



THE ACCEPTABLE PRAYER

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Chapter 1

Lack of Prayer is a Sin

- Prayer is the work of the angels and nourishment for the spiritual people.
- Prayer is the treasure of the monks – it is wealth for those who dwell in silence
- Ultimately, prayer is wrestling with God – just as Jacob did for a whole night, until God gave him a new name and a new heart.
- Prayer is a powerful weapon, a treasure that does not perish, and an asset that never fails. Prayer is the basis and the source of all blessings.
- When we pray, do we not speak to God and call Him, our Father? How privileged are we to be able to do so? The person who does not pray, does not have this privilege; even more, the person who does not pray, shuns away this privilege and sonship, just as David the prophet said, “A man who is in honor, yet does not understand, is like the beasts that perish.” (Psalm 49:20)

Lack of prayer is a sin: St. James the Apostle teaches us, “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” (James 4:17) Since prayer is the greatest, the lack of prayer and the abandonment of prayer, is the worst of sins. The abandonment of prayer is considered an insult to the Holy God. God constantly invites us to come close to Him, to speak with Him and to express all that we need. When we pray, we are able to praise God along with the heavenly hosts; in addition, prayer enables us to experience the blessings that we will find in our unity with God. Overall, when we speaking to God, we will find our happiness and our comfort. In contrast, the abandonment of prayer is proof that our spiritual lives have reached the peak of weakness and lukewarmness – because prayer is the heartbeat of life and the peak of spirituality and holiness. Through the light of prayer, we can generally measure either our spiritual progress or the recession of our spiritual lives, because prayer is the thermometer of our spiritual lives. I pray that God may reveal to us: the extent of how detrimental and how sinful it is to abandon prayer. Hence, we will not rest until we are, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—” (Ephesians 6:18)

Reasons behind the sin of abandoning prayer: The main reason behind the sin of abandoning prayer, is that we want to live according to the flesh. We sympathize with our bodies, and we pay excessive attention to bodily cares – consequently, we give our bodies a life of lavishness. In response, the body becomes rebellious against the spirit, and it does not want to pray, nor does it want to be pressured or forced into offering a fervent prayer, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” (Romans 8:7) The only remedy for rebellion, is to lift it up onto the cross, “knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” (Romans 6:6) We need to lift our bodies up to the cross of asceticism and the disciplining of the body. Our teacher, St. Paul the Apostle presents us with the following advice, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:16, 25) Life according to the body is not all about paying attention to food, drink, rest, and pleasure; instead, St. Paul the Apostle tells us, “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery,^[a] fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,^[b] envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of

which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians ٥:١٩-٢١). He also said, “...for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (١ Corinthians ٣:٣) A Christian who continues to live according to the flesh, with all its pleasures, will not lean towards God, nor have the strength to follow God. If he prays, he will merely pray as a routine, but he has no idea about the glory and the blessings that await him, behind a fervent prayer. The person will continue this way until his eyes are opened, to discover the reality: that the body will always lean towards drifting away from God, and it will always look for a comfort zone – tilting towards laziness. Those are the two ultimate enemies that make praying fervently, an impossible task.

How can we overcome the sin or weakness of not being able to pray? As the old proverb states, ‘If the illness is discovered, then its antidote or its medicine, will be easily found.’ Therefore, we need to acknowledge, and to come to the realization that: living according to the flesh and its pleasures, is the reason behind our weakness, our lukewarmness, and the complete absence of our prayers. We need to understand that prayer is the heart beat – the centre of our spiritual lives, and that it is the most effective way by which we can harvest blessings from heaven, and attract the attention of our loving God. When we are finally able to acknowledge, that everything in our spiritual lives depends on prayer “Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...” (Philippians ٤:٥-٦) Only then can we begin to persevere, with the help of our God. This way, we may become victorious over the pleasures and evil wiles of this body, which is made of dust – it is the same body that ends up tossing those who submit to it, into hades to perish, “For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (Galatians ٦:٨)

When I begin to persevere, I need to ask for God’s help, I need to put myself in front of Christ and say, ‘You know, Lord, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.” (Romans ٧:١٨) and “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans ٧:٢٣-٢٤). I need to humble myself in front of our Lord, and say to Him, “Lord you know my painful situation, and my weak prayer... You can see that my heart has turned cold and dark because of the pleasures of the body and sin. It is because of my sins, that my love for You has turned cold, and I have lost all longing to be present between Your hands. I do not have the fervent zeal that David the Prophet sings about, when he said, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm ٤٢:١, ٢) Return me, O Lord to Your longing and Your fear, just as You are able to restore the lost appetite of an ill person, so that after his recovery, he may eat once again. I know Lord, that I should pray constantly and without ceasing, just as You taught me when You said with your pure mouth, “Then He spoke a parable to them that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.” (Luke ١٨:١) You taught me to pray without losing interest, as You mentioned through the mouth of Your Apostle, “Pray without ceasing.” (١Thessalonians ٥:١٧) But, Lord, I am unable to do so, because I am lacking zeal, will power, and the fervent longing to pray. My body is overcoming my soul, with all its pleasures and lusts, and I cannot do anything alone with

my own strength or power. My only hope is in You, my full confidence is in Your help, O my Lord Jesus Christ.”” Therefore, if I submit all that I have, to God, and I ask Him to intervene and to heal my fractures, I will receive renewed help from Him. It is through His help, that I can persevere in order to learn about the acceptable foundation of worship, and the fervent prayer, about which our teacher St. James the Apostle tells us, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (James 5:16)

Chapter 2

The importance of prayer and its benefits for our spiritual lives

Our teacher, St. Paul the Apostle said, “...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—” (Ephesians 6:18) This verse teaches us with depth, about the importance of prayer, and it repeats words of significance about paying attention to prayer. It contains words that encourage and inspire us to pray. This verse also clarifies the importance of prayer in our lives, because prayer is the thermometer for our spiritual lives. It is through prayer, that the fervency of the believer’s spirituality, as well as its depth and its growth, are revealed.

There are many benefits to praying, including the following:

1. Through prayer, we spend time with Christ who used to pray frequently, “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.” (Luke 6:12) Christ, the Perfect One, used to pray ever so frequently in order to teach us to pray. He also wanted to clarify the importance of prayer to us, so that we may learn from Him, as He said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:29) When the disciples saw that their Good Teacher was praying with fervency and depth, as soon as He concluded His prayer, they said to Him, “Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” (Luke 11:1) Also, our teacher St. Peter the Apostle said, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps...” (1 Peter 2:21) Our teacher St. Mark the Apostle said, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight,

He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” (Mark 1:35) And our teacher St. Luke wrote, “So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.” (Luke 5:16) He who does not learn to pray, and does not learn from Christ’s virtues, as a faithful disciple to his Good Teacher, is undeserving of being called a Christian.

Prayer is the channel through which God’s blessings are brought to us. Our Lord Jesus said, ““Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ^ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7, 8) and He also said, “Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:24), and “And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” (Matthew 21:22). Prayer is the key to Heaven.

It is through prayer, that we receive God's blessings, as well as His responses to all of our requests and the solutions to all our problems. If we find that we are not able to delight in God's blessings, the reason is because of our lack of prayer, or due to how unpleasant our request is. Our teacher St. James the Apostle says, "You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet^[a] you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4:2-3) There are times when we ask of God, but He does not respond, because there may be some immorality in our lives, as the Psalmist says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear." (Psalm 66:18) and Isaiah the Prophet said, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, And your fingers with iniquity; Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity" (Isaiah 59:1-3) In addition, during the transfiguration, St. Luke mentions, "As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. ^[a]Hear Him!" (Luke 9:29-35) Indeed, prayer is the key to Heaven, and through prayer, we receive God's blessings. Our Lord Jesus taught us, through the words of St. Paul the Apostle, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God..." (Philipians 4:6) When we depend on God with all our hearts and our faith, and we have a continuous connection with God through prayer, we hold a strong boldness. As a result, we will receive responses to all of our prayers, and our hearts will be filled with joy and peace, "and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philipians 4:7)

1. When we pray, we fulfill an important commandment. Whoever is under the impression that there is a means other than prayer, by which we can reach God or repent, they are being deceived by the devil.
2. Prayer saves us from Satan's evil – our teacher St. Paul the Apostle tells, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, ^[a]against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." (Ephesians 6:12-13) Prayer is one of God's strongest weapons, through which we can resist Satan, so that he may flee from us. Prayer is God's sword of the Spirit – the word of God. Our teacher St. Peter the Apostle tells us, "Be sober, be vigilant; because ^[a]your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world." (1 Peter 5:8-9) The most powerful weapon with which we can resist the devil, and use for self defense, is prayer with faith. Prayer becomes even more powerful when it is

accompanied by fasting, because fasting is our fortification. Since prayer is our weapon, he who is armed with prayer and with fasting, is able to ensure victory over his enemy, because the enemy has no way of attacking or approaching a person who is armed and protected. Our Lord Jesus said that fasting and prayer enable us to conquer over the most powerful of demons, “However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” (Matthew 17:21) Our Lord Jesus also taught us to pray at all times, “So He said to them, “When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.” (Luke 11:2) that is, from Satan the evil one.

3. Prayer rescues us from many evils – Our Lord Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place.” (Luke 21:32) and “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26:41) A famous proverb that beggars recite, states, “A little almsgiving prevents many adversities.” Similarly, prayer lifts many adversities from us, and rescues us from evil, and difficult temptations. This is why our Lord Jesus taught us that when we pray, we should say, “And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:13)
4. Through prayer, the Holy Spirit is poured into our hearts. Our Lord Jesus said, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13) This also happened with the Apostles when they were praying in the upper room, “Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:3-4) and also, “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:31) Also when the people of Samaria believed and were baptized by St. Philip in the name of our Lord Jesus, “who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 8:14), they became filled with the Holy Spirit. Even now, when the priest prays over the seven Holy Sacraments, the Holy Spirit descends and gives the sacraments their strength and their powerful effects.
5. Prayer helps us to grow in grace, and it prepares us to meet our Lord. Our teacher St. Paul the Apostle tells us, “but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. (1 Peter 3:12) The most powerful means that is practiced regularly, that brings us closer to our Lord Jesus, and deepens our relationship with Him, is prayer. One of the divine fathers said, “The true divine person who knows God very well, is the one who prays.”, because praying with spirit uncovers everything, even the innermost depths of God’s heart “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:10) Prayer also makes us ready to meet with our Lord, just as our Lord said, “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour^[a] your Lord is

coming.” (Matthew २४:३२) and “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour^[a] in which the Son of Man is coming.” (Matthew २०:१३)

Chapter ५

The Answered Prayer

When we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus, in order for our prayers to be fervent, answered, and acceptable in front of God’s face – so that we may benefit from God’s vast promises as He accepts the prayers that we offer to the Father in His name, “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John १४:१३) and ““And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.” (John १६:२३), the following conditions must be met:

1. Faith – Our prayers must be based on a strong faith, having full confidence in God the Pantocrator. We need to believe and be certain, that God is both able and eager to give us our hearts’ longings, if they are according to His will. If our prayers are able to reach God, He will surely answer them, without any doubt. God will answer our prayers with the following responses, “yes or no, or wait”. God’s answer will ultimately and always be for our good and our benefit. Sometimes we may feel that God’s answer is not according to our wishes or our liking, and this is because of our short sightedness as limited human beings. God knows our nature, He knows what is best for us and He knows what benefits us, more than what we could ever want or need for ourselves. God will answer, “yes” if our requests are good, appropriate, beneficial, and according to His will. God will answer, “No”, if our requests are inappropriate, bad, or hurtful to us or to others – again, according to His will. God will answer, “Wait” if He sees that our request is not appropriate for the present time. Our Lord Jesus said, “Have faith in God.” (Mark ११:२२) and the Apostle teaches us, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (Hebrews ११:१) If you put all of your confidence in Christ, you will see that He always will be completely loyal to you. Beware of doubt in God’s true and honest timing, in His pure teachings, that are, “...Like silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times.” (Psalm १२:१), because, “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers २३:१९) Our teacher, St. James the Apostle warns us about being doubtful regarding God’s timing during prayer, “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ^v For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord...” (James १:१-५) and “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need...” (Hebrews ४:११)
2. We need to be forgiving and tolerant of one another – We need to forgive others with all our hearts, just as our Lord taught us, ““And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.” (Mark ११:२०) Christ, out of His love for us, forgives all of our blunders if we repent and confess our sins, and St. Paul the Apostle instructs us, saying,

“...bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” (Colossians ३:१३)
This way, we will willingly lift our pure hearts up to God, without feeling forced to do so, and without struggle – then we will find that our prayers are acceptable in front of the Throne of Grace.

३. We need to strive to abide by the God’s commandments, and we need to appease God by fulfilling them – “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” (John ३:२२), and the Psalmist says, “For I have kept the ways of the LORD, And have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His judgments were before me, And I did not put away His statutes from me. I was also blameless before Him, And I kept myself from my iniquity.” (Psalm ११८:१-२३) He asks from God, saying “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.” (Psalm ११९:१६) Also, throughout the midnight prayers, the priest prays, “Then the priests, the Levites, arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard; and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, to heaven.” (2 Chronicles ३०:२१)
४. Love – Our love for God and for people, is essential. God teaches us through the words of St. Matthew, “Jesus said to him, ““You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”^[a] This is the first and great commandment. ^३ And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew २२: ३७-३९). Our teacher St. Paul says, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.” (1 Corinthians १३:१) In other words, no matter how lengthy my prayers are, and no matter how much they are likened to the prayers of spiritual angels, but I have no love and sacrifice, God will not accept them. Instead, my prayers will be to His ears as the sound of sounding brass or a clanging cymbal – without meaning or life – God will not pay attention to them.
५. Mercy – King Solomon the wise says, “Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard.” (Proverbs २१:१३) Surely, “...judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James २:१३) One of the saints says, “If you are in need of mercy, then lend mercy to those in front of you.’ Those who are unmerciful, “...cried out, but there was none to save; Even to the LORD, but He did not answer them.” (Psalm ११८:६) As for the person who has mercy on others and helps those who are in need, “Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ “If you take away the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness...” (Isaiah ५८:९)
६. Fasting – Fasting and mercy together can be likened to the wings of an eagle, which are required for its flight. Without the wings, the eagle is paralyzed because it is unable to fly; instead, it will be knocked around to and fro until it dies. The Psalmist says, about

mercy intertwined with prayer, “Blessed is he who considers the poor; The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive, And he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies.” (Psalm 41:1-2) And about the intertwinement of fasting with prayer, our Lord said to us, “However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” (Matthew 17:21) Fasting calms the body down and it prevents the senses from flaring up with pleasures. Fasting also plays an important role, in that it pulls the reins on the tongue, so that it paves the way for us to offer a spiritual prayer. This way our souls are set free from the bondage of the flesh, and our senses are able to meditate upon the truths of eternity and upon our lives after death.

Our prayer needs to coincide with God’s will – Our teacher, St. John the Apostle, tells us, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” (1 John 5:14) If our prayers do not coincide with God’s will, they will ultimately be denied. Our teacher St. James the Apostle tells us, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.” (James 4:3) These pleasures, are illustrated through what we wear, what we eat or drink, or even praising ourselves on God’s account – being boastful, by taking personal credit for God’s work, or His service, or His gifts, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.” (Matthew 23:15) I Pray that we may deny ourselves, so that God Himself, along with His will, and His glory become our all in all – everything in our lives, that we may say with David the Prophet, “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth.” (Psalm 115:1) As long as our requests are made for the intent of benefiting the salvation of souls, then the response to the prayer is guaranteed. If your prayer coincides with God’s will and in the name of the Lord Jesus, thus, “May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble; May the name of the God of Jacob defend you; May He send you help from the sanctuary, And strengthen you out of Zion; May He remember all your offerings, And accept your burnt sacrifice. May He grant you according to your heart’s desire, And fulfill all your purpose. We will rejoice in your salvation, And in the name of our God we will set up our banners! May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.” (Psalm 138:1-6) We will become introduced to God’s will when we regularly read the Holy Bible, and meditate on the word of God, and His message for our salvation, which is the doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, St. Paul the Apostle advises us, saying, “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel...” (Philippians 1:27) This will not happen unless we study the Holy Bible and learn its meanings and commandments. We need to take verses and apply them to everything in our general day to day lives, because God does not merely view our prayers according to the way that we recite them, or for the length of time that we spend praying. Many people have a seemingly wonderful image within the church; however, outside of the church, they have an extremely tainted image and they act in an evil way. Therefore, God views our prayers based on our daily lives as a whole.

7. Being Steadfast in Christ – The Lord’s promise to us, is an honest and a true Godly promise, “And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.” (John 1:1) We need to be steadfast in Him, in His love, and in His commandments that we may have boldness in Him, and that He may grant us what we ask for, according to His wealth in glory.
8. Bearing the name of Christ – We cannot truly pray in the name of the Lord unless we bear this blessed name in front of others, as our Lord said about St. Paul the Apostle, “But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” (ACTS 9:15) We should never deny Christ in either our personal lives, nor through our evil actions that displease God. This attitude is not befitting of the sons of the Kingdom of Heaven, and we need to correct our ways so that God’s name is not blasphemed against, because of us. If we are the reason behind the shame that was brought upon God’s holy name, it makes no sense for us to pray in His name and expect Him to hear us. Also, we should not deny in front of others, that Christ is God who appeared in the flesh for the salvation of the world. We confess that Christ is the Lord – no matter how much persecution or difficulties this confession brings with it, even unto death, we should remain steadfast in the faith, just as the martyrs did. Our Lord Jesus warned us, saying, “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. ” But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32-33)
9. The life of righteousness and fearing God – God does not accept the prayer of a person who is careless about his salvation and eternal life, “He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy.” (Psalm 147:10-11), that is, the man who is proud of his strength. Instead, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.” (Psalm 111:10) Also, the blessed Apostle advises us, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...” (Philippians 2:12) Furthermore, the man who was born blind, said, “Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.” (John 9:31)
10. Praying with persistence – persistence is one of the conditions of an answered prayer, because prayer ultimately means: wrestling with God. God may not fulfill our requests from the first time that we ask of Him, because He wants to test our loyalty to Him. God wants to see our perseverance in prayer, as well as the frequency of prayer during our presence in front of Him. Being the loving father that He is, God has already prepared His son’s answer for the request he made, but He will not give it to him from the first time that he asks of Him. God wants to test His son’s love for Him, and He wants to hear His son speaking to Him – describing his needs in the endearing way that a child would ask his father. It is like a child throwing himself into his father’s arms and asking him to

quickly fulfill his request, in his loving childish way; after which his father would joyfully grant him his wish. The Lord commanded us to pray with perseverance, and He gave two examples of perseverance in prayer: the first example is of the widow and the judge: “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’” Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”” (Luke 18:1-8) The second example is of the friend who came at midnight: “And He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you’? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.” (Luke 11:5-8) When we have a request to make of the Lord, He wants us to ask with perseverance, just as this friend of the final hour did, “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” Luke 11:9

The following are the progressive steps that are to be taken when we want to make our requests known to God:

- Ask with the boldness of your sonship to God, and then if God does not fulfill your request, ask again with fervency and love, but without any murmuring. If your request remains unanswered, you need to knock very hard on the door to God’s mercy, with tears and if possible, with lamentation – from the depths of your heart, along with repetition in prayer. Do not ever cease from making your request known to God.
- You must have all hope in the Lord’s faithful promises, for He said, “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” (Luke 11:10) and “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13) Isaac is considered a symbol of fervency and a continuous and perseverant prayer, as his various requests were made known to God. We read the following verses about Isaac: “Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, “If all is well, why am I like this?” So she went to inquire of the LORD. “(Genesis 25:20-22) and “Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.” (Genesis 25:26) Isaac continued to pray to God for twenty years, so that God may grant him an offspring. God did not give him what he wanted immediately, He waited in order to test

his loyalty. This also serves as a beneficial lesson for us, from which we learn to pray without ceasing and without murmuring – without loss of hope towards receiving what we asked for from God. We need to know full well, that God will fulfill our requests at the right time, because He knows what is best for us and He has our best interest at hand – more than we will ever know for ourselves. The most important thing, is that we need to continue to pray without ceasing and without losing hope, we need to beseech God fervently with a pure heart and with the confidence of a child “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)

1. Honouring your parents – He who angers his parents, will receive their anger in return, and as a result, God will not respond to him when he prays. Contrary to this, he who honours his parents, will receive their blessings along with their best wishes, and God will accept his prayers. King Solomon the wise says, “And he that honours his mother is as one that lays up treasure.” (Sirach 3:4) and “He that honours his father shall have a long life; and he that is obedient unto the Lord shall be a comfort to his mother.” (Sirach 3:6)

2. Honouring your marital relationship – The married man who despises his wife, or perturbs her, causes his family to lose its happiness and beauty. Consequently, the prayer will lose its spirituality and flavour. Saint Peter the Apostle advises, “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.” (1 Peter 3:7). In parallel to this, he advises the women to obey their husbands and to submit to them, “As Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.” (1 Peter 3:6)

3. Prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ – In order for our worship to be accepted and our prayers to be proficient, we need to present all prayers in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.” (John 10:9) St. Paul the Apostle teaches us to present all of our prayers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they may be acceptable to God, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” (Hebrews 13:15) and “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25) For we have absolutely no personal right to approach God, but we can get closer to Him through our Lord Jesus. Saint Paul the Apostle tells us, “that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹² But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹³ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace...” (Ephesians 2:12-13) Our holy church understands this critical matter – that is, submitting all prayers through

the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the merit of His blood, which He shed on the cross, this is why the church added the phrase, “Through Christ Jesus our Lord...” to the Lord’s Prayer. This way, all the requests that are harboured within this prayer, and all prayers that precede it, must be presented to God in the name of Christ, and His never ending merits.

In addition, there is no litany (plural – litanies, which originates from the Greek word, ‘Litaneia’, meaning: to pray or to entreat), nor prayer that excludes the name of Christ, whether at its beginning or even at its end, or both. For example, the prayer of thanksgiving begins with “Let us give thanks to the beneficent and merciful God, Father of our Lord, God, and Saviour, Jesus Christ...” And it ends with a beautiful and powerful phrase, “Through the grace, compassion, and love of mankind of Your only begotten Son, our Lord God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, through whom is glory, honour, dominion, and worship are due unto You, now and forever and unto the age of all ages amen.” This conclusion bears a huge significance, because it is likened to a royal signature or a seal that is placed onto a request. This seal is essential in order for the request to bear its weight, so that it may be deemed valid and authorized by law, and ultimately, accepted in heaven. The phrase also bears two critical parts, which will ensure the acceptance of the prayer or the request:

- “Through the grace and compassion,” If it were not for God’s never ending grace that surrounds us, the weak prayers that come out of our sinful lips would have no chance of being accepted.
- The name of Christ, through whom our Lord instructs us to ask for everything. It is in His name and in His merits that our requests would obtain acceptance.

Our Lord Jesus repeats this crucial condition of asking in His name, six times throughout the following verses:

١. “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John ١٤:١٣)
٢. “If you ask^[c] anything in My name, I will do it.” (John ١٤:١٤)
٣. “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” (John ١٥:١٦)
٤. “And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.” (John ١٦:٢٣)
٥. “Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” JOHN ١٦:٢٤
٦. “In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you...” (John ١٦:٢٦)

The repetition and focus around this critical phrase, emphasizes the fact that it bears great significance. The phrase also illustrates a promise and encouragement, in that the Master’s commandments bear an everlasting divine strength in their fulfillment, because, “You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s signet ring; for whatever is written in the king’s name and sealed with the king’s signet ring no one can revoke.” (Esther ٨:٨) Therefore, how much more would this be, for a prayer that is submitted in the name of Christ, and the help of the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us, “but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us

with groaning's which cannot be uttered.” (Romans 8:26) Praying in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, means making our requests in the merit of Christ's blood, “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus...” (Hebrews 10:19) Our teacher St. Paul the Apostle also writes, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25) There is no other means by which we can enter the Holies, and there is no other name through which our prayers can be fulfilled. The Psalmist says, “Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.” (Psalm 134:1-5) King Solomon the wise, said, “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.” (Proverbs 18:10) and “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) The saintly fathers became aware of this great fact, indeed, constant calling for help, through this good name – the name of Salvation that belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ. They were trained according to this fascinating practice, they entered the blessed test, they lived in it and they harvested its fruits – they knew its benefits, and they longed to hand it over to their children in Christ. They sought to teach all those who asked them, about the secret to an answered prayer and God's never-ending consolations for us. One of the fathers once said, “There is no other virtue, greater than the virtue of continuous prayer and pleading in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Another one of the fathers once said, “Whoever wants to thoroughly purify his heart, should frequently recall the good name of our Lord Jesus Christ – the Holy Name, both in actions, in words, and in thoughts, with great love and longing.” Another father said, “A man needs to understand, that the frequent utterance of the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ, is what protects him under the cover of His mercy.” It has also been said, “Call on the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ, frequently – it is the treasure on whose behalf the wise merchant sold the love of his heart, and bought this treasure. He took it to his home, and he found it to be sweeter than honey in his mouth. Blessed is the person who keeps this treasure in his heart, for it will give him a great place in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Another father said, “The fullness of the divinity has descended in the incarnate Lord Jesus, bodily.” As was mentioned in the Holy Bible, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily...” (Colossians 2:9) Hence, we should not accept the wiles of the devils, when they tell us: that if we call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we would not be calling on the Father and the Holy Spirit at the same time. The devils do this, because they want to forbid us from calling upon the good name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Satan knows that, without this name, there would be no salvation whatsoever, as St. Peter the Apostle tells us, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) We fully believe that when we call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we would also be calling on the Father and the Holy Spirit at the same time – we by no means accept their separation, or any division in the divinity. We also believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is the means by which people are able to come close to God, and to be able to converse with him, as St. Paul the Apostle tells us, “...has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds...” (Hebrews 1:2) One of the brothers said to Abba Makarios, “Father, I am afraid because of my many sins, what should I do?” Abba

Makarios responded, “Be strong, my son, in the hope of life and the neverending mercy that is the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” One time, Abba Beaman visited St. Makarios the Great, and he asked him, “Father, what should a man do in order to obtain life?” Abba Makarios responded and said, “If you always obey the food of life, that is for the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ, without ceasing, He will be sweet in your mouth and in your throat. When you mention his name, your soul will become nourished – this is how you will be able to obtain life.” One of the brothers asked one of the fathers, “Father, teach me how to hold strong to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with my heart and my tongue.” The father responded, “It is written, “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:10) So when your heart is calm, you will find it singing in the name of our Lord Jesus, always; however, if your heart becomes afflicted with thoughtlessness and lack of calm, you need to mention the Lord’s name with your tongue, so that your mind may become accustomed to it. When God sees how much you are struggling and when He sees that your heart is longing for Him, He will send you His help. He will shun away the dark thoughts that clouded your mind and soul.” One of the brothers asked his spiritual father, “Father, what should I do about this temptation that dwells with me?” The father responded, “The mention of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will cut off all temptation.” Indeed, the true Christian does not know any musical melody that is more beautiful than the name of our Lord Jesus. Any prayer that is presented to God without the blessed name of our Lord Jesus, will not even pass above the head of the praying person. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the hope of all nations, the door to salvation, and the one to whom the intercession belongs. The Lord’s name is ever so powerful, and “His mouth is most sweet, Yes, he is altogether lovely.” (Song of Solomon 4:16) – all in all, He is our love.

Due to the fathers’ steadfastness in prayer and in constantly calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, they instituted the annual Psalis, for every day of the week, that they may serve the Lord’s good name. For example in the Saturday Psali – ‘Wats’ for my Lord Jesus Christ, the phrase that is repeated in every verse, is “O my Lord Jesus Christ, my Good Saviour...” Also, the phrase, “My Lord Jesus help me...” is mentioned in the Psali of ‘Adam’, for my Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, the phrase that is repeated in each verse of the remaining Psalis (both ‘Wats’ and ‘Adam’), is, “My Lord Jesus Christ, help me”.

The Psalms of the New Testament:

You can try this wonderful test for yourself: mention the name of the Lord Jesus Christ when you recite the Psalms of the Agpeya in the following way:

- Pray the Psalm, and when you see the words, ‘Lord’, or ‘O, Lord’ add the words, ‘Jesus Christ’ to them, this way, the prayers of the Psalms will have a distinct sweet flavour and a focus to them, as well as an aura of spirituality. For example, when you pray Psalm 130, of ‘Keep me, O Lord...’ which is a Psalm from the Prime prayer, add the following: Keep me, O Lord Jesus Christ; for I have hoped in You. I said to the Lord Jesus Christ, “You are my Lord, and You have no need of my goodness.” He has manifested His wonders to His saints who are in His earth, and He has wrought all His desires in them. Their ailments have been multiplied who hastened after another God. I will not assemble their meetings of blood, nor make mention of their names with my lips. The Lord Jesus

Christ is the portion of my inheritance and my cup. You are He who brings my inheritance back to me. The measuring lines have fallen to me among the best, and my inheritance is confirmed for me. I will bless the Lord Jesus Christ who has given me understanding; my reins too have instructed me even till the night. I foresaw the Lord Jesus Christ always before me; He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved. Therefore my heart rejoiced and my tongue exulted; moreover also my flesh shall live in hope: because You shall not leave my soul in Hades, neither shall You suffer Your holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me, O my Lord Jesus Christ, the ways of life; You will fill me with joy with Your face: delight is in Your right hand forever.
ALLELUIA.

Practice inserting the Good name of the Lord Jesus Christ in all the Psalms.

Chapter 4

St. Paul the Apostle and servant – the man of prayer

In this day and age, many zealous and honest servants try to follow in the footsteps of St. Paul the Apostle, the great and honest servant – this is a wonderful thing, for St. Paul himself said, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1) St. Paul was honest in his service and in his perseverance. However, the person who only ‘seemingly and publically’ tries to imitate St. Paul through sermons, preaching, outreach visits and messages, is mistaken if he forgets the hidden portion of St. Paul’s service, and the ultimate reason behind the success of his service, which is the life of prayer. St. Paul was a man of prayer from the very start. He tirelessly used to pray on behalf of the service and on behalf of those who were being served.

We detect the spirit of prayer and pleading through the life of St. Paul the Apostle, in the Holy Bible. For example, he said:

- “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established...” (Romans 1:9-11)
- “...do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him...” (Ephesians 1:16-17)
- “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love...” (Ephesians 3:14-15)
- “...always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy... And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment...” (Philippians 1:4,9)

- “For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding...” (Colossians 1:9)

St. Paul used to ask his congregation to pray frequently on his behalf, as we read in his letter, “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, ¹ that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints...” (Romans 10:1-3)

- “...you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our^[a] behalf for the gift granted to us through many.” (2 Corinthians 1:11)
- “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving...” (Colossians 4:2)
- “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you...” (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

Therefore, servants can use St. Paul the Apostle as an example of true service in the way that they please, however, they should not forget that he was a man of prayer and declarations – he was once taken up to the third heaven. This way, the service becomes prosperous and their perseverance is accepted, because it is according to God’s laws and commandments.

Chapter 6

Where there is no altar nor prayer, temptations will arise and sins will cause us to stumble

“Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ¹ And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.” (Genesis 12:7-8)

Abraham offered sacrifices of thanks, and he prayed in the name of the Lord. His relationship with the Lord was very strong, and he was always found praying in front of the Lord, offering thanks and praise to God – for His care and His watchfulness. “So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.” (Genesis 12:9) However, the Bible does not mention that Abraham built any other altars for God in any of the areas that he immigrated to, after moving from Bethel. Initially, Abraham had such a strong relationship with God; however, after he immigrated towards the south, his relationship with God weakened. It is quite possible that Abraham was excessively busy, as he travelled from one area to another in order to find land that would suit his livestock and the crops that he took with him. Abraham remained this way until he reached the borders of Egypt, “Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land.” (Genesis 12:10) It seems that Abraham’s spiritual life began to decline because he left Bethel, where God’s altar was. Instead, he paid more

attention to his livestock and crops – this is where danger lies. God is with us as long as we remain with Him, but if we forsake Him because of our attention to the world, He too will drift away from us, leaving us to our own weak strengths – hence, we end up falling.

When Abraham forsook his prayers to God and meditating in God, he fell into two sins: the first sin was that he began to ponder his wife's beauty, "And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, "Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance."" (Genesis 12:11) Secondly, Abraham told a lie, and the fact that he lied, was as a result of the fear that overcame him, after He forsook God. "Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I^[a] may live because of you."" (Genesis 12:13) This is also exactly what Adam went through; as a result, he was disconnected from God. He was overcome by fear, so that when God called his name, "Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) Adam answered in fear while hiding, he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."" (Genesis 3:10) The second sin that Adam committed was that he lied to God, because when God asked him, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" (Genesis 3:11) Instead of humbling himself and admitting his sin, by saying, 'Yes I have sinned, I ate from the fruit of the tree', Adam blamed God, saying, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."" (Genesis 3:12) After Adam was expelled from paradise and was disconnected from meditating about God and paying attention to God, he began to think about his wife, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain..." (Genesis 4:1) This was as a result of his disconnection from God, his attention to the worldly cares, his spiritual weakness, and his falling into sin. In contrast, David the prophet who was connected to God always, and who always prayed to God, said, "In return for my love they are my accusers, But I give myself to prayer." (Psalm 109:4) David felt God's friendship towards him, he felt that God was at his right hand, so that he would not be shaken, and that He was in front of him, fighting on his behalf. Therefore, David counted on God's mighty arm, and he did not fear evil "I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people Who have set themselves against me all around." (Psalm 124:6-7) and "In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 124:8,11)

Beginning and ending everything with prayer:

When Eliezer of Damascus (Abraham's servant), arrived in the city of Nahor, Abraham's brother, in order to find a bride for Isaac, his master's son, from his own tribe, he said, "11 Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, for all his master's goods were in his hand. And he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. 12 And he made his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water. 13 Then he said, "O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. 14 Behold, here I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. 15 Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'—let her be the one You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master.'" (Genesis 24:10-14). And just before Abraham's servant stopped talking, Rebecca, from Abraham's family, emerged with her clay vessel on her shoulder. When Rebecca filled her vessel with water,

Eliezer asked her to give him some water, and not only did she give him water, she also gave water to his camels. This is when God fulfilled the sign, which Eliezer asked for – Eliezer knew that had bestowed success upon him, “Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped the LORD.”¹⁵ And he said, “Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master’s brethren.”” (Genesis 24:26-27). From this, we learn that we should begin everything that is assigned to us, by praying, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...” (Philippians 4:6) Just as Eliezer thanked the Lord when He granted him success for his mission – he bowed down and thanked God, we too need to thank God at the end of every mission, knowing full well that He is the one who works in us, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.” (1 Corinthians 4:7) Hence, we should begin and end all of our missions with prayer, like our Lord Jesus Christ who spent a whole night in prayer before He chose His disciples, “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.”¹⁶ And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles...” (Luke 6:12-13) We also notice how our Lord Jesus thanked God, when He brought Lazarus back to life. “Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying.^[a] And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.”¹⁷ And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.” (John 11:41-42) May we ask our Lord to teach us to pray always, as we chant with the disciples, saying, “Lord, teach us to pray...” (Luke 11:1)

Chapter 12

The dilemma of thoughtlessness or scattered thoughts during prayer, and its remedy

St. Parsonifyous says, “The complete prayer is to speak to God without the thoughtlessness of the mind, nor with the prison of the world.” St. Makarios the great says, “If you approach prayer, beware that you may be steadfast, so that you do not submit your vessel to the hands of your enemies, for they long to seize your vessel, which is the longings of your soul, the righteous longings which we should use to serve God both night and day. God is not asking you to glorify Him merely with your lips, while your mind goes astray with the vanities of the world.” For God is, “...Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24) God reprimanded those who pray while their minds go astray and they lack focus, He says, “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And^[a] honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.” (Matthew 15:8) St. John El Tibaysy says, “My brother, do not think that prayer is merely talking, but hear this truth from me: the spiritual prayer is not merely words that we repeat, because we are not praying in front of a person. We should not merely pray with the words of the common people, because God is a Spirit, so we need to pray in front of Him, in spirit. This is why our minds need to participate with our hearts and our tongues. During prayer, the mind knows what it is saying, and the heart feels what the mind is thinking about, and the lips utter the words of the spirit – we need to be alert when we pray.”

St. Peter the Apostle advises us, saying, “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.” (1 Peter 4:7) But what is the way by which we can control our thoughts during prayer, especially since everyone complains about the problem of

thoughtlessness during prayer. In fact, it is impossible for us as novices in our spiritual lives, to prevent our minds from being scattered during prayer. It is rare for anyone of us to be completely focused in one scenario, for an extended period of time, whether it be prayer, or reading, or even studying etc. However, we cannot deny, that some of the fathers were able to perfect this virtue of maintaining a high level of focus during prayer, which is also referred to as the ‘crucifying of the mind’. They obtained this virtue by the work of the Holy Spirit within them, after much perseverance and suffering. St. Makarios the Alexandrian remained focused in prayer, for three days while his mind was uplifted to heaven. His mind did not descend back to earth, until he burned all the devils that were under his feet. The fire was so intense, to the point where it reached his feet. If we are all complaining about thoughtlessness and lack of focus during prayer, then none of us will be able to pray even one Psalm with a collected mind, with understanding, and meditation upon its words. We need to understand the various forms of thoughtlessness, the reasons behind thoughtlessness, and the lack of focus during prayer, so that we can learn how to tackle it.

There are two types of thoughtlessness:

١. The thoughtlessness of the mind in vain issues
٢. The thoughtlessness of the mind in righteous matters.

St. Mari Isaac the Syrian says, “The fact that we do not agree with the matters that are formed in the mind if we do not pray, this is within our capabilities. But in order for the mind to be silent, far from all that manifests itself to it, and to be uplifted above all matters and perseverance, this beyond the strength of nature, because there is a good type of thoughtlessness and a vile type of thoughtlessness. As for you, son, do not long for your mind to refrain from being overcome by general thoughtlessness, because this will be impossible; instead, long for your mind to become thoughtless in the matters of righteousness.” Based on that, the pure prayer is not the one that is free of the thoughtlessness of the mind, but free from the thoughtlessness of the vain matters. St. Mari Isaac says, “The pure prayer that is without thoughtlessness is not the prayer where the mind is without thought or vision in a particular matter, it is the prayer where the mind does not become thoughtless in the vain matters, during prayer. If the person’s thoughts wander off on the meanings of prayer and in the matters of righteousness, it does not mean that they have drifted off from the purity of prayer. Instead, it means that the person is paying attention to the matters that are worthy of attention, during prayer, with a conscience that is appeasing to God.” In other words, the righteous thoughtlessness occurs through glorifying God; for example, if someone attends a church sermon, when he returns home and begins to pray, he recalls the words of the sermon, their meanings and he can meditate on its deep spiritual meanings. St. Mari Isaac the Syrian also said, “Vile thoughtlessness occurs when the mind becomes scattered in vain thoughts, or thinking in the wrong way while praying in front of God. As for the righteous thoughtlessness, it is for the conscience to wander in God’s glory and greatness, during prayer – in other words, the recollection of the holy books, and understanding the Divine words and holy sayings that pertain to the spirit. It is out of ignorance, that we consider the righteous thoughtlessness to be foreign to the purity of prayer, and vain to collecting the thoughts.” Then St. Mari Isaac says, “It is good to collect the mind; but, if the mind longs to become free by extending to the Divine matters, or attentive to the righteous matters that pertain to the holy books, which are about God, then this type of thoughtlessness – or, the dispersion of

thoughts in this manner, is better than the mere portrayal of prayer. It is the limit of all minds and the purity of prayer.”

Reasons for vain thoughtlessness and its remedy:

There are a few reasons regarding why the mind becomes thoughtless in vain matters, during prayer. We will discuss some of those reasons, as well as their remedies.

1. When the stomach is too full with food and drink – He who fills his stomach with plenty of food, then wants to pray, will not be able to focus on curbing his thoughts and directing them. It is also well known that after eating, a large amount of blood is pushed down towards the stomach in order to help with its digestion; hence, the amount of blood going to the brain becomes much less. As a result of this, a person becomes less active, leaning more towards relaxing or sleeping. Our Lord Jesus, glory be to Him, tells us, “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.” (Luke 21:34) St. Mari Isaac the Syrian says, “Do not overburden your stomach, so that your mind is not overcome by thoughtlessness. If you want to pray this way, your joints will be lax and you will be overcome by laziness. Your movements will be tainted...and you will not be able to savour the words of the Psalms.” The remedy for this, is that we should not fill our stomachs with too much food, we should only eat as much as is needed to sustain our bodies, so that we may be able to go about our daylily responsibilities. We should also refrain from consuming alcoholic beverages, because they cloud the mind and make people less alert, as the Apostle said, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit...” (Ephesians 5:18) In addition, we should not pray immediately after eating, because during this time, the body is in a state of laxness, and the mind is in a state of idleness. This is what causes the mind to wander speedily, far from the words of prayer.
2. Life’s worries – this is another thing that our Lord Jesus points out to us, when He said, “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.” (Luke 21:34) This is because our Lord Jesus knows that man will become too intertwined, with the concerns of life and its demands. People tend to lose themselves in their worries – they become immersed in their anxieties, to the point where, when they try to collect their thoughts for prayer, their minds slip as they attempt to resolve or focus on other issues that are capturing their attention. The remedy for this, is to lessen our ties to the world and the worldly cares, as much as possible. We need to turn towards the commandment of our Lord Jesus when He spoke to Martha, saying, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴⁷ But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41-42) and “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:34) Also, with regards to this, St. Mar Isaac the Syrian says, “If you are seated in the midst of smoke, you will not be able to see clearly, unless you move away from it. Similarly, you will not be able to obtain purity of heart and the calmness of the mind that lead to a powerful prayer, unless you move away from the smoke of this world, which clouds the eyes of the soul.” He also said, “If you want to control your thoughts from being overcome by thoughtlessness, so that you can find time

for prayer: collect yourself from the worldly matters....and the thoughtlessness of the senses.”

Throughout the sixth hour in the Agpeya, the church teaches us to pray every day, saying “O Jesus Christ, our God, who was nailed to the cross in the sixth hour, and killed sin by the tree, and by Your death You made alive the dead man, whom You created with Your own hands, and had died in sin. Put to death our pains by Your healing and life-giving passions, and by the nails with which You were nailed. Rescue our minds from thoughtlessness of the earthly deeds and worldly lusts, to the remembrance of Your heavenly commandments, according to Your compassion.”

If we submit our lives to God, along with all our cares and our worries, this would be greatly beneficial for us. We need to count on Him, as our compassionate Father, who greatly cares for us. We need to refrain from intertwining ourselves in our worries and problems; instead, we should include God. We should ask God to manage our lives as He sees fit, just as David the prophet said, “Cast your burden on the LORD, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.” (Psalm 55:22) and King Solomon the Wise, when he said, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct^[a] your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6) and the advice of the Apostle when he said, “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7) The life of submission and dependence on God, will calm our minds and bring peace to our souls. Ultimately, this will curb our thoughts, and it will prevent us from being overcome by thoughtlessness during prayer.

3. The pleasures of the heart – The person who entangles his heart with many worldly cravings or longings that he wants to fulfill, becomes engulfed in them and strives to plan on reaching them. Hence, the person is unable to lift his mind and his heart to the heavens, in order to think about heaven and the heavenly. As a result, this person will begin to murmur with regards to prayer, because he considers prayer to be a waste of time and effort. The person becomes like the swine, that look downwards constantly at their hooves, muddling through the dirt in order to eat and bask in it. If this type of person tries to lift his eyes and his heart above, he will not be able to do so. His thoughts will quickly fall back to the longings and the yearnings, and how to fulfill and enjoy them. St. Peter tells us, “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit,”^[a] and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.” (2 Peter 2:22) Also, St. Paul warns us about being too immersed in the worldly pleasures that drown people into perishing, he says, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.” (1 Timothy 6:9) Our only pleasure and delight needs to be Christ, because He is, as the Prophet said, “...the Desire of All Nations...” (Haggai 2:7) Standing in God’s presence, should be our bliss, as Isaiah the prophet says, “Yes, in the way of Your judgments, O LORD, we have waited for You; The desire of our soul is for Your name And for the remembrance of You. With my soul I have desired You in the night, Yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early; For when Your judgments are in the earth, The inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” (Isaiah 26:8-9) This is

the pleasure of the righteous, as King Solomon the wise said, “The desire of the righteous is only good, But the expectation of the wicked is wrath.” (Proverbs 11:23) If our pleasures are good and righteous, our Lord promised to fulfill them for us, as King Solomon the wise said, “The fear of the wicked will come upon him, And the desire of the righteous will be granted.” (Proverbs 10:24). If all our longings are focused on obtaining eternal life, and enjoying being present with God, forever, then our thoughts will be collected and delivered above our minds. It is then that we will be able to offer a pure prayer, where we converse with our heavenly beloved, the One whom our souls long for – without thoughtlessness or daydreaming.

- ξ. Bodily fatigue – There is a mistake that many people become trapped in – they put God second, after their other priorities. Hence they toil all day in their jobs, as well as all the other worldly priorities, and they exert all their mental and physical efforts in fulfilling other things. At the end of a long day, after they return to their homes, being exhausted and tired from all their efforts, there is only but little time left prior to their sleep, when they can pray and meditate. In this event, the exhausted body is unable to stand for prayer, and the overloaded mind has no tolerance left to meditate nor to curb the thoughts. Hence, people have no time left to pray with depth, or to enjoy the fervency of prayer, that rises to heaven in order to reach God. I pray that we can give God the first fruits of our time. The Jews in the Old Testament dedicated the last day of the week to the Lord. As for the New Testament, the Christians dedicated the first day of the week to the Lord, which is Sunday – this is when they pray and worship God with all activeness, and joy. Based on this, we need to give God the first fruits of our time when we pray. We should pray early in the morning – at the start of our day when our bodies are fueled with rest. As for the evening, we need to include prayer and reading the Holy Bible as part of our evening schedule. Choose the right time for prayer, because if you merely leave the leftovers of the night for prayer, you will not benefit from it.
- ο. The misconception of praying in secret – Some people have a misunderstanding about praying in secret, and they try to pray without anyone knowing – they pray in fear and out of fear that someone would notice them. They pray with a low voice, so that no one hears them, or knows that they are praying. This is despite the fact that when our Lord Jesus ordered us to pray in secret, by this commandment He meant: that our prayers should not be for the purpose of boastfulness and showing-off or for seeking vain glory from others. He did not mean that we should pray out of fear – which would ultimately cause us to lose the blessings of prayer, and all the consolation that comes with prayer. Having said that, we should pray with an audible voice, because this way, more than one of our senses would be included in the prayer: the eye looks at what is written, the tongue pronounces the words, the ears hear, the mind meditates, and the spirit rises. St. Paul the Apostle said, “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:10) Confessing the name of the Lord by mouth, means speaking in front of Him, using words of gratitude and praise for all the blessings that God gives us. This way, our Lord accepts our prayers from us just as He would a sacrifice. Hosea the prophet advises his congregation, saying, “Take words with you, And return to the LORD. Say to Him, “Take away all iniquity; Receive us graciously, For we will offer the sacrifices^[a] of our lips.” (Hosea 14:2) Also,

David the Prophet said, “I will praise the name of God with a song, And will magnify Him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bull, Which has horns and hooves.” (Psalm 69:30-31), Our teacher St. Paul the Apostle said, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” (Hebrews 13:15)

One night, one of the blessed servants came to visit the monastery, and he sat in the guest room, which is located right beneath my cell. In the calm of the monastery and in the silence of the night, this man began to pray. He began to chant the Psalms aloud, in a calm and very beautiful way. This caught my attention, and I stood beside the window of my cell in order to listen to this beautiful, angelic voice, that was singing the Psalms. I remained this way beside the window – I felt as if I were in heaven, until he concluded his prayers. That night, I was deeply consoled, and this was a source of blessings for me. This encounter, awoke me from my laziness and taught me how to pray in a spiritual way. During another evening, shortly after the vespers prayer, I began to walk in the wilderness that surrounds the monastery. The night extended its dark veil upon the quiet wilderness and the weather was beautiful. All of a sudden, I heard a beautiful voice, and I saw the shadow of a monk from afar. He was praying and chanting the Psalms aloud in a very beautiful way – I was amazed. Both the shadow and the voice were gradually coming closer to me; in seeing this, I sat on the sandy ground so that my father, the monk who was immersed in prayer does not take notice of me – otherwise he may have lowered his voice. Finally, he stood close to where I sat, but he did not see me because of the darkness. He prayed the gospel of the hour and he recited the litanies that pertained to it. He was praying in a way that made me feel as if I were living in heaven for a moment in time, as I heard the calm words, one by one. I tried to listen closely to his voice, so that I could figure out which monk he was, but I could not. It was as if he were an angel sent to me by God, to teach me to chant the Psalms and prayers. This monk then went on his way, into the inner wilderness, until I could no longer see him, and his beautiful spiritual voice drifted away from my ears. I then stood up and returned to the monastery, feeling overjoyed, consoled, spiritually rejuvenated, and active. Therefore, if these audible and beautifully chanted prayers, were able to capture my attention – I who is made of dust, from the body that, by nature does not lean towards spiritualities, how much more will it capture God’s heart? How much more will it capture God’s hearing, and His attention, that He may hear us and accept our prayers – giving us our hearts’ desires? When we pray audibly, our minds are collected and our thoughts are protected from thoughtlessness and from wandering.

6. Anger – is one of the things that scatters the mind and disturbs the purity of the heart; hence, it spoils the prayer. Sometimes, when a person stands to pray, his heart becomes stirred with anger, against another person who caused him to lose his peace, or the likes of that. As a result, this person begins to ponder many thoughts, for an extended period of time. He can even begin to debate with himself, “I should have done this or that, in return and it would have stopped him in his tracks....” etc. Consequently, the heart is stirred with anger, hatred, and bitterness; which ultimately leads the person to abandon the Psalms that he was reciting, as he continues to debate with his thoughts. Eventually, if he manages to collect his thoughts and return to his prayers, he would do so with a bitter heart and a scattered mind.

The saints teach us, that “When we meditate upon people’s insults towards us, this severs the rope that we use in order to think about God.” The remedy for this, is to do our best to refrain from entering into arguments or problems with others. If these issues force themselves into our lives, we need to have strong and sacrificial love, with tolerance, in order to tackle these issues. We need to be kind and forgiving, looking for the first opportunity to resolve the issue in a calm and humble manner. We should forgive others their trespasses so that we may obtain forgiveness for our own sins, just as the Divine promise tells us, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁰ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”(Matthew 6:14-15) Also, one of the saints said, “If you need mercy from God, lend some mercy to your brother, so that it will become readily available for you.” When the thoughts of anger sneak their way into our minds during prayer, we need to transform them into praying for the person who insulted us – asking for mercy for him, and for the resolution of the issue. We need to ask God to give us tolerance and a big heart, so that we can endure with joy and gratitude, as we turn to the words of a saint who said, “Beware of anger, because it darkens the mind, and it shuns away God’s fear from the soul. Anger is the father of the foolish, whoever accepts it, is not meek in front of God.” Another one of the saints said, “The angry and hateful man, harvests from his prayers, what the farmer harvests from planting his crops on rocks.” St. Paul the Apostle teaches us to offer prayers that are free of anger or hatred, he said, “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting...” (1 Timothy 2:8) The church teaches us to pray every morning, from the morning doxology, saying, “Grant us, O Lord on this morning as we are without sin, to be worthy to lift up our hands without anger or vile thoughts.”

- ∇. Excessive larking – A person who like to joke and laugh a lot, in addition to making fun of others, remains this way, even during prayer. While he is praying, he may recall a joke that he once said, or a funny situation that he caused; hence, he becomes taken over by laughter while he is praying to God – God, the Lord of Lords and the king of kings! As a result of this attitude, this person’s mind becomes scattered; his prayers become cold. How sinful is this? How insulting is it to God, to stand in front of Him during prayer and begin to laugh?! I pray that we may learn how to be composed, and to avoid making fun of others. I pray that we may avoid the type of laughter that shuns away God’s fear from the heart, causing us to sin. As for the time that we spend with our friends, it needs to be according to what our teacher St. Paul the Apostle told us, “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy...” (Philipians 2:1)
- ∧. The inability to control our senses – Our senses are the channels that lead to our souls. It is through our senses that our souls are exposed to what is seen, and what is heard. So if we leave our senses without control or without a watch, they will allow many vile things to enter into our hearts, and this is not befitting for God’s children. Our ears may hear vile words or vile conversations, and this can have a bad effect on the purity and the calmness of our hearts. They will cause our hearts to become disturbed and turbulent, with things that are not befitting for God’s children. All the negative things that we saw and heard, will be retrieved in our minds during prayer. They will stir up various lusts within us, ultimately scattering our thoughts and defiling our prayers, thus, David the

prophet beseeched God, saying, “Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, And revive me in Your way.” (Psalm 119:37). The church teaches us to pray every day in the ninth hour saying, “O, Who tasted death in the flesh in the ninth hour for our sake, we the sinners, put to death our carnal lusts, O Christ, our God, and deliver us. Let my supplication draw close before You, O Lord; according to Your word give me understanding. Let my petition come before Your presence; according to Your word revive me.”

I pray that through God’s help, we may try to control our senses, this way we will only expose them to what is pure and holy: to see what is pure and holy, to listen to what is spiritual and blessed, and to touch what is pure and permitted. This way, we will avoid scattering our thoughts, and refrain from being tempted by lusts, during prayer. Hence, we can obtain prayer with a mind that is collected and thoughts that are controlled.

9. Temptations during prayer – The devil will try with all his might, to prevent us from praying or connecting with God altogether. The devil does this through creating doubt in the power of prayer and its benefits, or causing us to feel hopeless and to despair in God’s mercy for us. In addition, he will try to force us not to resort to God in our trials and tribulations. The devil can also cause us to become careless or lazy, or to procrastinate at the start of our prayer and perseverance. If we defeat the devil and we stand up to pray, he will begin to tempt us through his various weapons: scattering our thoughts, pointing out how tired we are, making us recall the insults of others to us, retrieving a lustful picture that we once saw, or vile words that we once heard. This way, the devil will cause us to lose the great profit that comes with prayer. We need to refrain from paying any attention to the devil’s temptations, and we should not submit to them. We need to ask for God’s help – He will help us and strengthen us, giving us victory over the devil. He will also give us grace so that we can observe the devil’s wiles from a distance, this way we can resist him through prayer itself. By this, the devil will flee from us, and only then can we offer the sacrifices of our lips to God, with joy, gratitude, and longing.

Chapter 9

Practices that will help us to control our thoughts during prayer

- We need to understand that when we pray, our bodies need to be strong and alert, this way we are not betrayed by them during prayer. When our thoughts are in control, this will force our bodies to stand to pray with concentration.
- We need to prepare ourselves for prayer: preparation for prayer is very beneficial - it makes the prayer more concentrated, and it makes the mind collected and aware of the words of prayer. The atmosphere of prayer is spiritual, it is another world that differs completely from our physical and worldly atmosphere. The time of preparation is essential: whether in the morning, when the soul is still laden with sleep, and because a person would be thinking about the activities of the new day, or towards the end of the day, when a person returns from work. St. Mar Isaac the Syrian tells us, “Before you pray to God, prepare yourself accordingly. Calm yourself down even a little before praying, so that you can prepare yourself for the atmosphere of prayer, and so that your emotions and your feelings are moved towards prayer.” It is not befitting for you to

move directly from what you were immersed in, and suddenly begin to pray; if you do that, you will not enjoy praying, and your mind will be scattered. St. John Kasian said, “Regardless of what our minds are thinking about before the hour of prayer, we must learn an important thing: during prayer we need to keep our minds spiritually alert.” During the preparation phase, try to raise your ‘spiritual temperature’ and your most heartfelt longings to God. You can do this by:

- Reading a chapter from the bible, or a few verses for consolation and personal meditation.
- You can read a spiritual book about prayer.
- You can sing a hymn or a spiritual song, especially the hymns or the spiritual songs that lean towards melancholy or repentance.
- You can meditate upon God’s love, His personal care for you, and his love for all of mankind.
- You can meditate upon your sins and your shortcomings, and how you offended God by sinning, and that you continue to do so.

Over and above all, know in your heart that you are standing in God’s presence and that God can see you and hear you. Fr. Nistarion said, “Beware that: every day you should stand in front of God without sin. Pray to Him as if you can see Him, because truly He is present.” When you stand to pray, stand tall, with concentration – just as a soldier does when he speaks to his lieutenant. St. John Climacus said about one of the fathers, “He was accustomed to collecting his thoughts at the start of prayer, saying, ‘come let us worship, let us bow in front of Christ our God.’” Until now, the church teaches us to practice this, because at the start of the prime prayer, the praying person collects his thoughts, saying, “O come, let us bow down: O come, let us ask Christ our God. O come, let us bow down: O come, let us beseech Christ our king, O come, let us bow down: O come, let us entreat Christ our Saviour. O Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God our God, through the intercession of Holy Mary and all Thy Saints, keep us, and let us start well. Have mercy upon us according to Thy will forever. The night has passed away, we give thanks unto Thee O lord, and we ask Thee to keep us this day without sin, and deliver us.

When you stand to pray:

- Do not lean against the wall behind you, or beside you, because this will be enough to cause your body to become lax, and your mind to wander away from the meanings of the words of prayer.
- Lift up your hands as much as you can during prayer, especially when reciting verses that call for the lifting up of the hands or the eyes, such as :
 - ❖ “Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.
° My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.” (Psalm ٦٣:٤-٥)
 - ❖ “Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless the LORD.” (Psalm ١٣٤:٢)
 - ❖ “Who plan evil things in their hearts; They continually gather together for war.” (Psalm ١٤٠:٢)

- ❖ “My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, Which I love, And I will meditate on Your statutes.” (Psalm 119:48)

The lifting of the hands during prayer, is enough to collect the mind. Recall what Moses the prophet did when he was praying upon the mountain, lifting both his hands, “And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. 15 But Moses’ hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. 16 So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.” (Exodus 17:11-13)

- Hold a cross in your right hand, during prayer. Greet this cross fervently every time you recite a Psalm of thanks to God, or when acknowledging God’s many blessings for us. This is also enough to collect the mind and to keep it focused in prayer.
- Beat your chest with humility when you recall a sin, or when you are repenting, or asking mercy, as you read phrases such as ,
 - Have mercy on me, Lord for I have sinned against You
 - Have mercy on me, God have mercy
 - My sin is before me at all times

The beating of the chest humbles the heart and collects the mind during prayer.

- During prayer, repeat some of the phrases that your soul is comforted by, that are suitable for your situation. When you pray a Psalm or a litany, if you reach a powerful phrase that suits your situation, repeat it many times and try to relate it to your situation. Afterwards, complete the remainder of the Psalm or the litany that you were praying. This is enough to lift the mind and create fervency and longing in the heart.
- Repeat the good name of our Lord Jesus Christ during the prayers of the Psalms, when you see the words, ‘O Lord’ or ‘Lord’, say after it, ‘Jesus Christ’. Try to lift your heart to God, this is enough to control the mind and it prevents the scattering of thoughts during prayer.
- Worshipping (prostrating) a lot during prayer, will collect the mind and it will protect it from wandering off. I pray that every time you mention the name of Christ, or every time you glorify God, or mention worshipping Him, or glorifying His blessed and great name, that you anoint yourself with the sign of the cross and prostrate yourself to the ground. If for any health reasons you are unable to prostrate yourself onto the ground, at least bow down and sign yourself with the cross – things like this are very beneficial for collecting the mind.
- If you are tired of standing during prayer and you want to complete your prayer while kneeling on the floor, do not bow your head or lean your hand against a wall or a chair, or anything in front of you or beside you. If you allow your body to become lax, your mind will wander away from your prayer.
- If you prostrate yourself to the ground during prayer, do not spend too much time on the ground, so that you do not become lax or doze off to sleep, this will cause you to drift off from prayer. Instead, after prostrating yourself, get up quickly and stand up straight for prayer, in fervency and longing. Know that you are prostrating yourself for the purpose of worship, not to allow your body to relax or rest.

- Read spiritual books, about meditations that pertain to the Psalms and the gospels that you are using in your prayers. In doing so, you will understand the meaning behind what you are saying, and the events that are being mentioned in each Psalm or gospel. This will further clarify the Psalms for you; as a result, you will love to recite them. It would be even better, if you are able to record your personal meditations in the margin of your personal Agpeya or Bible. This will open the doors of understanding for you as you read.
- Do not rush while reading the Psalms, because speed will cause you to mispronounce some of the words or verses. If you rush your prayer, it will lose its flavour and its spirituality – it turns into words that you have memorized and are merely repeating them. Do not cause prayer to become like the routine list of words, which magicians use, without understanding their meaning. Far be it from prayer, to be likened to that.
- Do not allow your prayer to be extended more than needed. The fathers advise us to pray often, but to reduce the duration of prayer – rather than praying for a minimal number of times, but prolonging the prayer. If we pray for extended periods of time, this will cause our bodies and our minds to become exhausted – which will ultimately increase thoughtlessness. This piece of advice is very similar to the advice that the doctor may give us: to eat a few lights meals throughout the day, instead of eating a big portion at once – as this will exhaust the stomach. The fathers advise us to pray many times during the day, as opposed to spending a lot of time praying at once. They have come to learn this, out of their experience and their knowledge of man’s nature. They know that a person is unable to focus or concentrate on one particular thing, for an extended period of time. If a particular job or practice is extended, especially if it is like prayer, which is concentrated in the mind, the mind becomes scattered and the thoughts never return to focus, no matter how hard we try. In this event, the only way to recollect our thoughts, is if we rest for a while or if we change our routine altogether. Similarly, if the body becomes exhausted from prolonged standing during prayer, it begins to lean over and to murmur. The body tries to find support to lean on, and this lessens the spirituality and the fervency of prayer.

The short and repeated prayer, protects us from thoughtlessness, it always keeps us connected to God and to His commandments. The length of a prayer depends on the individual’s spiritual level. A person can gradually extend the duration of his prayer and his presence with God, according to his overall spiritual level and according to his attention to prayer.

- At the conclusion of the prayers of the hours, when we pray kirieleyson 4 times, we should recall the 39 times that Christ was whipped – His back was scourged for our sakes. We can then recall the crown of thorns that was mockingly placed onto His head. We can also recall the spear that pierced his side. These are the pains that are illustrated by the prayer of kirieleyson, which we recite 4 times. Repeat this kirieleyson prayer saying:
 - ‘O You who was whipped for my sake, have mercy on me...’
 - ‘O You who was crowned with thorns for my sake have mercy on me...’
 - O you who was pierced with the spear for my sake, have mercy on me.’

This way you will attempt to repent, as you beseech God for mercy, that you may lessen Christ’s pain, which He suffered on behalf of your salvation.

- Hang an icon of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, on the eastern wall of your room. Look at the picture from time to time during your prayer, so that you can meditate on the nails that He was nailed with, on the blood that streamed from His wounds, on the crown of thorns that crowned His holy head, and on the fact that He was hanging on a cross – naked so that He may clothe you with grace. This is enough to collect your thoughts and to fill your heart with the Divine love that was presented on the cross.
- Beside the icon of the crucifix, place an icon of St. Mary the Virgin. Look at it from time to time when you are talking to St. Mary, in the parts that pertain to her in the Agpeya. Look at her icon when you ask for her accepted intercessions.
- Always remember that the powerful prayer, which leads to fervency, a united mind, united emotions, and elevated senses, will obtain heaven’s compassion and God’s appeasement. The person who prays this way, gains Divine help that will sustain him in his perseverance. When Daniel the prophet prayed with fervency, God sent him Arch Angel Michael to help him stand against the devil, who stood to fight him. God also sent His angel to inform Daniel that his prayer was accepted, as observed in the tenth chapter of the book of Daniel. Even our Lord Jesus Himself, prayed with fervency, to the point where, “Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. “ And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” (Luke २२:४३-४४)
- Do not forget that after praying your Psalms, you should pray your own personal prayer – in your own words. The Psalms are there to pave the way, and to prepare the soul to enter the path of the personal prayer. The personal prayer is where you express your longings, your feelings, your praises, and your gratitude towards God. This is also your opportunity to tell God all about your pain, your sufferings, your hopes, and your dreams. This way, you will find God’s attentive ear, God’s acceptance, and His response to your prayer.
- After the conclusion of your prayer, if you have some extra time and you are able to sit quietly, you can do so, for two reasons: to give your body some time to rest from the persevering efforts that you went through in order to pray, and secondly, so that you may absorb the essence of the prayer. The powerful prayer that is followed by a period of silence, will inevitably allow peace and spirituality to blossom in our hearts.

Chapter ^

Some of the sayings of the fathers regarding collecting the mind during prayer

- “He who prays with a fresh mind and collected thoughts, plunders the devil’s pride. He who prays with a scattered mind and without caring, becomes ridiculed by the devils.” (St. Mari Ephraim the Syrian)
- “When Abraham stood to offer a sacrifice to God, during the setting of the sun, the birds of the air fluttered around him and tried to peck at the sacrifice. In response, Abraham persevered to disperse them, so that they would not steal the sacrifice that he was offering. Similarly, when we offer our sacrifices of prayer to God, on the altar of our hearts, we should stand with awareness and alertness in order to protect our sacrifices until the end. This way, the vile birds, which are the evil thoughts, will not come near us,

and they will not be able to steal what our hearts have longed to present to God, through our illuminated minds.” (St. Gregory the Great)

- “Reading illuminates the mind and collects the thoughts, because we are reading what pertains to the sayings of the Holy Spirit. It uplifts those who recite it, especially those who recite it with understanding and put it into action.” (St. John Climacus)
- “Be attentive when you pray, so that the invisible sly foxes do not devour you.” (St. Moses the Black)
- “Just as the king’s soldiers stand between his hands, and not one of them can turn left or right, so is the person who stands in front of God in prayer – he must stand in fear with a unified mind. If he can do this, the devil cannot hurt him or frighten him.” (St. Serapion)

Chapter 9

The issue of feeling that God is absent during prayer, and how to conquer this feeling

Out of the twenty four hours in the day, we probably spend half an hour to one hour at most, praying and being present in God’s presence. We then wonder, why we cannot feel that we are actually standing in God’s presence when we begin to pray?! It is extremely important for us to understand how far away we are, and at the same time, to feel how much wealth God is giving us, from the inner light that illuminates our darkness. Our faith needs to be steadfast and strong, knowing full well, without any doubt, that God is present when we pray. Our true hope is in His love and in His attentiveness to every word we say. Our teacher St. Paul the Apostle tells us, “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end...” (Hebrews 6:11) And he also says, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16) From this aspect, the problem that torments us when we pray: feeling that God is absent, becomes resolved. Instead of being a problem, it becomes transformed to positive action: instead of praying with a heart that is shaken, I can benefit from this situation, and it becomes more practical, so that I can say: “I am blind, and I am standing outside the door, I am in darkness and I am likened to the beginning of creation – dark, without form, and void. Then God said, “let there be light...” He will transform my darkness to light.” When I pray, if I have the feeling that God is absent, I can remind myself of Bartemaus the blind who shouted to the Lord Jesus, without being able to see Him, and he said, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47) I need to understand, Just Bartemaus understood, that although I am blind, Jesus is still present. Jesus is present but I cannot see Him, and because of His utmost kindness for me, He will refrain from approaching me, if I am not ready for Him – because God will never impose Himself on us. If we closely examine the wrong direction in which our spiritual lives are headed, as well as our darkened and lukewarm hearts, can we truly say that we are ready to meet God?! Can we even hope for, or expect even one encounter with Him? The answer is: Yes, we can, but at the time that God permits, and our encounter with God will be a gift from Him to us.

The feeling that God is not present when we pray, compels us to knock relentlessly on the door of Divine mercy. We need to test our hearts and our deeds, we need to search our thoughts and our lives, until we purify them from all obstacles that separate us from God, and hides His face from us, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy,

That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, And your fingers with iniquity; Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity.” (Isaiah 59:1-3)

The reverence of meeting with God:

Every encounter that we have with God, whether it be short or long, has the reverence of the final judgement day. When we find ourselves standing face to face in front of the Living God – it is reverent to fall into the hands of the Living God. Being able to stand in front of God, is far greater than what mankind can bear, unless this particular soul is an original copy of the life of Christ. It is reckless of us to ask to face God, while we are not ready for this encounter. Do you recall the miracle of the catching of many fish? “So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, ^v and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. ^v Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.” ^v And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. ^v So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. [^] When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; [^] and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.” ^{^^} So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.” (Luke 5:1-11) When Peter accepted the Lord Jesus in his boat, and after our Lord Jesus concluded His sermon to the multitudes, He said to Peter and his friends, “Throw your nets...” Only then did Peter understand Christ’s Divinity, and only then did he realize, that he was present in God’s presence. This is why Peter was overcome with fear and trembling, because he recalled his own sins, amidst the light and the holiness of God the incarnate. Peter fell at our Lord Jesus’ feet and he worshiped Him, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord...” (Luke 5:8) Also, we recall the centurion who asked our Lord Jesus to heal his servant, “Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, [^] saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.” And Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him. “The centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. [^] For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! ^{^^} And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ^{^^} But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” ^{^^} Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.” And his servant was healed that same hour.” (Matthew 8:5-13) Do we feel this way? Do we harbour this feeling towards God, to the point where we do not

want to force Him to come? One word from Him is enough, we do not need any more. Do we believe from the bottom of our hearts, that God's word is life? Sadly, we are more apt to rushing things, and one way or another, we say to God, "Open the door now, I have no patience to wait any longer...appear to me, now. I have waited for You, for too long." This is undoubtedly a very unsuitable way of speaking to God, who is all holy and all great.

The joy of hope:

When we become aware that we are standing outside of the door, only then will we understand the extent of our spiritual blindness, and spiritual poverty in the things that are related to God. Only then will we try to excel in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we may outline our eyes with the Divine commandments, until we are able to see the path that leads to eternal life. Saint Peter the Apostle saw the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus on the holy mountain, and he heard the voice of the Father from heaven. In seeing this, he described God's word in a way that was more magnificent than the revelation itself, he said, "And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed,^[a] which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation..." (2 Peter 1:19-20)

Also, faith is sufficient for us to live according to the words of St. Paul the Apostle, who said, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." (1 Corinthians 13:12). In addition, having the hope that we are going to see God in heaven, face to face, and to live with Him forever, is enough for us. Therefore, there is no need for us to seek God's presence in a physical way – there is no need for us to expect God to appear to us at all times in a way that we can physically see Him with our eyes. Instead of this, I pray that we ask Him to change us and to purify us, so that we are able to find ourselves in His divine presence in the time that He chooses. Only then will we rejoice, and no one will steal our joy from us.

Chapter 10

The importance of praying with the Agpeya (the book of hours)

Praying with the Agpeya is according to a ritual, which the church instilled from a long time ago. The church did this, for the benefit of her children – it is something that is very essential and beneficial. Whoever has tried and continued to pray with the Agpeya, knows the depths of its many spiritual benefits. The concept behind the memorized prayers – like the prayers of the Agpeya, has been handed down to us by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, when he taught us to pray the Lord's Prayer, "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." (Matthew 6:9-13) In addition, upon the conclusion of the Lord's supper, which our Lord instituted, and handed down to His disciples in the upper room, the Bible tells us, that the Lord and His disciples, "And when they had sung a hymn, they went

out to the Mount of Olives.” (Matthew २६:३०) The praises that they sang were specific Psalms, which, according to the Jewish tradition, were recited in these occasions during that time period.

During the Apostles’ time, the church recited the Psalms during her prayers and her meetings; this is clear through the words of our teacher St. Paul the Apostle, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Colossians ३:१६) and “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.” (1 Corinthians १४:२६). The Holy church instituted the Agpeya prayers for us, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that we can use them to pray in our personal and our general prayers. The intention behind this, is for our spiritual benefits, and for our spiritual advancements – and for the deepening of our spiritual relationship with our loving God, the lover of mankind.

Some of the spiritual benefits of praying with the Agpeya:

Some people assume that if they pray their personal prayers, without using the Agpeya, that they are offering a deeper and a more effective prayer to God. However, the truth is contrary to this, because praying using the Agpeya has many benefits to it, and without praying with the Agpeya, one cannot reap those benefits in any way. You can pray your personal prayer after you complete your prayers with the Agpeya. Some of the spiritual benefits of praying with the Agpeya, include:

१. **Extending the duration of the time that you spend in God’s presence:** There are many who have prayed their personal prayer and refrained from praying using the Agpeya, and their prayers lasted no more than a few minutes. When a person cannot find any other words to say, he ends up concluding his prayer; this way, the person only ends up standing in God’s presence for a few short minutes. As for praying with the Agpeya, it gives us a greater chance to spend more time in God’s presence, and to offer Him a rich prayer, through the Psalms, gospels, litanies, and absolutions. To the best of my knowledge, praying with the Agpeya (from the start to the conclusion of one of the hours), only takes about half an hour, if it is recited in a calm and meditative manner.
२. **The Agpeya includes various types of prayers:** A person may limit his personal prayers to making his requests known to God, and expressing his gratitude to God. As for the person who prays using the Agpeya, his prayers are well rounded, as they include various types of prayers, including: prayers of gratitude, prayer requests, confession, praises, and others alike.

Giving thanks to God during prayer – giving thanks in prayer is introduced at the start of the Agpeya prayers, with many words of thanks that are embedded in the Psalms and the requests. This is where we thank God for His many marvelous works, such as:

- In the prime prayer – at the start of Psalm २१, we 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?”
- In the prayer of the third hour – at the start of Psalm २३, we say, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” and in Psalm १४०, “I will extol You, my God, O King;

And I will bless Your name forever and ever.”

- In the prayer of the sixth hour – in Psalm 124 we say, “O Lord, You have taken pleasure in Your land...”
- In the prayer of the ninth hour – in Psalm 150 we say, “O sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord all the earth...” and in Psalm 111, “I will confess Thee, O Lord, with my whole heart...”
- In the prayer of the eleventh hour – in Psalm 117 we say, “O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.”
- In the prayer of the twelfth hour – in Psalm 137 we say, “I will confess You, O Lord, with my whole heart, for You have heard all the words of my mouth.”

Requests in prayer: The prayers of the Agpeya cover all of the person’s needs, as we will later discuss in the book.

Being contrite in front of God: This is evident in the introduction of the Psalm of repentance, psalm 139: Have mercy upon me O god according to your lovingkindness. There are also many other psalms about being contrite in front of God, and Psalms of repentance, such as “O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure!” and, “Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord...” and, “Have mercy upon me O God and have mercy...” This is besides all the Psalms that illustrate the strong emotion behind the requests of the contriteness of heart – these are found in the prayer of the eleventh hour, the twelfth hour, and the midnight prayer.

Praise and glorification: There are parts of the Agpeya, which are full of praises and glorification, such as the three holies, the praises of angels, as well as the following Psalms: “O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth!” and “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.” And “Praise the Lord, ye children: praise ye the name of the Lord.” Praise and glorification is also observed in most of the Psalms of the ninth hour. This is when our Lord Jesus submitted His pure soul in the hands of His good Father, after He completed the mysterious salvation for us, through His pure and precious blood. It is rare that a person can do such justice to praising God, or to pay this much attention to praising, throughout his own personal prayer.

3. **It includes many fine details for each request:** The Agpeya prayers are unique in that they harbour some very fine details for each request. It would be very difficult for a person to remember to recite these details independently (using their own personal prayers), without the Agpeya. For example, when we want to thank God, through the Agpeya prayer, we say, “...we thank Thee upon every condition, for any condition, and in whatever condition. For Thou hast shielded us, rescued us, kept us, accepted us unto Thee, had compassion on us, supported us and brought us unto this hour.”
When we want to ask God for forgiveness: we say, “Loose, remit, and pardon, O God, our transgressions that we have committed voluntarily and involuntarily, consciously and unconsciously, hidden and manifest. O Lord, remit for the sake of Thy Holy Name, by which we are called, according to Thy mercy, O Lord, and not according to our sins.” In the absolution of the twelfth hour, we say, “Lord, all our sins which we committed against You in this day, whether in deeds or in words or in thoughts or through all senses, please remit and forgive us, for the sake of Your holy name, as You are Good One and

the Lover of mankind.”

Therefore, I ask you, my beloved sons and daughters: who is able to improvise and to pray on behalf of all these various types of sins, solely through their own personal prayer? When we want to ask for help – we ask God, to remove, “...all envy, all temptation, all the works of Satan, the intrigue of wicked people, the rising up of enemies, hidden and manifest, take them away from us, and from all your people, and from this Your holy place.” In addition, the absolution of the prayer of the twelfth hour, asks God to, “...grant us a peaceful night and a sleep free from all anxiety. And send us an angel of peace to protect us from every evil, and every affliction, and every temptation of the enemy...” And in the final absolution for all hours, we make numerous and various requests, which are difficult for us to compile into one single personal prayer: “Sanctify our souls, purify our bodies, set aright our reasoning, cleanse our thoughts, heal our sickness, remit our sins, and deliver us from all wrath and distress. Surround us with Your holy angels...” This is just an example to prove that, no matter how long our personal prayers are, they are still lacking much, compared to the prayers that our fathers the saints placed into the Agpeya. The Agpeya prayers are full of the depth and understanding of all a person’s spiritual and bodily needs.

- ε. **Keeping the memories of the holy events:** He who prays using the Agpeya, has the golden opportunity to meditate upon the life of our Lord Jesus on a daily basis. To mediate upon it and to become consoled by it, spiritually, at all times.

In the prime prayer, we recall, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it.” The rising of the sun in the morning reminds us that the Lord Jesus is the sun of righteousness. He is the true light that shines upon those who are sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death, that He may illuminate the path of life for them. The prime prayer also reminds us of the resurrection of our Lord from death, the third Psalm states, “I laid down and slept; and I arose; for the Lord is He who supports me.” In the third hour, we recall three important events of our Lord Jesus Christ, glory be to Him: Christ’s meeting with Pontius Pilot, and the final verdict to crucify our Lord, despite the fact that Pilot was a witness to His innocence. We also recall the insults were poured over our Lord Jesus – when the soldiers whipped him and placed the crown of thorns over His head; they spat on his face and they ridiculed Him. Needless to say that our Lord was in extreme pain – this is why in the first Psalm of this hour, we say, “May the Lord answer you in your day of trouble...” Our Good Saviour was silent and submissive to God’s will, and this is why, in one of the Psalms of the third hour, we say, “To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God I trust in You...” (Psalm 138:1-2) Moreover, on the day of our Lord Jesus’ resurrection to heaven, David the Prophet said, “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place?” (Psalm 134:3) This verse is the Psalm that precedes the gospel of the glorious feast of the ascension. In the last Psalm, we say, “God has gone up with a shout, The LORD with the sound of the trumpet...” (Psalm 134:6)

- The descent of the Holy Spirit: The gospel of the third hour speaks about how our Lord promised to send His Holy Spirit. In addition, the litanies and the absolution all speak about the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. Through these

prayers, one can ask for the Holy Spirit to be poured onto him personally.

- For the sixth hour: The church organized the sixth hour, to remind us of the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus on the cross, on behalf of our salvation. Some of the Psalms in this hour point to the crucifixion event, such as: “For strangers have risen up against me, and mighty men have sought my soul: they have not set God before them.” (Psalm 109) The sixth hour is also the time in which darkness was dispersed over all the earth. In addition, the litanies for the sixth hour speak about the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus on the wooden cross.
- The ninth hour: The church organized it in order to remind us of Christ’s death on the cross, on behalf of our salvation. Also during the ninth hour, darkness was removed from over the earth. This is proof of the end of Satan’s dark kingdom, after Christ’s victory over him, during the heated and conclusive battle on the cross. It was then that God became King over His people, this is why in one of the Psalms of this hour, we say the phrase, “The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many islands be glad.” In addition, we praise and glorify God, saying, “O sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless His name...” The prayer of the ninth hour reminds us of the repentance that belonged to the thief on the right hand side of the cross, and Christ’s acceptance of his repentance. Christ forgave this thief and accepted his repentance; hence, our Lord said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” This is why we beseech God in the litanies of the ninth hour – just as He accepted the confession of the thief who was on the right hand side of the cross, to accept our confession “O Thou Who didst receive unto Thee the confession of the thief upon the cross, receive us also unto Thyself, O Good-One...” This way, God may remember us in His mercies and during the second coming of His kingdom, when all the angels and the saints will be with Him.
- The vespers prayer: The church organized it in order to remind us of the time when Christ’s body was brought down from the cross, in order to be shrouded. This prayer is recited during the setting of the sun in order to remind us that our lives will set one day, and that we will be leaving this world. Therefore, in all seriousness, we need to repent in order to be ready for this great day. Just as Joseph and Nicodemus brought perfumed spices for Christ, when the sun was setting, we too offer our prayers to God during that same time, hoping that He will accept them as a fragrant scent – a holy sacrifice during the evening time.
- The prayer of the twelfth hour: The church organized this prayer to remind us of the time when the body of our Lord Jesus was buried in the tomb. The prayer of the twelfth hour is the prayer of repentance. We see this clearly throughout its Psalms, gospels, and litanies. We see it even more vividly throughout its absolution, where the praying person states: “Lord, all our sins which we committed against You in this day, whether in deeds or in words or in thoughts or

through all senses, please remit and forgive us, for the sake of Your holy name, as You are Good and Lover of mankind.”

- The midnight prayer: The church organized this prayer for praying at night in vigil, to prepare ourselves for Christ’s second coming, which is feared and filled with glory. This is when our Lord Jesus will judge the whole world and to give each one according to his deeds. The church dedicated the midnight prayers according to the words of our Lord: in the gospel of the first watch, which is the gospel of the virgins, “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming,^[a] go out to meet him!’” (Matthew २०:१) The church organized the midnight prayer into three watches, so as to teach her children to gradually pray in vigil, and always to be ready. During the first watch, the church inserted a long Psalm, Psalm ११३ that focuses on the Divine commandment and its blessings, for those who pay attention to memorizing it and practicing it in their lives. Whoever studies the Holy Bible regularly and pays attention to the commandments, will expose his soul in its true light. Following this, the person will confess his sins in the light of the commandments, and in the light of the Holy Bible – therefore arriving at the life of repentance. This is the aim of the second watch in the midnight prayer, hence, the church inserted the gospel of the sinful woman who repented, and the praying person recites its litanies, saying, “Give me, O Lord, many fountains of tears, as You gave, in the past, the sinful woman.” He who repents will learn about God’s love and His mercy. He will savour God’s kindness, His goodness, and His abundant mercy. In response, the person will then begin to serve people and preach to them about God’s loving forgiveness – and his perseverance becomes centred on his service. His vigil becomes centered on the salvation of others, and feeding them with spiritual foods. This is the aim of the third watch, as our Lord Jesus teaches us in His gospel “And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? “ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. “ Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.” (Luke १५:१५-१६) Staying in Vigil and being prepared to meet our Lord begins gradually, by reading God’s commandments, learning them, and putting them into practice. It continues by repenting to God with tears, as the sinful woman did, and then it resumes to toiling the night in service and teaching others – bringing them to the life of repentance and the knowledge of God. This is what the church does with her children, she labours with them so that the image of our Lord Jesus becomes inscribed within them. The church puts a living picture of Christ in front of them, along with the events of His birth, His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension, the pouring of His Holy Spirit over the church, and His second coming. The church places all of this in front of her children, through the prayers of the Agpeya so that they can use them to pray with on a daily basis: to meditate upon the words, and to be able to relate to them. This way, Christ’s image is inscribed in their minds, and the life and actions of Christ are printed in their minds. These inscriptions of Christ will become evident through a person’s life, his actions, and his words.

Therefore, I ask you, my beloved sons and daughters: aren't we mistaken when we abandon praying with the Agpeya? In doing so, we end up denying ourselves from meditating upon all these holy and blessed events.

- . **The element of sermons in the Agpeya Prayers:** The prayers of the Agpeya are based on the format of a sermon that presents spiritual guidance to the believer, so that he will live by it. One of the most wonderful examples of this, is in the prime prayer, where the church presents us with a daily spiritual plan for us to follow. We begin the prayer by a portion of St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, when he states: "I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and meekness with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.." This is a spiritual plan that we must recite prior to leaving our homes, so that we know how to deal with people in all areas, in the spirit of love and humility. If something happens and it errs against love, we would then rush to maintain the unity in the bond of peace, thus shunning away all anger, misunderstanding, evil, and its likes. Added to this teaching is another lesson that appears in the first Psalm of the prime prayer, and it warns about walking in the council of the ungodly, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the council of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of the waters that brings for its fruit in its due season, whose leaf also shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away, therefore the ungodly shall not stand in judgement, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish." Hence, we see many educational phrases in the prayers of the Agpeya that we should learn from. We should not limit the Agpeya for prayer only, because it is also a source of education for us, both spiritually and practically. From one of the educational phrases that appears in the fourteenth Psalm in the prime prayer, David the prophet asks God, "O Lord, who shall abide in Your dwelling place?" And in the midnight prayers, David the prophet asks, "Wherewith shall a young man straighten his way?" And the answer is: "By keeping Your word." Therefore, we notice that most of the psalms, the gospels, and the litanies of the Agpeya are educational and beneficial for both our spiritual and our practical lives.
٦. **The Agpeya prayers according to God's will:** Many people ask for things that do not coincide with God's will; hence, their requests are denied. They are the types of requests about which our teacher St. James the Apostle, said, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."(James ٤:٣) But as for the Agpeya prayers, they all coincide with God's will, and they are pleasing to God. The reason why, is that the prayers in the Agpeya were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The prayers consist of gospels, acts, and the sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ, which are also inspired by the Holy Spirit. As for the requests, which were written by our fathers the saints, they too were inspired by the Holy Spirit and His work within them. Therefore, whoever prays with the Agpeya, can guarantee that all his prayers will be accepted in front of God, because they coincide with God's will. Our teacher St. John the Apostle teaches us, saying, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." (١ John ٥:١٤)

- Y. **The Agpeya prayers are a practical lesson in teaching someone to pray:** When we pray with the Agpeya, we are taught how to pray. We learn what to say in prayer, in what manner we should speak to God, what the rules of prayer are, and what the elements are, that make up prayer. After the conclusion of prayer with the Agpeya, the praying person needs to pray his own personal prayer in his own words. However, a person's prayer needs to be according to the same style as the Agpeya, with all that is in it, from the elements of thanksgiving, repentance, praise, requests, and all that is good and that coincides with God's will. We ask God to give us pure lives, and prayers that are accepted in front of the Throne of Grace. Amen

Chapter 11

The Jesus prayer

The Jesus prayer is great, deep, powerful, and indispensable for anyone who longs to live with the Lord Jesus for the whole day, and to be ever present in His presence. Any person who loves God and is attached to Him, cannot live without the Jesus prayer. It is a prayer that is essential for anyone who wants to live with the Lord Jesus, according to His ways, and to be protected under His comforting Divine shadow. Although it is a simple prayer, it is a powerful one, and this is why it is referred to as the "targeting prayer". This prayer is like an arrow that pierces the devil, so that his evil wiles against the person who repeats this prayer, are destroyed. When we pray the Jesus pray, we can ask for the help of the Lord Jesus, and for His divine and never ending strength. You can dedicate a time for this prayer, and you can start by repeating it for a short number of times – be sure to say it slowly, and then you can increase gradually. There are many examples of what to say when we pray the Jesus prayer, the most famous of them, is: O my Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me, I the sinner. You should begin to train yourself to pray this simple, short, but powerful prayer, and to repeat it many times until you get used to it. This way it will be concentrated in your inner self, and it will be carved in your mind, your heart, and your presence. When you feel its blessings, you will not be able to stop reciting it, or to live without it. After you train yourself on this prayer, you can also add other phrases that are similar to it, that contain the name of the Saviour – our Lord Jesus Christ. A great example of this, is through a phrase that our great Father, Abba Anthony, the father of all monks, said, "O my Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me. O my Lord Jesus Christ help me. I praise You, O my Lord Jesus Christ." Also, it has been said about St. Makarios, that he used to recite the prayer many times, to the point where during the time of his departure to heaven, he was heard, saying, "O my Master Jesus Christ, the beloved of my soul, accept my soul unto You." After the completion of this prayer, he gave up his pure soul and he went to paradise with joy. You can also repeat some other phrases that are similar to this, for example:

- The phrase that St. Peter the Apostle said, when he began to drown, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30)
- The phrase that the blind man said when he was calling upon our Lord Jesus for help, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:47-48)
- Also, the phrase that the tax collector said when he was in the altar, as he felt that he was a sinner and undeserving, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13)

This way you are able to repeat the good name that belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, and you can add other short requests on behalf of yourself, your children, your siblings, your friends, your acquaintances, your relatives, and your neighbours. You can also ask for healing on behalf of those who are sick, you can ask for success on behalf of students, and help for anyone who is suffering from an adversity, you can ask for the Divine help for all who need it. You can also pray for your church, its shepherds, its services, its servants, and those who are being served – asking God to bless them, help them, and grant them grace and peace. The Jesus prayer brings with it many blessings to those who recite it frequently. This prayer unifies the mind and directs it to focus on the Lord Jesus, so it protects the mind from evil and thoughtlessness. Only then do our prayers become more focused, fervent, and deep, because of our love for our Lord Jesus Christ. The Jesus prayer also leads us to become more attached to God; hence, we are able to receive His Divine promise, when He said, ““Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. ^{١٥} He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. ^{١٦} With long life I will satisfy him, And show him My salvation.” (Psalm ٩١:١٤-١٦) As you can see, the prayer of Jesus is simple, therefore, it is suitable for everyone – both the educated, the uneducated, the monk, the layman, the anchorite in his cell, and the layman as he goes about his daily job, the young and the old, for men and for women, for youth and even for the young children if they are taught to recite it. You can recite this prayer at home, at work, while you are taking a walk on the street, or boarding the city bus, whether you are alone, or amongst others, in your coming in and your going out, while you are seated or while you are standing, even if you are in bed when you are about to sleep, you can recite this prayer. It is just as the Psalmist said, “When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.” (Psalm ٦٣:٦) Keep this prayer on your lips constantly, even if you are falling asleep, this way you will sleep while the name of our Lord Jesus is on your lips, on your mind, and in your heart. This way, you will sleep in Christ’s arms, peaceful and full of comfort, where anxiety, disturbing thoughts and dreams will never come. In the morning, as soon as you awaken, occupy your tongue, your heart, and your mind with this beautiful prayer: O my Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me. In this way, the Lord Jesus will be the first person whom you talk to and meet with in your new day – hence, your day will be a blessed one, and you will enjoy the rising of Christ’s face upon you, even before you see the rising sun. It is as if your usual words would be, It is as if your usual words would be, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.” (Psalm ١٧:١٥) Moving forward, your life will be a life of prayer and being connected to the Lord Jesus, as the Psalmist said, “In return for my love they are my accusers, But I give myself to prayer.” (Psalm ١٠٩:٤)

Chapter ١٢

The remedy for lukewarmness during prayer

One of the most dangerous things that attack our spiritual lives in general, especially our personal prayers, is lukewarmness and spiritual drought. In the event of spiritual drought, prayer does not stop, what stops are the consolations, the tears, and the graceful visitations that used to accompany you when you prayed. As for lukewarmness in prayer, it is the most

dangerous, because it attacks the persons will in itself, this way the will is weakened. As a result, the person stops praying or reading his holy bible. If a person stops praying, the words become frozen in his mouth and he becomes unable to follow through with the prayer. If he sits to read the holy bible, he will not understand a single thing from it, because he has lost the ability to focus, due to his scattered thoughts. In the event of spiritual lukewarmness, if a person tries to enter into the inner depths of his soul, he will quickly become lost – he will not reach it. If this person knocks on the door of hope and holds strong to God’s promises, he will find that the hope has become cold. As for the future, it becomes blurred in front of his eyes, and its motives are lost; in its place, many other paths appear paved, and although they may seem to the person that they are the correct ways, their end is death...” (Proverbs ١٤:١٢) Our teacher, St. John the beloved points out to the spiritual lukewarmness that overcame the angel of the church of Laodicea, he says, “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ١١ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot,^[a] I will vomit you out of My mouth.” (Revelation ٣:١٥-١٦) The lukewarm person is neither spiritually hot – worshipping God and praying regularly in spirit and in truth, “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ١٤ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John ٤:٢٣-٢٤), nor is he cold – committing some sins and having some shortcomings that move his conscience to repent, so that he sheds many tears for the sins that he committed. Spiritual lukewarmness is the issue that people face when they are in the middle of the path: they are not at the start of the path with coldness and spiritual weakness, nor are they at the end of the path, having arrived at the spiritual fervency that is required for worship, which God asks for from the praying person.

Reasons for Spiritual lukewarmness

There are many reasons for spiritual lukewarmness, including:

١. Drifting far from repentance: he who drifts far from repentance, (which brings forth the feeling of contriteness and fervent tears during prayer and in worship), but at the same time does not reach the wholeness of the spiritual life, becomes lukewarm if he doesn’t watch over his life.

Forgetting about everything and enjoying life: He who rushes to enjoy himself and chooses to forget about his evil past and his previous sins, loses the fervency in prayer and falls into spiritual lukewarmness. When we recall David the prophet, who continued to recall his sins, even after he received forgiveness from God, by the hands of Nathan the prophet – he used to say, “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent; A fire shall devour before Him, And it shall be very tempestuous all around Him.” (Psalm ٥٠:٣) This verse is present in Psalm which we pray at the introduction of every hour in the Agpeya prayers. In reading this Psalm, we can recall our sins along with David the prophet, this way we can become contrite in front of God in prayer – that we may shed our tears with him, when he said, “I am weary with my groaning; All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears.” (Psalm ٦:٦) If you want to lead a life that is free of spiritual lukewarmness, remember your sins and remember that you are weak. You also need to remember, that you can return to your dark past once again – this way you will hold strong to God, after which spiritual fervency will rule over your life. Put the following verses in front of you:

- “And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear...” (1 Peter 1:17)
 - “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...” (Philippians 2:12)
 - “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” (1 Corinthians 10:12)
The person who recalls his sins, will be ever so careful to watch over himself from sinning. He will be fervent in spirit; hence, spiritual lukewarmness will never rule over him.
2. The lack of genuine worship: Usually, a person begins his spiritual life with fervency, he prays fervently, fasts with diligence, reads his Holy Bible regularly, confesses, and takes Holy Communion on a regular basis. As time goes by, if a person is not watchful over his spiritual life, all these practices end up losing their spiritual fervency, and the person ends up falling into spiritual lukewarmness. In other words, the person practices all the forms of worship, without any spirit or fervency.
 3. A Person who feels superior: At the start of a person’s spiritual life, the person feels small, and so his worship is fervent. However, if this person takes over an important role or position in the workplace, to the point where he becomes visibly popular and visibly important and then he forsakes his worship – he will become afflicted with spiritual lukewarmness. This is apt to happen if this person is not committed to his spiritual cannon, and does not watch over himself or his humility.
 4. Being overly busy with the cares of this world: If a person becomes overly immersed in the cares of life, he will be overcome by spiritual lukewarmness, because all the cares of life will take over the depths of his heart, and God will only remain on the surface. Since the worldly cares become the person’s first priority, God will come last; hence, all these cares end up choking the word of God, so that it dies inside the heart, leading the spiritual fervency to become cold or lukewarm. Our Lord Jesus commented on the attention to worldly cares, when he alerted Martha to this, because He saw that she was overly busy with many unimportant things. At the same time, He praised Miriam for her calmness and for her way of worship – for she sat at His feet, listening to His words and abiding by them. “And Jesus^[a] answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴⁷ But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41-42)
 - o. Slowly drifting away from spirituality: If someone feels that he is drifting quickly, he will feel it, and he will hasten to remedy his situation. However, the person who slowly drifts away from his spirituality, will not feel that he is drifting away, because the drifting is happening gradually. He will continue to drift slowly until he finds himself at the end, and then he will be overcome by lukewarmness. We know about Abraham, the father of fathers, that he had a strong relationship with God, and in every place that Abraham travelled, he would build an altar for the Lord; he prays there in the name of the Lord, as observed in Genesis 12:7-8, Genesis 13:4, and Genesis 13:8. However, Abraham began

to drift spiritually when he came to Egypt and when he continued to travel towards the south; we do not hear that he built an altar for the Lord in Egypt, nor did he pray in the name of the Lord. This is why during that time period, Abraham fell into many sins, such as lying, and this was a result of the spiritual lukewarmness that overcame him, “Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land. ¹¹ And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, “Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance. ¹² Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I^[a] may live because of you.” ¹⁴ So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. ¹⁵ The princes of Pharaoh also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh’s house. ¹⁶ He treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels. ¹⁷ But the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. ¹⁸ And Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way.” ²⁰ So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.” (Genesis 12:1-20)

7. The many problems that we face: A person who faces many problems, and exerts much effort in thinking about them and about how to resolve them, is overcome by spiritual lukewarmness. The reason being: he wastes all of his efforts in thinking about the problems, how to face them, and how to defend himself against them. In this case, the problems take over the person’s feelings, and the person thinks about them instead of thinking about God. The person who wants to protect his spiritual fervency, should avoid problems as much as possible; he should learn to love quietness and peace, as the Lord says, “For thus says the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: “In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.”” (Isaiah 30:18)

The remedy for spiritual lukewarmness

We can benefit from the following advice in order to remedy spiritual lukewarmness:

- Take your life of repentance seriously and make sure your repentance is regular and holistic.
- Always remember that you are weak – be watchful and fearful, asking God for His grace, so that He can help you.
- Do not hasten to console yourself and to bask in enjoyment and comfort, because it is dangerous for your spiritual life
- Hold steadfast to all the elements of grace and salvation, such as: confession, taking Holy Communion, fasting, praying, reading your holy bible, and reading spiritual books on regular basis.
- Keep your humility, and always take the last seat – no matter how high up you go in life, and how famous or rich you become.
- Beware of judging and gossiping about others, because it will cause you to forget your

own sins – this way your prayer becomes lukewarm and your spiritual life becomes weak.

- Beware of constant talking, joking around, and making fun of others, because it causes your spirituality to become cold. Always be calm, composed, and reverent – slow to speak, and having respect for yourself and for others.
- Beware so that your spirituality does not begin to drift slowly, without your detection – beware of being lax in your spiritual cannon and your worship, lest you get used to this way of life.
- Do your best to stay away from problems and keep your peace; as a result, you will preserve the perseverance of your worship. You will be able to do positive things and ultimately, you will preserve your spiritual life.
- Do not immerse yourself in excessive work – whether in your day to day job, or even in your service at church. Be balanced and choose the balanced path: give what is to Caesar to Caesar, and what is to God, give to God. Make sure that you have some time for yourself, as a retreat, to rest your mind, and to rejuvenate yourself. Increase your knowledge by reading, and “sit-down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—“(Luke 14:28) in everything.
- If lukewarmness approaches you, do not allow it to prolong its stay, but try to rise up quickly through utilizing the various elements of grace.
- If lukewarmness overcomes you during prayer, read books about prayer, and this will give you a strong boost for prayer. If lukewarmness overcomes you when you are reading the Holy Bible, read something that describes the greatness and the benefits of the Holy Bible, and this will motivate you to read the Holy Bible.
- If lukewarmness overcomes you, hasten to sit with your father of confession and confess this weakness to him; he will give you some advice and practices that will help to free you from this trap. Ultimately, this will help you to return to your spiritually energetic and fervent self.
- Do not harbour a love for this world, so that it does not shun away God’s love from you. Keep in mind, that the more effort you exert in trying to come closer to God, despite all the cares of this world, you will receive Divine help from Him, which will assist you in your perseverance. He will visit you with His grace and with His help; as a result, your spiritual fervency will increase, and He will protect you from spiritual lukewarmness and spiritual drought.

My beloved sons and daughters: May God help you, and the Holy Spirit intercede on your behalf, with groaning’s which cannot be uttered.

I ask you, to remember me when you pray.

