

# Instructions of the Holy Fathers On Spiritual Life.

## Part II

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### Contents:

[A Great Science: Learning About Yourself](#)

[Blessed Cassian the Roman](#)

[Blessed Hesychius of Jerusalem](#)

[Blessed Nilus of Sinai](#)

[Saint Ephraim of Syria](#)

[Blessed John Climacus](#)

### A Great Science: Learning About Yourself

**M**an's preordination is to develop the good qualities that have been implanted in him by the Creator. This essentially pleasant and inspiring task is made difficult because our nature has been damaged by sin. It is for this reason that the inclination toward evil begins to emerge at a very early age, even before a person's will and mind have been fully developed. With time, repeated sins become bad habits — passions that propel the person toward sin with ever increasing force. If a person does not fight these passions, they develop into vices that can completely enslave the person. However, if a person heeds the voice of his conscience and — with God's help — fights his vile inclinations, he will not only conquer them, but will acquire good qualities that he previously lacked. Thus one grows and is perfected spiritually.

To understand your spiritual nature, to learn how to master your inclinations toward evil and various temptations is the most important science for every individual. As all the Saints fervently studied this science, their personal experience of internal struggle on the path to sanctity is especially important to us.

In the writings of the Holy Fathers, passions are divided into eight "patrimonial" or major classifications, which are the following: gluttony, fornication, love of money, anger, sorrow, despondency, vainglory and pride. The Holy Fathers go on to explain that three of these passions — gluttony, love of money and vainglory — give birth to the other five. (Apostle John the Theologian

calls these three as *"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life"* (1 John 2:16). In essence, all lusts are generated from a distorted and excessive love of oneself, from self-centeredness.

Apart from this, the Holy Fathers then turn their attention to the interrelationships between these passions. Normally, gluttony generates depraved carnal desires and from vainglory comes pride. When gluttony, carnal desires, love of money, vainglory and pride are not gratified, either anger or sorrow arises — depending on circumstances and the person's character. After the emergence of anger, sorrow also appears and as it increases, it develops into despondency.

Every major (or patrimonial) passion gives birth to many others, which in turn emerge in most diverse forms. "I will tell you what sins emanate from the major eight," writes Blessed John Climacus, "In raging passions, there is no rationale or order but every type of iniquity and confusion. For example, sometimes untimely laughter comes from the demon of lasciviousness, sometimes from vainglory when a person praises himself inwardly, and at other times laughter emerges from gluttony... Talkativeness comes sometimes from gluttony and sometimes from vainglory. Blasphemous thoughts are bred by pride, although they frequently emerge from judging others. Hardness of the heart happens from gluttony, sometimes from lack of compassion, and at other times from some addiction."

Passions are infirmities of the soul. Therefore, in order to commence on the path of recovery from your spiritual infirmities, it is essential to initially establish the correct diagnosis i.e. to see and understand them either in the light of the Gospel, or under the direction of an experienced spiritual father. Our lifestyle, our actions and our words usually reflect our inner state. "By their deeds you shall know them," said Christ.

However, sometimes our passions do not emerge outwardly because this would make us shameful before people, or because our circumstances impede their emergence. Sometimes passions remain in a state of suspended animation for long periods of time, waiting for the right combination of circumstances in order to emerge. Sometimes, our good deeds and intentions cloak our passions, making them very difficult to discern. It can be said with certainty, that each one of us carries the roots of all passions. To become free from them and to attain purity of heart requires great effort, which very few undertake conscientiously. This demands a continuous scrutiny of your innermost thoughts and feelings, severely censuring yourself for all your sins, to be deeply penitent and to often go to confession and partake of the Holy Sacraments. However, the fruits of the Holy Spirit obtained as a result of these efforts are enormous.

In this brochure, we have collected instructions of the Holy Fathers, which are particularly detailed in revealing the inner battle and give valuable advice on how to win this battle.

## **Blessed Cassian the Roman**

**B**lessed John Cassian was born in the 350's in the Gallic province (Marseilles) to famous and rich parents that provided him with a good education. From a young age, he cherished the God-pleasing life and, longing to achieve spiritual perfection, traveled east and entered the Bethlehem monastery

as a monk. After 2 years, in the company of another monk, he set out to Egypt to see the Egyptian "starets" (elders) so as to learn from them. Up to the year 400, they lived among the Egyptian recluses in various hermitages, caves & monasteries, familiarizing themselves with ascetic life. Later, they left for Constantinople, where Saint John the Golden Tongue (Chrysostomos), consecrated John Cassian as a deacon.

After Saint John's arrest, Cassian returned to his motherland and continued to live an ascetic life that he learned in Egypt. After a few years, he became renowned for his pious life and was consecrated into priesthood. His followers organized a monastery similar to those in Egypt. Soon after, a women's convent was established. Upon the request of a father superior of one of the Gallic monasteries, Saint Cassian wrote 12 books on regulations for novices, in the form of 24 conversations. He reposed in the year 435. Thanks to Saint Cassian, monasticism was very successful in spreading throughout the west, while his writings on ascetic life exerted great influence on the Eastern as well as the Western Churches.

### **On Divine Grace and Free Will**

1. Just as the beginning of any virtuous disposition is implanted within us by the special will of God, it is He Who gives us help toward accomplishing our good works. It all depends upon the extent of our readiness to submit to His instructions and accept His assistance. We earn a reward or warrant punishment according to our behavior — whether we rebel, or whether in reverent compliance try to live according to God's will, which has been extended to us through His merciful benevolence. For example, this was clearly revealed in the healing of the blind men of Jericho. The fact that our Lord was walking past them was a matter of Divine condescension. But the fact that they cried out: *"Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David"* (Mat. 21:31), was a matter of faith and hope. The actual healing and return of sight to them was again a matter of God's mercy.

2. God wants the human being that He has created to live forever and never die. If God notices the slightest spark of inclination in our heart toward good, His mercy would never allow it to be extinguished. In wanting everyone to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved, He would assist in every way so that the spark turns into a flame. The grace of God is close to everyone. It beckons everyone without exception toward understanding the truth, just as Christ said: *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Mat. 11:28).

3. God's grace always directs our will toward good and, consequently, He expects a corresponding effort on our part. So as not to give His gifts to the unconcerned, He seeks an opportunity when He may awaken us from our cold indifference. Christ gives them to us only after we show a willingness to accept them, so that His bountiful gifts do not appear to be without a reason. At the same time His grace is always given freely, because for our insignificant efforts, God rewards us with immeasurable generosity. That's why, irrespective of how great the human labors, the significance of the grace as a gift is not lessened by them. Although Apostle Paul states: "I labored more abundantly than they all (Apostles)," he goes on to explain that his efforts do not belong to him but to the grace of God, which was with him (1 Cor. 15:10). Thus he uses the word *labored* to describe the effort of his will. In words *not I, but the grace of God* he describes Divine assistance, and in saying that the grace of God was with him he shows that the grace assisted him not when he was idle, but when he labored.

## The Prayer Our Father

4. Some compare our mind to the lightest of feathers. When it is not affected by moisture and because of its lightness, it would soar to great heights from the weakest gust of wind. If it is weighed down with some kind of dampness, then it is unable to rise but adheres to the ground because of its weight. Similarly with our mind. If it is not overburdened with passions, earthly cares, not damaged with the dampness of destructive lusts and is therefore buoyant, then by the power of our natural purity and with the lightest winnowing of spiritual reflections, it will rise up high, soaring towards heaven, leaving everything earthly behind. In fact, that is why Christ teaches us: *"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life"* (Luke 21:34). Thus, if we want our prayers to reach not only the skies but beyond, then we must bring our mind to its natural buoyancy by cleansing it of all iniquities and dampness of earthly passions, so that our prayers — free of any foreign burdens — may soar easily toward God.

5. In turning to God with the words: "Our Father!" we acknowledge Him — Lord of the universe — as our Father, because He has set us free from slavery to our passions and adopted us. In saying further: "Who art in Heaven," — we express our readiness to put aside every attachment to this temporary life that distances us from the heavenly things, and henceforth strive fervently toward where our Father is. This type of disposition obliges us not to do anything that does not conform to our high calling as children of God and might deprive us of our Fatherly inheritance and subject us to God's severe judgment.

Having been honored with such a high calling as children of God, we must be aflame with a son's love for God and not seek benefits for ourselves, but His, our Father's, glory, saying: "hallowed be Thy Name." Through this we declare that all our wishes and all our happiness is concentrated in the glory of our Father — henceforth, let the glorious name of our Father be praised and revered by all.

Our second entreaty of a purified mind is: "Thy Kingdom come." Here, the conversation is about two kingdoms. One — is Christ's kingdom, that is found within Saints and arrives after the passions have been expelled from our hearts and God begins to guide us with the fragrance of virtues. The second kingdom is the one that will be revealed at a predetermined time, promised to all God's children when Christ said: *"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Mat. 25:34).

The third entreaty, which is proper for a son: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven," which means: let people be like Angels. Just as they carry out God's will, so let it be that the people on earth carry out His will and not their own. This also means: let all things in our life be according to Thy will, we place our fate in You, believing that everything — good fortune as well as misfortune — You will arrange for our benefit, and that Your concern for our salvation is greater than our own.

Further: "Give us this day our daily bread" means more than staple food but is of a higher nature; it is bread that has come down from heaven — Holy Sacrament. The word daily teaches us that yesterday's food is not sufficient if it is not given to us now. This convinces us to pour out this prayer daily, as there is not one day where we do not need to strengthen our inner being by eating this Bread.

"And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." The Merciful Lord promises us forgiveness of our sins if we ourselves set the example by forgiving our brothers: forgive us as we forgive. Apparently, only that person that has forgiven others can ask, with hope and boldness, the forgiveness of his own sins. He who has not forgiven with all his heart his brother who has sinned against him is asking, by saying this prayer, condemnation for himself rather than forgiveness. Because if this prayer is heard, then after the example of the unforgiving person, nothing but implacable anger and definite punishment will ensue. After all: *"For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy"* (James 3:13).

"And lead us not into temptation." Bearing in mind Apostle James's statement: *"Blessed is the man who endures temptation"* (James 1:12), the words in the prayer should not be understood in the sense that "do not allow us ever to be exposed to trials," but "do not allow us to be conquered in the presence of temptation." Job was tempted but was not led into temptation, because with God's help he did not utter anything senseless about God (Job 1:22) and did not defile his lips with blasphemous complaints, toward which his tempter tried to steer him. So were Abraham and Joseph tempted, but neither one nor the other were led into temptation, because they did not carry out the will of the tempter.

*"But deliver us from the evil one,"* i.e. do not allow the devil to tempt us beyond our strength, but with temptations, send us relief so that we may bear them (1 Cor. 10:13).

### Three Inducements Toward Perfection

6. There are three virtues that induce people to crush their passions: the fear of hell's tortures, the desire to receive the Kingdom of Heaven and the love of virtues. It is written in Proverbs that the fear of God leads away from sin: *"The fear of the Lord is to hate evil"* (8:13). It is also said that hope restrains from the lure of temptations: *"No one who has trust in Him shall perish."* It is said that *there is no fear in love and that it "never fails"* (John 4:18 and 1 Cor. 13:8). That is why on matters of salvation, the Apostle concentrates on the acquisition of these three virtues, saying: *"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three"* (1 Cor. 13:13). Faith, in arousing our fear of the coming judgment and suffering, diverts us from passions; hope, in wrenching our mind away from this passing world, stimulates us to despise all carnal pleasures; and love, by inflaming our love for Christ and desire to succeed in virtues, urges us to completely detest everything that stands contrary to them. Although these three virtues stimulate restraint from everything that is not permissible, their levels of worthiness differ between them. The first two are natural to people who strive toward success and have not yet embraced goodness fully; the third belongs exclusively to God and has been transferred from Him to humans, who restored within themselves His likeness and image. Because only God does good — not from fear or desire to reward, but solely from the love of goodness. He generously releases His gifts on the worthy, as well as the unworthy. Being eternally perfect and by nature unalterable goodness, He cannot be grieved by insults nor annoyed by people's iniquities.

7. Differentiate clearly in matters and deeds, and know that there is no real goodness apart from virtue, emanating from the fear of God and love toward Him, and that there is no real evil — apart from sin and withdrawing away from God. Now let us examine this carefully: did it ever happen that God (Himself or through somebody else) inflicted something bad on any of His Saints? Without a doubt, you will not find this anywhere. Because it has never happened that somebody could force

another to sin when that person is against it and resists. If it did happen that the person was forced to sin, it is because he had an inclination toward that sin, a lack of resolution in his heart and a corrupted will. Thus, for example, when the devil wanted to plunge the righteous Job into sin, he directed all the snares of his hatred, depriving him of all his wealth, killing all his children and covering him with sores from head to toe. Nevertheless, in no way could he stain Job with sin, because in "all these misfortunes," Job was resolute and did not utter an inane word against God.

## Review of the Spiritual Warfare

8. All sciences and arts have their own purpose, for the sake of which the people of these disciplines readily bear great labors and expenses. Thus, for example, a farmer untiringly tills his land, enduring heat and cold, aiming at making it produce crop. He knows that otherwise he will not receive the desired harvest. So does asceticism have its goal, for the sake of which a person who seeks perfection readily and tirelessly bears various labors. For the sake of this goal he does not feel overburdened because of frequent fasts, rejoices in vigils, constantly reading the Holy Scriptures and is afraid neither of ascetic deeds, nor deprivations.

9. The goal of our ascetic life is God's Kingdom, which is attained only through the purity of heart. It is toward this end that our eyes should look, and it is toward this end that all our concerns should be directed. Should our thoughts start to deviate, it is essential that we immediately return our mental focus to it.

10. As we read in the writings of the Apostles, there is a continuous war raging in the members of our body: *"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish"* (Gal. 5:17). Through God's providential arrangement, this war has somehow been infused into our nature — and it is impossible to regard it other than an attribute of our nature damaged by the fall of the first humans and experienced by everybody without exception. However, it is necessary to believe that this war arises within us through the will of God for our good and not to our detriment. It is left within us to arouse our efforts toward perfection.

The word "flesh" in the Apostles' Epistles must be understood not in the sense of a person as a being, but as carnal will or iniquitous thoughts; similarly, the word spirit should be understood not as some type of being, but as good and evil desires of the soul. This interpretation was determined by the Apostle himself: *"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh"* (Gal. 5:16). Because both one and the other desires are found in the same person, there is a continuous conflict taking place within us. While the flesh seeks gratification and strives mainly toward the sinful, conversely the Spirit wholly wishes to attach itself to spiritual matters, neglecting even the very essential needs of the flesh.

11. God's grace that comes to us, awakens our spirit and restores our higher aspirations, leading us away from the earthly. Finding itself under the grace's influence, the will cannot remain indifferent and lukewarm but ignites with zeal toward the heavenly things to which it sacrifices everything earthly. Meanwhile, the inclination toward the former state remains in the body, which is capable of again lowering itself to it. In order that this will not happen, a feeling that is hostile to higher aspirations is left in the body. As soon as the will — having savored the higher blessings and being unsympathetic to the lower inclinations — senses its presence, it immediately ignites with zeal and courageously defends the higher good.

## General outline of passions and the struggles against them

12. There are two types of passions: the natural, which come forth from the natural needs such as gluttony and fornication, and the unnatural i.e. the ones that do not have their roots in one's nature, such as love of money. The influence of passions emerges through the following means: some function only in the body and through the body, like gluttony and fornication, while some appear without the body's cooperation, like vainglory and pride. Furthermore, some are stimulated from without, like love of money and anger, while others originate from within, like despondency and sorrow. These types of manifestation of the passions' activities give rise to a further classification, dividing them into carnal and spiritual. Carnal ones originate in the body, nurture and please it; and the spiritual ones emanate from spiritual inclinations and nurture the soul, often to the detriment of the body. The latter ones are treated internally, by reformation of the heart, while the carnal passions are treated with dual medicines: external and internal.

13. These 8 passions have different sources and different influences. However, 6 of them (gluttony, fornication, love of money, anger, sorrow and despondency) are related among themselves, so that the excess in one gives rise to the next. Thus gluttony naturally gives rise to lust, lust to love of money, love of money to anger, anger to sorrow, and sorrow to despondency. That is why it is necessary to battle with them in that order, passing from the preceding to the following. As an example: in order to conquer despondency, you must first drive out sorrow; to drive out sorrow, you must first drive out anger; in order to extinguish anger, you must vanquish the love of money; in order to break free of the love of money, you have to subdue carnal lust; in order to crush carnal lust, you need to curb the passion of gluttony. The last two passions — vainglory and pride — are also related: an increase in one of them boosts the other; vainglory gives birth to pride. And in order to destroy pride, you must crush vainglory. At the same time, vainglory and pride are not in any way related to the first six passions, because we particularly succumb to these two, after we have vanquished the other passions. The nominated 8 passions work in pairs in the following manner: carnal lust joins with gluttony in a special union, anger with love of money, despondency with sorrow, pride with vainglory.

14. Every passion does not appear in one form only. Thus, gluttony occurs in three forms: it either arouses a desire to eat outside accepted hours, or induces to eat to excess without due regard as to the quality of the food, or insists on delicacies. These produce dissolute overeating and indulgence, which engender various mental and physical infirmities.

15. Fornication has three faces. The first is committed through the joining of one gender with the opposite; the second occurs without the participation of a woman, for which the Lord slew Onan and which the Scripture calls impurity; the third is committed in the mind and heart, of which the Lord said: *"Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart"* (Mat. 5:28). These three aspects were referred to by the blessed Apostle in the following verse: *"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness"* (Coloss. 3:5).

16. There are three kinds of anger. The first is the one that burns inside; the second breaks out in words and conduct; the third is the one that burns inside for a long time and is called a grudge.

17. Sorrow has two kinds. The first appears after an angry eruption, or is caused through sustaining forfeiture, losses and unrealized aspirations; the second occurs through the fear of one's fate or from excessive concerns.

18. Despondency has two kinds. One makes a person sleepy, and the other seeks entertainment.

19. Although vainglory has many faces, yet it mainly appears in two forms. The first — when we elevate ourselves with our physical advantages and various possessions; while the second — when we have a burning thirst for secular glory due to our spiritual advantages.

20. Pride has two faces. One is physical and the second is spiritual. The spiritual one is more ruinous than the physical. It especially tempts those who succeeded in acquiring some virtues.

21. Although these 8 passions tempt all people, they do not assail all of them in the same manner. Thus, for example, in one person the spirit of lust prevails, in another — anger, in some — vainglory, yet in another pride reigns.

22. Having established which passion is especially damaging to us, we must concentrate our struggle specifically against it, utilizing all our concern and every effort toward watching and crushing it, every minute directing our arrows of heartfelt lamentations and sighs against it, and unceasingly shedding tears in prayers to God for the termination of this passion that plagues us. Because nobody can be triumphant over any passion while he is not convinced that he is incapable of defeating it with just his own efforts.

### Struggle with the eight main passions

23. **Gluttony.** In regard to the abstinence from food, the same rule cannot be applied to everyone because not everyone has the same physical strength. The virtue of fasting is not observed with just the strength of the soul, but must also be proportionate to the toughness of the body. The holy Fathers determined the measure of our abstinence from food as follows: we should stop eating while we still want to eat. Guided by this rule, even a person weak in body can exhibit the virtue of abstinence on the same level as the robust and healthy, if he applies his willpower in restraining the craving for food when it is not demanded by his physical infirmity. For even the Apostle states: *"and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts"* (Romans 13:14).

24. **Fornication.** The second struggle that confronts us is that with the spirit of carnal lust — the most prolonged and perpetual one, and very few win in this battle. The passion of fornication in a person arises at a very early stage of puberty and does not stop until he conquers his other passions. Inasmuch as the emergence of this passion is twofold (in the body and in the soul), then to oppose it requires a dual weapon. Fasting alone is insufficient to acquire complete chastity. You need to couple it with a penitent and regretful nature, and unrelenting prayers against the vile spirit of fornication. Apart from this, you need to constantly read the Bible, think about God, alternating it with physical exertion and handiwork that restrain the thoughts from wandering to and fro. Most of all, what is needed is humility, without which there can be no victory over any passion.

25. Triumph over this passion is dependent upon a complete cleansing of the heart, from which — according to the word of the Lord — flows the poison of this sickness. "For out of the heart" says He, "proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications..." (Mat. 15:19).

26. And indeed, if every success in virtue is the work of God's grace and the overcoming of various passions is His victory, then to acquire chastity and to prevail over carnal passion is more so the



work of a special grace of God, about which the Holy Fathers, experienced in the cleansing of the soul from this passion, give witness. For not to feel the sting of the flesh while still living in the flesh is, in a way, akin to coming out of the body. That is why it is impossible for a person to fly upwards into the heavenly heights of perfection on his own wings, if the Lord's grace doesn't extricate him from the earthly quagmire. Because there is no virtue through which people are more equated to the Angels than that of acquiring chastity.

27. What serves as an indicator of purity and the attainment of perfection in a person is when a person, at rest or during a pleasant sleep, does not have any images of a seductive nature, or, having appeared, these images do not arouse in him any carnal desire. However, involuntary desires, although not considered a sin, indicate that the soul has not yet achieved perfection, and that the roots of passion have not yet been eradicated.

28. The level of chastity's worth determines the level of force of the enemies' slander raised against it. That's why we must, with all zeal, not only be temperate in everything, but continually be penitent and have prayerful lamentations in our hearts so that the blessed dew of the Holy Spirit, descending into the heart, cools and extinguishes the furnace of our flesh, which the Babylonian king (the devil) unceasingly tries to fire up.

29. **Love of money.** The third struggle facing us is that with the spirit of love for money — an alien passion, which is foreign to our nature. This passion originates from faint-heartedness, spiritual carelessness and absence of love for God. Other passions are seemingly implanted into human nature and consequently are conquered only after lengthy labours. The sickness of love of money comes to a person later in life and fastens on to the soul from without. That is why in the beginning it is easy to dislodge. However, should it take root in our heart because of our apathy and continued neglect, it will become more ruinous than the other passions and consequently would be very difficult to remove. Entrenched love of money, according to Apostle Paul, is "*a root of all kinds of evil*" (1 Tim. 6:10), because it arouses all the other passions.

30. You can be sick with love of money without having money. In this condition, even voluntary poverty will not be beneficial to the person that luxuriates in thoughts of riches. Just like those who, although are not defiled in body, are pronounced unclean of heart according to the word of the Gospel (Mat. 5:28), so are those that are not burdened by great wealth can be adjudged on a similar level as avaricious, because they are such in heart and mind. This is because they didn't have the opportunity to accumulate wealth and not because of their will, which in God's eyes always has more weight than want. That's why we must in every way be careful, so that the fruits of our labour are not wasted. It is regretful when the poor lose the fruits of their poverty by reason of their sinful desire to be rich.

31. **Anger.** In the fourth struggle we are faced with the task of eliminating the deadly poison of anger from the depths of our soul. Because as long as it nests in our hearts and blinds our mind's eye with a destructive gloom, we are unable to develop the correct distinction between good and evil, nor clarity of consciousness, nor maturity to give advice, nor be communicants of life, nor hold on firmly to the truth. We are unable to absorb the true spiritual light, for it is said: "*Mine eye is consumed because of grief*" (Psalm 6:7). We are unable to become communicants of wisdom, because "*anger resteth in the bosom of fools*" (Eccles. 7:9). Although regarded as being sensible, we cannot realize longevity of life, because: "*Even the wise perish because of anger*" (Prov. 15:1, Septuagint translation). We cannot always hold the scales of truth properly, according to the heart's directive, for "*the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God*" (James 1:20). Although

we may be of a famous descent, we cannot regard ourselves as esteemed, because "*an angry man is unseemly*" (Proverbs). Although we may command great knowledge, we are unable to possess maturity to give advice, because "*He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly*" (Prov. 14:17). Although nobody may bother us, we can never be at peace, away from disturbances and confusion, because "*an angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression*" (Prov. 29:22).

32. **Sorrow and despondency.** In our fifth struggle, we are faced with having to deflect the arrows of all-consuming sorrow, which, if they conquered us, would prevent us from seeing God, plunge our soul from the heights of its worthy stature, weaken and crush us. Sorrow will not allow us to pray with the necessary heartfelt animation, nor read the Holy books (a means of spiritual therapy), nor work diligently, nor be at peace and affable with people. Having taken away from us all powers of reasoning, sorrow will make us impatient and cantankerous, agitate our heart and make our soul appear inane and gloomy, crushing it with destructive depression.

33. Sometimes, this sickness is begotten from some type of passion: anger, lust or desire to become rich. At other times, without any apparent reason but through the actions of the cunning enemy, we are suddenly overwhelmed with such sorrow that we alter our attitude toward even our dearest individuals, so that anything they say to us, we regard as inappropriate and superfluous, unable to respond to them politely as our heart is filled with bitterness.

34. There is another, most frightful aspect of sorrow, which does not instill into the sinner an intention to change the lifestyle, but a destructive depression. It didn't allow Cain to repent after he murdered his brother, and forced a depressed Judas to hang himself after his betrayal.

35. The sorrow of this world is extremely complainant, impatient, cruel, obstinate and leads toward destructive depression. Having overwhelmed a person, it upsets him, distracts him from prayer, from every redeeming activity and from any act of repentance.

36. We can conquer ruinous sorrow if we try to enliven our soul with visions of future joy. In this way, we will be able to overcome the various forms of sorrow emanating from anger, from suffering losses, from having been offended, from spiritual disorders and that sorrow which brings us to depression. Being joyous in our vision of future blessings and remaining in this disposition, we will not lose heart when we experience unfortunate circumstances, nor exalt ourselves when we are happy — considering our circumstances to be worthless and temporary.

37. The sixth struggle facing us is that of despondency or melancholy. Despondency is akin to sorrow and is experienced mostly by people who commit themselves to a solitary life. It especially disturbs the ascetic at midday. Some Holy Fathers refer to it as the "midday demon" mentioned in Psalm 91.

38. **Vainglory.** The seventh struggle facing us is that with the spirit of vainglory — this multifaceted, deceitful and subtle passion, which often is very difficult to notice and recognize, and to protect yourself from. Other passions are plain and unvaried, but this one is multifaceted and attacks the warrior of Christ from all sides: during his struggle and even after he has achieved victory. Vainglory attempts to wound the warrior through all manner of ways: his clothing, and his physical build, and walk, and voice, and being well read, and his work, and his vigilance, and fasting, and praying, and solitary life, and his knowledge, and education, and silence, and submissiveness, and humility, and benevolence. It is akin to a dangerous rock hiding below the waves, which inflicts a sudden disastrous wreck to the seafarers when they least expect it.

39. Other passions, according to our efforts in surmounting and defeating them, wane and weaken every day. In fact, sometimes, because of a change in our location and living circumstances, they get exhausted and become subdued. Apart from this, because of their conflict with our opposing good deeds, it is easier for us to watch out and avoid them. However, the passion of vainglory, even though vanquished, continues to battle with great hardness and when it is considered dead, through its own demise comes to life, becoming healthy and powerful. While the other passions tyrannize those that they have overwhelmed, this passion oppresses its conquerors more callously and vanquishes them through conceited thoughts about their victory over it. It is in this that the subtle cunning of the enemy is revealed — that the Christ's warrior strikes himself with his own arrows.

40. **Pride.** The eighth and last struggle that confronts us is that with the spirit of pride. While this passion is last in the order of this rendition, in terms of its beginning and time, it is foremost. Pride is the most ferocious and untamable animal, especially attacking and devouring those striving for perfection after they have almost achieved the highest level of virtue.

41. There are two types of pride: the first is one that vanquishes those that are of a high spiritual standing, while the second defeats the novices and the carnal. Although both types of pride produce a destructive arrogance before God and people, the first relates directly to God while the second concerns people.

42. There is no other passion like pride that can eradicate all virtues and deprive a person of righteousness. Like some disease, this passion strikes the whole being with a deadly affliction and attempts to plunge to their destruction even those that have achieved the pinnacle of virtues. The other passions have their limitations, arising against only one selected virtue. Thus, for example, gluttony violates the demands of temperance, lust defiles chastity, anger drives away patience. As a result, being conquered by any one of the passions doesn't make the person devoid of other virtues. But when this particular passion captures the soul, it denies that person the protection of humility, utterly destroying his spiritual framework. Having leveled the high wall of piety and mixed it with the mud of iniquity, it deprives the soul of any traces of freedom — and the stronger it seizes the rich soul, the more it subjects it to the heavy yoke of slavery, stripping it of all its finery of virtues with the cruelest plunder.

43. Consequently, we must strive toward perfection with the needed fervor toward fasting, vigilance, prayer, a penitent heart and body, and other self-denying efforts, so that our labors are not ineffectual. It must be remembered that through just our efforts and self-sacrifice alone, we will not only be unable to achieve perfection, but without God's grace, we would not be able to perform the actual work of self-sacrifice and other spiritual labors.

44. These are the signs of carnal pride: during conversation — being vociferous, in silence — being miserable, during times of joy — loud laughter, in sorrow — excessive gloom, in giving a reply — causticity, in a serious conversation — flippancy, when words are uttered haphazardly without the heart's participation. Carnal pride is not acquainted with patience, is alien to love, brazen in inflicting insults but weak in enduring them, slow in obedience if it goes against its personal will and wishes, inflexible toward admonishments, not capable of renouncing personal whims, extremely stubborn in being subordinate to others, always striving to insist on its own decisions, does not agree to make concessions to others. In this way, by becoming incapable of accepting redeeming advice, carnal pride believes more in its own opinion than those of experienced elders ("starets").

45. It is impossible to overcome any passion without deep and sincere humility — and you cannot attain perfection and purity except through genuine humility.

## Blessed Hesychius of Jerusalem

**S**aint Hesychius was a native of Jerusalem and a student of Saint Gregory the Theologian. After the death of his mentor, he settled in one of the Palestinian deserts. In the year 412, the Archbishop of Jerusalem consecrated Saint Hesychius as a presbyter. In his priesthood he became well known for his inspired sermons. He died in 433.

1. **Excerpts from his teachings.** To many people it seems too difficult to restrain agitating thoughts in one's mind. Indeed this is not easy, because it is painfully difficult to constrain the discarnate in a physical body not only for the uninitiated in the mysteries of the spiritual warfare, but also for those who have attained experience in the inner spiritual battle.

2. Many do not realize that often our thoughts are nothing but wishful sentient images of earthly objects. When we abide longer in earnest prayer, the mind then liberates itself from irrelevant material images and begins to discern the cunningness of its foe (demon's snares, coercing the mind with mundane thoughts) and begins to perceive the benefit of prayer and contemplation of God.

## Blessed Nilus of Sinai

**B**lessed Nilus was a native of Antioch. While his noble descent and personal excellence elevated him to the position of the capital's Prefect, the aspirations of his spirit were not in accord with the responsibilities of the office and the ways of the city life. Consequently, in agreement with his wife (by whom he already had 2 children), he left the world so as to lead a solitary existence and focus on walking the path toward salvation. In the year 390, taking along his son Theodulus, he settled in Sinai while his wife and her daughter found a retreat in one of the Egyptian convents.

Blessed Nilus led an extremely stringent life: he and his son dug a cave to live in with their own bare hands, and existed not on bread but wild bitter vegetation. All their time was spent in prayer, studying the Scripture, contemplation of God and laboring.

On one occasion barbarians attacked Sinai and took Theodulus prisoner. Luckily, this ordeal did not last very long as Theodulus, together with the other prisoners, were sold in a town called Eluz where many Christians lived. The Bishop of this town paid for his release and Theodulus returned to his beloved Sinai desert.

Blessed Nilus lived around 60 years in the desert before reposing in the year 450.

Among his many works are: "On Prayer," "Thoughts That Lead Away From the Corruptible," "On the Eight Spirits of Evil." The latter work reveals sequentially the eight basic passions that afflict the

spirit of each and every one of us: gluttony, carnal lust, love of money, anger, sorrow, despondency, vanity and pride. Knowing the features of these passions makes it easier to recognize them within oneself and, consequently, begin to oppose them.

### How to pray.

1. Do not pray so that everything will be according to your wishes, because it may not always conform to God's will — but better pray "Thy will be done," and in every matter, pray this way because He always wants everything good and beneficial for your soul.
2. Instead of letting God to arrange things that are best for me, I sometimes unwisely forced God's will through my prayers, asking Him for one thing or another. Later, upon receiving what I had asked for, I was left lamenting because things were not what I thought they would be.
3. Therefore, don't lament if you don't receive instantly from God that which you had asked for. He wants to provide you with a greater benefit by forcing you to have to stand patiently before Him in prayer. Because what can be greater than conversing with God and communing with Him?
4. Condescending to our infirmity, the Holy Spirit comes to us even when we are not chaste; and if He finds our mind occupied in genuine prayer, He then descends into it and casts out the whole crowd of thoughts and wishes, thereby disposing our mind toward pure prayers.
5. When praying, do not imagine God as having any shape or appearance and do not allow your mind to take on any form, but approach the Ethereal in an ethereal way — and you will come together with Him.
6. Beware of the enemy's snares, because sometimes during a sincere and peaceful prayer, a strange and alien image appears suddenly. The enemy does this to lead you into self-conceit, instilling the thought that supposedly Divinity had appeared to you. Do not imagine that God's Being occupies space, has dimension or form, because it has neither quantity nor appearance.
7. Know that the Angels induce us toward prayers, stand with us during them, rejoicing and praying for us. But if we are careless and accept sinful thoughts, we distress our Angels. Because, while they have committed themselves for us, we are too lazy to ask God for ourselves. Worse yet, in neglecting to serve God and seemingly turning our backs on their Master, we conduct a mental conversation with unchaste demons.

### Struggles with passions.

8. **Gluttony.** The beginning of a fruit is a blossom, while the beginning of a productive life is self-restraint. A sufficient quantity of matter will fill a container, but a stomach, even if it bursts, will not say: enough. A body sparsely fed is like a well-ridden horse — it will never throw its rider. Just as a dead enemy will not evoke fear, so a body mortified through fasting will not disturb your soul.

9. Land left untilled for a lengthy period will germinate weeds, while the mind of a glutton will engender shameless thoughts. Much firewood emblazes a fire, while much food nurtures lust.

10. Do not take pity on your body when it complains of being fatigued and do not feed it heartily with gratifying food, because if it recovers its strength, it will arise against you with irreconcilable warfare.

11. Just like sprouts from a root, other passions spring up from gluttony and, along with gluttony, very soon branch into a tree of vices.

12. It is admirable to remain within the confines of necessity, and try with all your might not to cross these boundaries. If lust sways an individual — even to a slight degree — toward carnal pleasures, then no amount of directives would be able to hold him back, because beyond the bounds of necessity, there are no limits but a continuous care and bustle that will immeasurably increase one's efforts to satisfy the lust — just like a flame that grows with the addition of firewood.

13. Your physical self-deprivation should be rendered with a moral aim, so that you learn to weep in your heart over your sins.

14. An abstinent stomach promotes vigor in prayer, while a full one leads to sleep. It is impossible to find fragrance in pus or any chaste contemplation in a glutton. The burning of incense fills the air with an aroma, while the prayer of an abstinent person — with God's fragrance.

15. **Love of money.** Love of money is the root of all evil. Like a sick branch, it produces many other passions (vexation, anger, envy, falsehood, hypocrisy, vainglory and others). That's why, in order to eradicate the other passions, a person must first tear out their root.

16. The sea, in accepting waters from many rivers, does not overflow, and the wishes of the avaricious are not satisfied with his accumulated possessions. Having doubled his possessions, he doubles them again — and never ceases to increase his property until sudden death terminates his useless endeavors.

17. A non-accumulator of worldly goods lives a carefree life, while a materialist is afflicted with an incurable disease of caring for riches. When you do not submit your heart to the worries of the material, you then imprison a whole multitude of sinful thoughts. When you renounce your wishes to accumulate, you will then carry your cross without distraction.

18. The passion to accumulate is posed by old age and sickness, so that your trust in God will be replaced with your trust in possessions. Faith is the possession of a resolute conviction and patient trust in God's help. When you renounce all possessions, be wary: gloomy thoughts will begin to chastise you for your impoverishment — foreboding poverty, ignominy and scarcity in everything — so as to unsettle your endeavors toward acquiring virtue. However, if you examine the logic of self-denial, you will see that what you are being censured for is what is weaving you a heavenly crown.

19. Leaving earthly matters aside, let us turn toward spiritual gifts. How long are we going to remain in childish games and thereby not acquire any mature manner of thinking. If it is strange to witness an adult sitting on a pile of ashes and drawing childish images in the soot, then it is more so to see people, called toward the enjoyment of eternal blessings, scrabble in the dust of earthly cares.

The reason for this divergence lies in that we imagine that there is nothing more important than the perceptible — not realizing the insignificance of existing benefits and the superiority of future blessings — and blinded by the dazzle of the present, adhere to it with all our might.

20. Our ship being tossed about by earthly cares, let us throw off the ship's load to save the navigator — our mind. If during a storm, in order to save their lives, the passengers on a ship — with their own hands — start throwing overboard even their most treasured possessions, why don't we for the sake of a better life, spurn that which drags us down into an abyss? Why is it that our fear of God is not as strong as that of the sea? Consequently, I beseech you, let us reject everything earthly. Combating wrestlers do not enter the ring dressed immaculately, because the rules of the contest call for them to be undressed. Whether it's hot or whether it's cold — they go into the ring that way, leaving their clothes behind. If one of them refuses to undress, then he is obliged to refuse to participate in the contest.

21. It is natural for a soul that has attained perfection not to be concerned about earthly matters, while a soul filled with passion, burdens itself with cares. We do not refer to the act of non-accumulation as ordinary poverty — which comes from a combination of circumstances and plunges the impoverished person into despair — but a voluntary determination to be content with little.

22. The ancient Saints were non-accumulative to such an extent, that they selected a homeless and itinerant life, ate what nature had to offer and slept where and how they could. They had no house, no dining room and their clothing was sheepskin. They zealously carried out Christ's advice in every respect: "*Look at the birds of the air...*" (Mat. 6:26). They genuinely believed that when a person pleases God and concerns himself primarily with acquiring the Kingdom of Heaven, everything essential to the body would follow by itself.

23. **Anger, sorrow and pride.** Christ inclines His head toward a patient soul, and the calm soul becomes the habitat for the Holy Trinity.

24. He who loves this world has many sorrows, while the one that stands above it is always joyful.

25. Pride raises a proud person to great heights and from there, casts him down into an abyss. Rotten crops are worthless to a farmer, and benevolence from the proud is useless to God.

26. **On being non-judgmental.** A pious person is not one that shows benevolence to many but he who does not offend anyone.

## Saint Ephraim of Syria

**S**aint Ephraim was born to wealthy parents in Nisibis (Messopotamia) at the beginning of the fourth century and brought up in the fear of the Lord. Because of his youthfulness, he was of the opinion that everything happens by chance, but the following unpleasant happening convinced him he was wrong. Once, the young Ephraim was accused of stealing sheep, for which the judge sent him to jail even though he was completely innocent. Finding himself in the dungeon and lamenting over what's happened, Ephraim once saw in a dream how he was being punished for other sins that

he truly committed. After a certain period, the judge found out about his innocence and released him. Ephraim realized that peoples' lives were not directed by blind chance, but by Lord God. After this, Ephraim abandoned the world and withdrew into the mountains with the recluses, where he became a disciple of Saint James of Nisibis. Under his guidance, Ephraim changed and became meek, penitent and committed to God.

James became a bishop and made Ephraim his assistant. Later, Saint Ephraim went to Edessa and withdrew into the mountains. Here he committed himself to a strict routine of monastic ordeals and zealously studied the Word of God. God endowed Saint Ephraim with the gift of teaching and he became renowned for his inspirational sermons. He labored intensely in expounding the Holy Scripture and enunciating Orthodox teachings. At the close of his life, he visited the great Holy Fathers of the Nitria desert (in Egypt) as well as Caesarea in Cappadocia, where he met Saint Basil the Great. Upon returning to Edessa, he fell ill and peacefully reposed in the year 373. His incorruptible remains were moved into a church.

### **Path of spiritual life**

1. Approach, sinner, the good physician and be cured without any effort. Shed your burden of sins, proffer your prayers and wet the infected ulcers with your tears — because this Heavenly Physician heals ulcers with tears and lamentations. Approach and bring your tears — they are the best medicine. Because it is agreeable to the Heavenly Physician that every person treat themselves with their own tears and thereby be saved.
2. Do you want to pray without distraction? Try to pray in such a way that your prayer comes from the depth of your soul. Just like a tree that has sunk deep roots does not break during great winds, so does a prayer, coming from the very depths of the soul, rises towards Heaven and no outside thoughts will divert it. That's why the Prophet states: *"Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord"* (Psalms 130:1).
3. Do not neglect church services under the guise of some important business. Just like rain nourishes and cultivates seeds, so does a Church Service strengthens the soul in its virtue.
4. Just as a child does not permanently remain a child, but grows daily according to nature's laws until he reaches adulthood, so does a Christian, born from above through water and Spirit, should not remain in spiritual infancy. However, consigned to a spiritual life of ordeal, labors and much patience, he must continually progress and grow to the full spiritual stature, like the Apostle teaches: *"...to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"* (Eph. 4:13).
5. If you want to inherit the future Kingdom, then find the King's favor here in this world. And it is according to the measure of your honoring Him that He will elevate you; how much you serve Him here is how much He will honor you there, according to the Scripture: *"...them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed"* (1 Samuel 2:30). Revere Him with all your soul so that He will deem you worthy of a Saint's esteem. To the question: "How do you acquire His benevolence?" — I will answer: Bring Him gold and silver through the needy. If you have nothing to give, bring Him faith, love, temperance, patience, magnanimity, humility... Restrain yourself from judging, protect your eyes so as not to observe vanity, constrain your hands from doing wrong deeds, avert your feet from the wrong path; comfort the faint hearted, be



compassionate to the infirm, provide a cup of water to the thirsty, feed the hungry. In other words, everything that you have and were endowed with by God, bring it to Him because Christ did not scorn the widow's two coins.

6. One of the Saints declared: "Think of goodness so as not to think of evil, because the mind cannot remain idle." Therefore, let us engage our mind in studying the word of God, prayers and performing good deeds. Just as restless thoughts create restless acts, good reflections — good deeds.

7. Do not reveal your thoughts to anybody, but only to those that you know are spiritually inclined, because the devil has many snares. Do not hide anything from those that are devout, so that the enemy having located a weak spot does not nest in you. Do not seek counsel from the fleshly-minded.

8. Every good deed, undertaken by us for the glory of God, will then lead us toward our own glory. Fulfilling the commandments is holy and virtuous only when it is performed with our Lord in mind, with the fear of God and with love for Him. The enemy of the human race (devil) tries in every way to distract us from this state with various earthly enticements, so that instead of a true blessing — love of God — we will bind our hearts to the purported earthly benefits. Generally, whatever good deed a person undertakes to do, the evil one attempts to obscure and defile, adding to the fulfillment of the commandments seeds of vainglory, or doubt, or complaints, or something of the sort so that our good feat ceases to be righteous. A good deed becomes truly good only when it is accomplished for God with humility and earnestness. In this frame of mind, all the dictates of the commandments become easy, because our love of God deflects all difficulties in carrying them out.

9. Let us be magnanimous and carry burdens for one another, endeavoring to raise the fallen and free those who have been imprisoned by the enemy. Seeing one of his friends taken prisoner, what warrior would not engage the enemy in battle in order to free him? If he finds himself not powerful enough to free him, his thoughts of his friend will make him sad and cry. Shouldn't we give more of our souls for one another? Because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said: *"Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for his friend"* (John 15:13).

10. In relation to one another — being members of the one spiritual body — we are obliged to help one another. Just as bodily parts, directed by the soul, make one another complete, so must we, directed by the Spirit of God, serve one another without envy. Under this disposition, the surpluses of all those carrying out prayers will supply the lack in prayers of those carrying out obediences and conversely, the abundance of labors performed by those doing obediences will compensate for the lack of those abiding in prayer, so that in the words of the Apostle, there may be equality in everything. May only simplicity, love, humility and absence of envy grow among the brothers. To what extent a person believes, loves and labors, is measured by his daily accomplishments that make him worthy of the Heavenly Kingdom. This is the true Angelic life: when we unite with one another without envy, with simplicity and love, with peace and joy, when we regard a neighbor's achievement as a personal gain, while his weaknesses and sorrows as personal detriment. After all, it is said: *"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others"* (Philip. 2:4).

### **Virtues and passions.**

11. Spiritual and physical virtues. There are four main (generic) virtues: courage, prudence, chastity, and justice. These give birth to the following spiritual virtues: faith, hope, love, gift of prayer,

humility, meekness, magnanimity, patience, kindness, knowledge of God, absence of irritability, simplicity, tranquility, love of truth, freedom, being non-judgmental, absence of vanity, of envy and of hypocrisy, compassion, mercy, generosity, consideration, reverence, desire of future eternal benefits, God's Kingdom and becoming a son of God.

12. When physical virtues are free from any hypocrisy and flattery, a person grows humble and dispassionate. Physical virtues are the following: temperance, fasting, hunger and thirst, vigilance, the making of prostrations, the wearing of plain clothes and eating very simple food, sleeping on barren earth, poverty, non-accumulation of earthly things, exhaustion, solitude, silence, contentment with little, quietness, manual work, all types of voluntary sufferings and every kind of physical ordeal. They are all quite needed and beneficial for a person in good physical condition troubled by the passions of the body. When, however, the body is weak, or when a person, with God's help, has conquered his passions, physical virtues are not that important because everything is fulfilled through humility and gratitude to God.

13. Spiritual and physical passions. The following are spiritual passions: forgetting God, laziness and ignorance (of the Christian faith). These three passions obscure the spiritual eye — reason, and the person succumbs to the rule of other passions, namely: impiety, heresy, blasphemy, irritability, anger, sorrow, irascibility, hatred, maliciousness, slander, judging others, illogical sorrow, fear, dissension, jealousy, envy, vainglory, hypocrisy, lies, unbelief, foolishness, indiscrimination, shortsightedness, insatiability, love of acquiring things, laziness, passion for the earthly things, depression, faintheartedness, ingratitude, grumbling, presumptuousness, conceit, vehemence, haughtiness, love of power, flattery, slyness, shamelessness, indifference, effeminacy, dissimulation, mockery, two-facedness, assenting to sin, continuous thoughts of sin, meandering thoughts, self-love (mother of everything evil), love of money (root of all iniquities and passions), evil nature and deceit.

14. The following are physical passions: gluttony, voracity, extravagance, drunkenness, different kinds of indulgences, fornication, adultery, dissoluteness, corruptness, incest, depravity, evil wishes, all types of unnatural and shameful passions, stealing, sacrilege, robbery, murder, all appeasements of the body, fulfillment of carnal desires, especially when the body is healthy, witchcraft, fortune-telling, sorcery, clairvoyance, foretelling, elegance, flippancy, indulgence, passion for sartorial splendor, captivation by cosmetics, passion for gambling, attachment to earthly pleasures, hedonistic lifestyle that dulls the mind, reducing it to an animalistic level so that in no way can it lift its gaze toward God and virtue. The main reasons for and the root of all evil are — indulgences, love of fame and love of money, from which everything impure is born.

### **Struggles with the eight main passions.**

15. **Passion of fornication.** Do not allow your eyes to wander here and there, and do not look at the beauty of others so as the eyes do not assist the enemy to vanquish you.

16. If the demon of fornication troubles you, you can forbid him by saying: "May God consume you, full of stench, demon of uncleanness," for we know the saying: "*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God*" (Romans 8:7).

17. With the inflammation of carnal lust, think of the unquenchable fire and the everlasting worm, and the passion in the members of your body will be extinguished instantly. Otherwise, being weakened, you will be overcome and get used to sinning, even though you will be repentant. Consequently, be strict with every similar desire at its very onset, so that it doesn't overpower you and so that you don't get used to yielding to your enemy. After all habit is second nature. He who is used to yielding to sinful desires will always be rebuked by his conscience: even though he may exhibit a happy face in front of others, internally, he would be depressed by reason of his conscience. Because the nature of lust is to impart an agonizing sorrow to those that effect it. Consequently, heed your soul and always have God in you.

18. Should a physical conflict erupt in you, do not be afraid or fall in spirit. Otherwise you will embolden the enemy (devil) and he will begin to instill into you tempting thoughts: "The passion in you will not abate until you satisfy it with your lust." But in suffering, be resigned to the Lord, pour out a tearful prayer before His goodness, and He will hear and free you from the pitfall of passions (unclean thoughts) and from the miry clay (shameless thoughts) and set your feet upon a rock of cleanliness (Psalm 39:1-3). You will then see the help that has arrived from Him. Only be patient, do not allow your conviction to weaken, don't become fatigued bailing out the water from your canoe because the harbor of life is at hand. Then when you cry out, He will say: "Here I am" (Isiah 58:9). But He is waiting to witness your ordeal: are you ready to truly combat sin, even unto death. Therefore, do not be faint-hearted: God will not forsake you. God is witnessing your ordeal, as are the faces of Angels and a horde of demons. The Angels are ready to hand out the wreath of victory to the conqueror, while the demons — to cover the conquered with shame. Be vigilant so as not to sadden your own (Angels) and gladden the adversary (demons).

19. When the demon begins to depict tempting objects in your imagination and presents to your mind the beauty of a woman whom you have seen before, initiate a fear of God within you and recall those that have died in sin, think about the day when your soul will be separating from your body, imagine the trepidation that the voice of God will produce upon hearing about the neglectful life-style and the non-compliance with Christ's commandments: "*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Mat. 25:41). Also, visualize the eternal worm and unending torment. Think about this, and your urge for gratification will melt like wax before a flame, because demons cannot withstand the fear of God for even one moment.

20. **Anger and sorrow.** If you cannot endure insults — be silent, and you will become calm. Do not imagine that you are suffering more than others are. Just as it is impossible for a person living on earth to avoid breathing, so is every person living in this world cannot avoid experiencing sorrow and sickness. Being engaged with earthly matters, we experience sorrow from the earthly, while those that strive toward the spiritual, suffer spiritually with their soul. However, the latter would be blessed because their spiritual fruits in the Lord are abundant.

21. If sorrow has arrived, expect the arrival of happiness. Let us take the example of those sailing on the sea. When a storm arises, they battle with the waves, waiting for calm weather; and when calm weather arrives, they prepare for storms. They are constantly vigilant, so that the sudden arrival of wind does not find them unprepared by capsizing the vessel. We should also act likewise: when sorrow or a difficult situation arises, let us expect alleviation and assistance from God, so as not to be oppressed by the thought that we have no hope of salvation.

22. Everything is from God — good and sad. One is from benevolence, while the other is because God allows it to happen. From benevolence — when we live virtuously, because it pleases God that

we adorn ourselves with crowns of patience; by God's permission — when we sin and are brought to our senses; from God's will — when we do not improve even after being enlightened. God providentially punishes us sinners so that we would not be condemned with the world — as the Apostle states: *"But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world"* (1 Cor. 11:32).

23. **Vainglory and pride.** Do not do anything for show but from a pure heart, because God knows the hidden and secret things, and it is only from Him that we can hope to receive our reward.

24. A proud person cannot tolerate anyone that is superior to him — and in meeting him, either becomes envious or his rival. Rivalry and envy go hand in hand, and he who has one of these passions, has both of them.

25. The unchaste spirit of conceit is resourceful and diverse and uses all his strength to take possession of people: it entraps the wise with wisdom, the strong with strength, the rich with riches, the beautiful with beauty, the artist with arts.

26. A novice that doesn't have humility, doesn't have any weaponry against the enemy (devil) and will suffer a great defeat.

27. The beginning of humility is submissiveness. May humility be the basis and embellishment to your responses; let your utterances be plain and friendly. Conceit does not submit; it is disobedient, unruly, controlled by its own concepts, while humility is obedient, submissive to goodness, modest, renders respect to the insignificant as well as the great.

28. **Demon's snares.** Through various means, the cunning enemy injected every one of us with his poison and now tempts us with his lures. One observes Lent, but gives himself up to rivalry and envy. Another refrains from lustful desires, but is bound to vainglory. Another accomplishes great labors, but is entangled in judging others. Another avoids judging, but is obstinate and contradictory. Another is restrained with food, but is drowning in pride and conceit. Yet another is untiring in his prayers, but is irritable and wrathful. Another was successful in something small and elevates himself above those more negligent than he. In this fashion, sin has bound every person in one way or another, yet people don't realize this.

## Blessed John Climacus

**I**nformation on the early life of Saint John Climacus (from the word ladder) has not been preserved. From his works it is clear that he received a good education, and from an inner inclination, joined a Sinai monastery at the age of sixteen. He spent the first 4 years under the guidance of "starets" Macarius, who tonsured him as a novice. After the death of the "starets" — under whom he had spent 19 years — Saint John began a life of a recluse. Concealing his monastic ordeals, he used to return to the monastery on Sundays, partook of Holy Sacraments and conversed with the Holy fathers in order to check spiritual condition. Having lived as a recluse for some 40 years, Saint John was elected Abbot of the monastery. However, after 4 years he returned to his solitary life and died

at the age of 80, in 563. Saint John wrote "The ladder of divine ascent." In this book of 30 chapters, he traces the ascending steps towards spiritual perfection.

## **Understanding God's will, Spiritual burning**

1. Everyone wanting to understand God's will must first deaden the personal will within oneself. Having prayed to God with faith and simplicity, they must inquire of the fathers and brothers with a humble heart and without any doubts in their minds. And they should accept their advices as though they came from God's lips, even though it might go against their own understanding of the matter. Those who are guided by this precept are fully humble and God does not allow them to be deceived.
2. Some ascertained God's will in the following manner. They distanced themselves from all bias toward one or the other side — arguments for or in opposition to, on a given subject. Having stripped the mind of its personal will, they submitted to God their topic, with fervent prayers over a determined period of days. Hence they found out God's will — either through what the higher Reason communicated to their mind, or because one of the possible resolutions had completely lost its meaning to them.
3. He, who through enlightenment from above acquired God within himself, receives quick responses about God's will, both in matters that require expedience and those that can wait.
4. We should test our intentions in all instances, because God surveys them in all our undertakings. All that is alien to passion and every type of iniquity, and is done solely for God and not for the sake of something else, is ascribed to us favorably, even though it may be imperfect.
5. There are courageous souls that through their strong love of God (with a humble heart) undertake deeds beyond their strength. And there are proud hearts that take on similar tasks through the instigation of our enemies (demons), because they often cunningly stimulate us into exertions that are above our capabilities, so that we, not having reached success, would lapse into despondency and leave even those tasks that are commensurate to our strength.
6. I have seen people sick in soul and body who, because of the multitude of their sins, undertook deeds that were beyond them and which they could not continue. I said to them that God judges our repentance, not by the measure of their labors but by the measure of their humility, accompanied by tears, contrition and turning away from sin.
7. Sins and passions are not a part of human nature, for God is not the Creator of passions. But He implanted into our nature many virtues, among which the following can be named: mercy (for even the pagans are compassionate), love (for even dumb animals often weep at the loss of one another), faith (for it is natural to all people), hope (for when we lend, sow or labor, we hope to receive a gain from this, and when we travel, we hope to reach our destination). Hence, if love and virtue is inherent in our nature — for love is the fulfillment of the law — then it is clear that virtues are not alien to our make-up. And may those that want to justify their neglect through feebleness, be ashamed.

## **Struggle with the 8 major passions**

8. He who has vanquished the three main passions — vainglory, love of money and gluttony — will be able to conquer the remaining five: lust, anger, sorrow, despondency and pride. But he, who doesn't attempt to vanquish the former, will conquer not even one.

9. Some people by nature are prone to temperance, or silence, or chastity, or modesty, or resoluteness, or meekness. While others, having a nature that runs nearly completely contrary to these good qualities, force them upon themselves and while they occasionally fail, nonetheless as vanquishers of nature, I acclaim them more than the former.

10. What sins emanate from the 8 main desires of passion, and which of the main three is the parent to each of the other five? The mother of lust is gluttony; mother of despondency — vainglory, sorrow and anger are born from all three main passions; and vainglory is the mother of pride. What sins proceed from the main eight? To this I will state that in violent passions, there is no reason or order but every iniquity and disarray.

11. In drawing water from a well, we can accidentally scoop up a frog with the water, as with acquiring virtues, we sometimes imperceptibly perform vices that are entwined with them. Thus hospitality is sometimes intertwined with gluttony; with love — lust or judgment; with prudence — excessive strictness; with discretion — cunning; with meekness — suspicion, procrastination, laziness, contradiction, and disobedience; with taciturnity — desire to lecture; with joy — conceit; with hope — indolence; in silence — despondency and negligence; with chastity — bitterness; with humility — unbounded boldness; and accompanying them all as a general poison is vainglory.

12. Continually note the emergence within you of various movements of passion and you will see that there are many passions residing within you. Often we are unable to discern these various spiritual ailments — either by reason of our weakness, or by reason of our deep-rooted habit of sinning.

13. **Anger and sorrow.** Like a fast-moving millstone, anger in a single moment can destroy the spiritual wheat of the soul faster than anything else in a day. Consequently, it is necessary to watch yourself diligently. Like a flame that is fanned by a strong wind, anger quickly burns out and destroys the pasture of the soul.

14. Nothing is more inappropriate to those repenting than to have irritable anger, because turning to God demands great humility, while irritability is a sign of being highly self-opinionated.

15. If the Holy Spirit is peace for the soul, and anger is confusion of the heart, then there is nothing that bars Him from dwelling in us more than irritable anger.

16. If we pay attention, we will see that many people prone to anger fervently practice vigilance, fasting and taciturnity — and the enemy doesn't hinder them — because even under deeds of penitence and tears, he knows how to conceal the roots of this passion.

17. If you are bearing a grudge, bear it against the demons, and if you are hostile against someone, be always hostile against your body. Flesh — is an ungrateful and insidious friend that, when you gratify it, does more harm.

18. Remembrance of wrongs is a crooked interpreter of the Scripture that explains the words of the Spirit allegorically to his own advantage. May it be put to shame by the prayer, given to us by Jesus

Christ: "...and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors..." which we are not allowed to utter if we are angry at someone.

19. If after much effort at trying to improve yourself, you cannot extract this thorn from your heart, then go to the person that you are angry at, and contritely make peace with him — at least in words. In this way, being put to shame for your lengthy hypocrisy, you will eventually come to love him.

20. Upon seeing someone being very negligent toward deeds of self-sacrifice, our Most Gracious Master and Lord humbles his flesh by sending an infirmity that acts as a less difficult deed and by doing this cleanses his soul of insidious thoughts and passions.

21. Like a small flame softens a large amount of wax, so does a little shame soften our heart, rejoices it and destroys all its cruelty, all feelings of indifference and callousness.

22. **Vainglory.** God often conceals from us those virtues that we have acquired. But a person that praises or flatters us, opens our eyes to them, and this makes the richness of our virtues disappear.

23. It is not he that judges himself who shows humility (for who will not tolerate his own censures) but he that doesn't lessen his love of that person that has reproached him.

24. Vainglory attaches itself to natural abilities very easily and quite often, through them, hurls its wretched slaves to destruction.

25. Once I saw the demon of vainglory drive out his brother — demon of rage. One monk became angry with another, but when secular visitors arrived, the angry monk suddenly calmed down and gave himself up to vainglory, because he could not serve these two masters simultaneously.

26. He who has become a slave to vainglory leads a double life: one, outwardly, the other — by inner thoughts and feelings, one solely by himself and the other — with people.

27. A person, having foretasted heavenly glory, will naturally shun every type of earthly glory, and I would be amazed if anyone that has not tasted the former, would totally shun the latter.

28. I have seen how some started their spiritual labors through vainglory and later, having changed their outlook, crowned their bad beginning with a praiseworthy ending.

29. He who is haughty about his natural gifts, like: sharp-wittedness, acumen, skills in reading and pronunciation, quickness of mind and other similar abilities, in having received them without any labors — will never receive any supernatural blessings, because "*he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much*" (Luke 16:10).

30. He who asks gifts from God for his labors is placing himself on a dangerous foundation. But he who regards himself as a perpetual debtor before God will become enriched with Heavenly gifts, far beyond his expectations.

31. Do not heed the thought suggesting that you declare your virtues for the benefit of the listeners, "*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?*" (Mat. 16:26). Nothing brings as much benefit to your loved ones as humble and unfeigned character and words. In

this way, we will be able to influence others so that they do not exalt themselves. And what can be more beneficial than humility?

32. **Pride.** It often happens that when a caterpillar reaches full maturity, it gets its wings and flies up high. So is vainglory, having strengthened, gives birth to pride — the origin and consummation of all evil.

33. Where sin has occurred, pride had previously settled there, because a precursor of a fall is pride.

34. Do not rely on your virtues before you hear the final pronouncement on you from the Judge, because in the Gospel we see that even the invited guest at the wedding feast was bound hand and foot and thrown into outer darkness (Mat. 22:13).

35. Pride is poverty of the soul, which imagines itself to be rich, and being in darkness, thinks it has light.

36. Pride is like a rotten apple, rotten inside yet outwardly radiant with beauty.

37. A proud person does not need a demon-tempter: he has become his own demon and adversary.

38. He who is possessed with pride is in need of God's extraordinary help for deliverance, because human means of salvation are ineffectual.

39. There is no other thought that is more difficult to confess than a blasphemous one (by reason of pride), and that is why some people suffer from blasphemous thoughts right up to old age. It must be understood that nothing assists the demons' successes more than us not confessing vile thoughts, but keeping them inside, thereby strengthening them.

40. If some of the Angels were made demons through pride, then undoubtedly humility can make Angels out of demons. Consequently, let the fallen be bold and trust in the Lord.

41. A proud soul becomes a slave of fear. In relying upon itself, it fears every sound and even shadows.

42. Sometimes it happens that all passions — save one — leave not only the faithful but also the non-believer, and that one being primal, replaces all the others and is so pernicious that can dislodge one even from Heaven. This passion is pride.

43. Often God providentially leaves some minor passions in spiritual people, so that in acknowledging their weaknesses, they censure themselves, thereby becoming enriched in humility.

44. Just as the poor, in seeing royal treasures, realize their poverty even further, so does the soul, in reading narratives of the great virtues of the holy fathers, inevitably becomes even more humble in its thoughts. (John Climacus)

45. He who is weak in body and has committed many grave transgressions should progress along the path of humility and related virtues, as there is no other way that he can be saved.



## Love toward your neighbor.

46. Do not judge sternly those that verbally instruct others on great virtues while at the same time, they themselves are being remiss toward good deeds, because the benefits from these teachings often eliminate that deficiency. All of us did not receive in equal measure: some have excellence more in word than in deed, while conversely, others are stronger in deed than in word.

47. One of the shortest paths toward receiving forgiveness for our sins is in not judging anyone, because it is said: "*Judge not, and you shall not be judged*" (Luke 6:37).

48. The eager and severe critics of a neighbor's sins have this passion because they do not recall nor lament their own sins. If every person carefully examined his own conduct without being encased in pride, he would be incapable of concerning himself with anything but repentance, because he will realize that the length of his whole life will not be sufficient time to lament over his sins, even though he may live for a long time and shed a river of tears.

## Qualities of perfection.

49. Just like a wind agitates the top of the sea during calm weather, but causes its depths to churn during a storm, so are the actions of the winds of darkness — demons. They shake the passionate people to the depths of their hearts, but only touch the surface of the mind in those that have succeeded. Therefore these latter restore their inner peace more quickly.

50. Some people value the gift of performing miracles and other outward spiritual gifts, not realizing that there are many superior gifts that are not evident and are therefore safe from the fall.

51. We will never cease to progress in virtue and love, neither in this age nor in the next, being enlightened by the light from above. For even the Angels — those intelligent beings — are not stationary, but add glory to glory and intelligence to intelligence.

52. A person without passions is one that has made his flesh indifferent to passions, elevated his mind above everything earthly, submitted all his feelings to his mind, placed his soul before God, forever stretching out to Him, even when it is beyond his ability.

53. Some say that to be without passion is the resurrection of the soul before the resurrection of the body, while others say that such resurrection is the knowledge of God.

54. Many penitents received forgiveness for their sins very quickly, but no one became dispassionate very quickly, because acquiring this state requires a lengthy period, daily works of love and God's assistance.

55. **Demons' snares.** Among the wicked spirits, there are some that are more cunning than others. They are not content with leading only us into sin, but instill into us thoughts to make others our accomplices in evil, so as to afflict us with harsh torment. I have seen a person transmit his sinful habit. Later, coming to his senses, he began to repent and abandoned his sin. However, because the person that learned his bad habit did not cease to sin, the repentance of the former was in vain.

56. Among the wicked spirits there are those that have explained the Bible to us at the commencement of our spiritual life. They normally do this within the hearts of the vain, and more so with those that are educated in earthly studies, so that they can deceive them slowly but surely, plunge them into heresy and blasphemy. We can recognize this demonic "theology" by a feeling of confusion, by a disorderly and indecent joy, which is present in the soul during these contemplations.

**Missionary Leaflet # EA12**

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