 39: ONE SHOULD NOT MISS ANY CHANCE TO DO GOOD DEEDS.

If you desire to ceaselessly push forward on the road of virtue, you should take heed to things, which might be opportunities to obtain virtue, and never allow them to escape your grasp. So those are poorly counseled, who do everything they can to keep from any hindrances that lie on the way of virtue, despite the fact that these might have been a great help towards successful advancement. An example, if you would like to become long-suffering, you should not keep away from people, things and opportunities which try your patience. Come to them with a good intention and the determination to permit them to have their ill-effect on you, but when the time comes, ready yourself to endure them with a resolved calm spirit. If you do not do this, you will never have the chance to learn patience.

You should keep the same disposition with respect any labor which you do not like, either for the value of it itself or because it is given to you by someone you dislike, or because it gets in the way of the work you enjoy. Put another way, you should not keep away from it, but rather you should do it without digging in your heels, and you should get it done, as if it were the most enjoyable work, never allowing your heart to be disturbed by it, in particular by the idea that, were it not for this work, you would be fully at peace. For if not you will never learn to suffer afflictions you encounter, nor will you find the genuine peace you are looking for by fleeing from such matters, on account of self-regard, because peace does not abide in hearts that are self-seeking.

I counsel you to do the same with regard to your thoughts, which sometimes overtake you and bother your mind with thoughts of human wrongs and other unseemly things. Do not smother them or push them off, but allow them to depart from you on their own, not with your opposition, but by the patience with which you suffer them. Allow them to trouble and painfully bother you, because at the same time they will instruct you generally to endure patiently all sufferings. The one who tells you instead to run from such slight afflictions, is counseling you to stop seeking the virtue which you are laboring for.

It is true, for the beginner who is unskilled in war, that it is better to run from chance troubles and to dismiss them, instead of subjecting oneself to their effects and enduring them. But even in this case, one should not always flee. Instead it is better to battle against the invaders with all possible care, but sometimes to be unconcerned with them, in accord with the degree of one's advancement in virtue and moral fortitude which his advancement provides. But with regard only to carnal lust it is not a good idea to do this. Here one should run away from all encounters, which stoke this passion, because of its intractability and the schemes of the foe, with which he knows how to move carnal passions to incite someone to satisfy their lusts.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 40: THAT ONE SHOULD LOVE OPPORTUNITIES TO EXERCISE VIRTUES, IN PARTICULAR WHEN THEY ARE DIFFICULT.

Never, dearly beloved, should you escape from what might be an opportunity to obtain virtue. Rather, if an opportunity presents itself, you should welcome it with joy, deeming as best and most profitable such things which are undesirable for your heart and produce no sympathy within yourself. I expect that, with aid from God, you will be able to do this, if you etch deeply in your mind the following ideas:

First, you should understand that the chances for virtue you encounter are the best way you can possibly have for obtaining it. These are given to you by God Who is answering your prayer. Having created a desire to obtain virtue, of course you have prayed to God that He give it to you. And by praying for it, you certainly prayed for the means of obtaining this gift. Yet God does not grant the virtue of patience, for example, without toil, nor the virtue of humility without opportunities for humbling degradation and disgrace. Thus, following your prayer concerning these virtues, He delivers to you the needed occasions. Then what are you doing, fleeing from them? You disdain God's assistance which you prayed for, and you ridicule God's gift.

So resolve to accept with gladness the opportunities you encounter to gain virtue, and even more so the hardships they offer. Because in such instances our commendable deeds elicit great resolve and moral fortitude, and by this we make each occasion a great step forward on virtue's path, which should be our regular aim alone.

It would be best for me to explain here that, in counseling you to use the most fitting opportunities to acquire virtue, I am not trying to advise you to leave aside the less significant opportunities, and to neglect them. No rather you should never neglect any of them, important or not, so as to be constantly working for virtue in general. For example, if you suffer patiently obvious abuse and even blows, then you should also endure menacing looks and a hurtful expressions, or biting words. Because such insignificant cases happen more often, our correct reactions have a greater opportunity of demonstrating themselves, and thus keep our moral fortitude in a regular state of tension. And so we have enough force to conduct ourselves as we ought on important occasions. If we neglect these chances, we diminish our moral fortitude and make it less capable of coping with important circumstances.

Next, create a steadfast resolve and faith in yourself, that everything happens to us from the will of God, and for our benefit, in order that we might gain some spiritual fruit. Even though we cannot assume certain things, like our sins and those of others, are the direct consequence of a willed act of God, yet even they do not occur apart from God, as a way of chastening and humbling us. With regard to sufferings and persecutions, for which we are to blame or because of the ill-will of others, God Himself sends them, looking that we might suffer and be tortured by them, so as to achieve the blessings of virtue, which we will gain if we suffer as we ought the trial which He has given us. The same is true for the other judgments of His, which are hidden from us, but which are surely fitting and blessed.

So, convicted that it is God's will that you suffer the difficulty, which assaults you, either from the wicked nature of others, or invited by your own ill-deeds, you will stop to think and state as some others do, "No, this

is not from God, it is cruel and unjust, and God does not desire such things and He withdraws with disdain from it and from those who do such things. By this they look to justify their inability to be long-suffering and the winds of anger and vengeful feelings from some small injustice. But in truth the only thing they accomplish is to fight against God's law and to try to throw off the life-saving cross, which is imposed on them by God for their own well being, rather than taking it with a good disposition, which would no doubt be well-pleasing to him. And what do they get out of this? They are unable to throw off their cross. They insult God, and yet they achieve no peace. Rather, to sorrow they add conflict and pointless exasperation and make their state intolerable. But had they taken what happened with a good disposition, they would have found peace and would have drawn God's goodness to themselves, and they would have eaten well from the fruit of the spirit. Thus you should make it a rule that if you should encounter injustice, injuries or attacks, give no heed to them, however wrong your foes might be, but rather attend steadfastly to one thing only, that God allows this to occur for your own well-being and that you will deny yourself this good if you allow impatience, annoyance or conflict in connection with it. And do not attempt to reason as to why God has permitted this. Do you trust that God is ever right and merciful? Then trust that this time as well He demonstrates His justice and compassion, even though you do not perceive how this is. And recall how the Lord blesses those who conduct themselves this way, "Blessed are those that have not seen, but yet have believed" ([John 20:29](#)).

Can you trust that the words of your Lord, "Take up your cross," can be applied to you personally? If you believe this, then you should take it up. The Lord has, at present, put it upon your shoulders. Do not state, "this is too heavy a burden." God understands better your ability. To some God

delivers trials and grief, brought about by occasions and in no way dependent upon others. These are more easy to carry. To other people He sends those causes through others, and they are more difficult, in particular when we cannot deal with the sorrow caused unintentionally. It is still harder when we have done something good for those people. The last case is the most difficult to bear. If God delivers this to you, understand that it is exactly what is most helpful for you, and to this right understanding enjoin the stimulating thought: God observes that you are strong enough to bear it and assumes that you will suffer it with a good heart, not complaining. Do not be a disappointment to God's expectations.

I must enjoin that God wants us to suffer persecutions which come from the evil nature of others, in particular from those to whom we have done some good things, rather than those which are the unfortunate result of poor circumstances. Why? Since our innate pride is more quickly subjugated and stamped out by the former rather than the latter. And also since, if being obedient to the will of God is the primary thing in our spiritual work, there is no more profitable way of bringing it about and demonstrating it than in such cases, if we do them with a good heart, thanking God warmly for sending them, because they are such a great blessings, thus being a witness to our full obedience to God's will, and to a heartfelt zeal. This character comes from difficult trials visiting us. Looking upon the birth of such an inclination and wanting to strengthen it and make it more deeply rooted, God sends us a cup full of the most strong temptations, which, when borne with a willing heart and joy, ever bring forth this blessed spiritual fruit. So, knowing this, desiring and seeking after it, we must receive this cup from God's hands, closing our curious eyes, and with full faith, plainly perceiving in it God's great love for us and the our

assured spiritual advancement. So we must drink it down with joy. The more we do this willingly the more bitter will be the taste.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 41: IN DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES, HOW TO ADVANCE IN A SINGLE VIRTUE.

In an earlier chapter, we stated that it is more useful and profitable to spend time practicing one virtue rather than many at the same time, and that we should profit from this virtue in every circumstance we encounter, regardless how different it might be. Now hearken to me, and I will demonstrate how this can be accomplished with ease.

For instance, if you should by chance on that same day, or even in that hour, be blamed unfairly for something blameless in itself or if you are denied a request, or if something occurs and you are unjustly suspected of an evil-deed, or if a bodily ailment distresses you, or one of your bosses orders you to do something which you do not enjoy, or if you encounter something disagreeable, of which our low human life is so replete, then on account of the different nature of these or like occurrences different virtuous deeds are required of you. However, sticking with the rule you have set, it is more profitable for you to direct all of them to the end of practicing a certain virtue you are currently laboring toward.

So if when you encounter the things spoken of, you are first of all directing yourself with patience, then be careful to suffer them with patience and with joy. If your foremost concern is with progressing in humility, work to understand that you are worthy of all evil and have merited the foes you encounter. If your labor is to obtain the virtue of being obedient, push yourself to bend your neck in submission under the powerful hand of God and, in order to please Him, submit voluntarily to His creatures, regardless if they possess a reasoning mind or not. For through

these He sends you such persecutions. If you are laboring to be successful in poverty, push yourself to be content and happy that you lack earthly luxuries. If you strive to make your love higher and more profound, work to stimulate in yourself a feeling of love for your neighbor, because then he is an agent of good that you can use for your betterment. And stimulate yourself to the love of God because, now as always, He is the primary reason for love and He sends troubles, or permits them to happen, so that you can advance spiritually. From the things I said you can see how you can exercise a virtue using conflict which is not quick, but lasts for a long time, like sickness or other such things.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 42: HOW MUCH TIME YOU SHOULD DEVOTE TO EACH VIRTUE AND WHAT ARE THE MARKS OF YOUR PROGRESS.

It is not possible to figure out how long one should practice a virtue before becoming rooted in it. Each person must figure this out for himself, thinking about his condition, circumstances and accomplishments in the spiritual life, and particularly according to the decision of his spiritual father who guides him. Still if someone's zeal to be successful is hot, and he does not cease in any hardship, much progress will soon be apparent.

The mark of progress is when, having started the path of virtue, someone follows it carefully, with a steadfast conviction never to depart from it, however difficult it might be and whatever sacrifices it might involve, despite times of growing cold and a darkening of the soul, of spiritual poverty and a want of the blessed delights, all of which God in His providence permitted to happen for your benefit.

The second and no less confident mark of advancement is the intensity of the conflict in which the flesh fights against good convictions. The more this war loses its force, the more clear becomes the advancement in virtue. Thus, when you do not feel any fight or attack on your lower carnal nature, particularly when opportunities for stimulating them are in front of your eyes, you can have faith that your virtue has obtained enough strength. However if you start to labor on the road of virtue with greater preparedness and spiritual joy than you did previously, you may deem this a mark of progress in virtue, even more than a subduing of the body.

And with St. Isaac's counsel, once one has figured out the aim, toward which one must focus all the deeds of one's life, one can question those who are skilled in signs, which demonstrate if one is going the right way or has wandered from it and has followed some other side road, and ever keep these signs in mind. He thinks that these signs are the following: "If you see your mind is not being compelled, but works freely and advances in good thoughts, this is mark of advancement, in the same manner when, prayerfully standing, your mind does not drift here and there, and your mouth stops suddenly in the midst of a verse, and the bonds of silence are placed upon your soul, without you desiring it. Also when you observe that with every good thought and memory of yours rising in your soul, and with each spiritual meditation you become tearful, and the tears run freely down your face. Or when at times you notice that your mind, of its own doing, sinks into the recesses of your heart and stays in this state for as long as an hour, while peace reigns in your mind. All these are marks of healthy progress on the path of the spiritual life you have decided to undertake."

But it is wrong to be confident that we are fully established in the sought after virtue, or have overcome a passion forever, even if its motions have not been felt for awhile. Because this might hide the wicked schemes of the man-hating devil, and the wiles of the sin which abide within us. Because these things, which are of a very different nature, many times are seen by us in a favorable light and we receive them as if they were good on account of our hidden pride. Also if we think about the perfection to which God invites us, then, even if we have traveled for a considerable time along the path of virtue, we will be even more ready to suppose that we have barely started the life we should be leading, and certainly we have not become established in it. On account of this the holy fathers refer to the lives of the most perfect, as imperfect, which is, not free from blame. "Even

the perfection of those that are perfect is not perfect," says St. John Climacus. St. Paul as well sees perfection in always pressing forward, without looking back or supposing that we have already achieved what we look for. So he calls himself imperfect, not having as of yet achieved what he looks for. "Not as if I had already achieved," he says, "or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold ..." Brothers, I deem myself not to have taken hold. However this one thing I do, forgetting all those things which are behind me, and reaching forward to those things which are before me, I push on to the prize of the heavenly calling of God in Jesus Christ" ([Phil 3:12](#)). And desiring to show that only this makes up our perfection, he enjoins, "Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things" ([Phil 3:15](#)). Stated another way, our perfection is not to suppose that we have achieved perfection, for the virtuous state is not standing still but ever pressing forward in virtue. Also, there, at times, lurk in the recesses of our heart such subtle and concealed passions, that we do not even perceive them. So how could we be so arrogant to suppose that we are fully cleansed from such passions? If even the keen, prophetic eyes of David could not see them in himself, how could we assign such a capacity of discernment to ourselves? So, if even he never stopped entreating God, saying, "Cleanse me from hidden faults" ([Ps 19:12](#)), how much more should we beseech Him to purify us from our secret passions? Because we can only sense the results of passions, and we can learn their force and source only with enlightenment from the Holy Spirit. So we are conscious of passions in ourselves only when they are active, but once they quiet down, we suppose that we have achieved a passion-free state.

How can we be sure that our passions are not dead, but only dormant? By the fact that, when we happen to encounter such things which feed the passions lying hidden within us, particular if this occurs suddenly, and they

straightaway are enlivened and make their presence felt, at times with rather violent motions, so that, thrown into disorder, we question where they were hiding and from where they suddenly gained such strength. St. Isaac the Syrian clarifies this by the following charming illustration: in winter, plants and flowers disappear from the face of the earth, but their roots are safe, hidden in the depths. However once they feel the rain and the warmth of spring, they straightaway start to sprout and so cover the entire face of the earth. And thus with the passions as well. As it is quite natural for a ravaged land to bring forth thorns and thistles, so also it is the case with human nature, corrupted from the fall and conceived now in sin and open to its excitements, to bring forth passions, which breed sins. So our nature cannot be trusted.

Thus, because you are only a beginner in the spiritual war, exercise yourself carefully with virtue, as if you had not as of yet placed a foundation for it, and recall that it is always better to be concerned with pressing ahead in virtue rather than to discover and define the marks of perfection. Only God our Lord knows our hearts. He will enlighten some, letting them see their advancement in virtue. However others He does not give this understanding. Because He sees that in the first instance this understanding will lead to humility, while in the second men will be incapable of keeping from vainglory. Therefore, as a loving Father, He takes away from the latter the danger of descending into sin which is hateful to Him, and grants the former a chance to increase the virtue of humility, which is particularly pleasing to Him. But even someone who is not granted knowledge of his advancement, can learn about it in time, if he does not stop practicing virtue and if it is well-pleasing to God to show this to him for his own benefit.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 43: THAT ONE SHOULD NOT SEEK TOO STRONGLY TO BE FREE FROM PERSECUTIONS, BUT SHOULD RATHER GIVE HIMSELF UP TO GOD'S WILL

If you are suffering persecutions with a grateful heart, pay attention, for fear your foe be successful in tempting you, or your self-regard conceives a wish to be free of it. Because then you will have to endure a double loss. The first being, that although the appearance of such a wish and your giving in to it does not straightaway strip you of the virtue of patience, it does very much undermine it. So, when the desire to be at liberty from the persecution sent to you is not accomplished, your patience slowly weakens and finally bears you into an impatient disposition. The second is that from then on your patience becomes strained, but God loves and rewards only what is done freely. So, from then on, even though you will still have to suffer, because the mere will to be free of persecutions is not enough to be free of them, your perseverance will be recompensed. God will recompense you for suffering your persecution for the time you have suffered it with a good heart, not looking to be delivered from it. But from the moment this desire was born, God will give you no recompense for your reluctant suffering. However if you hinder and drive away the longing to be at liberty from your suffering, once it shows itself, and if you give up yourself completely to the salutary will of God, declaring your eagerness to endure even a hundred times more trouble, if God wants to send them to you, then, even though your current suffering is for an hour or less, God will receive it as if it were a much longer time and will recompense you for it.

Do the same thing in all other instances, do not give into your desires, but rather maintain a close watch over them, guiding them to only one goal, to stay within the will of God. Because then your desires will all be favorable and just, and you will stay calm throughout every trial, finding solace in the will of God. If you trust with all your heart that nothing can befall you save by the will of God, and if your only desire is to be actively doing the will of God, it is clear that no matter what befalls you, you will always have just what you want.

When I state that without the will of God nothing can befall you, I mean persecutions and hardships, which God sends to chastise and instruct us on account of our sins. However I do not refer to your own or others sins, because God does not desire sin. These trials are good for us and are well called, "a cross of salvation," which He frequently requires from His most beloved children and those who work to satisfy Him, and the suffering of which is particularly well-pleasing to Him.

And when I stated, do not seek to be free of hardships, it should be correctly understood as submission to the will of God. We cannot resist wanting to be at liberty from grief, because God has put in our nature a desire for well-being, and thus He included in the prayer He gave to us the petition, "Do not lead us into temptation," which we recite many times each day. If following this prayer, which God is certain to hear, He sends hardships to us, it is obviously His special will, to which we, His creation, aware of our obligation to obey Him in all things, should give in to with a favorable heart and suffer our trial as a matter essential to salvation. Also repeating the petition, "Do not lead us into temptation," you should mean, "Not as I wish, but as you will," ([Matt 26:39](#)) copying our Savior. Put another way, say this prayer, not on account of the fact you hate temptations

and seek to keep away from them, but only on account of the fact that the Lord ordered us to pray in such a manner, keeping our soul prepared to receive with a virtuous heart all that God wishes to send to us, and denying a pandering to a self-loving desire for continuous well-being, which is not possible while we are in the world, because it is the property only of the coming everlasting life.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 44: A WARNING ABOUT BAD ADVISE FROM THE DEVIL ABOUT GOOD DEEDS

When the wily devil notes that we are progressing well on the virtuous path, with spirited eagerness, and with a good order, despite his efforts to guide us away with his clear inducements to evil, then he changes into an angel of light and, now with apparently good thoughts, now by words from Holy Writ, now with examples from the lives of the Saints, he compels us to perform immoderate and premature work for spiritual perfection, so as to thrust us down into the abyss at the time when we suppose that we stand at the peak. So he instructs some evilly to mortify their bodies with fasting, whipping, sleeping on the ground and other bodily toils, so as to make them fall into pride and to suppose that they are accomplishing great deeds, or to make them fall sick from severe exhaustion and to become inept at performing even the smallest good deeds, or to make them so tired by the weight of their toils, that they become insensitive to all spiritual works, and even to their salvation. And so as their zeal for good works cools, they cast themselves into carnal comforts and luxuries with a greater zeal than before. O how many souls have fallen into this trap of their foe, for, being filled with senseless zeal for their self-mortification they exceed their ability and they bring themselves to ruin by their own contrived ascetic feasts and so become the object of ridicule of the wicked devils. Of course this would never have befallen them if they had followed sound judgment and good counsel, and had brought to their minds the fact that these works of self-mortification, even though laudable and beneficial when one is strong enough and the soul is sufficiently humble, should always be governed with a good sense. And

they should only be used as a way to advance spiritually, rather than becoming a goal outright, and should at times be lessened, but at other times increased, sometimes altered and other times stopped completely for a season.

Those who lack the strength to be as harsh with themselves as the saints were, nor can rise to such labors, can copy their life in others ways. For example they can establish a good inclination in their hearts, obtain the practice of warm prayer, fight a ceaseless battle against lustful thoughts and desires, guard the chastity of their hearts, have a love for quiet and solitude, be humble with everyone, do good things for those who have caused them grief, however slight. All of these virtuous deeds of the heart are more well-pleasing to God than extreme acts of self-mortification, when the latter are not suitable for our moral state.

Also, I counsel you to use a sound judgment in performing acts of asceticism, when they are called for. Do not begin with high standards, but start from the bottom, because it is better to climb up slowly, rather than to suddenly perform some elevated thing and then have to climb down, out of shame. Also I counsel you to keep away from the other excesses, into which even more people fall into since they are thought to be spiritual. Governed by self-pity and luxury, they show too great a care for their physical well-being, and exhibit such concern over themselves that they shudder at the smallest effort, being afraid to hinder their well-being. Nothing further is present in their mind than their favorite subject of discoursing about preserving their good health. However by coming up with tasty dishes, which pamper their delicate tastes, they weaken their health and keep themselves from the blessings which they so highly regard, since they cannot do what is required to achieve it. Even though they excuse their

deeds with the desire to labor more effectively for the Lord, in reality it is nothing but an attempt to bring peace to two irreconcilable foes, the flesh and spirit. And the result is that neither benefits, but instead there is clear harm done to both, because from this they sap the body of its health, and the spirit of its well-being. So a moderate and well-ordered life, governed by reason, which accounts for the needs of the soul and the health of the body, along with its state of health, are less hazardous and more helpful for the soul and body. In regard to this, the standard is not the same for everyone, even though one law covers all, that is, to keep the body in subjection to the spirit. Recall also what was said before, that acquiring the virtues of either soul or body, should be a gradual process, moving upward a little at a time.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

**CHAPTER 45: THE HARSH JUDGMENT WE MAKE
AGAINST OTHERS IS FROM OUR HIGH-REGARD OF
OURSELVES AND THE PROVOCATION OF THE DEVIL -
HOW TO CONQUER THIS INCLINATION.**

Self-regard and self-love breed in us another evil which does us much harm. That is, a harsh judgment of our neighbors, when we consider them to be nothing, disdain them, and if the opportunity presents itself, to humiliate them. This bad habit or vice, being born from pride, feeds and flourishes on pride, and as a consequence feeds pride and causes it to grow. Because each time we judge, our pride advances a step, by the attendant effect of self-regard and self-indulgence. Because we think so highly of ourselves, of course, we look down on others from our lofty position, judging and hating them, because we appear to ourselves to be far from the shortcomings we suppose others have. And so, noting our evil inclination, our ever-evil foe stands close watching and, opening our eyes, he instructs us to keep a steady watch over what others both say and do. From such observations he has us make conclusions as what their thoughts and feelings are. And on these presumptions, he makes us form an opinion about them, which is generally not favorable, exaggerating an apparent shortcoming into a deeply-etched feature. These judges do not perceive that the very source of their ill-conceived opinion, is impressed on their mind by the wiles of the enemy, and then he fans them into a firm belief that they are truly such, even though it is not the case at all.

So then, my brother, because the foe is ever watching you, looking for a chance to sow wickedness in you, keep guard over yourself twice as

carefully, for fear you fall into the nets spread out for you. Once he reveals some shortcoming in your neighbor, hasten to cast off this suggestion, for fear it become rooted in you and grow up. Throw it away, so that no hint remains in you, and replace it with thoughts of the good qualities that you know your neighbor has, or of those people should have. If you still feel the desire to judge another, add to this, the certain truth, that you possess no authority to do this and that once you take on this authority you subject yourself to judgment and damnation, not in the presence of powerless people, but in the presence of God, the all-Mighty Judge of everyone. This reversing of thoughts is the best way, not merely for repelling chance critical thoughts, but also for wholly liberating yourself from this sin. The second way, just as strong, is never to lose the understanding of your own evil, your unchaste and wicked passions and deeds, and likewise to ever hold on to an understanding of your worthlessness. You will surely find in yourself many passions and passionate deeds. If you have not forsaken them and shrugged your shoulders, declaring, "No matter what," you cannot help being concerned with discovering a remedy for these evils, which are destroying you. However if you conduct yourself sincerely in this, you will have no free time to trouble yourself with the business of others and to condemn them. Because then, if you allow yourself to do this, the words will continue to resound in your ears, "Doctor, heal yourself" ([Luke 4:23](#)). "Cast out first the beam from your own eye" ([Matt 7:5](#)).

Also, when you harshly condemn some wrong act of your neighbor, you should know that a small root of the identical evil is also within your own heart, which, through its lustful nature, instructs you to make presumptions about others and to pass judgment on them. "An evil man brings forth evil things out of the evil stored in him" ([Matt 12:35](#)). But an eye, that is sound, free of passion, also looks without passion on the deeds

of others, and not with evil intent. "Your eyes are too pure to look upon evil" (Hab 1:13) So when the idea comes to you to denounce someone else for a shortcoming, be angry with yourself as an offender, doing the same, and just as guilty. And tell your heart, "Unworthy though I am, how can I lift my head to see the shortcomings of another and to condemn them, when I am sunk in the same sin and my wrongs are even worse?" By so doing you will turn upon yourself the weapon, which evil urges you to employ against someone else, and rather than hurting your brother it will cover-up your own sores.

If your brother's vice is not secret but clear to all, try to figure out the root, not what the evil passion for condemning others proposes, but in what brotherly love for him suggests, and tell yourself, because this brother has so many secret virtues, in order to guard them from being hurt from vainglory, God has permitted him to descend into the present vice, or to abide a short period of time in this unfitting disguise, so that he might appear shameful in his own eyes and, that being loathed for it by others, he should collect the fruits of humiliation and so become even more well-pleasing to God. By these means the present case will help him more than harm him. Even should someone's sin be not only obvious, but truly terrible and come from a hard, unrepentant heart, do not judge him, but lift your eyes up to the wonderful and unintelligible judgments of God. Then you will perceive that many who previously were full of sin, afterward repented and attained a high level of holiness, while others, who were on a lofty height of perfection, fell into a great chasm. Take heed, for fear you suffer this downfall by judging others. So stand fast, ever keeping watch, in fear and trembling, fearing more on your own account than for others. And rest assured that each good word you speak on behalf of your neighbor, and every delight on account of him is the work and fruit of the Holy Spirit

abiding in you, while each evil word and hateful condemnation is from your wicked nature and the propositions of the devil. So when you are being tempted by some ill-deed of your brother, do not allow your eyes to rest in sleep until you have cast off this temptation from your heart and have become fully reconciled with your brother.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 46: CONCERNING PRAYER.

Even though a want of confidence in yourself, a trust in God and persistent efforts are needful in our spiritual battles, as we have shown already, still the single most important matter is prayer, the fourth weapon, used in this war, as we stated at the start of first chapter. Because it is by prayer that one obtains the first three weapons, and by prayer they gain their full force. Prayer attracts blessings, and the hand receives them. Such blessings are richly poured out on us from the never-ending source of God's boundless love and goodness to us. In the spiritual battle, with prayer you place your battle-axe into the hand of God, so that He will fight with your foes and conquer them. However to ensure that prayer shows its full force in you, it is important that it always reside inside you, as a normal function of your spirit, and you should guard and encourage it by cultivating the following inclinations:

(a) You should be ever zealous in serving God alone in everything you do, and you should serve Him in a way that is well-pleasing to Him. To make and maintain this inclination, you need to have the conviction, and ever hold it in your mind, that each rationale creature should worship the Lord with praise and service, if only on account of His wonderful attributes, His goodness, majesty, wisdom and His innumerable other perfections. Adding to this a regular remembrance of the fact that in an ineffable way, by His incarnation He has ministered to you, benefited you, redeemed you, liberated you from a terrible curse, cured your sores caused by poisonous sin and healed them, not by means of wine or oil, or bandages, but by means of His priceless blood, which poured out of His most holy side, and from His holy flesh afflicted by whippings, thorns, and nails. If you recall

all these things, how can you fall short in not consecrating every moment of your life to His service with word, deed and thought? Also, you should not forget the advantage we gain from such a service, because it makes us lords of ourselves, victors over of the devil and God's sons.

(b) You should have a hot and living faith which, in His abundant compassion and loving kindness, God desires for He is prepared to give you all that is required for you to minister to Him worthily, and to grant you every blessing which you require. Such faith and trust will become for you a receptacle, which God, in His boundless mercy, will fill up with the richness of His blessings. And the larger your vessel, the better and deeper the gifts your prayer will receive. How can one suppose that the all-powerful and unalterable God, Who orders us to pray unto Him and has promised to bestow on us the blessings we seek, should deny us, and not grant us His Spirit, if with fervent and patient prayer we entreat them from Him? Did He not tell us, "How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" ([Luke 11:13](#)). And did He not promise, saying, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" ([Matt 21:22](#)).

(c) You need to draw near to prayer with the disposition that desires only the will of God, and not your own, both in asking and in receiving what you have requested. Put another way, you should be given to prayer since God desires it, and you should seek to be heard, which again He wills. In short, let your mind and heart be fully given over to uniting your desires with God's will, to be obedient in all things, and in no way to seek to bend the will of God to your own. Why should this be the case? Since your will is always mixed-up with love of self, it is often misguided and does not understand what it should desire. However God's will is always good,

righteous, wise, beneficial and inerrant. Because the will of God is an unchangeable law for all that is and that will be, to be obedient to its rule must be the will of all rationale beings and the chief of their desires, and they should subject themselves to it in everything.

So you need to always seek, ask and long for only what is well-pleasing to God. If you are ever doubtful as to whether something is well-pleasing to Him, seek after it and entreat Him about it with the mindset that you wish to do such and such or to have such and such only if God desires it as well. Concerning those things which are you confident are well-pleasing to God, like virtues, you should look for them and ask for them merely to please God more and to serve Him more profitably, and for no other aim, even if it is a spiritual one.

(d) Also, you should approach prayer bearing deeds in agreement with your entreaty, and after prayer you should labor still more diligently to become worthy of receiving the grace and virtue you seek. So the work of prayer should be joined to the work of self-compulsion and applying all your strength to what you seek, because in the spiritual life, asking for something and seeking it through your own actions come one after the other, alternatively. However if one prays to God to obtain some virtue, and concurrently gives himself over to carelessness, having no concrete means of obtaining this virtue, and not laboring for it, truly such a one tests God, instead of praying. So the holy James said, "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" ([James 5:16](#)). What makes it effective, says St. Maximus, is when, apart from entreating a saint to pray on behalf of him about something, the person also prays about it on their own and with all carefulness does all that is possible to gain the petition.

(e) You should mix into your prayer the four works about which St. Basil the Great writes, saying, "first, glorify God, then thank Him for His mercy, then confess to Him your sins and the transgressions of His commandments, and in the end beseech Him to give you what you need, especially with regard to your salvation. In addition to this you might, for instance, pray in this manner, "O Lord my God! I chant and praise Your unutterable glory and Your infinite majesty. I thank You that, through Your goodness alone, You have allowed me to exist and to partake in the life-saving blessings of Your incarnation, that You have many times saved me, even without me knowing it, from dangers which threatened me, and saved me from invisible enemies. I admit that many times I have suppressed my conscience and transgressed your sacred commandments without fear, and so demonstrated myself to be ungrateful of many of Your varied bounties. O most compassionate Lord, do not let my lack of thanks be too much for Your compassion, but disregard my sins and transgressions. Look mercifully on my sorrowful tears, and from Your many tender compassions, help me, even now. Give me what I require for my salvation, and direct my life so that I might be well-pleasing to You, and so that unworthy as I currently am, I might also glorify Your holy name."

When you finish this prayer you can list your current needs, those of the spirit, soul and body. Then if you are practicing some particular virtue, speak of it as well and pray for God's assistance in making progress toward perfection in it. If you are bothered by the motions of a particular passion, pray for assistance in fighting and overcoming it. If you should encounter some wrong or harm, loss or persecution, never forget to thank God for it, because, being sent in agreement with the will of God, which is ever good, it is coming to you for your own good.

(f) So that your prayer is effective in the presence of God and should draw His good-will, ornament it and fashion it with wings by a steadfast faith not just in God's boundless bounty and the unchangeable truth of His oath to hear us when we petition Him, even before our prayer is finished ([Isa 58:9](#)), but most particularly in the authority of the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who became incarnate for us, suffered death on the cross, was resurrected, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father, where He never ceases to intercede on our behalf, because, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" ([Rom 8:32](#))

That you might be heard, offer up also the intercessions of the Theotokos (Mother of God), who prays for us day and night, and of all the saints, archangels and angels, the apostles and prophets, shepherds and teachers, martyrs, holy fathers and mothers and those who have been well-pleasing to God in every way, and of your guardian angel and patron saint, who is your namesake, along with the saint of the Church where you were baptized and where you pray. By starting your prayer with these intercessions, you begin it with humility, which above all else is most pleasing to God, for He looks on no one with more love than the one who is meek and humble. "A broken and contrite heart, You, O God, will not despise" ([Ps 51:17](#)).

(g) You should always offer up your prayers with untiring persistence, following the words of the Apostle, "Be steadfast in prayer, being watchful and thankful" ([Col 4:2](#)). Because a humble long-suffering and untiring persistence in prayer will overcome the unconquerable God and win His mercy. As the parable of the Lord tells us, the persistence of the widow moved an evil and unrighteous judge to grant her entreaty. The Lord gave

us this parable with a special intention, to teach us not to grow weary, but to pray patiently, as we hear in the Gospel, "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up" ([Luke 18:1](#)). If, as I say, an unrighteous judge was persuaded to grant the widow's entreaty since she begged him, how can God not bend His ear to our prayers, if we persevere in entreating Him because He is the very substance of love? So, when you entreat God to give you something, and He tarries in responding, persevere in praying, maintaining a steadfast trust in His assistance. Because a persistent prayer is never neglected by Him uncompensated and He is ever prepared to pour out abundant blessings in return, greatly surpassing the longings of those who pray, if they have no inner hindrances and are not in a condition where it is more profitable for them to have their entreaties unanswered. In such a case, rather than what they seek, God bestows some other good thing on them, which is more helpful, whether they are conscious of it or not. In this sense the confidence that a prayer never stays unheard is very much justified. All that occurs is that, when we make our petition and we are not mindful that what we seek is not beneficial for us, God does not grant us what we seek, and what he does grant continues to be unseen, for to see involves danger for the one who receives it. Thus you should always be long-suffering in prayer, and persuaded that prayer never abides without bearing fruit. If you do not obtain what you seek, trust that you are receiving or that you will receive a different good in its stead. If you do see it, do not attempt to discover why this is the case, but instead turn to your indignity and let your soul be filled with humble ideas and motions. If you incite and make steadfast such ideas in yourself, as a result of prayer, then, even if you obtain nothing at all, seen or unseen, welcome these feelings as the fruit of your prayer, and as being healthy for you and well-pleasing to God. Listen to what St. John

Chrysostom writes, "Prayer is a wonderful blessing if done with the right disposition and if we instruct ourselves to thank God, when we obtain what we seek and when we do not obtain it. Because when He grants something, and when He does not, He does it for your benefit. So when you receive what you seek, it is abundantly clear that you have obtained it. However when you do not obtain it, you also receive, for what you do not receive is without a doubt harmful for you. And to not receive what is detrimental means to be given what is beneficial. So if you obtain what you seek or if you do not, be thankful to God trusting that God would always have given us what we sought were it not often more profitable for us not to receive it. Thus ever pray to God with perseverance and give thanks to Him for everything, trusting and confessing your belief that He is lovingly beneficent to you and wisely so, when He gives and when He does not grant what you seek. Steadfast in this faith, be humbly obedient to divine Providence, encountering everything with thanks and gladness that befalls you, whether it be agreeable or disagreeable.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 47: THE DEFINITION OF MENTAL OR INTERIOR PRAYER, AND THE DIFFERENT FORMS IT TAKES.

Mental or interior prayer is when someone in prayer gathers his mind into his heart, and there delivers his prayer to God in silent words, glorifying and thanking Him, confessing his sins with repentance and beseeching Him for his spiritual and carnal needs. One should not only pray with words, but in the mind as well. And not just in the mind but in the heart also, so that the mind perceives what is said with words, and so that the heart feels what the mind is thinking. When all these things are yoked together they constitute real prayer, and if there be anything lacking in prayer, it is either a defective prayer or it is not a prayer.

Certainly you have heard these phrases: vocal prayer, mental prayer, heart-felt prayer, and perhaps you have heard definitions of each one. Why is prayer divided into separate parts? This is because of our negligence, in that sometimes the tongue says holy prayerful words, yet the mind drifts away somewhere else. Or sometimes the mind comprehends the prayer, but the heart lacks any feeling for it. In the first instance prayer is just words, and not really a prayer at all. In the second case the prayer is associated with mental prayer, and this is an incomplete prayer. A full, genuine prayer is when the words, and thoughts are mixed with prayerful feelings. There is also, by the grace of God, prayer with only the heart, and this is spiritual prayer. In this prayer the Holy Spirit moves within the heart. The one who prays this way is aware of it, but is not the mover of it. Instead the prayer acts on its own. This prayer is the property of the perfect. The type of prayer which is accessible to everyone and demanded from all is the prayer

in which the mind and the feelings are mixed with the prayer. There is another type of prayer, which is referred to as, "standing in the presence of God." This is when the one who prays is entirely focused in his heart and there meditates with God being present within. Associated with this are certain feelings: a fear of God and a sense of awe at His majesty, or faith and hope, or love and subjection to the will of God, or remorse and a readiness for sacrifice. Such a condition happens when someone is deeply submerged in prayer with word, mind and heart. If someone prays in the correct way and for a considerable period of time, these states come to him more frequently, and in the end this state can become persistent. Then it is known as "walking with God" and this is constant prayer. This was David's state, who said concerning himself, "I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken" (Ps 16:8). So, my brother, if your desire is for your prayer to bear much fruit, never be satisfied merely with oral prayer, but pray in addition with your mind and heart, employing your mind for understanding, and your heart for the emotional part. Foremost, pray with your heart. Prayer erupting out of a heart is like lightening, which takes a fraction of a second to streak across the heavens and appear before the great throne of the ever-merciful God. God hears such a prayer and inclines most readily to it. It was this type of prayer that Moses used when he stood before the Red Sea, and suddenly he heard the voice of God say, "Why are you crying out to me?" (Exo 14:15), and God granted him the ability to liberate his people from their peril.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 48: HOW TO PRAY IN THIS MANNER.

I will assume that, having read this far, you will now say, "How do I learn how to prayer this way?" The response is: teach yourself to pray exactly in the manner I have taught, which is, not just with words, but also with your mind and heart. Doing this you will learn. How did you learn how to read? You started to practice, and eventually you figured it out. What about writing? You started to write, and so you learned. In the same manner you will learn to pray as I have shown you, if you start to pray in exactly this manner.

Of course you know the words of various prayers, for you were taught them from your youth. You can also find them in prayer books and in the service books of the church. These are the prayers that saintly men and women have poured forth from their hearts, when they were moved by the Holy Spirit and expressed to God their heart-felt desires. Within them is the spirit of prayer, so that if you read them as you ought, you also will be filled with the spirit, in the same manner that the spirit of the writer is made known to the one who reads carefully. Everyone has felt this, and I am certain you have as well.

These prayers are gathered into our prayer books, in order that you have no need gather them yourself. So acquire a prayer book and, at the times which are ordained for prayer, which is usually the morning and evening, read over the prayers, focusing on each word, thinking the thoughts which are expressed there and working to produce in your own heart the same motions which are in the prayer. That is all you need to know and this is what most people do.

You will tell me, Yes, everyone does this. However if this is the case, why does everyone not make good prayers? Because even though they pray, that is to say, they open their prayer book, and stand in front of their icons and read, they do not gather their mind and heart into it. The mind roams about, and the heart follows after its own interests, rather than praying. However when you pray you should restrict your mind to the words in the prayer-book and force your heart to take them in. Then you will sample the fruit of your recital.

So because you possess the words for prayer and you understand what it means to know them and feel them, everything else depends on you. Successful prayer is in your hands. Work diligently and you will be successful. However I will add some words to guide you to this success.

(a) Try to meditate on and feel your prayers, not just at the time of prayer, but during your free time. If you practice this, then, when it comes time for prayer, you will have no trouble in replicating the entire content of the prayer you have read. Once you start a prayer, the thoughts and feelings in them will immediately show themselves to your mind, and you will speak the words as if they were your own, born inside your heart and pouring forth from it, rather than having been borne into it.

(b) Having meditated on, and felt your prayers, work on memorizing them. When you have accomplished this, you will bear the prayers inside you. When they are in your prayer book they are outside of you. However when you have memorized them, you bring them within you. And so, whatever happens, you will always bear your prayer-book inside. Plus, if you memorize your prayers, you etch the thoughts of your prayers and feelings more profoundly in yourself, than if you just read over them, and

felt their import. This practice of studying prayers, when you not only memorize the words, but also keep within yourself the thoughts and emotions they bear, will build up inside of you a framework of prayer. This is the most effective method of forming the practice of praying well.

(c) However when the time comes to recite your prayers, do not start to say them once you have torn yourself from your normal work, but first ready yourself, "stand for a period of time quietly, until your emotions calm down," as the prayer-book teaches you, and bring to mind what you are about to draw near and to do, who you are, and who is the One before Whom you are about to pray, what precisely you are going to say and how you will say it. In the morning this preparation is required for then the soul is burdened under the weight of sleep and from the concerns of the approaching day which will wash over you as soon as you arise from sleep. In the evening it is also required on account of the many impressions from the day, and particularly those things that are notable, either agreeable or disagreeable. Try to sweep away all these matters from your mind, so that the labor of prayer completely absorbs your attention and you can dedicate the time solely to prayer. If some things have pricked you, and you cannot deal with them effectively, make them into a matter for your prayer, or for giving thanks, or for seeking help and freedom, or give yourself over to the will of God.

(d) Just prior to starting your prayers, bring to your mind and have the feeling that you are standing in the very presence of God with a reverent fear, and enliven your heart to the conviction that God beholds you and listens to you, that He does not reject those who pray to Him, but regards with loving-kindness both them and you in this hour of prayer. May your

prayer have wings of hope that He is ready to give what you need and will grant your petition, if it is the best thing for your soul.

(e) Once you have brought yourself into this state, recite your prayers, with the deepest focus, taking every precaution to make them come from your heart, as if they were your own prayers, even though they were memorized. Do allow your mind to drift. Once you perceive this, bring your mind back within, and continue your prayers from the point where your focus drifted to another matter. Recall that your mind does not drift when the heart is full of prayerful feelings. Thus your first concern should be for your feelings. Do not allow yourself to hasten your prayers, but persevere until the end with reverence and patience, as is fitting for a holy work.

(f) If, while reciting your prayers, seeing this method and disposition, some part of prayer particularly moves your heart, grabs your attention as a matter very much in agreement with your own situation, and moves you to pray with your own words, do not allow such an opportunity to pass by, but pause and pray with your own words, until the desire or feeling to pray has been fulfilled.

(g) If you work to recite your prayers in this manner, you will acquire a spirit of prayer, which you should attempt to retain as much as possible. On account of this, do not immediately cast yourself into your daily business and suppose that, having done your rule of prayer, you have completed your duty to God and can now let your mind and feelings wander freely. No, for the entire day you should attempt to keep yourself as you were during your prayer time. To achieve this, always keep in mind that you are walking in the presence of God and that only by His hand are you kept above the abyss of empty nothingness. With this in mind, do everything, great and small, as

God wills it, seeking His blessing and moving everything to the glory of His name. Behaving this way you will keep the right state for prayer until you reach the time for your evening prayer. Having done the evening rule in the same manner, you will sleep well at night. And so you will have lived one day and night in a sound, prayerful mindset. In such a way pass each day, and after a few months, or maybe even a few weeks, you will perceive your prayer gaining strength and as ever-burning lamp, prayer will always burn in your heart.

(h) I will include another minor rule, which is, the importance for this labor of prayer to continue without being interrupted from its inception until some success is achieved. However if today you pray well and maintain a good state of prayer, but tomorrow you become lazy and pass the day scatter-brained, then, acting in such a way you will never be successful in prayer. It will be the same thing as erecting a building and then then tearing down. Finally, prayer might dry up completely and the soul will not be able to do it. Once having started, one must patiently stay in prayer, never becoming weak or pampering oneself with particular indulgences.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 49: ABOUT PRAYING WITH YOUR OWN WORDS.

Everything which was said so far was said about prayer or psalmody in already established words which, even though said with focus and feeling, still are not one's own. Should someone always constrain themselves to these prayers? Prayer will answer this question for the one who prays. Start praying correctly with memorized prayers, and from the beginning prayer will start to join itself to the soul. And the more steadfastly it becomes joined, the more it pushes one to offer up personal prayers that are formed in the heart, in accord with one's needs. Thus, with normal prayers, one will additionally offer up such prayers to God. So one's own prayer has its understood place and part in the labor of prayer.

In the previous chapter, I have mentioned already that when you pray and the words of some prayers particularly move your soul and fill it, you should not forsake them without giving them attention. Instead you should stop and pray from your heart about what is filling up your soul. Make sure to do this. The same occurs when you read Holy Writ or beneficial works from the holy fathers, or when you ponder heavenly matters, about the majesty and perfection of God, His magnificent created works, omnipotence, providence, and the great work of his dispensation by His incarnation for our salvation. It is also effected by particularly notable happenstances in daily life, or said another way, something which particularly pricks the soul, grabbing its attention and compelling it to rise in prayer up on high to God. In every case, do not neglect to attend to the movements within, but react to its motion, and pause whatever you are doing.

These sudden motions mean that prayer has started to dwell in your heart, filling it. Because these motions do not happen once you have started the practice of prayer, but only after a time. These inner motions demonstrate you are making progress in the labor of prayer. And the more often they happen, the more a spirit of prayer will fill your heart. It should all conclude in prayer always using one's own words. Even though in reality it does not happen this way, but one's own prayer always comes into the prayer rule. Because they are of the same character and measure of virtue, and if they are replaced it is through standing in the presence of God, in voiceless meditation.

You should know, in addition, that at times in such instances it is the motion alone for a prayer that is born, but in another time prayer goes with the motion, shaping itself within the heart, without any labor from the person praying. In the first case, you should make a fitting prayer, but in the second you should only listen and not hinder the prayer pouring out of the heart. Also, I remind you, do not allow yourself to be tempted by a desire to come up with your prayers without an inner feeling and necessity. You can put together a clever prayer for God, but it will not be a true prayer. It will only be a collection of words and ideas, but it will lack the spirit of prayer. Do not do this. You will not keep from vanity and a high regard for yourself, and these will hinder and block real prayer.

With regard to prayer, that forms within the heart, when an impulse comes to pray about something which impacts you personally and which you particularly need, often it is your own creation from the parts of prayer, gathered in the heart from learning and bringing together existing prayers, but often it comes about from the action of heavenly grace. In such instances, it is the seed of spiritual prayer which I spoke of in chapter 47.

When you start to be given this, it will indicate to you that you are drawing to the limits of the perfection available to you. Thank God then and walk in the way of life with still more fear and trembling. The more valuable the treasure, the more envious the eyes of the foes.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 50: ABOUT BRIEF PRAYERS, OR BRIEF PRAYERFUL GROANS TO GOD.

Frequently it has been related that true prayer is inner prayer, recited not just with words but with the mind and heart as well. This type of prayer grabs one's full attention and retains it inside the heart. This is the reason why to stay inside yourself is a trait of genuine prayer and its foremost condition. The thought of God being present and hearing your prayer, and the casting off of all other thoughts cannot be separated from staying inside, in prayer. This is known as sobriety or keeping a watch over the heart. So all the concern of someone laboring to progress in prayer should be foremost directed and should be guided to this end, which is, to never leave the heart, soberly guarding it from all thoughts, except the single thought of God, and to do whatever is needed to keep one's focus on God, aware of His presence, as if before His very Face. This is the most noble work of prayer. Praying, done in the way demonstrated above, is the path to this, and to understanding how needful it is. It is the first to instruct the mind to focus on the heart and to attend only to God. Having learned the importance of this focus, it is natural for someone, who prays, to want it to be a constant state of his spirit. Because then regular prayer would abide in him, and his desire will naturally lead to the effort to fulfill it. All those who have felt such a need are seeking it. Every instruction from the holy fathers about sobriety and protecting the heart leads this way and has no other source but success to this end.

Should you also feel this need, then you pose the question: how do I acquire this constant abiding inside, before the face of God, with a sober

guarding of my heart? Praying opens the path and begins the journey, but does not attain the end by itself, nor does it bring the necessary force and perfection. Praying is complicated. It holds and offers to the mind many matters which, even though holy, might remind one of others, that are part of your day or social life and lead by these to worldly, unimportant matters, in agreement with the normal rules of association of ideas and visualizing things. And thus it occurs, the most strict praying can never be exercised without one thinking of running away and drifting outside. Because this troubles the prayer and makes it impure and mixed. There is no one who prays, who is not disappointed by it and does not desire to be saved from this illness. Consideration of this was given from the earliest days of the life of the spiritual undertaking. So then, what means, after saying the prayer, was formulated to fix the problem? The method of short prayers was invented, which would retain the mind ever within, before God's face, and so would give it no opportunity of wandering, nor of going without. St. John Cassian mentions this, saying that during his time in Egypt, this was widely practiced. When we examine the teachings of the other fathers we see that it was practiced on Mt. Sinai, Palestine, Syria and throughout the Christian world. What other meaning could the prayer have, "Lord have mercy," and all the other brief prayers, which fill up our church services and psalmody? So this is my counsel: choose a brief prayer or many such prayers, and with their oft repeating come to a state where they keep repeating on their own, and keep your attention fixed on a single point, the remembrance of God.

All are free to choose their own brief prayers. Read the Psalms, for there you can discover in each Psalm inspiring petitions to God. Elect from these those which are most intimately connected to your condition and which are most appealing to you. Memorize them and recite now one, then

another, and then a third. Combine your normal prayers with these ones, and have them on your tongue always, regardless of what you might be doing, from one hour of prayer to the next. You can also compose your own prayers, if they better articulate your needs. Fashion them according to the 24 short prayers of St. John Chrysostom, which are written in your prayer book.

But do not have too many, for fear you overtax your mind and your focus wanders from one to the next, which will be completely opposite the intention for which they were made, that is, to keep your focus. St. John Chrysostom's 24 prayers are the maximum one should use. To use less is perfectly acceptable. To have more than one is good for variety and for keeping a spiritual freshness. However in using them one must not go from one to the next too fast. Choosing one which matches your spiritual needs, petition God with it until your appetite for it becomes dull. You can substitute your full psalmody, or some portion of it, with these brief prayers. Make it your rule to repeat them many times, 10, 50 or 100 times, with fewer bows. But always bear one thing in mind, always fix your attention on God. We will refer to this practice of brief prayers to God as sighings, which are done throughout the day and night, whenever we are not asleep.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 51: CONCERNING THE JESUS PRAYER

There have always been and there still are prayerful people who would rather use one short prayer and repeat it regularly. St. Cassian relates that the prayer often repeated during his time by all those in Egypt was the initial verse from Psalm 70, "O God, hasten to save me. Come quickly, to help me, O Lord" (Psalm 70:1). It is recorded in the life of St. Joanniky that he repeated the prayer, "The Father is my hope, the Son, my shelter, the Holy Spirit, my defense." He also appended it onto each verse of the thirty psalms that he memorized, which made up his prayer rule. Another regularly used the prayer, "Being but a man I have sinned, but You, a Compassionate God, have mercy on me." Others, favored other prayers. From the oldest times the chosen prayer of a great many people was, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." We can find traces of it with St. Ephraim, St. Chrysostom, St. Isaac the Syrian, St. Hesychius, St. Barsanuphius and John, and St. John Climicus. Later on it became increasingly general, and it started to be on the lips of everyone and it became part of the ordinances of the Church, where it is offered instead of all the prayers recited at home and for the church services. Because of this it is now used by us more than any other brief prayer. My counsel to you is to develop the practice of it.

This prayer was known as the Jesus Prayer for it is said to our Lord Jesus Christ. As with any other brief prayer, it is vocal, but over time it becomes and should be known as mental, when it is said not just vocally, but also with the mind and heart, being consciousness of the words and feeling its content, particularly if, with long and focused exercise, it becomes so enmeshed in the motions of the spirit that the words fall away

and only the motions are perceived within. Each brief prayer can attain this level. The chief position is given to the Jesus prayer for it joins the soul to our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Lord Jesus is the only door to being in union with God, which is the goal of prayer. Because He said, "No one comes to the Father, except through me" ([John 14:6](#)). So one, who obtains it, also acquires the entire dispensation of the incarnation and in this is our salvation. Hearing this, it will not surprise you that those who labored for their salvation spared no effort in working to form the routine of this prayer and to be taken by its power. You also should copy their model.

Outwardly, to obtain the regular habit of this prayer one must reach the point where it starts to always roll off your tongue from its own will internally, it also consists of fixing the focus of the mind in the heart and regularly standing there before the Lord, with different measures of heartfelt warmth, repelling all other thoughts, and more than anything else, falling prostrate at the feet of our Lord and Savior with a repentant, humble heart. The first step toward obtaining this practice is to repeat this prayer as many times as you can with a fixed attention from the heart. Regular repetition, once established, gathers the mind into one, standing before the Lord. Creating this order inside results in a warm heart and a repulsion of all thoughts, even simple ones, not just the passionate ones. When the flame of holding to the Lord starts to always burn in the heart, then, with this, a clam ordering of the heart will be created inside, with repentant, humble inner prostration to the Lord. We come this far through our own labors with the aid of heavenly grace. Anything more than this which may be achieved in the labor of prayer will purely be a gift of grace. The holy fathers speak of this for fear that having attained this summit, someone may suppose he has nothing more to seek and suppose that he has achieved the peak of perfect prayer or the spiritual life in general.

So, your first chore is to recite the Jesus prayer as much as you can, until you have the habit of reciting it endlessly. Do it in this manner:

(a) Make space in your prayer rule for the Jesus prayer. Recite this prayer numerous times at the start of your prayers and at the end. If you possess enough zeal, do the same after each prayer in your rule, in imitation of St. Joanniky the Great, who, included in his prayers, the rule that following each verse of the psalms, he would recite the prayer, "The Father is my hope, the Son, my shelter, and the Holy Spirit, my protection."

(b) As to the frequency with which you should recite this prayer and when, you should decide for yourself, or ask for counsel from your spiritual Father. But do not do too much initially, but rather increase the number of recitations slowly, as the pleasure you take in this prayer grows. If you feel like doubling the number, do not say no to yourself, but do not accept it as a fixed rule, but just for that time. And no matter how many recitations your heart desires, do not say no.

(c) Do not hasten to move from one prayer to the next, but finish them with a deliberation, as you would do when petitioning a noble. But take heed not just to your words, but also that your mind descend into your heart, standing before the Lord, as if He were there, with a full sense of His majesty, grace and truth.

(d) If you have some time, between one set of prayers and the next, tell yourself to stop, as when you stand in prayer, and send this prayer to the Lord, reciting it many times. If do not have any free time, put this prayer inwardly everywhere in between your tasks, and even when talking.

(e) Reciting this prayer in the midst of your rule, or standing in the posture of prayer in between rules, after each repetition make a bow, 10 times from your waist, and then make a prostration. Repeat this until you finish. You have, certainly heard or read that the holy fathers order a great number of bows. One of them stated, "Prayer is not enough unless in prayer one tires his body with bows." Should you attempt to follow such advise, as much as you are able, you will soon come to see the fruit of your toil in achieving the practice of the Jesus prayer.

(f) In terms of further guidance about the Jesus prayer, read St. Simeon the New Theologian in the Philoklia, in addition to St. Gregory of Sinai, St. Nicephore the monk, St. Callistus and Ignatius. The instructions of the other fathers about interior prayer can also be used with the Jesus prayer. Note that in the teachings of the previously mentioned fathers you will discover guidance relating to how to sit, how to hold your head and how you should breath. As Callistus and Ignatius noted, these techniques are not required, but are just external aids, not necessarily appropriate for everyone. In your case, it is enough to maintain your attention in your heart, in the presence of the Lord and to offer Him this brief prayer with awe and humility, and with bows if you stand during your rule, or merely with a mental prostration, when recite them during your normal duties.

(g) You should also note that your focus should be within your heart, or perhaps inside your chest, as certain fathers say, just above the left nipple. It is there that the Jesus prayer should be recited. When your heart starts to hurt with tension, take the advise of Nicephore the monk, which is, to depart from that spot and place yourself with your mind's focus and with the words of the prayer where we often speak with ourselves, that is, underneath the Adam's apple in the upper portion of the chest. Later on

again move back to the spot over the left nipple. Do not scorn this comment, even if it appears simple and unspiritual.

(h) If you read through the holy fathers, you will find a number of warnings. All of these are from experience using bad practices. To avoid these mistakes, you need to have someone who can advise you, a spiritual father or a like-minded friend, whom you can discuss and verify everything that happens while you pray. In terms of yourself, always be humble and simple, never attribute any success to your own efforts. You should know that all successful deeds come from within, unseen, without show, just like how the body grows. So, if a voice inside you cries out, "Here it is." Understand that this is the voice of your foe, offering you fiction rather than something real. Here is the root of being self-deluded. Straightaway smother this voice, for fear it start to sound in you like a trumpet, making you vainglorious.

(i) Do not set a time-frame for advancement in this prayer. Instead be determined to do one thing only, to work and work. Months and years will pass before you see the beginnings of success. One of the Athonite fathers stated that only after two years of labor did his heart begin to grow warm. A different father spent eight months working at it before this warmth came to him. With each person it comes according to the measure of his abilities and his persistence in this labor.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 52: AIDS TO SUCCESSFULLY ACQUIRING THE HABIT OF PRAYER.

If you seek to be successful in the work of prayer, adapt everything to this, for fear you bring to ruin with one hand what the other constructs.

(a) Maintain a strict discipline over your body in terms of food, sleep and rest. Do not give it what it wants simple because it wants it. As the Apostle stated, "Do not make provisions for the flesh, to satisfy its lusts" (Rom 13:14). Give no rest to your flesh.

(b) Minimize your external dealings. This is during the time you are training yourself in how to pray. Later when prayer starts to work in you, it will suggest what you can add without harming your prayer. Be careful to protect your senses, in particular, your eyes and ears, and also bind your tongue. Without such protection, you will not be able to advance one step in your work of prayer. Just as a candle will not burn in the wind and rain, neither will the flame of prayer be kindled in a flood of senses from without.

(c) Use up your left-over prayer time with reading and meditation. For reading, choose mostly books that deal with prayer and in general, the spiritual life. Contemplate on God alone and heavenly things, and most of all the incarnation, which was for our salvation, and on our Lord and Savior's passion and death. Doing all these things you will constantly be submerged in an ocean of heavenly light. Also, make sure you go to church, as often as you can. Just being present in a church will enfold you in a cloud

of prayer. How much then will you receive if you stand during the whole service in a genuine prayerful state?

(d) Understand that you cannot progress in prayer without generally advancing in the Christian life. It is essential that no sin, which has not been cleansed through repentance, should weigh down the soul. If during your labor in prayer you do something, which disturbs your mind, move quickly to cleanse yourself with repentance, in order that you can gaze up to the Lord with boldness. Always maintain a humble, repentant contrite disposition in your heart. Also, do not leave aside any opportunity for doing good, or for showing a good temperament, most of all humility, obedience and giving up your own desires. Clearly one should also have a zeal for salvation which must always be burning and fill the entire soul, in everything, great or small, it should be the main driving force, along with a fear of God and a steadfast trust.

(e) Being thus established, work at praying, sometimes with established prayers, sometimes with your own, sometimes with brief petitions to the Lord, and at times with the Jesus prayer, not leaving anything aside which can help you in this labor. And you will obtain what you strive for. I bring to your mind the words of St. Macarius of Egypt. God will note your labor in prayer and that you truly seek to be successful in prayer, and He will grant your petitions. Because you should know that, even though prayers that are made from one's own effort are well-pleasing to God, yet that genuine prayer, which eternally abides in the heart is God's gift, and a work of heavenly grace. So, in your prayers about everything else, do not neglect to pray about prayer.

(f) I will recount for you what a God-loving man told me: "I was not leading a particularly good life, but God was merciful to me and sent me a spirit of contrition. This was at the time when I was preparing for communion. I was working hard to implant in myself a steadfast resolution to amend my ways, and particularly prior to confession I prayed for a considerable time before the icon of the Theotokos, petitioning Her to give me this resolution. Then, when I was in confession, I honestly related everything. My spiritual father did not say a word, but while he was praying the absolution over my head, a tiny, sweet flame was kindled in my heart. The feeling was something like eating an excellent bite of food. This small flame stayed in my heart, and I felt as if someone were grabbing my heart. From then on I prayed regularly, and maintained my focus there, where this feeling was. My only concern was to keep it. And God helped me. I had never heard about the Jesus prayer, and when I did hear about it, I saw that what was inside me was exactly what is sought by using this prayer." I relate this story so you might understand what the labor of prayer strives for and what are the marks that has been achieved.

(g) I will also include the following words from St. Gregory of Sinai, "Grace dwells in us from our holy baptism. However by our inattention, vanity and the poor life we live it is hindered, or buried. When someone decides to lead a virtuous life and is zealous for his salvation, the fruit of his entire work is, then, to preserve this gift of grace. This happens in a two-fold way: first this gift becomes clear by laboring in following the commandments, that is, inasmuch as one is successful in keeping the commandments, this gift becomes increasing luminous. Next, it shows itself by the regular recitation of the name of Jesus Christ in prayer. The first means is powerful, and the next one even more so, so that even the first way gains strength by it. So, if we truly want to open the seed of grace hidden

within us, let us move quickly to exercise ourselves in this latter prayer of the heart, and let us only have this labor of prayer in our heart, not employing images, until it warms our heart and it starts to burn with unutterable love of the Lord." This part includes everything which I spoke of before in the fourth paragraph.



Part One: The Spiritual Combat

CHAPTER 53: THE FUNCTION THAT PRAYER PLAYS IN UNSEEN WARFARE.

While discoursing on prayer I focused your attention most of all on the manner of lifting up prayer to the appropriate level. It might appear odd to you that, because we are talking about unseen warfare, and you want to know in what manner prayer can assist it, all you heard was how to offer up a real prayer. Do not be shocked, because prayer can become a powerful weapon in unseen war when it becomes real, that is, when it becomes rooted in the heart and starts to work there ceaselessly. From that point it becomes an unassailable and insurmountable wall, protecting your soul from the darts of the foe, which are the carnal lusts and allures of the world with its spiritual delusions. Its presence in the heart can end the unseen war. On account of this you were counseled to hasten to graft the work of prayer onto your heart, and to preserve it there with all stillness. Because this is the same thing as to say, do this and you will overcome your foe, even without a fight. And truly this is how it happens. However until your prayer attains such a degree, your foes will grant you no rest or peace, from fights, and the threats of war. Will prayer help you at this point? Yes and more than any other weapon in the spiritual war, for it constantly draws heavenly help, and by the power of God it repels the foes, so long as it is done zealously and with a resignation to the will of God. It has a chief role in our resistance to our foe's assaults. This is how things go. When, like an attentive sentry, your mind sounds an alarm about the enemies drawing near, and when the darts of your foes are felt. These darts are either lustful thoughts or motions from passions. Your spirit, if it is burning with zeal for your salvation, will perceive such evil doings

and by exerting its powers, will fearlessly repel it from your heart. At the same time with the same inner effort, it goes up to God in prayer, beseeching His aid. Help descends, foes are put to flight, and the battle wanes.

St. John Kolov explains this in a precise manner, saying, "I am as one sitting under a great tree, who sees many animals and snakes come to him. He is unable to stand up against them, so he quickly climbs a tree and there is safe. So it is with me: I sit inside my cell and see wicked thoughts rise up in opposition to me, because I am not strong enough to fight them. I flee to God with prayer, and so I am saved from my foe."

St. Hesychius relates something similar in his chapters about prayer and temperance: "You should gaze within perceptively and intensely at your mind, so as to see those who enter, and when you see them, you should immediately crush the snake's head with resistance, and with this call upon Christ with sighs. Then you will have the experience of invisible heavenly intercession." Also he stated, "Each time evil thoughts increase in us, let us cast among them the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we will immediately see them scatter like smoke, as experience will teach." And again: "Let us wage this mental war in the following way. The first matter is attention. So when we perceive an evil thought coming close, let us angrily cast a sincere curse against it. The third matter is to turn the heart to invoking the name of Jesus Christ and pray to Him to scatter straightaway this demonic apparition, for fear the mind follow after this fantasy like a child enticed by a skilled juggler." Also he stated, "Resistance often stops any further progress of thoughts, and calling the name of Jesus Christ exiles them from the heart. Once the suggestion is developed in the soul with an image of some object, like someone who has hurt us, or an attractive

woman, or silver and gold, or if thoughts of all such things draw near, it suddenly becomes clear that these illusions were borne into our heart by the malicious spirits, lust and greed. If we have an experienced mind, which is practiced at defending itself from overtures and can see plainly, as if in daylight, the alluring demonic fantasies and allurements, then, with opposition and prayer to Jesus Christ, it quickly and easily repulses the fiery-hot darts of the devil. It does not permit lustful fantasies to allure our thoughts, and stops our mind from becoming attached to them or any offered image. And it does not play with such thoughts allowing them to increase or to sympathize with them, because evil works follow these thoughts as unavoidably as night follows after the day.

In St. Hesychius you will find many similar explanations, and you will see that he provides a full outline of all our unseen battles. Thus I counsel you to frequently read, as much as you can, his chapters on temperance and prayer.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 1: THE ALL-HOLY SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Thus far, my dear reader, I have been discoursing on the four weapons which are necessary to conquer the foes in the unseen war. These are, a lack of self-dependence, an immovable hope in God, fighting and resisting sin, and prayer. Now I would like to introduce another formidable weapon in this war, which is, the most holy Eucharist. This sacrament is the top-ranked sacrament, and the most effective of all the spiritual weapons. All four weapons which we mentioned get their force from gifts of grace, which have been purchased for us with the blood of Christ. However this sacrament is the very blood of Christ, and His flesh, in which Christ is present as God. When we employ those four weapons, we struggle with the foe with the force of Christ. In the latter instance our Lord Jesus Christ Himself smites our foes through us, or in accord with us. Because the one who eats the body of Christ and drinks His blood dwells with Christ, and He in him. As He said, "The one that eats my flesh and drinks my blood, dwells in me, and I in him" ([John 6:56](#)). So, when we conquer our foes, it is Christ's blood which is victorious. As we read in Revelation, "and they conquered him (the calumnious devil) by the blood of the Lamb" ([Rev 12:11](#)). This, the most holy sacrament, an ever-victorious weapon, or rather indeed Christ's presence in this sacrament, can be readily received in two ways. The first is in the sacrament of the flesh and blood of Christ, with the required preparation, which is, contrition, confession, a cleansing penance and the necessary fast. The second is inward and spiritual in both the mind and heart. The first might happen as often as external circumstances, inner disposition and the counsel of your spiritual

father permit. The second can happen at each moment in order that you might ever have this all-powerful weapon at your disposal and fight with it against your foes. So take heed and partake of the all-Holy Mysteries of Christ as frequently as you can, as long as your spiritual father lets you do so. However labor to partake of Christ our Lord within and spiritually, never ceasing. I have given you advise about this in the former chapters about prayer.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 2: ABOUT HOW ONE SHOULD PARTAKE OF THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION, THAT IS, TO PARTAKE OF CHRIST OUR LORD IN THE SACRAMENTS.

To accomplish the goal with which we draw near this holy sacrament, we should have particular inclinations, do particular exercises and perform certain things before taking communion, during our partaking of communion and afterward. Before communion, we should cleanse ourselves of every defilement from sin, mortal and non-mortal, by the sacrament of penitential confession, and we should perform whatever our spiritual Father orders during confession, mixing it with a steadfast determination to minister only to our Lord Jesus Christ with our entire heart, soul, strength and mind, and to do those things which are well-pleasing to Him. For in this sacrament He grants us His body and blood, and along with it, His soul, Divinity and the full power of His incarnation. When we reflect how small a matter it is which we give Him, in contrast to His gift, let us at least determine in our heart to be careful in doing everything we can to His greater glory. And even should we gain the greatest gift ever presented to Him by earthly or heavenly creatures, let us confess our willingness to offer it up without wavering to His Divine Glory.

If you desire to partake of this holy sacrament, to conquer and bring to ruin, with its power, the foes of the Lord and of yourself, start to contemplate the night before, or even earlier, on how great a desire our Savior, God's son and God Himself, has that you, by partaking of this sacrament, should grant Him a spot in your heart. He desires this so that He

can be joined to you, and be of assistance in pushing out of your heart every passion, in order to overcome your foes.

This will of the Lord is so powerful and zealous that no fashioned mind can grasp its perfection. But, so that you might have a small measure of understanding of this, you should try to etch profoundly in your mind these two thoughts, (1) what an unspeakable joy it is for the ever-merciful Lord to be in a genuine communion with us, as holy Wisdom witnesses, saying, "And my joys were present with the sons of men" ([Prov 8:31](#)). (2) how much God detests sin, because it hinders his union with us, which is so pleasurable for Him, and since it is completely opposed to His heavenly perfections. Because His nature is purely blessed, light and beautiful, He is unable to do anything but completely hate sin, which is truly the extreme of evil, darkness, defilement, abomination and disgrace in our souls. God's disdain of sin is so great that from the very start all the works of divine Providence for us and every precept of the Old and New Testaments were aimed at doing away with every trace of sin. Most especially is this true about the marvelous passion of our Savior Jesus Christ, Son of God and God. There are some theologians and professors that state that, should it have been necessary, our Lord Jesus Christ would have been prepared to take on Himself an unending stream of other deaths to overcome the power of sin (remember the saying of St. Dionsius the Areopagite concerning the vision of Titus.) It is in this way that God's anger goes after it.

Being enlightened by such thoughts and meditations as to how great is the will of God to come into your heart, to finally overcome your foes, who are His enemies as well, you cannot help but feel a hot desire to receive Him into yourself, so that He accomplish in you such a work. So fully encouraged and filled with boldness from the certain hope that the divine

General, your Jesus, can enter you, you should oft challenge the passion which bothers you the most and which you seek to conquer, and cast it down with disdain, and hatred, while stirring in yourself the prayerful longing for the corresponding virtue that opposes it, along with the zeal to do the corresponding virtuous works. This is what you should be doing during the evening before communion. When the morning comes, shortly before Holy Communion, take a mental summary of all the moments you did wrong, or sinned, from the your last communion until now. Recall also how blindly and foolishly you did these things, as if for you God, Who judges and recompenses, did not exist. Even though He has seen everything and has endure horrible tortures and a disgraceful death upon the cross to save you from such things. Understand that you flouted all these things each time you were given to sin and placed your own disgraceful lusts above the desires of your God and Savior. Allow the face of your soul to be muddied with disgrace when you understand such ingratitude and folly. But do not allow yourself to be overtaken by the turmoil of all these things, and be thrown into despair. With his limitless patience the Lord knows your contrition and your declaration of readiness to minister to Him alone. He inclines to compassion and moves quickly to you and in you, so as to overwhelm and drown in the enormity of His love the enormity of your ingratitude, folly and faithlessness.

So draw near to Him with humility and a sense of uselessness, but with complete trust, love and devotion, readying a large tabernacle for Him within your heart, to allow His entire being to enter you. But how and in what manner? By casting out from the heart not just passionate affections and attachments for created things, but also all such thoughts, and by shutting its door, to stop anything or anyone from going in, save the Lord.

Once you have partaken of the holy Mysteries, straightaway go into the hidden depths of your heart and there adore the Lord with complete humility, speaking to Him in the following manner, "O my all-compassionate Lord, You see how readily I descend into sin, to my destruction. What great strength each passion that assaults me has over me, and how utterly helpless I am to liberate myself from it. Assist me, by giving me strength in my powerless contests, or instead take up Yourself my armaments and battle on my behalf to finally conquer my evil foe." Then, turning to our heavenly Father and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who along with His Son has in His great kindness dwelt in you in these mysteries, and to the Holy Spirit, Whose grace has motivated and readied you to partake of the blood and body of the Lord, and Who, after communion, now richly grants His grace to you. And so worship the one God, in the Holy Trinity, Who grants His graces to us. Once you have given Him pious thanks for the great compassion granted to you at this moment, offer to Him, your steadfast determination, eagerness and zeal to battle your sin, in the hope of conquering it through the strength of the one God who is Three in essence. Because you should understand that if you do not employ all the efforts you can to overcome your passion, you will not receive any aid from God. And if, in fighting with all readiness and zeal, you depend merely on your own efforts, you will be unsuccessful. Labor with all care, but know that success only will come with assistance from God. He will certainly help you and change your helpless labors into powerful strength, and will grant you a ready victory over the foes that battle against you.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 3: ABOUT HOW TO KINDLE A LOVE OF GOD WITHIN BY PROFOUNDLY ENTERING INTO COMMUNION

To kindle an ardent love of God in yourself by deeply entering into the divine sacrament of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, turn your mind to meditate on the love, which God has demonstrated to you personally in this sacrament. Because this majestic and awesome God was not satisfied in fashioning you into His form and likeness. And after you sinned and insulted Him and so fell from your high status, He was not satisfied merely with sending His Only-begotten Son to dwell 33 years in the world to save you, and, through a horrible torture and grievous death upon the cross to redeem and grab you back from the devil's hands, to whom you were formerly enslaved by sin, and again to renew you to your previous status. No this was not enough. He also established the sacrament of His blood and body for you as food, in order that the entire force of His incarnation might be infused in your being. Set this final token of the powerful love God has for you as the subject of your ceaseless and profound meditation, in order that, beholding its many riches, you should be fed and have your heart kindled with an inseparable love and yearning for God.

(a) Consider that time when God started to love you, and you will observe that there was no beginning to His love. Because He is eternal in His divinity, and so his love for you is also eternal. So, before time began He counseled within Himself and decided to grant you His Son in a wondrous way. Understanding this, exult in spiritual ecstasy and cry out, "Even in the depth of endless time the infinite God loved and guarded my

nothingness. For even at that time He made a provision for my benefit. And His indescribable love, was determined to grant me, as food, His Only-begotten Son. After all this, how can I let myself for a moment not hold on to Him with my every thought and desire, and all my heart?"

(b) Consider as well that all affections between creatures, no matter how deep, are limited. But God's love is infinite. Thus, when it had to be satisfied in its own way, He had to offer up His Son, Who is equal to Him in majesty and limitlessness, because His nature is the same and one. So His love is of the same magnitude as His gift, and so also His gift is as large as His love. Both are so large, that no rationale mind can understand anything being greater. So recompense this limitless love with as much love as you can.

(c) Consider further that God conceived of this love for us not by any requirement, but only from His natural compassion. He loved us spontaneously from Himself, with a incomprehensible, limitless love.

(d) Consider as well that for our part we could never have merited such love by any work on our part worthy of praise, that the boundless God would recompense our complete poverty with the richness of His love. For He loved us just because in His compassion He willed it. And not merely did He love us, but He gave Himself up for us, His ignoble creation.

(e) Note the purity of His love and see that, by contrast to the love of creatures, it is untainted with any thought of gain from us. Because God does not need anything, being all-sufficient and blessed. So, He wanted to pour out on us His indescribable love, which He did, not for any personal benefit, but for our own profit.

Considering all these things, can you keep yourself from saying, "O the marvel of it! The all-powerful God has given His heart to me, the very least of His creatures. What do You want from me, O King of glory? What do you expect from me, who am nothing save dust and ashes? O Lord my God, I clearly see, by the light of Your boundless love, that You have only one desire, which primarily shows the splendor of Your love for me, that is, that You want to grant me all of You as food and drink with no other aim but to change all of me into Yourself. And You are doing this not because you have any needs that I can satisfy, but only because I have such a great need of You. Because this way You abide in me and I in You. And by this union of love I become as You are. In normal words: by the union of my fleshly heart with Your divine heart a single heavenly heart is fashioned inside of me."

Such considerations cannot help but fill you with joy and amazement, when you behold yourself so highly treasured by God and so loved by Him. You should know that in His limitless love for you He desires nothing from you, only that you love Him, in order that you be happy and at peace, by saving you from all passionate allurements to all created things and to yourself. Because then you can bear yourself as a whole-burnt offering to your God. Then, for the rest of your life you can love only Him and have a yearning desire to gratify Him which will take hold of your mind, will, memory and all of your senses. Each favor coming from the love of God for you can effect this in your soul. However this effect is quite natural if you look with a right understanding at the most blessed sacrament of Communion. While you gaze upon it in your mind, open wide your heart to it, and pour forth the following pious and loving petitions: "O divine Food. When will the time come when I will be scarified for You and consumed, not with another fire, but with the fire of Your love? O uncreated Love and

Bread of Life. When will I live with, for and in You alone? When, O my life, beautiful, sweet and everlasting, when, O heavenly Manna, will I forsake all other worldly food? When will my sole desire be You and to be fed by You? When will this happen, O my all ever-satisfying sweetness and highest good! O my Lord, most sought after and most virtuous! Rend from my wretched heart every evil attachment and inclination, ornament it with Your divine virtues and fill it with a virtuous inclination that would make me, in truth, do everything only to be well-pleasing to You. Then, finally, I will be able to open my heart to You, no longer being unworthy of You, and I will call upon You with love, and You will enter my heart. Then, my Lord, when You have come inside my heart, You will not encounter any hindrance and You will do there everything that You loving do for souls that are given unto You."

With such loving considerations and heart-felt feelings you should spend both the evening and morning, preparing yourself to receive communion. Then as the holy hour of communion draws close, ponder, most clearly, with a humble, warm heart, Whom you are going to accept into yourself, and who it is that you are, who are about to partake of Him.

He is God's Son, robed in unimaginable majesty, in Whose presence tremble heaven and all authorities. He is the Holy of holies, more radiant than the sun, inconceivably pure, compared with which every created being is foul. Out of His love for you He took on the form of slave; He chose to be hated, and crucified by the hatred of the unruly world, while He continued to be God, holding the life and death of the world in His hand. Yet who are you? You are nothing, who with your corrupt, wicked, malicious nature have become even less than nothing. You are worse than the most impure of all things, a mock of the demons from hell. Borne away

with your fantasies and desires, you have forsaken your powerful, beneficent Lord and rather than being thankful to the gracious God for His numerous and great graces, you have trampled under foot His priceless blood, which was shed for you. And yet, despite all this, He is summoning you to His heavenly banquet in His unending and unalterable love for you. Sometimes He even compels you to draw near it with frightful warnings, bringing to your mind His words, which He said to all, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you will have no life in you" (John 6:53). So He does not forsake you, even if in your sinful life, you are leper, frail, blind and a pauper, a servant to every passion and vice.

The only things He asks of you are that you should:

(a) Lament in your heart that you have offended Him.

(b) Hate sin more than anything else, great or small.

(c) Offer yourself to Him completely and be concerned with only one thing, with all the care and yearning of your heart to always comply with His will in everything you do, and be forever obedient only to Him.

(d) Possess a steadfast faith in Him and an immovable trust that He will be merciful to you, and will purify you of all your sins and defend you from your foes, seen and unseen.

Encouraged by such unspeakable love from God, draw near to the Holy Communion with fear and love, declaring, "I am not worthy Lord, to partake of You, because I have often angered You with my sins, and I have not grieved all my evil deeds. O Lord, I am unworthy, to receive You, because I have not as of yet purified myself from the inclinations and

affections which are abhorrent to You. O Lord, I am unworthy to partake of You, because I have not as of yet truly surrendered to Your love and will, and become obedient to You, my God, all-mighty and ever good. In Your compassion, make me worthy to partake of You, because I flee to You with faith."

Following this statement, when you have partaken of Holy Communion, enclose yourself in the hidden depths of your heart and, forgetting about everything material, speak to God with such words as, "Great King of heaven and earth. Who forced You to enter my defiled heart, when I am detestable, poor, blind, and naked? Of course, there was no one, except Your boundless love for me. O love, uncreated! O sweetest love. What do You desire from me, even though I am pauper? Nothing, as I see and know, except for my love for You. Nothing, but that there should be no other fire burning on the altar of my heart, save the fire of love which burns for You, which would devour all other love and all other desires except the desire to bear myself to You as a burnt offering and fragrant incense. Nothing else do You ever look for or want from me, and nothing else do You desire or look for from me now. Thus, O Lord, hearken to the oaths of my heart. Behold I mix my will with yours and as You have given all of You to me, so I give all of myself to You, to be fully in You. O Lord, I know, that this cannot be true, except I give up myself completely. It cannot be the case if any self-love remains in me, if I retain some inclination to do my own will, my own ideas, or some self-indulgent habits. So my will is to aspire from now on to fight against myself not to do those things which are not well-pleasing to You, even if I desire them. I will also strive to do everything which is well-pleasing to You, even if everything else, both inside and outside fights against me. On my own, I do not have the strength to do this. However because from now on You are in me. I boldly trust that

You will achieve in me what is required. I seek and work so that my heart might be one with Your heart. I have faith that Your grace will grant this to me. I will compel myself neither to see, hear, think or have sympathy for anything, that is outside Your will. For Your will is set by Your commandments, and they guide and show me that what I desire will be granted to me by You working within me. I will labor not to allow my focus to drift from my heart, where You abide. For there I can regard You endlessly and be made warm with the rays of light coming from You. And I can have faith that this will be granted me by the mere touch of Your hands. I work only for You so that You might be my light, strength and happiness. I have faith that I will be granted this by Your saving help in my inner being. It for this that I pray now, and ever more. Grant me this, O compassionate Lord."

Then work to increase each day your faith in holy Communion, and never stop being amazed at the wondrous mystery of it, pondering how God shows Himself to you disguised as bread and wine, and then becomes part of your being, to sanctify you, and to make you more virtuous and blessed. Because blessed are those who even though they have not seen, believe. As our Savior said, "Blessed are those that have not seen, and yet believed" (John 20:29). And have no desire that God show Himself to you during your life under any other form other than Communion. Strive to kindle in yourself a fervent desire for Communion and to advance each day both in your zealous readiness to do only the will of God, and to progress in spiritual wisdom, making it the queen and governor of all your spiritual works, with the soul and body. Each time you partake of the bloodless sacrifice of communion present yourself as a offering to God. In other words, confess your full willingness to suffer all persecutions, every grief and wrong you encounter in life, on account of God's love, Who offered

Himself on our behalf. St. Basil the Great more fully describes the responsibility of the communicant in Holy Communion, from the words of St. Paul that those who consume the Lord's flesh and drink His blood show the death of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:26). Such a death was endured by the Lord for all, and for communicants as well. To what end? "In order that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died on their behalf, and rose again" (2 Cor 5:15). Thus those who draw near to the holy sacrament with faith, love and a willingness to be faithful to the commandments of God, and to all clear signs of His will, that they are ready to lay down their lives on behalf of it, work to complete the task to longer live for themselves, the world or for sin, but rather for the Lord God Who they partake of in Communion, that is, He Who died and was resurrected for them.

Last of all, having received, through Communion, the Lord, Who was sacrificed for you, and having received the force of this offering, after praising the Lord and giving Him thanks, send up, using the name of his sacrifice, your own petitions and prayers to your Father in heaven, spiritual or otherwise. Then also pray about God's holy Church, your kinsfolk, benefactors and those who have died in the faith. Now that you communed by means of the sacrifice, by which the Son of God has received mercy for all of us from God the Father, your supplication will be heard and will bear fruit.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 4: SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

Being in communion with the Lord by means of the sacramental body and blood is possible only at particular times, in accord with the opportunity and your enthusiasm. However it should never be more than daily. However interior, spiritual communion, is always possible, every minute and hour. In other words by His grace, it is always possible to be in communication with Him, and to be conscious, when He wills it, of this communication in one's heart. By the Lord's promise, by receiving His body and blood we partake of Him, and He come into us and abides within, with all His blessings, letting the heart, which is ready for it, to be conscious of this. Genuine communicants are ever in a blessed state following their communion. For it is then that the heart receives the Lord spiritually.

But because we are restrained by our body and surrounded by external events and communication, in which duty requires us to participate, so, by the daily dividing of our focus and feeling, the spiritual communion of the Lord slackens and becomes hidden. The feeling of partaking of the Lord becomes obscured. However communication with the Lord remains intact, unless sadly a sin enters and brings to ruin the graceful state. Nothing is comparable with the joy of receiving the Lord. So the diligent, when they feel that it has grown weaker, hasten to return its full force, and having restored it, they sense themselves again receiving the Lord. This is a spiritual partaking of communion with the Lord.

It is in this manner that it happens between the times of partaking of communion through the Mysteries. And this can be done unceasingly for

someone who is attentive to keeping his heart pure and strives to keep his feelings directed to the Lord. Yet this is a gift of grace, given to the one who labors in the way of the Lord, if he is careful and merciless with himself. Even if one should receive the Lord spiritually only occasionally, this partaking is still a grace. The only thing that we can bear to Him is a thirst and hunger for His gift, and we must strive eagerly to receive it. And there are works which open the path to this communion with the Lord and can assist us in receiving it, even though it always appears to come as if it were unforeseen. These labors are pure prayer, with a child-like weeping in the heart, and works of self-denial and exercise of the virtues. When there is no sin to defile the soul, when no wicked thoughts or feelings are allowed, that is to say, when the soul is unstained and cries out to God. What then can hinder the Lord, Who is everywhere present, from allowing the soul to taste Him, or to permit the soul to be conscious of this taste? And thus it happens, except when the Lord judges it better, for the benefit of the soul, to lengthen its thirst and hunger for Him before gratifying it. Among the works of self-denial that are most effective for this end are, a humble obedience; throwing oneself at the feet of all; casting aside one's love of goods and suffering wrongs with a good heart. All such things should be done with a spirit of full submission to God's will. Such deeds make one more like the Lord than others, and the Lord, Who dwells in him, lets his soul taste Him. In addition pure and careful fulfillment of the law of God yields fruit in the heart, where the Lord dwells together with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

This spiritual communion with the Lord is not the same as a memory of communion, and should not be confused with it, even if the memory has strong spiritual feelings and a zealous yearning for true communion with Him. It should also not be confused with what the worshipers in the church

partake of when communion is offered. They accept sanctification and good-will, as one's participating in the bloodless sacrifice by faith, penitence, and a willingness to offer themselves to God's glory, and they receive it according to the measure of their inclinations. However it is not the same thing as communion, even though communion can also be present here.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 5: ABOUT BEING THANKFUL TO GOD.

All the blessings we receive, and all good works that we do are of and from God. So it is our duty to render thanks to Him for all these things. These blessings include all that we accept from His liberal generosity, either seen or unseen, for all good actions, for all well-meaning efforts and every triumph over our foes for our salvation, as we were commanded, "In all things render thanks, because this is God's will in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess 5:18). So strive to keep warm sentiments of thanksgiving for God from when you first awake and throughout the day, to when you go to bed with thankful words on your lips. Because you are covered with heavenly blessings, one of these being sleep itself.

God has no need of your thanksgiving. However you are very much in need of His heavenly blessings. And the place to accept and retain these blessings within is your thankful heart. "The best means of keeping the generosity of a benefactor," writes St. John Chrysostom, "is to remember his favor and ever render thanks to him." St. Isaac tell us, "The thanks of the receiver urges the giver to grant still greater gifts. He who is not thankful for a little will find himself disappointed in his greater hopes. A gift will always be augmented, save when there is no thanks rendered." St. Basil the Great enjoins the helpful warning, "If we do not render thanks for the blessings God bestows on us, He must take away these blessings so as to bring us to a right mind. Just as the eyes fail to notice what is too close, but require a reasonable separation, so thankless souls, when lacking blessings, many times become aware of previous mercies. While they had no thanks to

render to the One Bestowing when they enjoyed His gifts, they extol the past ones when they are gone.

Taking care to hear my words, you will inquire, "How can I constantly have feelings of thanks burning in me?" Study all the favors God has bestowed on humanity and you. Regularly recount them in your mind. And if you possess a good heart, you will not be able to keep from singing your thanks to God. You can find such hymns in various prayers and writings of the saints. Listen to how St. Basil the Great speaks about God's generosity to us, "From nothing we are brought into existence, being created in the image of the Creator, we were granted a mind and speech, which make up the perfection of our character and grant us an awareness of God. With careful study, the wonders of creation are like a book demonstrating to us how great is God's Providence in everything along with His Wisdom. We can tell good from evil. Even nature instructs us to elect what is helpful and turn from the harmful. Being alienated from God through sin, we are summoned to communion with Him, and liberated from degrading slavery through His Only-begotten Son's blood. And what about the hope of salvation and joy of heavenly bliss. What about the kingdom of heaven and the blessings which are promised which exceed every description and understanding." Read through these words about God's favors to us, or choose a different one, or make up one yourself, including in it the blessings which God has personally bestowed on you. Frequently repeat them in word and thought, not just each day, but many times in a day, and you will constantly have the sense of thankfulness to God.

However, one evoked, a feeling such as this does not want to remain hidden, it looks to be expressed. So how can you show God your thankful feelings? By doing what God wants you to do, when He covers you with

His generous gifts. What does God want? When God covers you with His blessings He wants you to remember Him when you see them. He wants you to completely hold fast to Him in love. He never wants you to deviate from His will in anything, and to work at being well-pleasing to Him in everything. He wants you to be completely dependent on Him. He wants you to recall the many times you have sinned against your Benefactor with wicked and disgraceful deeds, in order that you are filled with feelings of repentance, and that you lament until you are at peace with your conscience and become assured that God has forgiven you fully. And so you should do these things.

Can you see how broad is the practice of giving thanks and how many different ways you can fulfill this requirement? Understand from this how grievous a sin it is to be negligent in this, and labor not to defile yourself with this vice. Lack of thanksgiving is called black. What word would be fitting for ingratitude toward God? So be careful to constantly keep a warm feeling of thankfulness to God, particularly during the liturgy in church when the Eucharist is offered to God, because the very word Eucharist means a giving of thanks. Take heed not to forget that here the only fitting thanks you can offer to God is a complete readiness to offer up yourself and all you possess to the magnificence of His holy name.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 6: ABOUT SURRENDERING TO GOD'S WILL

When someone has become repentant he offers himself as a servant of God, and straightaway he starts his service by following His commandments and will. This labor starts with sweat on the brow. The commandments are not difficult by themselves, but there are many hindrances to keeping them in the outer circumstances of the laborer, and particularly in his inner disposition and practices. With help from God a diligently laborer conquers everything and finally obtains peace within and a peaceful flow of life.

The one who struggles acts on his own, with some help from God. However after the first few days he begins to realize that despite his labors if anything good is accomplished, it is only because he is granted heavenly power to do it. The more he goes on, the more he understands this to be true. When there comes to be a certain amount of peace within, this understanding is strengthened and takes control, until in the end he completely submits to the will of God and His influence. God's influence starts to work in those who labor for their salvation right from the first time they turn to God, and it changes how they turn. It starts to grow as the one struggling turns more away from himself and holds fast to God and, understanding his own lack of strength, has an even more steadfast faith in the power of God. When finally he gives himself up fully to God, God becomes very much present in him, both in demonstrating what he should do and accomplishing it. This is the very peak of Christian perfection, where it is God who works in you to will and to do" (Phil 2:13). As was mentioned at the start, the seed of this perfection rests on not being self-

dependent and hoping in God. However here it is demonstrated in its maturity.

What makes up a full submission to God's will can be understood when it shows itself in its fullness. It comes by itself and there are no set rules for obtaining it, so one cannot say, "do this and you will acquire it." It grows almost unnoticed with the traits of not being independent and hoping in God. I have spoken about it here simply because it needs to be discussed somewhere, and what was mentioned at the conclusion of the previous chapter about offering oneself to God presented an opportunity to speak about it now. Complete surrender of one's will to God is really about being a burnt-offering to God. The evidence that this state has been achieved is dying to oneself and one's opinions, desires, feelings or inclinations, so as to live by Divine guidance in agreement with God's will and by partaking of Him. The beginning of this effort is our Lord and Savior. He gave up everything in Himself to God the Father, and also us in Himself, "Because we are members of his body, flesh and bones" (Eph 5:30). Therefore let us quickly follow His footsteps, because He gave to God the Father a task for us, hoping that we would be ready in word and deed.

Why is such an offering made at the end, and not at the start? Because a sacrifice to God should be perfect, without spot. And at the start, perfection is only sought, but not achieved. When finally it is achieved, then it is right to offer up oneself as a sacrifice. Initially one only pledges oneself to this offering, but in the end he offers himself as the sacrifice. For truly, it is impossible to offer oneself up as a burnt-offering before one has become perfect. Different offerings can be made, such as atoning sacrifices, purification and thanksgiving sacrifices, yet not a burnt-offering. One can

try to, and talk about it, but it will all be mere words and not the true act. This act is done without using words.

Understand that so long as you are still drawn to earthly things, and you lean on things inside or out, which are not God, so long as you enjoy the taste of material things, you are unworthy to be a burnt-offering. First strive to give up all this. Force all the separate lives in you to cease so that only life in God remains. Put another way, make it so that it is no longer you that live, but God, our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit which abide in you. Then sacrifice yourself to God, or at that point you will be scarified to God. And, until this happens, keep a remorseful spirit as an offering to God, a contrite and humble heart, and be satisfied with this for awhile, but not forever. Because in the end you will need to offer yourself up wholly to God as a burnt offering.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 7: ABOUT WARMTH OF HEART, AND ALSO ABOUT ITS COOLING AND BECOMING DRY.

Having spiritual warmth in your heart is the fruit of feeling for God and for everything heavenly. It comes into being when one turns to God with a repentant heart. During works of penitence, which cleanse the heart, it gathers more strength, and from occasional warm feelings visiting the heart it steadily becomes a regular occurrence, until in the end it is a permanent presence in the heart. St. John Climacus wrote about this warmth when he said, "Always labor to have feelings for God and heavenly things." Each thing which gives pleasure to the heart, warms it, and so a warmth of the heart can take many forms. Spiritual warmth comes from spiritual things in the spiritual life which influence the heart. Its notable feature is a giving up of all material things, when one's attention is completely fixed on God and heavenly matters. As a result of this feature the warm feelings of the soul are as distant from the body as heaven is from earth.

The spiritual warmth is concentrated and looks like to be simple and singular. However in reality it is a collection of many spiritual motions, just like the sunbeam is a synthesis of seven distinct colors from the spectrum. It is made up of reverence, repentance, tenderness, bowing before God, adoration, zeal, and a love for God. Because these spiritual feelings cannot all become fixed in the heart immediately, spiritual warmth does not straightaway become a characteristic of our heart.

Before spiritual warmth in the heart is a constant state, it comes and then leaves. Either it comes by itself, or as a divine guest, or it is the

product of spiritual labors like reading, contemplation, prayer, self-mortification and good works. It leaves when one's focus drifts from spiritual matters, upon which the heart participates in things which are not spiritual, and enjoys them. This extinguishes spiritual warmth, just as water extinguishes a fire.

Would you like to keep this spiritual warmth present in your heart? Keep your attention fixed within yourself and stand within your heart in God's presence. Never let your mind wander, disrupting your focus. Have no sympathy for matters of the soul or body which come into the heart. Sever immediately all concerns and anxieties from the beginning, retaining your zeal to be well-pleasing to God and to save your soul.

With regard to external matters, keep the order which reason suggests. Direct all external matters to your final goal, and while doing one do not trouble your mind with concerns about many. However I will enjoin that when you have felt this warmth, you cannot but labor to retain it. And laboring as such you will use appropriate means for this end. Employing them you will observe the most profitable way to keep it. If you do this work with a sound judgment, spiritual warmth will be a trustworthy guide, instructing you how to govern your inner life and how to conduct yourself in outward dealings in order to keep that spiritual warmth.

Although spiritual warmth in your heart is sweet, its absence is bitter, troublesome and scary. It has been said previously that it leaves when one's attention and heart wander from matters of the spirit and turn to things which are not spiritual. Although this does not mean something sinful, for one who has sampled spiritual warmth is no longer drawn to sin or vain and earthy things. But once one's attention moves toward earthly things, the

spiritual warmth wanes. However when the heart holds fast to it, it leaves completely, and there remains a cold feeling toward divine matters and God Himself, accompanied by a lack of interest in a spiritual labors and matters, which are done to retain this warmth. If one collects himself quickly and hastens to renew this former regular warmth-inducing order, this warmth comes back quickly or sometimes not so quickly. However if he pays no heed to it, and by being scattered, given to self-dependence, intentionally lets himself linger in such a cold state, and if he dangerously actually gratifies in deed his non-spiritual inclinations, being resurrected by it, the zeal he had for the spiritual life is eroded, if not completely destroyed. This last state is the forerunner of descending into previous regular sins, which will certainly conquer the careless. However if one recollects himself, he should have no trouble in regaining his former spiritual state.

This is the way that cooling occurs. It is always by our own misleads, because it is the product of a waning attention and a lack of watchfulness. This weakening is produced either from temptations or earthly surroundings, when images of worldly delusions beguile and carry one away from oneself. It may also happen from the schemes of our foe who plots ways to incite someone to leave his inner self, which our foe at times is successful in doing, just by adding his own more alluring images to the regular flow of fantasies, and at times by affecting the body. Regardless of the source, the cooling starts when focus comes out of the inner depths, and its further advancement is determined by the heart holding fast to something which is initially vain, and afterward passionate and sinful. In each case the person is to blame. Because ones liberty cannot be violated by either the world nor the devil, they can only bring about temptations.

At times cooling is from grace. In its true form, spiritual warmth comes from grace in the heart. When grace is present, the heart becomes warm. When it leaves it becomes cold. Grace can also leave someone, when he leaves himself, allured by bad things. This cooling is a chastisement. However at times grace leaves on its own, for the aim of helping the spiritual advancement of God's servants. In such instances this leaving is instructive. However in this case the the result is the same, a cooling. This cooling is an empty feeling in the heart, because the guest has left. The difference between such coolings is that blameworthy cooling saps the zeal for the spiritual life, while an instructive cooling from grace leaving causes it to burn even more ardently, which is also one of the reasons for its departure.

Heavenly grace leaves on its own for didactic reasons so as to, (1) incite zeal, which can weaken from a long calm period. (2) Force one to study his situation with more attention and cast off attachments and employments not related to a life well-pleasing to God and not directing someone to Him. (3) To augment the emotional feeling and understanding that all good present in us is the product of the grace of God. (4) To compel us to esteem the gifts of God more highly in the future, to take greater care in preserving them and to be more meek. (5) To more sincerely give up ourselves into the hands of God's providence, with full self-denial and self-humbling. (6) To compel us not to become overly given to spiritual joys in themselves, and so dividing our heart, because God wants all of it to be His. (7) To keep us from slackening our labors when heavenly grace is working in us, but rather to make us labor without sleeping on the way of God, laboring with all the talents He has given us for this end.

So, even if a cooling comes from a didactic withdrawing of heavenly grace, you are the reason for it, because, even though heavenly grace departs on its own, it leaves with its gaze toward you. Thus when you experience a cooling for spiritual matters and employments and for everything heavenly in general, go deeply into yourself and study diligently what happened. And if you are to blame, move quickly to repair it, not just because you want to return to spiritual joys, but because your desire is to eliminate everything in yourself that is improper and not well-pleasing to God. If you discover there is nothing like this, give in to God's will, telling yourself, "God has so decreed, let Your will be done in regard to me, O Lord, feeble and unworthy though I am." Then wait patiently, never letting yourself stray from the regular order of your spiritual works, life and exercises. Conquered by a lack of interest in them, which has assaulted you, by compelling yourself to exercise them, neglecting any thoughts which work to sidetrack you from your labors by proposing that this work is pointless. Willingly drink down your bitter cup, declaring to the Lord: "O Lord, look upon my humility and my labors, and do not take away Your mercy from me," and let your labors be excited by a trust that this cup is from the love God has for you. For He wants you to achieve a higher degree of spiritual perfection. Willingly follow in the Lord's steps not just to Mount Tabor, but to Golgotha as well, that is, not merely when you feel a divine light and spiritual delights inside you, but when you are assaulted by darkness, persecutions, stress and resentment as well, which the soul must undergo sometimes from demonic temptations, inner and outer. Even should this cooling be attended by a great darkness and chaos that is so great that you do not know what you should do or where you should turn. Be not afraid. Stand steadfast in your spot, be submissive to your cross and throw off from yourself all worldly comforts, which either the world or the

body propose, incited by your foe. Also attempt to conceal your illness from others and speak about it to none save your spiritual father. And you should do so, not to grumble about the illness which has afflicted you, but instead to receive guidance as to how you should keep away from it in the future, and how to endure it with a good heart, for as long as God wishes you to have it.

Keep praying your prayers, partaking of communion and doing the other spiritual exercises like normal, but not for the spiritual delights, nor to have your current cross removed, but to be granted strength to continue nailed to this cross with an undisturbed soul, for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was crucified for us, and to live and act in a manner which is ever well-pleasing to Him. If sometimes your health makes it impossible to pray and have a good mindset, as you had done previously, because of the great darkening and turmoil of your mind, do all these things as best you can, so long as you perform them without slothfulness and luxury. Then what you do not do perfectly, will be received as if it were perfect on account of your desire, labor and seeking. Stay in this desire, labor and seeking, and in time you will perceive its marvelous fruits, hope and strength, fill your soul.

I give an example to you here of how to invoke God during times when your mind darkens. Cry out to Him, saying, "O soul, why are you depressed? Hope in God, because I will, in time, praise my God, who is the health of my body" ([Ps 43:5](#)). "O Lord, why do you stand far off? Why do you hide Yourself in times of trouble" ([Ps 10:1](#)). "O my God, do not forsake me. Do not be far from me" ([Ps 38:21](#)). Recall how Sarah, the beloved wife of Tobias, was motivated by God to pray in her distress. "Each person laboring for You, O Lord, understands that truly if our life is a

contest, it will have a crown, and if it is full of persecutions, they will be recompensed, and with Your mercy, will not stop even in corruption. You did not exult in our destruction, but You brought calm after the storm, and joy after weeping. O God of Israel, blessed be Your name forever." Remember also Christ our Lord, Who, by His incalculable sufferings felt that He was forsaken by His heavenly Father in Gethsemane and upon the cross. So when you feel as if you are being crucified in your current state, call out from your heart, "O Lord, your will be done." "Not what I will, but what You will" ([Matt 26:39](#)). If you do these things, your patience and prayer will ascend to God, like the flame of the offering of your heart. And you will show that you are filled with love that is strong as death, and a zealous willingness to shoulder your cross and to follow Christ our Lord on any road, which He elects to use to summon you to Himself. This is a genuine godly life. To yearn for and seek after God on account of God, and to possess Him and to partake of Him as He desires. If people began their godly life with this disposition, and measured their advance by its power, rather than the tides of spiritual delights, they would not be readily taken by temptations, which come from themselves, or by the schemes of the foe. They also would not be idle or complain when episodes of cooling or dryness occur. Rather, they would receive such times with thankfulness and endure them happily, persuaded that if it is the will of God it must be for their benefit. So, ignoring them, they would remain on the path of their life being well-pleasing to God, keeping all the commandments with even more zeal, self-denial and striving.

It sometimes occurs that when the soul is languishing in this cool condition with a disinterest in spiritual things, the foe assaults with great force, instigating wicked thoughts, disgraceful urges and alluring fantasies. His goal is to bring about a hopelessness that one has been forsaken by God

and to compel such a one to renounce his fight and be given to something lustful, so as to guide him to return easily into the whirlpool of a immoral life. Being conscious of this, be steadfast. Allow the waves of sin to bellow out around the heart, but so long as your heart is full of hatred of sin and possesses a longing to be devoted to God, your small ship is safe. Heavenly grace has taken away its solace from you, but it remains close by, observing, and it will not forsake you helpless, as long as your desires are on the side of virtue. Thus remain steadfast, encouraged with the certainty that this tempest will be finished soon, and with it your dry spell will depart. Trust that this condition has been permitted to occur for your own benefit. If you suffer this time of testing you will finish it with a greater understanding of your weaknesses, great humility and a firmer confidence that help from God is always close at hand. I have already had the opportunity to talk to you about such rigorous assaults of the foe. Review what I mentioned there.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 8: ABOUT PROTECTING AND EXAMINING YOUR CONSCIENCE

My dear brother, employ all possible means so that your conscience is pure, in your thoughts, words and actions. These all should be irreproachable. Never let it rebuke you and eat away at you on account of anything. If you undertake this, it will strengthen your inner and outer deeds and it will be a mistress for your entire life, governing it correctly. A clean conscience will give you an irreproachable life, because then it will be sensitive and powerful for doing good against wickedness. The conscience is the law, written by God in the hearts of all people, to shine a light before them and to lead them to virtue, as apostle Paul tell us, "They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts" (Rom 2:15) From this saying, St. Nilus advises us that, "In all your labors keep to the guidance of your conscience as if to a lamp." You should keep your conscience pure in four relationships: (1) with God, (2) with yourself, (3) with your neighbors and (4) with everything, which you have control over.

All these things you understand, but I will mention again the key points: With respect to God, keep God in mind and walk in His presence; be conscious of being carried and protected by the power of God, and that you are being guided to the end which He had in mind when He created you out of nothing; consecrate yourself and everything you have to the ministry of God and glorifying His name; abide in Him, trust Him and surrender your future to him.

With respect to yourself, be fair with yourself and allot its due to each part of yourself. Allow your spirit, which looks to the heavenly and eternal God, govern your soul and body, whose collective task is to arrange your temporal life. Allow the soul to obey the commands of the spirit and make your mind submissive to truth show to you by God, and allow it to enlighten the full spectrum of its knowledge. Keep its will within the Divine commandments, not permitting it to venture off into its own desires, which are against them. Allow it to instruct the heart to only have a taste for heavenly matters and those which have the divine impress. In this vein allow it to arrange its affairs, in the public and daily life. Give your body what it requires, keeping strict allowance, and setting for yourself the ordinance of "make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires," ([Rom 13:14](#)) at any time or in anything. If you stick to this, you will be a good governor and benefactor of yourself.

In terms of your neighbors, reverence all of them as icons of God. Hope for the best for all of them and do good to them as much as you can. Be humble before everyone and look to please them all within the boundaries of what is right. Be joyful with those who are rejoicing and lament with those who are grieving. Do not judge or humiliate anyone, even though it be in your mind or feelings. Do not hide the truth, if you are aware of it, from those who look to you for counsel and direction. However do not impose yourself as a guide on anyone and be at peace with all, willing to make any necessary sacrifice to keep such peace. Take heed never to lead someone astray.

With regard to material things: respect everything as being the creation of God. Preserve and employ, to glory of God, everything which you own. Be satisfied with the things you possess, however much that is, and thank

God for it. Do not form any passionate affections for anything and consider everything as external ways and means in order to be at liberty in the way you deal with them, without their being ties and obstacles in your virtuous occupations. Never let yourself rest on these frail supports. Do not brag about your goods, and do not envy those belonging to another. Keep from being greedy and luxuriant in those matters which are not good. Each person is required to do this each day in one way or another, almost at each step. So, if you live in a honest way, you will have a pure conscience, as St. Paul tells us ([Heb 13:18](#)).

Those who are willing to live in a honest manner and are zealous for their salvation behave as I have mentioned, trying not to do wrong in any of these matters and to keep their conscience clean. But, despite their labors, now bad thoughts and feelings, now poor choices of words, now wrong deeds slip past, sometimes unseen, other times noticed by others, and so they cover with dust the immaculate face of the conscience. And so at the close of the day, almost everybody can see the gypsy, who has traveled the dusty road, with dust on his eyes, nose, mouth, hair and face. On account of this each person who is earnest for salvation has the chore of examining his conscience at night and noticing all the bad things which came into his thoughts, words and deeds, he needs to cleanse them with repentance, that is, to do what all dusty travelers do, that is, to wash with water, which likewise, the former does by washing himself with repentance, remorse and tears.

This examination of self should test everything, good and bad, right or wrong, from every angle, as mentioned previously. If you notice something which is good in its own right, examine if it was right in terms of the intention, if it were right in the way it was done and the disposition you had

to it after it was finished, which is to say, if it was performed for its own end. Was it done to gain favor with others or for to be self-indulgent? Was it proper, timely and at the right place? Was it done to blow your own horn and to glorify yourself, without praising God? A good work is done right when it is out of obedience to the will of God and His glory, with a full giving-up and forgetfulness of self.

If you discover something wrong, study why you did it, when your will is to do what is right. Locate the outer and inner causes that led to it. Examine how you should have moderated your actions so as not to sin, and look at why you did not do so. Then, blaming only yourself and not others, figure out intelligently how you should conduct yourself in the future to keep from sinning in such occasions, and set a steadfast rule for yourself to enact your decision without erring, or being self-indulgent or looking for favors, and so using even unclean motions to fertilize the fields of your heart.

At the close of your examination, thank God for everything that was done right, without allotting any portion of it to yourself, because truly "it is God which works in you to will and to act" ([Phil 2:13](#)). Without Him we can do no good thing. ([John 15:5](#)) Thus give thanks to God and as St. Paul did, forget about it, and follow his model, increasing your zeal and "reaching ahead to those things which are before you" ([Phil 3:13](#)). In terms of the wrong things you have done, repent and have a contrite heart in the presence of the Lord, faulting yourself for always bearing Him loaves as offerings which are impure, being mixed with chaff and other impurities. But be determined to guard yourself closely the next day, and let nothing wrong slip by, not just in words and deeds, but in thoughts and feelings.

Those who take heed to themselves do all this, which is, an examination. This is done during the day so that by the evening the examination of their conscience is merely a repeat of what was done earlier, with corrections and augmentations. One has to consent that this latter way is best and more natural. No ill which was permitted can be hidden from the conscience. And once it is perceived the conscience straightaway is disturbed. Would it not be better to calm it down immediately by a condemnation of your actions, along with remorse, and a conviction to act correctly in the future, than to wait until the evening? I would like to enjoin a few more words on this matter. Scrutinize your deeds most carefully and dive deeply into their sources, declaring from them a pitiless judgment against yourself. The deeper you investigate everything that happens inside you and all that comes forth from you, removing all wrong things and supporting all good things, the more rapidly you will purify your conscience. In the same manner the deeper the well, the more pure the water therein.

Once the conscience has come to understand right from wrong, it will not stop to insist on deeds conforming to the former, and to drive off with condemnation and regret anything of the latter that was allowed. However until it attains a full understanding of the difference or until it has its "senses exercised for distinguishing both good and evil," ([Heb 5:14](#)) thus having eyes to see, it continues in this state to be dependent on other activities of the soul, particularly reason. However until the heart is cleansed from the passions, reason is often subject to bribes and so generates numerous justifications, which fog the conscience's eye and misguide it to see black as white. So, as long as you are still wrestling with the passions, in examining yourself put your deeds in front of the mirror of

God's word and be directed by this in discerning their measure and worth. Also, do not be negligent to visit your spiritual father frequently.

Start and finish the examination of your actions with a careful prayer. Petition the Lord to grant you eyes to behold the inner depths of your heart, because "the heart is deceitful beyond everything, and incurable; who can know it?" (Jer 17:9) Only God knows Who is "greater than our heart, and knows everything" (1 John 3:20). "Before you, even you only, know the hearts of all the children of men" (1 Kings 8:39). There are bad feelings which are deeply concealed in the heart. Sometimes they slip into one's deeds. Sometimes they are unnoticed and defile them with the foul odor of sin. Thus pray with the prophet David, "Cleanse me from my hidden faults" (Ps 19:12).



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 9: ABOUT PREPARING FOR BATTLE WITH OUR FOES AT OUR FINAL HOUR.

Even though our entire life is a ceaseless warfare and we must struggle to our last hour, the more important battle comes at our final hour. The one who falls then cannot rise again. Do not be shocked at this. Because if your foe was bold enough to draw near to our Lord, Who was sinless, in the final days on earth, as the Lord said, "The prince of this world comes, and has nothing in me" ([John 14:30](#)). What can stop him from assaulting us, sinful creatures, at our final hour? St. Basil the Great notes in this commentary on the seven psalm, "For fear he rend my soul as a lion, tearing it into pieces, while there is no one to save," ([Ps 7:2](#)) that the most indefatigable fighters who have fought unremittingly with the devils throughout the course of their life, have kept from their snares and resisted their attacks, in their last days are examined by the prince of this age, to see if anything sinful abides in them. And the ones who show wounds, or blemishes and empresses of sin are kept in his power, while those, who reveal nothing of these things, freely pass by him and rest with Christ.

If this is true, it is impossible not to be mindful of this coming prospect and to ready oneself ahead of time to encounter that event and pass by it with success. Your entire life should be a preparation for this, for you will show yourself to be well prepared at that hour, if during the entire temporal life apportioned to you, you battle with courage against the foes of your salvation. Having obtained during your life the necessary skills to conquer your foes, you will readily win the crown of victory at your final hour.

Also, meditate often on death, recalling all the things which must occur then. If you do these things, that time will not catch you off-guard, and so will not scare you too much, and your soul, not enfeebled with fear, will demonstrate itself more steadfast and strong to fight and conquer your foe. Worldly people flee from the thought of death, in order to not interrupt the comforts and joys of their senses, which are not compatible with the thought of death. This causes their attachment to the good things of the world constantly to grow and strengthen, because they encounter nothing against it. However when the moment comes for them to leave this life and all the comforts and the things they enjoy, they are thrown into great confusion, fear and torture.

To have this thought about death yield its full fruit, you should put yourself mentally in a dying persons place, in a torturous agony, and you should imagine vividly your foes temptations which might attack you then. At the same time you should bring to mind the thoughts and emotions needed to repel them. I will now relate to you your foe's possible attacks at that time, and the means of repelling them, in order that you, while alive, might be used to rehearsing them mentally, and be able to use them in your final hour. Because this war and this fight comes only once, but because it is unavoidable, one should learn how to encounter it and engage it skillfully, for fear you err and suffer a loss which cannot be made up for.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 10: THE FOUR TEMPTATIONS OUR FOES USE IN OUR FINAL HOUR: (1) THE TEMPTATION OF A WAVERING FAITH AND HOW TO CONQUER IT.

The most important and dangerous temptations which our foes, the devils, normally inflict on us in our final hour are: (a) a shaky faith, (b) despair, (c) vainglory, (d) a variety of forms which the devils take on which appear to those who are dying. In terms of the first, when the wicked foe starts to sow in your mind, thoughts of unbelief or, becoming manifest in a form, talks with you in a way in opposition to the faith, do not argue with him, but confirm in yourself the faith which he assaults. Then tell him with a righteous anger, "Get away, Satan, father of lies. I will not listen to you. With every part of my being I believe and I always have believed what my mother, the holy Church has always believed. This is sufficient for me, "Permit no thoughts of unbelief, and stand steadfast. As Holy Writ says, "If the ruler's spirit rises up against you do not leave your place' (Ecc 10:4). Be very conscious, and retain this awareness that these thoughts are nothing but schemes from the devil who labors to mislead you in your final hour. If you are unable to remain steadfast in your mind, stay alert with regard to your desires and feelings, and do not be moved toward his suggestions, even if they are supported by Holy Writ, which the soul-slayer uses. Because whatever part of Holy Writ he may bring to your mind, he does with the goal of bringing you to your doom through a twisted interpretation of the true words of God.

Should this wicked snake pose the question, "what exactly does the church teach?" Give no heed to his question. Completely ignore him,

knowing that he is all lies and trickery, and that he has started this discourse with you to mix you up with words. However if you feel that you have a sound faith and are firm in your mind, and you want to overcome your foe, respond to him that the holy church alone knows the truth. Should he ask you again, "what is that truth?" Tell him that the truth is that through the cross, our Lord Jesus Christ has struck his head and has destroyed his power. Then hold fast, with a focused mind, to a meditation on the Lord, Who was crucified for our sake, and pray to Him, saying, "O my God, Fashioner and Redeemer, come quickly to help me and never let me be moved, however slight, from the truth of Your holy faith. Because by Your love, I was born into this truth. Let me dwell in it and thus finish my life to the glory of Your name."



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 11: (2) THE TEMPTATION OF DESPAIR

The next temptation at our final hour, by which our foe works to smite us, is a fear of the recollection of our numerous sins. One cannot avoid this fear, but it can be eased by trusting in the redemption for our sins through Christ our Savior's death on the cross. The foe clouds this faith and augments the fear of our sins, in order to suppress any hope of salvation and to cast us down with despair and despondency. And so, dear brother, ready yourself ahead of time to repel this assault, and determine even at present to hold firmly in your hand our symbol of victory, the cross of Christ, when you draw near to death's gates. Said another way, keep steadfast in your heart your faith in the redemptive power of our Lord dying for us on the cross. If, going through death's gates, you experience assaults of despair, quickly realize, first, that they are the work of our foe, and not the normal result of recalling your sins. This calling to mind engenders humility, remorse and sorrow for having done wrong to the righteous and compassionate God. So, even though it produces fear, such fear does not quench hope in the mercy of God, and being mingled with it, yields a profound trust in salvation, taking away all feelings of being thrown out. If you understand this, you will always perceive all memories of sins that come from the devil and have the power to distress you and throw you into despair, quenching every hope of salvation and casting you down from a fear of being thrown out. Once you are conscience of this it will not be hard for you have great hope, which will remove all despair.

Great hope moves one to ponder the Divine mercy, into whose boundless depths one granted with it, throws his many sins, with a steadfast belief that God wishes and looks, not for our destruction, but rather for our

salvation. The only confident foundation on which this belief can be strengthened, and most important at that time, is the limitless power that comes from the death of our Lord and Savior on the cross. So, because we should ever strive to gain the protection of the cross, how much more should we do so at that time! Here is an appropriate prayer to make to your Lord and God when you go through the gates of death, "O Lord. I have many reasons to be afraid. For, in Your justice, You may condemn me and throw me out on account of my sins. Yet still greater is my bold hope in your forgiveness on account of Your limitless mercy in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. So I entreat You to spare me, Your wretched and poor creation, in Your limitless goodness. For even though I am condemned for my sins, I am washed clean by the precious blood of Your Son and our God to praise You forever. I place my entire being into Your hands. Deal with me in Your mercy. For You alone are the Lord of my life."



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 12: (3) THE TEMPTATION OF VAINGLORY

The next temptation at our final hour is vainglory and self-regard, which incites one to depend on oneself and one's own deeds. So you should never, particularly in your final hour, allow your focus to rest on yourself and what belongs to you, giving in to being self-satisfied, even if you have advanced in the virtues beyond all the saints. All your satisfaction should be in God, and you should put your hope completely in His mercy and the Passion of our Lord and Savior. Disparage yourself in your eyes until the end, if you want to be saved. If some work you did happens to enter your mind, consider it a work which God did in you and by you, rather than being something of your own doing.

Let your refuge be the protection of Divine mercy. But do not let yourself expect it as if were a recompense for you numerous, toils you have suffered or for the victories you have achieved. Ever stand in the saving fear and the steadfast belief that every work and toil would have been useless, if God had not brought it under the wing of His goodwill and had not been there to help it and work in it. So place your trust in his compassionate goodwill. If you take this counsel, you can be confident that at your final hour the assaults of the foe will come to nothing, and an open road will lie before you, on which you can travel rejoicing from the earthly valley to the Jerusalem in the heavens, which you have been yearning for.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 13: (4) TEMPTATION BY PHANTOMS

Should our wicked, scheming and tough foe, who tirelessly tempts us, try to seduce you in your final hour with phantoms, dreams or by changing into a luminous angel, stand steadfastly aware of your poverty and worthlessness. And tell him from a brave and fearless heart, "O accursed one, go back to your darkness. I am not worthy of dreams and revelations. There is but one thing I require, the boundless mercy of my Lord Jesus Christ, and the intercessions of our Lady, the Theotokos (Mother of God), the ever-Virgin Mary and all the saints." Even if there is a clear sign that makes you suppose that you are seeing a genuine vision sent from God, do not be hasty in trusting it, but instead be quick to move deeply into the understanding of your worthlessness. Do not be afraid to upset God with this. Because our humility is never disagreeable to Him. If you really need such revelations, God is aware of how to keep you from shutting your eyes to them, and will be forgiving to your mistrust that they are from Him. He Who gives grace to the humble, does not remove it for actions prompted by humility. These are the normal weapons employed by our foe to assault us in our final hour. However he also employs, for the same end, any other passion, which a dying person had during his life. And those which he was most given to, the foe works to excite, so that one should depart from this life in a passionate condition, which would then determine his fate. On account of this, my beloved, we must be armed to fight against our worst passions prior to this great war, battling against them fearlessly, we should be being victorious against them and rid ourselves of them, so as to conquer them more readily in our final hour, which may come upon us at

any time. In regards to this the Lord tells everyone, "Fight against them until they are consumed" (1 Sam 15:18).



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 14: ABOUT HEART-FELT SPIRITUAL PEACE

My beloved, your heart, is fashioned by God solely for the end of loving Him and serving as a tabernacle for Him. Thus He bids you to grant Him your heart, telling you, "My son, grant me your heart" (Prov 23:26). However because God is peace beyond all understanding, it is absolutely necessary for the heart, which wants to welcome Him, to be at peace. Because only He is only found in peace says David. Thus work above all else to establish and make steadfast the calm state of your heart. All of your virtues, actions and works should be focused on achieving this peace, and particularly your courageous works of fighting against the foes of your salvation. The skilled worker of silence, Arsenius said, "Make it your entire concern that your inner condition should be in agreement with God, and you will conquer your outer passions.

A peaceful heart is troubled by the passions. Thus if you do not permit passions to draw near the heart, it will ever abide in peace. In unseen war, the fighter stands completely armed and ready at the doors of the heart and repels all who try to enter and trouble it. While there is peace in the heart, overcoming those who attack is not troublesome. Heartfelt peace is the aim of spiritual war, and the most efficient way of being successful in it. Thus, when passionate commotion slips into the heart, do not jump up to repel the passion trying to conquer it, but descend quickly into your heart and work to restore a quiet state there. Once the heart has quieted down, the contest is finished.

Our life is nothing but ceaseless war and unending temptations. Temptation brings about a fight, and so a battle results. Because of this

warring you should be ever vigilant and do your best to protect your heart, keeping a watch over it, to maintain its peace and quiet. When troubling motions rise up in your soul, zealously labor to smother them and soothe the heart, for fear this trouble make you drift from the right way. Because the human heart is as a weight in a clock or a rudder on a boat. If you lighten the weight or make it heavier, it will suddenly alter the motion of all the parts, and the hands will no longer give the right time. If you push the rudder right or left, the direction of the boat is changed, so that it no longer remains on the courses it previously was on. In the same manner, when your heart is troubled, all within becomes disordered and our mind ceases to think aright. On account of this it is important not to tarry in silencing the heart once it is troubled with internal or external things, if at prayer or some other time.

Thus you must understand that you will understand how to pray correctly only when you have become skilled at keeping inner peace. So focus your attention on this task and try to discover how to accomplish this state when all actions are done with a peaceful heart, pleasure and joy. Briefly, I would like to say, that keeping a peaceful heart should be something you regularly attend to all your life. You should never permit it to be thrown in disorder. Then performing all your normal business deals in this calm harbor of peace as was written, "My son, continue with you business in meekness," ([Ecc 3:17](#)) you will achieve the blissful state promised to those that are at peace, "Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth" ([Matt 5:5](#)).



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 15: ON HOW TO PRESERVE PEACE WITHIN.

In order to preserve peace within you:

(a) First keep your outer senses in check and run from all immorality in your outer actions, that is, do not look, speak gesture, walk or do anything with commotion. Rather always be calm and orderly. Be used to conducting yourself with a modest quietness in your outer motions and deeds. You will readily and without toil achieve peace within, in your heart, because as the holy fathers tell us, the inner person sets his tone from the outer.

(b) Have love for everyone and live peaceful with all, as St. Paul says, "If it is possible, as much as you can, live at peace with everyone" (Rom 12:18).

(c) Make sure that your conscience is spotless, in order that it does not eat away at you or rebuke you in anything. Instead it should be at peace with God, yourself, your neighbors, and everything external. If you keep your conscience pure, it will develop and intensify your peace within. As David tells us, "Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble" (Ps 119:165).

(d) Familiarize yourself with enduring all forms of discomfort and rebukes without being disturbed. It is true that prior to obtaining this custom you will have lament and suffer many things in your heart, from a lack of skill in controlling yourself in such instances. However once this custom is obtained, your soul will be greatly comforted in the conflicts you encounter. However, if you are determined, you will daily learn to control yourself

more and more, and you will soon attain a state in which you will know how to keep your spirit at peace in every tempest, both within and without.

If sometimes you cannot control your heart and bring peace to it by casting out all stress and sorrow, give yourself over to prayer and be diligent about it, imitating the three times our Lord and Savior prayed in Gethsemane, which He did to demonstrate to you, with His example that prayer ought to be your shelter in every tribulation and distress of heart and regardless of how faint and sorrowful you may feel, you will not give up until you attain a state in which your will is full in agreement with God's will and, at peace from this, your heart becomes filled with a daring courageousness and is happily prepared to encounter, and receive those things which it was afraid to avoid, just as our Lord was afraid, and felt sorrow, but He restored His peace by prayer, saying calmly, "Let us arise and be going. Look, he draws near who is about to betray me" ([Matt 26:46](#)).



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 16: THAT A PEACEFUL HEART IS ESTABLISHED SLOWLY.

Your regular concern should be to not let your heart become troubled, but rather to employ every possible means to keep it in a peaceful and calm state. When God sees your labors, He will send His grace to you and will turn you soul into a peaceful city. Then your heart will be transformed into a house of comfort, as the Psalm allegorically states, "Jerusalem is built as a city" ([Ps 122:8](#)). God requires but one thing from you, that each time you are troubled by something, you straightaway bring yourself back to a peaceful state, and so be untroubled in all your activities. You should understand that needs patience, because in the same way that city is not built in a single day, so you also cannot be expected to gain peace within in a day. Because acquiring inner peace means constructing a house for the God of peace and setting up a tabernacle for the Almighty. And through these means you become God's temple. You should know as well that it is God Who constructs this house in you, and without Him your labor is in vain. As it is written, "Unless the Lord build the house, those that labor, labor in vain" ([Ps 127:1](#)). Also you should realize that the primary foundation of this peaceful heart is humility and keeping from works and deeds that bear anxiety and concern. In terms of the first, who does not understand that meekness, a peaceful heart and a humble heart are so intimately related that where there is one, the other is present as well. One whose heart is peaceable and meek is humble as well. And the one who has a humble heart is meek and peaceable also. Because of this our Lord bound them permanently together, stating, "Learn from me, because I am meek and humble of heart" ([Matt 11:29](#)). In terms of the second, we see its

model in the Old Testament, that is, that God wanted His house to be constructed, not by David, who was largely occupied with wars and hardship during his life, but rather by Solomon, his son, who, as his name demonstrates, was a king of peace, fighting with no one.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

**CHAPTER 17: TO KEEP A PEACEFUL HEART ONE SHOULD
KEEP AWAY FROM GLORY AND INSTEAD ONE SHOULD
LOVE HUMILITY AND POVERTY.**

So, dear brother, if you love having a peaceful heart, labor to go into it through the door of humility, because there is no other door except humility that leads in to it. And to obtain humility, work to accept all persecutions and trials with a warm embrace. Be like beloved sisters, and run from all glory and honors. Instead prefer to be unknown and mocked by everyone, and to accept no concern or comfort from anyone except God. Convicted of its usefulness, firmly fix in your heart the understanding that God is your sole good and shelter, and that everything else is thorns, which will mortally wound you if brought into your heart.

If by chance you are dishonored by someone, do not be upset, but happily endure it, confident that God is with you then. Do not look for honor and have no other wish than to endure the love you have for God and to do those things that magnify His glory. Strive to be happy when someone insults, rebukes or blames you. Because this bad treatment and disgrace hides great wealth, and should you accept it gladly, soon you will be spiritually rich, unknown to the person who has done you this favor, that is to say, the one who bore this disgrace upon you. Never look to be loved or honored, so that you might be more at liberty to suffer along with the crucified Christ, because then you encounter no stumbling-block to this from anybody or anything. Take heed to yourself as your fiercest foe. Do not follow after your own desires, thoughts or feelings, if you do not want to get lost. Always be completely armed to fight against yourself, so that

when you want something, however saintly, strip it bare of all things which are unnecessary and put it, alone, in the presence of God, with great humility, begging Him that His will and not yours be done. Undertake this with an honest surrender of your will to God's, with no hint of self-regard, understanding that there is nothing in you, that can help you work out your salvation.

Keep yourself from suggestions which seem to be holy and excite an excessive zeal. Of this the Lord spoke allegorically, saying, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them" ([Matt 7:15](#)). Their fruit is their limp spirit. Understand that all things which pull you back from a humble nature and from interior peace and quiet, however wondrous they may seem are merely false prophets who, with sheep's clothing, which is, a hypocritical eagerness to good deeds to neighbors without distinction. These are truly ravenous wolves who will strip you of your humble, peaceful and quiet state, which is so important for all who look to advance spiritually on a regular basis. The greater the external part of an act appears holy, the greater care must be used to examine it, yet without turmoil. If you should make this mistake, there is no need to be depressed. Rather humble yourself before God and, aware of your weak nature, let it be a lesson for the future. Because it could be that God has permitted it to occur, to shatter some hidden element of your pride that you are not aware of.

Should you detect that your soul has been pierced by a poisonous barb from a thorn, which is to say, by a passion, or lustful thought, do not be disturbed, but intensify your focus and work to not let it attain your heart. Meet them squarely and fight them, retaining your heart behind you, away

from their reach and spotless before God. And so, on account of its purity, you will ever have God present in the depth of your heart. Also, fill your inner person with the confidence that everything that happens to you is a test and a lesson, to instruct you to discern things well, which tend to your salvation, in order that, by following them you might receive the true crown, made ready for you in God's steadfast love.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 18: IN ORDER FOR GOD TO EMBRACE YOUR SOUL IT IS NECESSARY THAT IT STAY ISOLATED.

Because the God of gods, and the Lord of lords was well-pleased to fashion your soul so that it would be an abode and a temple for Him, you should greatly esteem it and not allow it to be corrupted by tending to things that are lower than it. Your full desire and hope should ever be centered on this unseen dwelling of God. However you should know that if your soul is not isolated in itself He will not visit your soul. God wants it to be isolated, that is to say, to be as distant as it can be from all thoughts and longings, and most of all its own will. With regard to this last one, you should not perform any rigorous works or deprivations by yourself and without due consideration, or look for occasions to be persecuted for the love of God, being obedient merely to the proposals of your own will. To do this you should have the guidance of your spiritual director, who leads you as God's representative. You should obey him in everything, and by him, God will guide your will toward what He wills and determines to be most beneficial for you. Never do something only from your desire, but allow God to act in you to do solely what He desires you to do. Your desires should be free of yourself, that is to say, you should have no desires. If you must have a desire it should be that regardless if a matter turns out to be favorable or not, you would not be at all bothered by it, but keep a peaceful spirit, as if you wanted nothing at all.

Such a temperament is genuine freedom for the heart and isolation. Because then it is bound neither by your mind or will in regard to anything. If you offer up to God your soul emptied in this way, free and alone, you

will see the wondrous deeds He will work in it. But more than anything He will surround you with heavenly peace. This gift from Him will become a vessel for every other gift, as we are told by the great Gregory of Salonica, "O wondrous unification, hidden treasure-chest of the Almighty God, where He alone agrees to hear you speak to Him, and He speaks with your heart and soul. O deserted isolation which has turned into a paradise. Because only there does God let man see and speak with Him. 'Now I will turn aside, and see this great sight, said Moses about the bush in the Sinai desert, a real place, yet full of inner meditations ([Exo 3:3](#)). If you would like to be deemed worthy of the same thing, step into this place, taking off your sandals, because this ground is holy. The first thing you must do is to lay bare your feet, which is to remove the inclinations of your soul, and allow them to be divested of all worldly things. Do not take a purse, nor bag on this journey, just as the Lord ordered His disciples to do ([Luke 10:4](#)). No longer should you be attracted to the things of this world, nor should you greet anyone on the way, as Elisha told his servant and the Lord charged His disciples. Your entire mind, inclination and love should be fixed only on God and not to any created thing. "Let the dead bury their own dead" ([Matt 8:22](#)). Alone, walk in the land of the living, and let death have no portion in you.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 19: ABOUT PERFORMING APPROPRIATE WORKS OF LOVE FOR YOUR NEIGHBORS, SO THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE A PEACEFUL SOUL.

In the Gospels the Lord declared He had come to bring the fire of love on earth to our hearts, and that His overwhelming desire is that it be kindled quickly" (Luke 12:49). Love for God has no limits, as the beloved God has no limits. However love for your neighbor needs to have a limit. If you do not stay in the correct bounds, it could turn you from God's love, and cause you serious harm, casting you to your doom. You need to love your neighbor, however your love should not be harmful to your soul. Do all your deeds in a simple and holy way, with nothing else in mind, other than to be well-pleasing to God. This will guard you from taking any missteps in doing works of charity for your neighbor.

The key thing in these works is helping the salvation of your neighbor. However such deeds are often harmed by misplaced zeal, which brings about nothing but trouble both to your neighbor and to you. Be a model of heartfelt faith and of a life which is well-pleasing to God, and as the apostles, you will have the sweet-smelling fragrance of Christ, which drew all to follow Him. However do not annoy others with unrestrained words, because by doing this you will not only ruin your peace with others but also with yourself. Have a steadfast zeal and a bold desire for all to know the truth in the same measure of perfection as you have it, and to be drunk with this wine, which God promised and which is now granted by Him as free gift (Isa 55:1). You should always have a strong thirst for your neighbor's salvation, but it must come from your love of God, and not from poorly

placed zeal. God will implant in your soul, a love for your neighbor, when it has given up everything. Later on, He will come in His own season to gather His fruit. However you should not sow anything yourself. The only thing you need to do is to offer up the earth of your heart to God, free of every tare and thistle, and He will sow seed in it, when and how He wishes. This seed will bear fruit in its due season. Ever keep in mind that God wants to see your soul isolated from everything, so as to unite it with Himself. So let Him act in you, and do not impair Him by interfering with your desires. Do not form any plans for yourself, save one, namely to ever seek to be well-pleasing to God by being obedient to His will. According to the parable in the Gospel, the landowner has gone out already to seek laborers for his vineyard. Put aside every anxiety, and passionate attachment for things of the world, and God will robe you with Himself and grant you things that are beyond your imagination. As much as you are able, completely forget about yourself, and let God's love alone abide in your soul.

Also, you should use moderation in your zeal with regard to others, and the Lord will keep your soul at peace. Take heed, for fear your soul lose its primary blessing, a peaceful heart, from foolhardy concerns about the benefit of others. The root from which you profited by this blessings is complete obedience to God with your soul, along with complete renunciation. Do these things, not expecting a reward, and never think that you can somehow do something which is worthy of anything. God is the One who is primary actor in everything, and needs nothing from you, save humility in His presence, and your soul, liberated from all worldly concerns, as a gift to Him. And there should be but one desire in the depths of your heart, to always have the will of God fulfilled in you in everything.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 20: THE SOUL, DIVESTED OF ITS WILL, SHOULD SURRENDER TO GOD.

Trust in God, my dear brother, Who summons everyone, saying, "Come to me, all that labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matt 11:28). Obey this voice that summons you, hoping that the Holy Spirit will come. With your eyes closed dive into the ocean of divine providence and goodwill. Allow the powerful waves of the will of God to bear you along, like some object, without your own desires resisting. And so you will be carried into the harbor of salvation and Christian perfection. Do this frequently throughout the day and look for quiet within and without as often as you can, in order to dedicate all the powers of your soul to exercises which can affect in you a strong love for God. Such exercises would be prayer, ceaselessly invoking the sweetest name of our Lord and Savior, tears which flow out of love for Him, a warm and joyful worship of Him, and other such spiritual deeds. Allow these deeds to be exercised in you without compelling your heart, for fear you stupidly wear yourself out with forced practices, and so become hard-hearted and unreceptive to the influence of grace. Seek the counsel of someone who has experience, and with their help, work to obtain the practice of regular meditation on the holiness of God and His enumerable graces. Receive with humility, sweet drops, which can fall onto your soul from His indescribable goodness.

But do not irritate God seeking manifestations of His goodwill. Rather remain humble in your isolation, waiting for the will of God to be done in you. And when God gives them to you without much labor on your part,

you will enjoy their sweet fruit. Humility, giving up oneself, and surrendering to God's will, are the keys which unlock the mysterious treasure-chest of the spiritual gifts of perception and love from God. These keys will also lock the door to ignorance and spiritual dryness.

As much as possible, love to silently stand alongside Mary at the feet of Christ our Lord and to hear what He will speak to your soul. Take heed, for fear your foes, the most potent of which is yourself, hamper this pious standing in silence in the presence of the Lord, When you search for God with your mind, to rest in God, do not apportion to Him any particular spot or limit by your short-sighted and powerless imagination. Because he has no bounds, for He is everywhere, filling all things, or put another way, everything is in Him. You will discover Him inside yourself, within your soul, each time you genuinely look for Him. God wants to be with us, sons of men, so that we become worthy of Him, even though He does not need us.

When you take up the Bible, do not try to read page upon page, but meditate on each word. Pause on words which cause you to go deeply into yourself, or make you sorrowful, or fill you with spiritual joy and love. It is a sign that God is coming near to you. Accept Him with a humble, open heart, since He wants you to receive Him. On account of this if you neglect to finish the spiritual reading assigned to you, do not be anxious. Because the reason for this, as it is for all spiritual practices is to become a worthy vessel to receive the Lord, and when He gives you this, there is no need to be concerned about how it happens. Also, when you ponder a divine matter, particularly some portion of the passion of Christ our Lord, pause at the point where your heart is touched, and keep your focus on it a little longer, to extend this heavenly feeling.

A significant hindrance to keeping inner peace, my dear brother, is fixing yourself as if with some unchangeable command, to go through a certain number of Psalms, and chapters from the Gospels or letters. Those who fix such numbers, often rush through their reading, not bothering to notice if their heart is being touched by it or not, or if spiritual thoughts arise in their mind. Often when they cannot finish their reading, they are bothered and troubled, not on account of missing the spiritual fruit that comes from the reading, which they require to form a new person in themselves, but rather just because they did not read everything. Hear what St. Isaac says about this, "If you want to achieve joy in reading through texts and to understand the spiritual words they speak, put aside the fixed number of verses, in order that your mind be focused on studying the Spirit's words, until, being filled with awe at God's dispensation, your soul is excited to a higher knowledge of them, and so is moved to glorify God or to a sadness that is beneficial to the soul. Laborious work yields no peace for the mind, and being anxious usually strips the mind of the power of taste, and like a leech plunders the thoughts and sucks the life-blood out of the body and its members.

If you truly want to finish the course of your life in virtue, have no other goal save to discover God wherever He elects to show Himself to you. Once this is granted to you, cease all your other actions and do not press head with them. Forget everything else and enjoy your rest in God. After the Almighty elects to draw back from you and stops showing His closeness to you, then you can resume to your normal spiritual practices, still having the same goal in mind, which is to find, with their help, your Beloved, and once you find Him, again to do what I mentioned earlier, which is, to cease everything you are doing, and to repose only in Him. Take heed to my words, because there are many people who are occupied with spiritual

work, who dispossess themselves of the salvific fruits of peace, obtained from their spiritual exercises, simply because they persevere in them, fearful of losing out if they neglect to finish them, persuaded, incorrectly, that this is what makes up spiritual perfection. So following after their own will, they often force themselves, but acquire no genuine stillness or peace, where God truly abides and finds repose.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 21: ON ONLY SEEKING GOD AND NOT PLEASURES AND COMFORTS.

You should always choose those things that are hard and painful. Have no love for pleasures and comforts, which are unprofitable for the soul. Love the subordinate state, reliant on the will of another. Every act you perform should bring you a step closer to God, and do not permit your actions to be hindrances on this road. God alone should be your delight. He should be for you the most wonderful joy and everything else should be bitter by comparison. Offer up to God every adversity you encounter. Love Him and cede your entire heart to Him, not hesitating or being afraid. And He will discover a way to resolve all your troubles and lift you up if you have fallen down. Briefly if you love God then you will receive endless blessings from Him. Therefore you should offer up all of yourself as a sacrifice for God, in a peaceful and quiet spirit. To assist you on this road, and to free yourself from being tired and misled, put your will into the will of God. The more fully you can put it there, not giving anything to yourself, the stronger you will be and the more solace you will receive. Your will should be so in tune with God's will, that you desire nothing that He does not want.

With everything you do always renew the intent and determination of your soul to be well-pleasing to God in everything. Have no plans for the future because you do not know "what the day might produce" ([Prov 27:1](#)). Yet keep yourself at liberty. This should not hinder anyone from making an effort to be concerned about the things that need to be done in his state and occupation. Because such concern agrees with with the will of God and

not does interrupt ones inner peace, dedication to God or one's progress in the spiritual life. In all things that you do keep a steadfast determination to do everything you can and all that is required, but be unconcerned about all else and with humility submit to any outer consequences.

The one thing that you are always able to do is to offer up your will to God, desiring nothing else. As a consequence you will ever enjoy liberty, and being unattached all around, you will ever rejoice and be at peace. This spiritual liberty is a great blessings, and you will hear about it in writings by various saints. It is really a constant dwelling of the inner person within, with no desire coming out of his inner disposition to seek anything outside of himself. So long as you stay at liberty this way, you will partake in that heavenly, unutterable joy, which cannot be separated from the kingdom of God, confirmed within us. As the Lord states, "The kingdom of God is inside you" (Luke 17:21).



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 22: NEVER BE DISCOURAGED WHEN INNER PEACE WITHDRAWS OR DISRUPTED.

Often those who keep to the way of God often encounter times when the divine peace, the sweet isolation and the liberty they love is disrupted and withdraws. There are times when motions of the heart put forth dust clouds inside so they are unable to see the way they are supposed to follow. If you experience something like this, understand that God lets it happen for your own benefit. This is exactly the battle for which God has given His saints luminous crowns. Therefore, recalling this, do not lose heart in the struggle you encounter. And, as in any other turmoil, cast your gaze up to the Lord and tell Him from your heart, "O Lord my God. Be gracious to Your servant, and may Your will be done in me. I understand and confess that Your words are steadfast and true and Your promises trustworthy. I place all my trust in them, and I stand firmly on Your path." Blessed is the soul which surrenders itself to the Lord every time it encounters turmoil and difficulties. If, despite this, the conflict continues and you are unable to harmonize and join your will with God's will as rapidly as you would like, do not be upset or despair, but persist in surrendering yourself to God, and bow willing before His judgments. By this you will achieve a victory. Recall the struggle, which our Lord Jesus Christ had to suffer in Gethsemane, when His humanity, initially terrified by the cup that had to be drunk, cried out, saying, "My Father, if be possible, let this cup pass by me." However later, coming to His sense and placing His soul in God's hands, He said freely and with deep humility, "yet, not as I will, but as You will" ([Matt 26:39](#)).

When you are faced with trials, restrain yourself from taking any steps before lifting your eyes up to our Lord, Christ crucified. It is there that you will see in large letters how you should conduct yourself in times of distress. Copy the actions you see and not the letters, that is, when you sense assaults of self-obsession and self-indulgence, do not regard them and do not cowardly slink down from your cross, but take refuge in prayer and suffer it with humility, working to overcome your will, and to be steadfast in wanting God's will to be done in you. If you emerge from prayer with such fruit, exult and be glad. If you do not achieve it, your soul will be left hungry, having not sampled its normal food. Try not to let anything abide in your soul, for any length of time, save God only. Do not be sorrowful or disturbed by anything. Do not cast your eyes on the evil done by others and to poor examples. Instead be as a small, innocent child who does not see them and harmlessly moves on.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 23: TAKE HEED, FOR OUR FOES HAVE MANY SCHEMES TO DESTROY OUR INNER PEACE.

Our foe, the devil, exults when our heart or soul is in distress. Therefore he employs all of his trickery to try and disquiet our souls. The first way he does this is by trying to stir up self-admiration, which causes grace to leave, which forms and fosters inner peace. On account of this, he proposes the thought that everything which seems good to us, is obtained through our own efforts and, casting aside humility and simplicity, he inclines us to put a great value on and attribute much of it to ourselves, and to feel that we are rather important, clouding in forgetfulness the work of heavenly grace, without which no one is able to even speak the name of the Lord. St. Paul mentions this saying, "No one can say that Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3). This grace is granted to every believer and its presence is a mark that one is a genuine believer. Once a believer has received it, he cannot do anything authentically good without its assistance. It stays with the believer, as the Lord promised, and our foe cannot do anything with the believer who has it and is enveloped by it. Thus the foe works by every possible means to make it go away, and the first thing he does, as was mentioned before, is to propose self-admiration or feelings that we are not worthless, but somebody important. To the one who welcomes such proposals, the foe proposes a novel idea, which is that you are better than others, that you have more zeal and are more prodigious in deeds. Once he successfully sows this thought, the foe then guides the person to condemn and scorn others, which will undoubtedly be followed by pride. All these things can happen in the heart during a single moment. Yet even so, the work of grace is straightaway

lessened, which causes one to lose focus on oneself, lessening one's zeal and producing thoughts which are, at first empty, and then later lustful. This is followed by passionate motions, and is connected with a tempest in the heart. And so inner peace destroyed. A state such as this may be temporary if the one suffering it comes to his senses, and filled with regret, repents and by means of prayer restores his regular inner state. The foe is cast out, but he does not grow faint-hearted, and comes back time and time again with the same proposals, with the same aim in mind, that is, to ruin our inner peace.

Since you know these things, my dear brother, guard yourself carefully in order to oppose these evil tactics. As the Lord has told us, "Watch and pray, so that you do not enter into temptation" ([Matt 26:41](#)). Keep a close watch over yourself with due care, for fear your foe come close and plunder you, taking away your cherished prize, namely, inner peace and a still soul. Our foe labors to bring to ruin the peace in our soul, for he knows that when the soul is distressed it is more readily given to evil. You must keep a close watch over your peace because you know that if the soul is at peace, the foe cannot enter it. Then it is prepared for everything that is good and does good works voluntarily and with ease, having little trouble with any hindrance. To be more successful in this, strive to foresee the movements of our foe. A forward movement of our foe is a self-dependent thought. Set it as a rule to consider as obviously coming from our foe each thought which causes you lower your trust that all good things come from God, and that you cannot be successful without His grace. So then, you should place all your hope in Him. You should consider all such thoughts as obviously coming from our foe and angrily refuse them, and put them to flight, until they are gone. The work of the Holy Spirit in us always leads our souls in the direction of union with God, to kindling a sweet love for Him, and a

blessed and steadfast trust in Him. Anything that is opposed to these things is the handiwork of our foe.

He employs every means possible he can think of to trouble the soul. He presents the heart with extraneous fears, fatigues the soul, keeps it from the required inclinations and from being joyful as it ought to be in confession, communion, or prayer. Instead it forces it to do these things not with a humble, bold love, but with fear and confusion. He causes the soul to accept with hopeless grief and pain a poverty of spiritual feelings and the lack of inner joy, which often happens during prayer times or at other spiritual exercises. He does this not by proposing to it that this spiritual poverty is permitted by God for its betterment, but rather by suggesting that all its labors are useless, and so it is best to forsake them. By this means he brings about a sense of hopelessness and disorder so powerful that the soul starts to suppose that all the things it does are pointless, and that God has forgotten and forsaken it.

Yet this is obviously false. A soul might suffer dryness and a poverty of spiritual, divine feelings, but despite this, it can do all sorts of good deeds, with a simple faith, equipped with long-suffering and regularity. Still, to assist you in better understanding all of this, and to keep you from being harmed when God finds it beneficial for you well-being, to put you in an impoverished spiritual state, I will explain in the next chapter what blessings are to be had from humble patience for those, who employ it during episodes of spiritual dryness, so that you might learn how not to lose the peace in your soul and be consumed by grief, when you must endure either this or some troubling influx of thoughts and passionate movements.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 24: THAT ONE SHOULD NOT BE DISTURBED BY A LACK OF SPIRITUAL EMOTIONS OR INTERIOR TEMPTATIONS.

Even though I have already covered the topic, in chapter 7, of spiritual dryness and cooling of the heart and the sorrow these affect in the soul, I will now include something I did not mention there, that is, that this sorrow and dryness or spiritual poverty can bring benefit the soul greatly, if we suffer and welcome them with a humble patience. If one only knew how profitable this was ahead of time, he would surely not regard this condition as a burden nor would he experience grief should it befall him. Because then he would not consider this bitter lack of interior spiritual consolations as a mark of divine disapproval, but rather would see it as God's love for him, and thus would gladly welcome it as a merciful gesture.

Truly, he might already derive comfort from the fact that these states are primarily given to those who have delivered themselves over with marked zeal to serving God, and to giving due heed to keeping from all such things that might trouble Him. So they suffer them not at the start of their conversion, but rather when they have labored in His service for a great deal of time, so that their heart has been adequately cleansed through holy prayer and remorse, and when they have felt a particular spiritual joy and warmth which has made them dedicate themselves fully to God, and after they have put this dedication to God into practice. For we do not see sinners and those who are given to worldly vanities having such experiences or being forced to undergo such trials. This shows clearly that

such a bitter state is a worthy and valuable food, to only be partaken by those the Lord summons and loves most. And even though its taste is unpleasant when consumed, it brings about a great benefit, although this may not be clear at the time. Because when the soul is in a dry state and is tasting such bitter gall, and enduring temptations and having distracting thoughts which would make one shudder, it is poisonous to the heart and can almost kill the inner man. However when the soul discovers itself in such a state, it learns not to trust itself nor to depend on its own good condition. So it achieves genuine humility, which God desires us to have. Also it then becomes encouraged with a wish to achieve a strong love for God, a most strict attention to the mind and the hardest courage to suffer such temptations without injury and leaves this fight with its "senses trained to discern good from evil" ([Heb 5:15](#)), according to St. Paul. However because these good fruits are concealed from the soul, I say again, it is disturbed and runs away from this bitter gall, because it does not want to be without its spiritual joys even for a brief time, and considers all spiritual exercises without them to be useless.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 25: ALL TEMPTATIONS ARE SENT FOR OUR BETTERMENT.

So that you might better understand that, generally speaking, every temptation is sent from God for our benefit, take heed to what I will tell you. The natural disposition of one's polluted nature is to be proud, to love self-praise and showing off, to hold onto one's own opinions and decisions and always to desire that everyone hold him in higher regard. This self-love and high regard of oneself is quite hurtful in spiritual works, to such a degree that even shadow of them is sufficient to keep one from attaining genuine perfection. So in His wise judgment for all of us, and particularly for those who have truly surrendered themselves to His ministry, our loving heavenly Father permits temptations to assault us, in order to bring us to a state where we can readily flee this horrible danger of self-applause, and are nearly forced to have a humble regard of ourselves. He did this very thing with Peter the apostle by allowing him to deny Him three-times so that he might realize his weakness and not depend on himself. St. Paul also had a similar trail, for after he had been taken up to the third heaven and the unutterable heavenly mysteries were shown to him, God forced him to suffer a bothersome temptation in his flesh. This was done to remind him of his helplessness and nothingness and to help him advance in humility, so that he should only boast of his weakness, for fear the greatness of the revelations shown to him by God should make him prone to pride, as he states, "And for fear I be elevated by the exceeding greatness of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn for the flesh, a messenger of Satan that he might buffet me, that I might not be exalted" (2 Cor 12:7).

So, affected by compassion for this misguided and unruly inclination of ours, to have a high self-regard, God permits all sorts of temptations to assault us. Sometimes they are quite torturous, in order that we might better perceive our weakness and be humbled. In this the Lord demonstrates His care and concern and His wisdom. Because by humbling us He forces us to benefit greatly from what seems most hurtful, because above everything humility is what is most important for our soul. So, if every temptation is granted to us to instruct us in humility, it follows that each servant of God who samples bitter conditions such as dryness and spiritual poverty, experiences this in order to learn how to be humble by supposing that they came to be on account of his own sins, and that no one else could be so negligent in such things, or labor for God's sake with a soul so cold, that such a condition only befalls those who are forsaken by God, and so that he has also been forsaken, and deservedly so. Out of such humility this good is born: someone who previously considered himself as someone important, now having sampled the bitter pill sent from heaven, starts to consider himself as the greatest sinner in the world, unworthy of even being called a Christian. And truly he would not have come to so low an opinion of himself and such a profoundly humble state, if he were not disposed to it by those particular temptations and this great grieving and heart-felt bitterness. And so God shows great mercy in this life to the soul which gives itself up to Him with prudent humility, in order to let Him cure it according to His will, using the medicine He alone knows perfectly to be most successful to bring it to a good condition.

Apart from these fruits, which are borne to the soul by these temptations of a want of spiritual comforts, there are many other additional fruits. After being made remorseful by these interior burdens, one is forced with a new energy and zeal to flee to God and beseech Him for ready

assistance. He does assiduously everything which seems helpful to overcome the sorrow in his soul and to cast out the bitter gall from his heart, and to keep away from this tortuous state of the soul in the future. He also makes a steadfast resolution to walk from then on, in the way of the spiritual life, closely paying attention to all the motions of his heart, and to keep away from even the faintest shadow of sin or heedlessness which can separate him from God or God from him. So the sorrow he thought to be so counterproductive to his goals and so injurious, because a spur for him, pushing him to seek after God with more warmth and to keep away, more strictly, from everything that is does not conform to the will of God. In short, every sorrow, and affliction which the soul endures during interior temptations and the lack of spiritual consolations and joys, are merely cleansing medicines. Through such temptations, God in His benevolent affection purifies the soul if the soul can suffer them with a humble heart and patience. And these tortures guarantee that those who patiently endure them will win a crown which will be more illustrious, the more grievous the tortures endured by the heart.

It is plain from all these things that we should not afflict ourselves too grievously or be too disturbed by other temptations which war against us from without, or by the formerly mentioned temptations inside, as those who lack understanding of this business. Because from their lack of experience and knowledge, they suppose that what is from God is from the devil, or instead from their sins and corrupt nature. They mistake divine signs of love for wrath and misunderstand His gifts and graces thinking them to be scourges, from a harsh divine anger. And so they suppose that everything they have done and are doing is pointless and their current deprivation beyond repair. Because if they trusted that these temptations cannot weaken their virtuous state, but will rather help it when the soul

receives them humbly and endures them with thankfulness. If they trusted that they are ordered by God's loving-kindness toward us, they would not be over disturbed and would not lose their inner peace because they suffer such temptations, or have disgrace thoughts, or experience spiritual dryness during their prayers or other spiritual disciplines. All these things would only move their soul to be more humble before God and would force them to decide in their hearts to fulfill the will of God in all things they do, because it is only in this way that God wants to be pleased. They decide to employ every possible means to guard their peace and calm in receiving everything that happens to them, as if it came from our Divine Father, from where comes the bitter cup they must presently drain. Because if a temptation comes from the devil, or somebody else or is the result of our sins, it still relies on God and is sent from Him for our good and to turn away some other major temptation from us.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 26: THE CURE FOR BEING BOTHERED BY MINOR SINS AND FAULTS.

Should you chance to stumble into a sin that can be pardoned either in word or deed, for instance, if you are disturbed by a chance occurrence, or you criticize someone or listen to others criticize, or get into an argument or are impatient, bothered, mistrusting, or heedless, you need not be overly troubled, grieved, and depressed in considering what you did. Most of all you should not magnify your disturbance by grievous thoughts concerning yourself, that you will never be at liberty from such shortcomings, that your desire to labor on behalf of the Lord is too faint, or that you are not advancing in the way of God as you ought. Because each time you do this you saddle your soul with a multitude of other fears effected by faint-heartedness and sorrow. Because what comes next? You are bashful about standing in God's presence, because you have shown yourself to be unfaithful to Him. So you lose time in studying how you had tarried in each sin, if you were desirous of it, if you rejected such thoughts and motions, and so forth. The greater you torment yourself, the more your spirit becomes troubled, and the more your stress grows and your hesitation to confess your sins. Even should you go to confession, you go with a troubling fear, and following confession you still cannot find inner peace, because it feels like you have not related everything. So you live a bitter life, troubled and not bearing fruit, and you lose much time in vain. All this occurs because we neglected our normal weakness and forgot the correct disposition the soul should have toward God. Stated another way, we lose sight of the fact that when the soul commits a pardonable sin (i.e non-

mortal sin), it should return to God through humble repentance and a firm hope, and not torment itself with excessive grief, bitterness and distress.

I speak these words about sins which are pardonable, because only these are acceptable for a soul, which has given itself over to the strict life related here. We speak only to those who lead a spiritual life and actively labor to advance in it, making every possible effort to keep from mortal sins. Those who are not leading a strict life, but take what comes by chance and are undisturbed if they offend God with a mortal sin need different advice. The medicine given above is not for such. They should lament deeply and weep grievously, regularly studying their conscience strictly, confessing all their transgressions without self-regard. They should not disregard anything which can remedy and save them. In slight daily sins, repentance should always be inspired and infused with a steadfast trust in God, and still more it should be so with sins more onerous than normal, into which even an ardent servant of God at times falls into by God's permission. Because for a remorseful person, distress, which can torture the heart and eat away it, cannot restore hope in the soul, if it not mixed with a steadfast trust in the goodness and mercy of God. Such trust should ever fill the heart of those wanting to attain the most lofty heights of Christian perfection. It livens and tightens the soul and spirit. But many who have ventured in the way of the spiritual life do not take heed to this, and so cease to advance with a weakened heart. And so they become unfit for receiving the blessed grace, which the Lord has placed on this path and which often rewards only those whose labors never grow slack and who move firmly forward.

However most of all, those who experience some disquiet of the heart, or bewilderment, or a divide in their conscience, should go to their spiritual

father or someone else who is skilled in the spiritual life, while at the same time beseeching the Lord, trusting that He will show the truth through them, and send a solution for their anxieties. So one should be completely at ease with their counsel.



Part Two: The Path to Paradise

CHAPTER 27: IF ONE IS DISTURBED, HE SHOULD STRAIGHTAWAY RESTORE PEACE IN HIS SOUL.

Each time you stumble into a pardonable sin, even should it occur a thousand times in a day, once you perceive it, do not torment yourself and so lose your time without any gain, but straightaway humble yourself and, being aware for your weakness, return to God with hope, and from the depths of your heart, call out to Him, saying, "O Lord my God. I have done these things because of who I am, and thus one could only expect this or even worse sins, if Your grace does not come to my aid, and I am forsaken. I sorrow for what I have done, particularly since my life has no virtuous answer to Your concern for me, but I continue to fail and fall. Forgive me and strengthen me so that I not offend You any more and that I not stray from Your will. Because with zeal, I desire to labor for You, to please You and to be obedient to You in everything." Once you have prayed in such a manner, do not trouble yourself with thoughts about whether God has truly forgiven you. The Lord is close at hand, and hears the groans of His servants. So be at peace in this security and having restored your calm, resume your normal work as if nothing occurred.

You should do this not one time, but, if need be, a hundred times, at each minute, and the final time with the same firm trust and boldness toward God as the first time. In so doing you will give honor to God's boundless goodness, for you should always perceive Him as full of a limitless compassion for us. Then you will never stop advancing in your life, without losing time and labor.

A final way of guarding your inner peace when you give in to sin, is the following: mix the inner work of considering your uselessness and your humility in the presence of God, with the warm memory of the great mercy which God has demonstrated to you personally, and so revitalizing your love for Him, stir in yourself a desire to be thankful to Him and to praise Him. Then thank and praise Him warmly from deep within your soul. Because thanking and praising God is the supreme manifestation of our living union with God. Should you suffer your fall well, its fruit will be, with the help of God, your rising on high toward Him. This should be held in mind by those who are overly bothered and tortured by minor sins, so that they see how greatly blind they are in this regard, and how much they can hurt themselves with their poor-judgment. So this last counsel is really for them. It places into our hands the key, that the soul can use to open the spirit's great treasure-chest and in a brief time can be enriched with the our Lord Jesus Christ's grace, to Whom be the glory, honor and worship, together with His eternal Father, and the Holy Spirit, now and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

