



### **Saint Paissy Velichkovsky**

**Whom the Holy Church Commemorates on November 15**

**Author of the Slavonic *Dobrotolubiye (Philokalia)* which was published  
in Moscow in 1783.**

Saint Mark the Ascetic lived in the fifth century and according to Nicephorus Callistus was distinguished for his writings, some of which are preserved in Volume One of the *Philokalia*. His work was held in such esteem that in old times there was a saying,

“Sell all thou hast, and buy Mark.”

Icon courtesy The Holy Nativity Convent, Brookline, Massachusetts 02445

*The Great Horologion* © 1997 The Holy Transfiguration Monastery Brookline, Massachusetts 02445

Where the Old Testament is cited in our Virtual Parish Texts of Saint Mark’s works we have used the Septuagint. This text contains the Canonical Scriptures of the Orthodox Church and has stood as the official text of the Old Testament for the Orthodox Church. The Fathers of the Church have used the Septuagint either in Greek or Slavonic as the standard reference for their citations from the Old Testament.

It is worth noting that the prophecies of the time of our Christ’s saving appearance on earth, His Virgin Birth, of the many details of His earthly ministry, of His walking on the water (Job 8:9; 33:16) of His Transfiguration (Ps. 49:2), of His mighty work on the Cross down to the most minute actions (Ps. 21),

of His conquering of Death and the Devil (Job 33:17) , of His Resurrection and of His Ascension are all recorded without amendment or omission in the text of the Septuagint.<sup>1</sup>

Saint Irenaeus of Lyon in his *The Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* writes: “This is the beloved preaching of the truth and this is the plan of salvation and the way of life which the prophets foretold and Christ established and the Apostles delivered to us and the Church gives to her children in all the world; which it is necessary to keep with great care being of sound mind and well pleasing to God, with good works and a sound character.”<sup>2</sup> The *Proof* advanced by Saint Irenaeus which, of course, includes “the plan of salvation and the way of life,” is that “which the Prophets foretold”... “Christ established.” Did not the Lord Jesus say of the Scriptures, “they testify of me” (Jn. 5:39)?

HOMB’s Virtual Parish Editor

**Saint Mark the Ascetic (5th-6th c.)**

## **On The Spiritual Law Two Hundred Texts**

[http://www.orthodoxphotos.com/Monasteries\\_and\\_Churches/Romanian/index.shtml](http://www.orthodoxphotos.com/Monasteries_and_Churches/Romanian/index.shtml)

Text from G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (trans. and eds.) *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, vol. 1* (Faber & Faber, London & Boston: 1979), pp. 110-124.

1. Because you have often asked what the Apostle means when he says that ‘the law is spiritual’ (Rom. 7:14), and what kind of spiritual knowledge and action characterizes those who wish to observe it, we shall speak of this as far as we can.
2. First of all, we know that God is the beginning, middle and end of everything good; and it is impossible for us to have faith in anything good or to carry it into effect except in Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> A good copy of *The Septuagint* is available from Saint Nectarios Press 800-643-4233/ 206-522-4471. Nina Seco is the Bookstore Manager. She will be glad to assist you in any way possible.

<sup>2</sup> *The Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, Saint Irénée; ΕΙΣ ΕΠΙΔΕΙΞΙΝ ΤΟΥ ΑΠΙΟΣ ΤΟ ΑΙΚΟΥ ΚΗΡΥΓΜΑΤΟΣ tr. by H.L. Bishop Karapet ter Mekertschian and Rev. Dr. S. G. Wilson. Paris, 1919. §98, p. 730.

3. Everything good is given by the Lord providentially; and he who has faith that this is so will not lose what he has been given.
4. Steadfast faith is a strong tower; and for one who has faith Christ comes to be all.
5. May He who inaugurates every good thing inaugurate all that you undertake, so that it may be done with His blessing.
6. When reading the Holy Scriptures, he who is humble and engaged in spiritual work will apply everything to himself and not to someone else.
7. Call upon God to open the eyes of your heart, so that you may see the value of prayer and of spiritual reading when understood and applied.
8. If a man has some spiritual gift and feels compassion for those who do not have it, he preserves the gift because of his compassion. But a boastful man will lose it through succumbing to the temptations of boastfulness.
9. The mouth of a humble man speaks the truth; but he who speaks against the truth is like the servant who struck the Lord on the face (cf. Mark 14:65).
10. Do not become a disciple of one who praises himself, in case you learn pride instead of humility.
11. Do not grow conceited about your interpretations of Scripture, lest your intellect fall victim to blasphemy.
12. Do not attempt to explain something difficult with contentiousness, but in the way which the spiritual law enjoins: with patience, prayer and unwavering hope.
13. Blind is the man crying out and saying: 'Son of David, have mercy on me' (Luke 18:38). He prays with the body alone, and not yet with spiritual knowledge.
14. When the man once blind received his sight and saw the Lord, he acknowledged Him no longer as Son of David but as Son of God, and worshipped Him (cf. John 9:38).
15. Do not grow conceited if you shed tears when you pray. For it is Christ who has touched your eyes and given you spiritual sight.
16. He who, like the blind man, casts away his garment and draws near to the Lord, becomes His disciple and a preacher of true doctrine (cf. Mark 10:50).
17. To brood on evil makes the heart brazen; but to destroy evil through self-restraint and hope breaks the heart.
18. There is a breaking of the heart which is gentle and makes it deeply penitent, and there is a breaking which is violent and harmful, shattering it completely.
19. Vigils, prayer and patient acceptance of what comes constitute a breaking that does not harm but benefits the heart, provided we do not destroy the balance between them through excess. He who perseveres in them will be helped in other ways as well; but he who is slack and negligent will suffer intolerably on leaving this life.
20. A self-indulgent heart becomes a prison and chain for the soul when it leaves this life; whereas an assiduous heart is an open door.
21. 'The iron gate that leads into the city' is a hard heart (Acts 12 :10); but to one who suffers hardship and affliction the gate will open of its own accord, as it did to Peter.
22. There are many differing methods of prayer. No method is harmful; if it were, it would be not prayer but the activity of Satan.
23. A man wanted to do evil, but first prayed as usual; and finding himself prevented by God, he was then extremely thankful.

24. When David wanted to kill Nabal the Carmelite, but was reminded of the divine retribution and abandoned his intention, he was extremely thankful. Again, we know what he did when he forgot God, and how he did not stop until Nathan the Prophet reminded him (cf. I Kings 25:32-35; 2 Kings 11:2-12:24-LXX).
25. At the times when you remember God, increase your prayers, so that when you forget Him, the Lord may remind you.
26. When you read Holy Scripture, perceive its hidden meanings. 'For whatever was written in past times was written for our instruction' (Rom. 15:4).
27. Scripture speaks of faith as 'the substance of things hoped for' (Heb. 11:1), and describes as 'false' those who do not know the indwelling of Jesus (cf. 2 Cor. 13: 5; ἀδόκιμοι, reprobate, false)
28. Just as a thought is made manifest through actions and words, so is our future reward through the impulses of the heart.
29. Thus a merciful heart will receive mercy, while a merciless heart will receive the opposite.
30. The law of freedom teaches the whole truth. Many read about it in a theoretical way, but few really understand it, and these only in the degree to which they practise the commandments.
  
31. Do not seek the perfection of this law in human virtues, for it is not found perfect in them. Its perfection is hidden in the Cross of Christ.
32. The law of freedom is studied by means of true knowledge, it is understood through the practice of the commandments, and is fulfilled through the mercy of Christ.
33. When we are compelled by our conscience to accomplish all the commandments of God, then we shall understand that 'the law of the Lord is blameless' (Ps. 18:7 LXX). It is performed through our good actions, but cannot be perfected by men without God's mercy.
34. Those who do not consider themselves under obligation to perform all Christ's commandments study the law of God in a literal manner, 'understanding neither what they say nor what they affirm' (1 Tim. 1:7). Therefore they think that they can fulfill it by their own works.
35. There are acts which appear to be good, but the motive of the person who does them is not good; and there are other acts which appear to be bad, while the motive of the doer is good. The same is true of some statements. This discrepancy is due sometimes to inexperience or ignorance, sometimes to evil intention, and sometimes to good intention.
36. When a man outwardly praises someone, while accusing and disparaging him in his heart, it is hard for the simple to detect this. Similarly a person may be outwardly humble but inwardly arrogant. For a long time such men present falsehood as truth, but later they are exposed and condemned.
37. One man does something apparently good, in defense of his neighbour; another, by not doing it, gains in understanding.
38. Rebukes may be given in malice and self-defense, or out of fear of God and respect for truth.
39. Cease rebuking a man who has stopped sinning and who has repented. If you say that you are rebuking him in God's name, first reveal the evils in yourself.
40. God is the source of every virtue, as the sun is of daylight.
  
41. When you have done something good, remember the words 'without Me you can do nothing' (John 15:5).
42. Afflictions bring blessing to man; self-esteem and sensual pleasure, evil.
43. He who suffers injustice escapes sin, finding help in proportion to his affliction.

44. The greater a man's faith that Christ will reward him, the greater his readiness to endure every injustice.
45. By praying for those who wrong us we overthrow the devil; opposing them we are wounded by him.
46. Better a human than a demonic sin. Through performing the Lord's will we overcome both.
47. Every blessing comes from the Lord providentially. But this fact escapes the notice of the ungrateful and the idle.
48. Every vice leads in the end to forbidden pleasure; and every virtue to spiritual blessing. Each arouses what is akin to it.
49. Censure from men afflicts the heart; but if patiently accepted it generates purity.
50. Ignorance makes us reject what is beneficial; and when it becomes brazen it strengthens the hold of evil.
  
51. Even when nothing is going wrong, be ready for affliction; and since you will have to give an account, do not make extortionate demands.
52. Having sinned secretly, do not try to hide. For 'all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do' (Heb. 4:13).
53. Reveal yourself to the Lord in your mind. 'For man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart' (1 Kings 16:7 LXX).
54. Think nothing and do nothing without a purpose directed to God. For to journey without direction is wasted effort.
55. Because God's righteousness is inexorable, it is hard to obtain forgiveness for sins committed with complete deliberation.
56. Distress reminds the wise of God, but crushes those who forget Him.
57. Let all involuntary suffering teach you to remember God, and you will not lack occasion for repentance.
58. Forgetfulness as such has no power, but acquires it in proportion to our negligence.
59. Do not say: 'What can I do? I do not want to be forgetful but it happens.' For when you did remember, you cheated over what you owed.
60. Do good when you remember, and what you forget will be revealed to you; and do not surrender your mind to blind forgetfulness.
  
61. Scripture says: 'Hell and perdition are manifest to the Lord' (Prov. 15:11 LXX). This refers to ignorance of heart and forgetfulness.
62. Hell is ignorance, for both are dark; and perdition is forgetfulness, for both involve extinction.
63. Concern yourself with your own sins and not with those of your neighbour; then the workplace of your intellect will not be robbed.
64. Failure to do the good that is within your power is hard to forgive. But mercy and prayer reclaim the negligent.
65. To accept an affliction for God's sake is a genuine act of holiness; for true love is tested by adversities.
66. Do not claim to have acquired virtue unless you have suffered affliction, for without affliction virtue has not been tested.
67. Consider the outcome of every involuntary affliction, and you will find it has been the destruction of sin.
68. Neighbours are very free with advice, but our own judgment is best.
69. If you want spiritual health, listen to your conscience, do all it tells you, and you will benefit.

70. God and our conscience know our secrets. Let them correct us.

70a. He who toils unwillingly grows poor in every way, while he who presses ahead in hope is doubly rich.

71. Man acts so far as he can in accordance with his own wishes; but God decides the outcome in accordance with righteousness.

72. If you wish not to incur guilt when men praise you, first welcome reproof for your sins.

73. Each time someone accepts humiliation for the sake of Christ's truth he will be glorified a hundredfold by other men. But it is better always to do good for the sake of blessings in the life to come.

74. When one man helps another by word or deed, let them both recognize in this the grace of God. He who does not understand this will come under the power of him who does.

75. Anyone who praises his neighbour out of hypocrisy will later abuse him and bring disgrace upon himself.

76. He who is ignorant of the enemy's ambush is easily slain; and he who does not know the causes of the passions is soon brought low.

77. Knowledge of what is good for him has been given to everyone by God; but self-indulgence leads to negligence, and negligence to forgetfulness.

78. A man advises his neighbour according to his own understanding; but in the one who listens to such advice, God acts in proportion to his faith.

79. I have seen unlearned men who were truly humble, and they became wiser than the wise.

80. Another unlearned man, upon hearing them praised, instead of imitating their humility, prided himself on being unlearned and so fell into arrogance.

81. He who despises understanding and boasts of ignorance is unlearned not only in speech but also in knowledge (cf. 2 Cor. 11:6).

82. Just as wisdom in speech is one thing and sound judgment another, so lack of learning in speech is one thing and folly another.

83. Ignorance of words will do no harm to the truly devout, nor will wisdom in speaking harm the humble.

84. Do not say: 'I do not know what is right, therefore I am not to blame when I fail to do it.' For if you did all the good about which you do know, what you should do next would then become clear to you, as if you were passing through a house from one room to another. It is not helpful to know what comes later before you have done what comes first. For knowledge without action 'puffs up', but 'love edifies', because it 'patiently accepts all things' (1 Cor. 8:1; 13:7).

85. Understand the words of Holy Scripture by putting them into practice, and do not fill yourself with conceit by expatiating on theoretical ideas.

86. He who neglects action and depends on theoretical knowledge holds a staff of reed instead of a double edged sword; and when he confronts his enemies in time of war, 'it shall even go into his hand, and pierce it' (4 Kings 18:21 LXX), injecting its natural poison.

87. Every thought has its weight and measure in God's sight. For it is possible to think about the same thing either passionately or objectively.

88. After fulfilling a commandment expect to be tempted: for love of Christ is tested by adversity.

89. Never belittle the significance of your thoughts, for not one escapes God's notice.

90. When you observe some thought suggesting that you seek human fame, you can be sure it will bring you disgrace.

91. The enemy, understanding how the righteousness of the spiritual law is applied, seeks only the assent of our mind. Having secured this, he will either oblige us to undergo the labours of repentance or, if we do not repent, will torment us with misfortunes beyond our control. Sometimes he encourages us to resist these misfortunes so as to increase our torment, and then, at our death, he will point to this impatient resistance as proof of our lack of faith.
92. Many have fought in various ways against circumstances; but without prayer and repentance no one has escaped evil.
93. Evils reinforce each other; so do virtues, thus encouraging us to still greater efforts.
94. The devil belittles small sins; otherwise he cannot lead us into greater ones.
95. Praise from others engenders sinful desire, while their condemnation of vice, if not only heard but accepted, engenders self-restraint.
96. A self-indulgent monk has achieved nothing through his renunciation. For what he once did through possessions he still does though possessing nothing.
97. Moreover, the self-controlled man, if he clings to possessions, is a brother in spirit of this kind of monk; because they both feel inward enjoyment they have the same mother—though not the same father, since each has a different passion.
98. Sometimes a man cuts off a passion in order to indulge himself more fully, and he is praised by those unaware of his aim. He may even be unaware of it himself, and so his action is self-defeating.
99. All vice is caused by self-esteem and sensual pleasure; you cannot overcome passion without hating them.
100. ‘Avarice is the root of all evil’ (1 Tim. 6:10); but avarice is clearly a product of these two components.
101. The intellect is made blind by these three passions: avarice, self-esteem and sensual pleasure.
102. Scripture calls these three the daughters of the horseleech, dearly loved by their mother folly (cf. Proverbs 30:15 LXX).
103. These three passions on their own dull spiritual knowledge and faith, the foster-brothers of our nature.
104. It is because of them that wrath, anger, war, murder and all other evils have such power over mankind.
105. We must hate avarice, self-esteem and sensual pleasure, as mothers of the vices and stepmothers of the virtues.
106. Because of them we are commanded not to love ‘the world’ and ‘the things that are in the world’ (1 John 2:15); not so that we should hate God’s creation through lack of discernment, but so that we should eliminate the occasions for these three passions.
107. ‘The soldier going to war’, it is said, ‘does not entangle himself in the affairs of this world’ (2 Tim. 2:4). For he who entangles himself with the passions while trying to overcome them is like a man who tries to put out a fire with straw.
108. If one becomes angry with one’s neighbour on account of riches, fame or pleasure, one does not yet realize that God orders all things with righteousness.
109. When you hear the Lord saying that if someone does not renounce all that he has he ‘is not worthy of Me’ (Matt. 10: 37), apply this not only to money but also to all forms of vice.
110. He who does not know the truth cannot truly have faith; for by nature knowledge precedes faith.

111. Just as God assigns to everything visible what is appropriate, so He does also to human thoughts, whether we wish it or not.
112. If some obvious sinner who does not repent has suffered nothing before his death, you may be sure that judgment in his case will be merciless.
113. He who prays with understanding patiently accepts circumstances, whereas he who resents them has not yet attained pure prayer.
114. When harmed, insulted or persecuted by someone, do not think of the present but wait for the future, and you will find he has brought you much good, not only in this life but also in the life to come.
115. Just as the bitterness of absinth helps a poor appetite, so misfortunes help a bad character. For the first benefits the physical condition, and the second leads to repentance.
116. If you do not want to suffer evil, do not inflict it, since the suffering of it inevitably follows its infliction. 'For whatever a man sows he will also reap' (Gal. 6:7).
117. Reaping unwillingly the wickedness we deliberately sow, we should marvel at God's righteousness.
118. Because an interval of time elapses between sowing and reaping, we begin to think there will be no requital.
119. When you sin, blame your thought, not your action. For had your intellect not run ahead, your body would not have followed.
120. The secret sinner is worse than those who do evil openly; and so he receives a worse punishment.
121. The trickster who works mischief in secret is a snake 'besetting the path, biting the heel of the horse' (Gen. 49:17 LXX).
122. If you praise your neighbour to one man and criticize him to another, you are the slave of self-esteem and jealousy. Through praise you try to hide your jealousy, through criticism to appear better than your neighbour.
123. Just as sheep and wolves cannot feed together, so a man cannot receive mercy if he tricks his neighbour.
124. He who secretly mingles his own wishes with spiritual counsel is an adulterer, as the Book of Proverbs indicates (cf. Proverbs 6:32-33 LXX); and because of his stupidity he suffers pain and dishonour.
125. Just as water and fire cannot be combined, so self-justification and humility exclude one another.
126. He who seeks forgiveness of his sins loves humility, but if he condemns another he seals his own wickedness.
127. Do not leave unobliterated any fault, however small, for it may lead you on to greater sins.
128. If you wish to be saved, welcome words of truth, and never reject criticism uncritically.
129. Words of truth converted the 'generation of vipers' and warned them 'to flee from the wrath to come' (Matt. 3:7).
130. To accept words of truth is to accept the divine Word; for He says: 'He that receives you receives Me' (Matt. 10:40).
131. The paralytic let down through the roof (cf. Mark 2:4) signifies a sinner reproved in God's name by the faithful and receiving forgiveness because of their faith.
132. It is better to pray devoutly for your neighbour than to rebuke him every time he sins.
133. The truly repentant is derided by the foolish—which is a sign that God has accepted his repentance.
134. Those engaged in spiritual warfare practise self-control in everything, and do not desist until the Lord destroys all 'seed from Babylon' (Jer. 27:16 LXX).

135. Suppose that there are twelve shameful passions. Indulging in any one of them is equivalent to indulging in them all.

136. Sin is a blazing fire. The less fuel you give it, the faster it dies down; the more you feed it, the more it burns.

137. When elated by praise, be sure disgrace will follow; for it is said: 'Whoever exalts himself will be abased' (Luke 14:11).

138. When we have freed ourselves from every voluntary sin of the mind, we should then fight against the passions which result from prepossession.<sup>3</sup>

139. Prepossession is the involuntary presence of former sins in the memory. At the stage of active warfare we try to prevent it from developing into a passion; after victory it is repulsed while still but a provocation.

140. A provocation is an image-free stimulation in the heart. Like a mountain-pass, the experienced take control of it ahead of the enemy.

141. Once our thoughts are accompanied by images we have already given them our assent; for a provocation does not involve us in guilt so long as it is not accompanied by images. Some people flee away from these thoughts like 'a brand plucked out of the fire' (Zech. 3:2 LXX); but others dally with them, and so get burnt.

142. Do not say: 'I don't want it, but it happens.' For even though you may not want the thing itself, yet you welcome what causes it.

143. He who seeks praise is involved in passion; he who laments afflictions is attached to sensual pleasure.

144. The thoughts of a self-indulgent man vacillate, as though on scales; sometimes he laments and weeps for his sins, and sometimes he fights and contradicts his neighbour, justifying his own sensual pleasures.

145. He who tests all things and 'holds fast that which is good' (1 Thess. 5:21) will in consequence refrain from all evil.

146. 'A man slow to wrath abounds in wisdom' (Prov. 14:29 LXX); and so does he who listens to words of wisdom.

147. Without remembrance of God,<sup>4</sup> there can be no true knowledge but only that which is false.

148. Deeper spiritual knowledge helps the hard-hearted man: for unless he has fear, he refuses to accept the labour of repentance.

149. Unquestioning acceptance of tradition is helpful for a gentle person, for then he will not try God's patience or often fall into sin.

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<sup>3</sup> Prepossession (προλήψις—prolepsis) is defined by Saint Mark as 'the involuntary presence of former sins in the memory'. This state of 'prepossession' results from repeated acts of sin which predispose a man to yield to particular temptations. In principle he retains his free choice and can detect demonic provocations; but in practice the force of habit makes it more and more difficult for him to resist.

<sup>4</sup> 'Remembrance of God' is the Jesus prayer.

150. Do not rebuke a forceful man for arrogance, but point out to him the danger of dishonour; if he has any sense he will accept this kind of rebuke.

151. If you hate rebuke, it shows that the passion in which you are involved is due to your own free choice. But if you welcome rebuke, the passion is due to prepossession.

152. Do not listen to talk about other people's sins. For through such listening the form of these sins is imprinted on you.

153. When you delight in hearing evil talk, be angry with yourself and not with the speaker. For listening in a sinful way makes the messenger seem sinful.

154. If you come across people gossiping idly, consider yourself responsible for their talk-if not on account of some recent fault of your own, then because of an old debt.

155. If someone praises you hypocritically, be sure that in due course he will vilify you.

156. Accept present afflictions for the sake of future blessings; then you will never weaken in your struggle.

157. When someone supplies your bodily needs and you praise him as good in his own right apart from God, he will later seem to you to be evil.

158. All good things come from God providentially, and those who bring them are the servants of what is good.

159. Accept with equanimity the intermingling of good and evil, and then God will resolve all inequity.

160. It is the uneven quality of our thoughts that produces changes in our condition. For God assigns to our voluntary thoughts consequences which are appropriate but not necessarily of our choice.

161. The sensible derives from the intelligible, by God's decree providing what is needed.

162. From a pleasure-loving heart arise unhealthy thoughts and words; and from the smoke of a fire we recognize the fuel.

163. Guard your mind and you will not be harassed by temptations. But if you fail to guard it, accept patiently whatever trial comes.

164. Pray that temptation may not come to you; but when it comes, accept it as your due and not undeserved.

165. Reject all thoughts of greed, and you will be able to see the devil's tricks.

166. He who says he knows all the devil's tricks falls unknowingly into his trap.

167. The more the intellect withdraws from bodily cares, the more clearly it sees the craftiness of the enemy.

168. A man who is carried away by his thoughts is blinded by them; and while he can see the actual working of sin, he cannot see its causes.

169. It can happen that someone may in appearance be fulfilling a commandment but is in reality serving a passion, and through evil thoughts he destroys the goodness of the action.

170. When you first become involved in something evil, do not say: 'It will not overpower me.' For to the extent that you are involved you have already been overpowered by it.

171. Everything that happens has a small beginning, and grows the more it is nourished.

172. Wickedness is an intricate net; and if someone is careless when partially entangled, he gets completely enmeshed.

173. Do not desire to hear about the misfortunes of your enemies. For those who like listening to such things will themselves suffer what they wish for others.

174. Do not think that every affliction is a consequence of sin. For there are some who do God's will and yet are tested. Thus it is written that the ungodly and wicked shall be persecuted (cf. Ps. 36:27 LXX), but also that those who 'seek to live a holy life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution' (2 Tim. 3:12).

175. At a time of affliction, expect a provocation to sensual pleasure; for because it relieves the affliction it is readily welcomed.

176. Some call men intelligent because they have the power of discernment on the sensible plane. But the really intelligent people are those who control their own desires.

177. Until you have eradicated evil, do not obey your heart; for it will seek more of what it already contains within itself.

178. Just as some snakes live in glens and others in houses, so there are some passions which take shape in our thoughts while others express themselves in action. It is possible, however, for them to change from one type to the other.

179. When you find that some thought is disturbing you deeply in yourself and is breaking the stillness of your intellect with passion, you may be sure that it was your intellect which, taking the initiative, first activated this thought and placed it in your heart.

180. No cloud is formed without a breath of wind; and no passion is born without a thought.

181. If we no longer fulfill the desires of the flesh, then with the Lord's help the evils within us will easily be eliminated.

182. Images already established in our intellect are more pernicious and stubborn than those which arise while we are thinking. The latter precede the former and are their cause.

183. One kind of evil dwells in the heart through long-continued prepossession; another kind attacks our thoughts through the medium of everyday things.

184. God assesses our action according to our intention; for it is said that the Lord will 'grant thee according to thy heart' (Ps. 19:4 LXX).

185. He who does not persevere in examining his conscience will not endure bodily suffering for God's sake.

186. The conscience is nature's book. He who applies what he reads there experiences God's help.

187. He who does not choose to suffer for the sake of truth will be chastened more painfully by suffering he has not chosen.

188. He who knows God's will, and performs it according to his power, escapes more severe suffering by suffering a little.

189. If a man tries to overcome temptations without prayer and patient endurance, he will become more entangled in them instead of driving them away.

190. The Lord is hidden in His own commandments, and He is to be found there in the measure that He is sought.

191. Do not say: 'I have fulfilled the commandments, but have not found the Lord'. For you have often found 'knowledge with righteousness', as Scripture says, 'and those who rightly seek Him shall find peace' (Prov. 16:8. LXX).

192. Peace is deliverance from the passions, and is not found except through the action of the Holy Spirit.

193. Fulfilling a commandment is one thing, and virtue is another, although each promotes the other.

194. Fulfilling a commandment means doing what we are enjoined to do; but virtue is to do it in a manner that conforms to the truth.

195. All material wealth is the same, but is acquired in many different ways; similarly, virtue is one, but is many-sided in its operations.

196. If someone makes a display of wisdom and instead of applying it talks at length, he has a spurious wealth and his labours 'come into the houses of strangers' (Prov. 5: 10 LXX).

197. It is said that gold rules everything; but spiritual things are ruled by the grace of God.

198. A good conscience is found through prayer, and pure prayer through the conscience. Each by nature needs the other.

199. Jacob made for Joseph 'a coat of many colours' (cf. Gen. 37:3 LXX), and the Lord gives knowledge of truth to the gentle; as it is written, 'He will teach the meek His ways' (Ps. 24:9. LXX).

200. Always do as much good as you can, and at a time of greater good do not turn to a lesser. For it is said that no man who turns back 'is fit for the kingdom of heaven' (cf. Luke 9:62).



## **On Those who Think They Are Made Righteous by Works: Two Hundred Twenty Six Texts**

Text from G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (trans. and eds.) *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, vol. 1* (Faber & Faber, London & Boston: 1979), pp. 125-146.

1. In the texts which follow, the beliefs of those in error will be refuted by those whose faith is well founded and who know the truth.

2. Wishing to show that to fulfill every commandment is a duty, whereas Sonship is a gift given to men through His own Blood, the Lord said: "When you have done all that is commanded you, say: 'We are

unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do' ” (Lk 17.10). Thus the kingdom of heaven is not a reward for works, but a gift of grace<sup>5</sup> prepared by the Master for his faithful servants.

3. A slave does not demand his freedom as a reward; but he gives satisfaction as one who is in debt, and he receives freedom as a gift.

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<sup>5</sup> The holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church teach that divine grace and every gift of the Lord is an uncreated energy or action from the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, that is, from the unapproachable divine Essence One in Trinity and Undivided. The manifold graces and divine energies distributed to the Orthodox Faithful are operations of God Almighty, Who upholds “all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3). He also works in Orthodox Christians “both to will and to do according to His good pleasure” (Phil. 3:13) in the strength of their free wills. Further, St. Paul knows himself and his followers to be “workers together with Him” (2 Cor. 6:1).

In the trine immersion of our Orthodox Baptism, without which it is impossible either to pray or to be saved, our old man is put to death and we ourselves, like St. Paul, as a “new creature” (2Cor.5:17; Gal.6:25), “put on the new [man],” which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col. 3:10). This new creature, that is, ourselves as Baptized Orthodox Christians, is renewed by God’s own uncreated divine energy, light, and power with our every prayer, in every fasting day when we confess Christ before men as we fast, in our daily prayers, in our prayer together in Church, as we are driving and welcome the opportunity to pray when a traffic signal stops us, in truth, with our every deed willingly done for the sake of Christ.

With every breath that we draw, we live in Him and He lives in us. Truly, “He died our death that we might live His life” so that our life here in Him is the beginning of our eternal life in the Kingdom of heaven. Did Christ not tell Peter, James and John as they ascended Mount Tabor forty days before His Crucifixion that ‘there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Kingdom of God?’ (Lk. 9:27). How did the Kingdom of God appear? “As He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening” (Lk. 9:29). Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Kingdom of God. Three of His disciples saw Him, according to their capacity, as He is. As He revealed Himself at noon day on the Mountain when His uncreated radiance outshone the created brilliance of the sun, as the eyes of the disciples were empowered to view Him, so shall those who live out their lives in His Orthodoxy—who draw their last breath in the true confession of faith under an Orthodox Hierarchy belonging to a Synod of true confession—so shall they outshine the sun in the uncreated splendor and power of the Holy Spirit in them as Christ “lifts them up all the days of eternity” (Esaias 63:9 LXX). Amen.

4. 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures' (1 Cor. 15:3); and to those who serve Him well He gives freedom. 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant,' He says, 'thou hast been faithful over a few things. I will make thee ruler over many things: enter into the joy of thy Lord' (Mt 25:21).
5. He who relies on theoretical knowledge alone is not yet a faithful servant: a faithful servant is one who expresses his faith in Christ through obedience to His commandments.
6. He who honors the Lord does what the Lord bids. When he sins or is disobedient, he patiently accepts what comes as something he deserves.
7. If you love true knowledge, devote yourself to the ascetic life; for mere theoretical knowledge puffs a man up (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1).
8. Unexpected trials are sent by God to teach us to practice the ascetic life; and they lead us to repentance even when we are reluctant.
9. Afflictions that come to us are the result of our own sins. But if we accept them patiently through prayer, we shall again find blessings.
10. Some people when praised for their virtue are delighted, and attribute this pleasurable feeling of self-esteem to grace. Others when reproved for their sins are pained, and they mistake this beneficial pain for the action of sin.
  
11. Those who, because of the rigor of their own ascetic practice, despise the less zealous think that they are made righteous by physical works. But we are even more foolish if we rely on theoretical knowledge and disparage the ignorant.
12. Even though knowledge is true, it is still not firmly established if unaccompanied by works. For everything is established by being put into practice.
13. Often our knowledge becomes darkened because we fail to put things into practice. For when we have totally neglected to practice something, our memory of it will gradually disappear.
14. For this reason Scripture urges us to acquire the knowledge of God, so that through our works we may serve Him rightly.
15. When we fulfill the commandments in our outward actions, we receive from the Lord what is appropriate; but any real benefit we gain depends on our inward intention.
16. If we want to do something but cannot, then before God, who knows our hearts, it is as if we have done it. This is true whether the intended action is good or bad.
17. The intellect does many good and bad things without the body, whereas the body can do neither good nor evil without the intellect. This is because the law of freedom applies to what happens before we act.
18. Some without fulfilling the commandments think that they possess true faith. Others fulfill the commandments and then expect the kingdom as a reward due to them. Both are mistaken.
19. A master is under no obligation to reward his slaves; on the other hand, those who do not serve him well are not given their freedom.
20. If 'Christ died on our account in accordance with the Scriptures' (Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3), and we do not 'live for ourselves', but 'for Him who died and rose' on our account (2 Cor. 5:15), it is clear that we are

debtors to Christ to serve Him till our death. How then can we regard sonship as something which is our due?

21. Christ is Master by virtue of His own essence and Master by virtue of His incarnate life. For He creates man from nothing (2 Maccabees 7:28 LXX), and through His own Blood redeems him when dead in sin; and to those who believe in Him He has given His grace.

22. When Scripture says 'He will reward every man according to his works' (Mt 16:27), do not imagine that works in themselves merit either hell or the kingdom. On the contrary, Christ rewards each man according to whether his works are done with faith or without faith in Himself; and He is not a dealer bound by contract, but God our Creator and Redeemer.

23. [We who have received Baptism offer good works, not by way of repayment, but to preserve the purity given to us.](#)

24. Every good work which we perform through our own natural powers causes us to refrain from the corresponding sin; but without grace it cannot contribute to our sanctification.

25. The self-controlled refrain from gluttony; those who have renounced possessions, from greed; the tranquil, from loquacity; the pure, from self-indulgence; the modest, from unchastity; the self-dependent, from avarice; the gentle, from agitation; the humble, from self-esteem; the obedient, from quarrelling; the self-critical, from hypocrisy. Similarly, those who pray are protected from despair; the poor, from having many possessions; confessors of the faith, from its denial; martyrs, from idolatry. Do you see how every virtue that is performed even to the point of death is nothing other than refraining from sin? Now to refrain from sin is a work within our own natural powers, but not something that buys us the kingdom.

26. While man can scarcely keep what belongs to him by nature, Christ gives the grace of sonship through the Cross.

27. Certain commandments are specific, and others are comprehensive. Thus Christ enjoins us specifically to 'share with him who has none' (Lk 3:11); and He gives us a comprehensive command to forsake all that we have (cf. Lk 14:33).

28. There is an energy of grace not understood by beginners, and there is also an energy of evil which resembles the truth. It is advisable not to scrutinize these energies too closely, because one may be led astray, and not to condemn them out of hand, because they may contain some truth; but we should lay everything before God in hope, for He knows what is of value in both of them.

29. He who wants to cross the spiritual sea is long-suffering, humble, vigilant and self-controlled. If he impetuously embarks on it without these four virtues, he agitates his heart, but cannot cross.

30. Stillness helps us by making evil inoperative. If it also takes to itself these four virtues in prayer, it is the most direct support in attaining dispassion.

31. The intellect cannot be still unless the body is still also; and the wall between them cannot be demolished without stillness and prayer.

32. The flesh with its desire is opposed to the spirit, and the spirit opposed to the flesh, and those who live in the spirit will not carry out the desire of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:15- 17).

33. There is no perfect prayer unless the intellect invokes God; and when our thought cries aloud without distraction, the Lord will listen.

34. When the intellect prays without distraction it afflicts the heart; and 'a heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise' (Ps 50:18 LXX).

36. Whatever we do without prayer and without hope in God turns out afterwards to be harmful and defective.

37. Christ's words that the 'first will be last, and the last will be first' (Mt 19:30) refer to those who participate in the virtues and those who participate in love. For love is the last of the virtues to be born in the heart, but it is the first in value, so that those born before it turn out to be 'the last'.

38. If you are listless when you pray or afflicted by various forms of evil, call to mind your death and the torments of hell. But it is better to cleave to God through hope and prayer than to think about external things, even though such thoughts may be helpful.

39. No single virtue by itself opens the door of our nature; but all the virtues must be linked together in the correct sequence.

40. He whose mind teems with thoughts lacks self-control; and even when they are beneficial, hope is more so.

41. There is a sin which is always 'unto death' (1 Jn 5:16): the sin for which we do not repent. For this sin even a saint's prayers will not be heard.

42. He who repents rightly does not imagine that it is his own effort which cancels his former sins; but through this effort he makes his peace with God.

43. If we are under an obligation to perform daily all the good actions of which our nature is capable, what do we have left over to give to God in repayment for our past sins?

44. However great our virtuous actions of today, they do not requite but condemn our past negligence.

45. He who suffers affliction in his intellect but relaxes physically is like one who suffers affliction in his body while allowing his intellect to be dispersed.

46. Voluntary affliction in one of these parts of our nature benefits the other: to suffer affliction with the mind benefits the flesh, and to suffer it with the flesh benefits the mind. When our mind and flesh are not in union, our state deteriorates.

47. It is a great virtue to accept patiently whatever comes and, as the Lord enjoins, to love a neighbor who hates you.

48. [The sign of sincere love is to forgive wrongs done to us. It was with such love that the Lord loved the world.](#)

49. We cannot with all our heart forgive someone who does us wrong unless we possess real knowledge. For this knowledge shows us that we deserve all we experience.

50. You will lose nothing of what you have renounced for the Lord's sake. For in its own time it will return to you greatly multiplied.

51. When the intellect forgets the purpose of true devotion, then external works of virtue bring no profit.

52. If poor judgment is harmful to everyone, it is particularly so to those who live with great strictness.
53. Philosophize through your works about man's will and God's retribution. For your words are only as wise and as profitable as your works.
54. Those who suffer for the sake of true devotion receive help. This must be learnt through obeying God's law and our own conscience.
55. One man received a thought and accepted it without examination. Another received a thought and tested its truth. Which of them acted with greater reverence?
56. True knowledge is patiently to accept affliction and not to blame others for our own misfortunes.
57. He who does something good and expects a reward is serving not God but his own will.
58. A sinner cannot escape retribution except through repentance appropriate to his offence.
59. There are those who claim that we cannot do good unless we actively receive the grace of the Spirit.
60. Those who always by choice incline to sensual pleasures refrain from doing what lies within their power on the grounds that they lack help.
61. Grace has been given mystically to those who have been Baptized into Christ; and it becomes active within them to the extent that they actively observe the commandments. Grace never ceases to help us secretly; but to do good—as far as lies in our power—depends on us.
62. Initially grace arouses the conscience in a divine manner. That is how even sinners have come to repent and so to conform to God's will.
63. Again, grace may be bidden in advice given by a neighbor. Sometimes it also accompanies our understanding during reading, and as a natural result teaches our intellect the truth about itself. If, then, we do not hide the talent given to us in this way, we shall enter actively into the joy of the Lord.
64. He who seeks the energies of the Spirit before he has actively observed the commandments is like someone who sells himself into slavery and who, as soon as he is bought, asks to be given his freedom while still keeping his purchase money.
65. When you have found that external events come to you through God's righteousness, then in your search for the Lord you have found 'knowledge and righteousness' (cf. Proverbs 16:8 LXX).
66. Once you recognize that the Lord's judgments 'are in all the earth' (1 Chron. 16:14 LXX), then everything that happens to you will teach you knowledge of God.
67. Everyone receives what he deserves in accordance with his inner state. But only God understands the many different ways in which this happens.
68. When you suffer some dishonor from men, recognize at once the glory that will be given you by God. Then you will not be saddened or upset by the dishonor; and when you receive the glory you will remain steadfast and innocent.
69. When God allows you to be praised, do not become boastful on account of this divine providence, lest you then fall into dishonor.
70. A seed will not grow without earth and water; and a man will not develop without voluntary suffering and divine help.
71. Rain cannot fall without a cloud, and we cannot please God without a good conscience.

72. Do not refuse to learn, even though you may be very intelligent. For what God provides has more value than our own intelligence.
73. When through some sensual pleasure the heart is deflected from the ascetic way, it becomes difficult to control, like a heavy stone dislodged on steep ground.
74. Like a young calf which, in its search for grazing, finds itself on a ledge surrounded by precipices, the soul is gradually led astray by its thoughts.
75. When the intellect, having grown to full maturity in the Lord, wrenches the soul from long-continued prepossession, the heart suffers torments as if on the rack, since intellect and passion drag it in opposite directions.
76. Just as sailors, in the hope of gain, gladly endure the burning heat of the sun, so those who hate wickedness gladly accept reproof. For the former contend with the winds, the latter with passions.
77. Just as flight in winter or on the Sabbath day (cf. Mt 24:20) brings suffering to the flesh and defilement to the soul, so too does resurgence of the passions in an aged body and a consecrated soul.
78. No one is as good and merciful as the Lord. But even He does not forgive the unrepentant.
79. Many of us feel remorse for our sins, yet we gladly accept their causes.
80. A mole burrowing in the earth is blind and cannot see the stars; and he who does not trust God in temporal things will not trust Him in eternal things.
81. True knowledge has been given to men by God as a grace preceding the fullness of grace; it teaches those who partake of it to believe above all in the Giver.
82. When a sinful soul does not accept the afflictions that come to it, the angels say: 'We tried to heal Babylon, but she was not healed' (Jer. 28:9 LXX).
83. When an intellect forgets true knowledge, it fights with men for harmful things as though they were helpful.
84. Fire cannot last long in water, nor can a shameful thought in a heart that loves God. For every man who loves God suffers gladly, and voluntary suffering is by nature the enemy of sensual pleasure.
85. A passion which we allow to grow active within us through our own choice afterwards forces itself upon us against our will.
86. We have a love for the causes of involuntary thoughts, and that is why they come. In the case of voluntary thoughts we clearly have a love not only for the causes but also for the objects with which they are concerned.
87. Presumption and boastfulness are causes of blasphemy. Avarice and self-esteem are causes of cruelty and hypocrisy.
88. When the devil sees that our intellect has prayed from the heart, he makes a powerful attack with subtle temptations; but he does not bother to destroy the lesser virtues by such powerful attacks.
89. When a thought lingers within a man, this indicates his attachment to it; but when it is quickly destroyed, this signifies his opposition and hostility to it.
90. The intellect changes from one to another of three different noetic states: that according to nature, above nature, and contrary to nature. When it enters the state according to nature, it finds that it is itself

the cause of evil thoughts, and confesses its sins to God, clearly understanding the causes of the passions. When it is in the state contrary to nature, it forgets God's righteousness and fights with men, believing itself unjustly treated. But when it is raised to the state above nature, it finds the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace and the other fruits of which the Apostle speaks (cf. Gal. 5:22); and it knows that if it gives priority to bodily cares it cannot remain in this state. An intellect that departs from this state falls into sin and all the terrible consequences of sin— if not immediately, then in due time, as God's righteousness shall decide.

91. Each man's knowledge is genuine to the extent that it is confirmed by gentleness, humility and love.
92. Everyone baptized in the Orthodox manner has received mystically the fullness of grace; but he becomes conscious of this grace only to the extent that he actively observes the commandments.
93. If we fulfill Christ's commandments according to our conscience, we are spiritually refreshed to the extent that we suffer in our heart. But each thing comes to us at the right time.
94. Pray persistently about everything, and then you will never do anything without God's help.
95. Nothing is stronger than prayer in its action, nothing more effective in winning God's favor.
96. Prayer comprises the complete fulfillment of the commandments; for there is nothing higher than love for God.
97. Undistracted prayer is a sign of love for God; but careless or distracted prayer is a sign of love for pleasure.
98. He who can without strain keep vigil, be long-suffering and pray is manifestly a partaker of the Holy Spirit. But he who feels strain while doing these things, yet willingly endures it, also quickly receives help.
99. One commandment is higher than another; consequently one level of faith is more firmly founded than another.
100. There is faith 'that comes by hearing' (Rom. 10:17) and there is faith that 'is the substance of things hoped for' (Heb. 11:1).
101. It is good to help enquirers with words; but it is better to co-operate with them through prayer and the practice of virtue. For he who through these offers himself to God, helps his neighbor through helping himself.
102. If you want with a few words to benefit one who is eager to learn, speak to him about prayer, right faith, and the patient acceptance of what comes. For all else that is good is found through these.
103. Once we have entrusted our hope about something to God, we no longer quarrel with our neighbor over it.
104. If, as Scripture teaches, everything involuntary has its cause in what is voluntary, man has no greater enemy than himself.
105. The first among all evils is ignorance; next comes lack of faith.
106. Escape from temptation through patience and prayer. If you oppose temptation without these, it only attacks you more strongly.

107. He who is gentle in God's sight is wiser than the wise; and he who is humble in heart is stronger than the strong. For they bear the yoke of Christ with spiritual knowledge.

108. Everything we say or do without prayer afterwards turns out to be unreliable or harmful, and so shows us up without our realizing it.

109. One alone is righteous in works, words and thoughts. But many are made righteous in faith, grace and repentance.

110. One who is repentant cannot be haughty, just as one who sins deliberately cannot be humble-minded.

111. Humility consists, not in condemning our conscience, but in recognizing God's grace and compassion.

112. What a house is to the air, the spiritual intellect is to divine grace. The more you get rid of materiality, the more the air and grace will come in of their own accord; and the more you increase materiality, the more they will go away.

113. Materiality in the case of a house consists of furnishings and food. Materiality in the case of the intellect is self-esteem and sensual pleasure.

114. Ample room in the heart denotes hope in God; congestion denotes bodily care.

115. The grace of the Spirit is one and unchanging, but energizes in each one of us as He wills (cf. 1 Cor. 12:11).

116. When rain falls upon the earth, it gives life to the quality inherent in each plant: sweetness in the sweet, astringency in the astringent; similarly, when grace falls upon the hearts of the faithful, it gives to each the energies appropriate to the different virtues without itself changing.

117. To him who hungers after Christ grace is food; to him who is thirsty, a reviving drink; to him who is cold, a garment; to him who is weary, rest; to him who prays, assurance; to him who mourns, consolation.

118. When you hear Scripture saying of the Holy Spirit that He 'rested upon each' of the Apostles (Acts 2:3), or 'came upon' the Prophet (1Sam. 11:6), or 'energizes' (1Cor. 12:11), or is 'grieved' (Eph. 4:30), or is 'quenched' (1Thess. 5:19), or is 'provoked' (Esaias. 63:10), and again, that some 'have the first fruits' (Rom. 8:23), and that others are 'filled with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:4), do not suppose that the Spirit is subject to some kind of division, variation or change; but be sure that, in the way we have described, He is unvarying, unchanging and all-powerful. Therefore in all His energies He remains what He is, and in a divine manner He gives to each person what is needful. On those who have been baptized He pours Himself out in His fullness like the sun. Each of us is illumined by Him to the extent to which we hate the passions that darken us and get rid of them. But in so far as we have a love for them and dwell on them, we remain in darkness.

119. He who hates the passions gets rid of their causes. But he who is attracted by their causes is attacked by the passions even though he does not wish it.

120. When evil thoughts become active within us, we should blame ourselves and not ancestral sin.<sup>6</sup>

121. The roots of evil thoughts are the obvious vices, which we keep trying to justify in our words and actions.

122. We cannot entertain a passion in our mind unless we have a love for its causes.

123. For what man, who cares nothing about being put to shame, entertains thoughts of self-esteem? Or who welcomes contempt and yet is disturbed by dishonor? And who has 'a broken and a contrite heart' (Ps 51:17 LXX) and yet indulges in carnal pleasure? Or who puts his trust in Christ and yet worries or quarrels about transitory things?

124. If a man is treated with contempt by someone and yet does not react with anger in either word or thought, it shows he has acquired true knowledge and firm faith in the Lord.

125. 'The sons of men are false, and cheat with their scales' (Ps 62:9. LXX), but God assigns to each what is just.

126. If the criminal will not keep his gains for ever and his victim will not always suffer want, 'surely man passes like a shadow and troubles himself in vain' (Ps 39:6 LXX).

127. When you see someone suffering great dishonor, you may be sure that he was carried away by thoughts of self-esteem and is now reaping, much to his disgust, the harvest from the seeds which he sowed in his heart.

128. He who enjoys bodily pleasures beyond the proper limit will pay for the excess a hundredfold in sufferings.

129. A man exercising authority should tell his subordinate his duty; and, if disobeyed, should warn him of the evil consequences.

130. He who suffers wrong and does not demand any reparation from the man who wronged him, trusts in Christ to make good the loss; and he is rewarded a hundredfold in this world and inherits eternal life (cf. Mk 10:30).

131. The remembrance of God is suffering of heart endured in a spirit of devotion. But he who forgets God becomes self-indulgent and insensitive.

132. Do not say that a dispassionate man cannot suffer affliction; for even if he does not suffer on his own account, he is under a liability to do so for his neighbor.

133. When the enemy has booked against a man many forgotten sins, he forces his debtor to recall them in memory, taking full advantage of 'the law of sin' (cf. Rom. 8:2).

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<sup>6</sup> The 'ancestral sin' is the sin of our Forefathers, Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:2-25 LXX). We do not inherit the guilt of Adam's sin. We do inherit death, and the associated sicknesses and ills that we all experience, as well as a proclivity to sin. Our wills remain, although impaired, free to act for the sake of Christ. Without this freedom, we would be unable to repent and, through repentance, to be saved.

134. If you wish to remember God unceasingly, do not reject as undeserved what happens to you, but patiently accept it as your due. For patient acceptance of whatever happens kindles the remembrance of God, whereas refusal to accept weakens the spiritual purpose of the heart and so makes it forgetful.

135. If you want your sins to be ‘covered’ by the Lord (cf. Ps 31:1 LXX), do not display your virtues to others. For whatever we do with our virtues, God will also do with our sins.

136. Having hidden your virtue, do not be filled with pride, imagining you have achieved righteousness. For righteousness is not only to hide your good actions, but also never to think forbidden thoughts.

137. Rejoice, not when you do good to someone, but when you endure without rancor the hostility that follows. For just as night follows day, so acts of malice follow acts of kindness.

138. Acts of kindness and generosity are spoiled by self-esteem, meanness and pleasure, unless these have first been destroyed by fear of God.

139. The mercy of God is hidden in sufferings not of our choice; and if we accept such sufferings patiently, they bring us to repentance and deliver us from everlasting punishment.

140. Some, when they actively observe the commandments, expect this to outweigh their sins; others, who observe the commandments without this presumption, gain the grace of Him who died on account of our sins. We should consider which of these is right.

141. Fear of hell and love for God’s kingdom enable us patiently to accept affliction; and this they do, not by themselves, but through Him who knows our thoughts.

142. He who believes in the blessings of the world to come abstains of his own accord from the pleasures of this present world. But he who lacks such faith becomes pleasure-loving and insensitive.

143. Do not ask how a poor man can be self-indulgent when he lacks the material means. For it is possible to be self-indulgent in a yet more despicable way through one’s thoughts.

144. Knowledge of created beings is one thing, and knowledge of the divine truth is another. The second surpasses the first just as the sun outshines the moon.

145. Knowledge of created beings increases the more we observe the commandments actively; but knowledge of the truth grows the more we hope in Christ.

146. If you wish to be saved and ‘to come unto the knowledge of the truth’ (1Tim 2:4), endeavor always to transcend sensible things, and through hope alone to cleave to God. Then you will find principalities and powers fighting against you (cf. Eph. 6:12), deflecting you against your will and provoking you to sin. But if you prevail over them through prayer and maintain your hope, you will receive God’s grace, and this will deliver you from the wrath to come.

147. If you understand what is said in a mystical sense by St Paul, that ‘we wrestle...against spiritual wickedness’ (Eph. 6:12), you will also understand the parable of the Lord, which He spoke ‘to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to lose heart’ (Lk 18:1).

148. The Law figuratively commands men to work for six days and on the seventh to rest (cf. Ex. 20:9-10). The term ‘work’ when applied to the soul signifies acts of kindness and generosity by means of our possessions—that is, through material things. But the soul’s rest and repose is to sell everything and ‘give to the poor’ (Mt. 19:21), as Christ Himself said; so through its lack of possessions it will rest from its work

and devote itself to spiritual hope. Such is the rest into which Paul also exhorts us to enter, saying: 'Let us strive therefore to enter into that rest' (Heb. 4:11).

149. In saying this we are not forgetting the blessings of the life to come or limiting the universal reward to the present life. We are simply affirming that it is necessary in the first place to have the grace of the Holy Spirit energizing the heart and so, in proportion to this energizing, to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The Lord made this clear in saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is within you' (cf. Lk 17:21). The Apostle, too, said the same: 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for' (Heb. 11:1); 'Run, that you may reach your goal' (1 Cor. 9:24); 'Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you except ye be reprobates?' (2 Cor. 13:5).

150. He who has come to know the truth does not oppose the afflictions that befall him, for he knows that they lead him to the fear of God.

151. To recall past sins in detail inflicts injury on the man who hopes in God. For when such recollection brings remorse it deprives him of hope; but if he pictures the sins to himself without remorse, they pollute him again with the old defilement.

152. When the intellect through rejection of the passions attains to unwavering hope, then the enemy makes it visualize its past sins on the pretext of confessing them to God. Thus he tries to rekindle passions which by God's grace have been forgotten, and so secretly to inflict injury. Then, even though someone is illumined and hates the passions, he will inevitably be filled with darkness and confusion at the memory of what he has done. But if he is still befogged and self-indulgent, he will certainly dally with the enemy's provocations and entertain them under the influence of passion, so that this recollection will prove to be a prepossession and not a confession.

153. If you wish to make a blameless confession to God do not go over your failings in detail, but firmly resist their renewed attacks.

154. Trials come upon us because of our former sins, bringing what is appropriate to each offence.

155. The man who possesses spiritual knowledge and understands the truth confesses to God, not by recalling what he has done, but by accepting patiently what comes.

156. If you refuse to accept suffering and dishonor, do not claim to be in a state of repentance because of your other virtues. For self-esteem and insensitivity can serve sin even under the cover of virtue.

157. Just as suffering and dishonor usually give birth to virtues, so pleasure and self-esteem usually give birth to vices.

158. All bodily pleasure results from previous laxity, and laxity results from lack of faith.

159. He who is under the power of sin cannot by himself prevail over the will of the flesh, because he suffers continual stimulation in all his members.

160. Those who are under the sway of passions must pray and be obedient. For even when they receive help, they can only just manage to fight against their prepossessions.

161. He who tries to conquer his own will by means of obedience and prayer is following a wise ascetic method. His renunciation of external things indicates his inward struggle.

162. He who does not make his will agree with God is tripped up by his own schemes and falls into the hands of his enemies.

163. When you see two evil men befriending one another, you may be sure that each is co-operating with the other's desires.

164. The haughty and the conceited gladly agree together; for the haughty man praises the conceited man who fawns on him in a servile manner, while the conceited man extols the haughty man who continually praises him.

165. The man who loves God benefits from both praise and blame: if commended for his good actions he grows more zealous, and if reproved for his sins he is brought to repentance. Our outward life should accord with our inner progress and our prayers to God with our life.

166. It is good to hold fast to the principal commandment, and not to be anxious about particular things or to pray for them specifically, but to seek only the kingdom and the word of God (cf. Mt 6:25-33). If, however, we are still anxious about our particular needs, we should also pray for each of them. He who does or plans anything without prayer will not succeed in the end. And this is what the Lord meant when He said: 'Without Me you can do nothing' (Jn 15:5).

167. If a man disregards the commandment about prayer, he then commits worse acts of disobedience, each one handing him over to the next like a prisoner.

168. He who accepts present afflictions in the expectation of future blessings has found knowledge of the truth; and he will easily be freed from anger and remorse.

169. He who chooses maltreatment and dishonor for the sake of truth is walking on the apostolic path; he has taken up the cross and is bound in chains (cf. Mt 16:24; Acts 28:20). But when he tries to concentrate his attention on the heart without accepting these two, his intellect wanders from the path and he falls into the temptations and snares of the devil.

170. In our ascetic warfare we can neither rid ourselves of evil thoughts apart from their causes, nor of their causes without ridding ourselves of the thoughts. For if we reject the one without the other, before long the other will involve us in them both at once.

171. He who fights against others out of fear of hardship or reproach will either suffer more harshly through what befalls him in this life, or will be punished mercilessly in the life to come.

172. He who wishes to be spared all misfortunes should associate God with everything through prayer; with his intellect he should set his hope in Him, putting aside, so far as possible, all concern about things of the senses.

173. When the devil finds someone preoccupied needlessly with bodily things, he first deprives him of the hard-won fruits of spiritual knowledge, and then cuts off his hope in God.

174. If you should ever reach the stronghold of pure prayer, do not accept the knowledge of created things which is presented to you at that moment by the enemy, lest you lose what is greater. For it is better to shoot at him from above with the arrows of prayer, cooped up as he is down below, than to parley with him as he offers us the knowledge he has plundered, and tries to tear us away from this prayer which defeats him.

175. Knowledge of created things helps a man at a time of temptation and listlessness; but at a time of pure prayer it is usually harmful.

176. If it is your task to give spiritual instruction and you are disobeyed, grieve inwardly but do not be outwardly upset. For if you grieve, you will not share the guilt of the person who disobeys you; but if you are upset you will be tested by the same temptations as he is.

177. When you are explaining things, do not conceal what is relevant to the needs of those present. You should discuss explicitly whatever is seemly, but refer less explicitly to what is hard to accept.

178. If someone is not under obedience to you, do not rebuke him to his face for his faults. For that would imply you have authority over him, and are not just giving advice.

179. What is said without explicit reference to individuals is helpful to all, for each applies it to himself according to his own conscience.

180. He who speaks rightly should recognize that he receives the words from God. For the truth belongs not to him who speaks, but to God who is acting in him.

181. Do not argue with people not under obedience to you when they oppose the truth; otherwise you may arouse their hatred.

182. If you give way when someone who is under obedience to you wrongly contradicts you, you lead him astray over the point at issue and also encourage him to repudiate his promise of obedience.

183. He who with fear of God admonishes or corrects a man who has sinned, gains the virtue that is opposite to that sin. But he who reproaches him out of rancor and ill will becomes subject to a similar passion, according to the spiritual law.

184. He who has learned the law properly fears the Lawgiver and, fearing Him, he turns away from every evil.

185. Do not be double-tongued, saying one thing when your conscience says another. For Scripture places such people under a curse (cf. Sirach 28:13 LXX).

186. One man speaks the truth and is hated for it by the foolish; another speaks hypocritically and for this reason is loved. But in both cases their reward is not long delayed, for at the appropriate moment the Lord renders to each his due.

187. He who wishes to avoid future troubles should endure his present troubles gladly. For in this way, balancing the one against the other, through small sufferings he will avoid those which are great.

188. Guard your speech from boasting and your thoughts from presumption; otherwise you may be abandoned by God and fall into sin. For man cannot do anything good without the help of God, who sees everything.

189. God, who sees everything, rewards at their proper value not only our actions but also our voluntary thoughts and purposes.

190. Involuntary thoughts arise from previous sin; voluntary ones from our free will. Thus the latter are the cause of the former.

191. Evil thoughts which arise against our will are accompanied by remorse, and so they soon disappear; but when they are freely chosen, they are accompanied by pleasure, and so they are hard to get rid of.

192. The self-indulgent are distressed by criticism and hardship; those who love God by praise and luxury.

193. He who does not understand God's judgments walks on a ridge like a knife-edge and is easily unbalanced by every puff of wind. When praised, he exults; when criticized, he feels bitter. When he feasts, he makes a pig of himself; and when he suffers hardship, he moans and groans. When he understands, he shows off; and when he does not understand, he pretends that he does. When rich, he is boastful; and when in poverty, he plays the hypocrite. Gorged, he grows brazen; and when he fasts, he becomes arrogant. He quarrels with those who reprove him; and those who forgive him he regards as fools.

194. Unless a man acquires, through the grace of Christ, knowledge of the truth and fear of God, he is gravely wounded not only by the passions but also by the things that happen to him.

195. When you want to resolve a complex problem, seek God's will in the matter, and you will find a constructive solution.

196. When something accords with God's will, all creation aids it. But when God rejects something, creation too opposes it.

197. He who opposes unpleasant events opposes the command of God unwittingly. But when someone accepts them with true knowledge, he 'waits patiently for the Lord' (Ps 27:14 LXX).

198. When tested by some trial you should try to find out not why or through whom it came, but only how to endure it gratefully, without distress or rancor.

199. Another man's sin does not increase our own, unless we ourselves embrace it by means of evil thoughts.

200. If it is not easy to find anyone conforming to God's will who has not been put to the test, we ought to thank God for everything that happens to us.

201. If Peter had not failed to catch anything during the night's fishing (cf. Lk 5:5), he would not have caught anything during the day. And if Paul had not suffered physical blindness (cf. Acts 9:8), he would not have been given spiritual sight. And if Stephen had not been slandered as a blasphemer, he would not have seen the heavens opened and have looked on God (cf. Acts 6:15; 7:56).

202. As work according to God is called virtue, so unexpected affliction is called a test.

203. God 'tempted Abraham' (cf. Gen. 22:1-14 LXX), that is, God afflicted him for his own benefit, not in order to learn what kind of man Abraham was—for He knew him, since He knows all things before they come into existence (Susanna 42 LXX)—but in order to provide him with opportunities for showing perfect faith.

204. Every affliction tests our will, showing whether it is inclined to good or evil. This is why an unforeseen affliction is called a test, because it enables a man to test his hidden desires.

205. The fear of God compels us to fight against evil; and when we fight against evil, the grace of God destroys it.

206. Wisdom is not only to perceive the natural consequence of things, but also to accept as our due the malice of those who wrong us. People who go no further than the first kind of wisdom become proud, whereas those who attain the second become humble.

207. If you do not want evil thoughts to be active within you, accept humiliation of soul and affliction of the flesh; and this not just on particular occasions, but always, everywhere and in all things.

208. He who willingly accepts chastening by affliction is not dominated by evil thoughts against his will; whereas he who does not accept affliction is taken prisoner by evil thoughts, even though he resists them.

209. When you are wronged and your heart and feelings are hardened, do not be distressed, for this has happened providentially; but be glad and reject the thoughts that arise within you, knowing that if they are destroyed at the stage when they are only provocations, their evil consequences will be cut off; whereas if the thoughts persist the evil may be expected to develop.

210. Without contrition of the heart it is altogether impossible to rid ourselves of evil. Now the heart is made contrite by threefold self-control: in sleep, in food and in bodily relaxation. For excess of these three things leads to self-indulgence; and this in turn makes us accept evil thoughts, and is opposed to prayer and to appropriate work.

211. If it is your duty to give orders to your brethren, be mindful of your role and, when they contradict you, do not fail to tell them what is necessary. When they obey you, you will be rewarded because of their virtue; but when they disobey you, you will none the less forgive them, and will equally be rewarded by Him who said: 'For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you' (cf. Mt 6:14).

212. Every event is like a bazaar. He who knows how to bargain (Lk 19:13 'trade until I come')<sup>7</sup> makes a good profit, he who does not makes a loss.

213. If someone does not obey you when you have told him once, do not argue and try to compel him; but take for yourself the profit which he has thrown away. For forbearance will benefit you more than correcting him.

214. When the evil conduct of one person begins to affect others, you should not show long-suffering; and instead of your own advantage you should seek that of the others, so that they may be saved. For virtue involving many people is more valuable than virtue involving only one.

215. If a man falls into some sin and does not feel remorse for his offence as he should, he will easily fall into the same net again.

216. Just as a lioness does not make friends with a calf, so impudence does not gladly admit the remorse that accords with God's will.

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<sup>7</sup> (Lk. 19:13) 'Trade till I come' such is the Orthodox reading of this text. It is included as an alternative reading in the first edition of the King James New Testament of 1611. Our wills, impaired as they are by the 'ancestral sin' are free to act in our own best interests for the sake of Christ. Please also see p.13, n. 5.

217. Just as a sheep does not mate with a wolf, so suffering of the heart does not couple with satiety for the conception of virtues.

218. No one can experience suffering and remorse in a way that accords with God's will, unless he first loves what causes them.

219. Fear of God and reproof induce remorse; hardship and vigils make us intimate with suffering.

220. He who does not learn from the commandments and warnings of Scripture will be driven by 'the horse's whip' and 'the ass's goad' (cf. Proverbs 26:3 LXX). And if he refuses to obey these as well, his 'mouth must be controlled with bit and bridle' (Ps 32:9 LXX).

221. He who is easily overcome by the lesser will inevitably be enslaved by the greater. But he who is superior to the lesser will also with the Lord's help resist the greater.

222. When someone boasts about his virtues, do not try to help him by reproving him. For a man cannot love showing off and at the same time love the truth.

223. Every word of Christ shows us God's mercy, justice and wisdom and, if we listen gladly, their power enters into us. That is why the unmerciful and the unjust, listening to Christ with repugnance, were not able to understand the Wisdom of God, but even crucified Him for teaching it. So we, too, should ask ourselves whether we listen to Him gladly. For He said: 'He who loves Me will keep My commandments, and he will be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him' (cf. Jn 14:21). Do you see how He has hidden His manifestation in the commandments? Of all the commandments, therefore, the most comprehensive is to love God and our neighbor. This love is made firm through abstaining from material things, and through stillness of thoughts.

224. Knowing this, the Lord enjoins us 'not to be anxious about the morrow' (Mt 6:34); and rightly so. For if a man has not freed himself from material things and from concern about them, how can he be freed from evil thoughts? And if he is beset by evil thoughts, how can he see the reality of the sin concealed behind them? Thus sin wraps the soul in darkness and obscurity, and increases its hold upon us through our evil thoughts and actions. The devil initiates the whole process by testing a man with a provocation which he is not compelled to accept; but the man, urged on by self-indulgence and self-esteem, begins to entertain this provocation with enjoyment. Even if his discrimination tells him to reject it, yet in practice he takes pleasure in it and accepts it. If someone has not perceived this general process of sinning, when will he pray about it and be cleansed from it? And if he has not been cleansed, how will he find purity of nature? And if he has not found this, how will he behold the inner dwelling-place of Christ? For we are a dwelling place of God, according to the words of Prophet, Gospel and Apostle (cf. Zach. 2:10; Jn 14:23; 1 Cor. 3:16; Heb. 3:6).

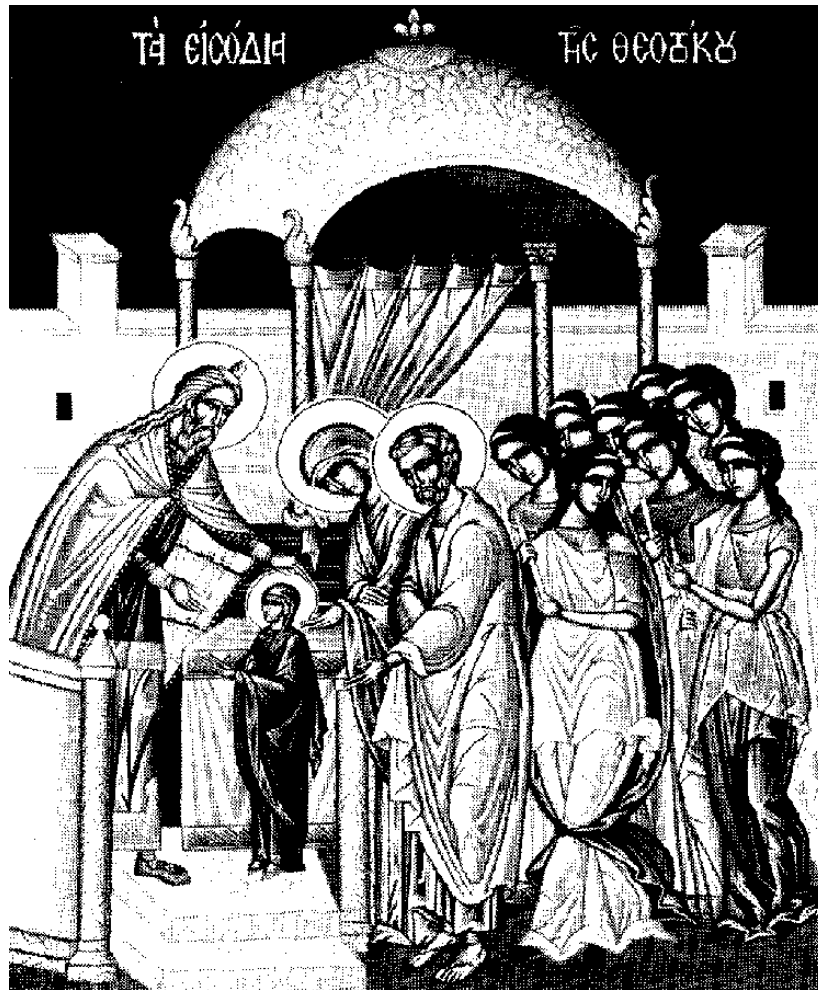
225. Following the sequence just described, we should try to find the dwelling-place and knock with persistent prayer, so that either in this life or at our death the Master may open to us and not say because of our negligence: 'I do know you not from whence ye are' (Lk 13:25). Not only ought we to ask and receive, but we should also keep safely what is given; for some people lose what they have received. A theoretical knowledge or chance experience of these things may perhaps be gained by those who have begun to learn late in life or who are still young; but the constant and patient practice of these things is

barely to be acquired even by devout and deeply experienced elders, who have repeatedly lost it through lack of attention and then through voluntary suffering have searched for and found it again. So let us constantly imitate them in this, until we, too, have acquired this practice irremovably.

226. Out of the many ordinances of the spiritual law we have come to understand these few. The great Psalmist again and again urges us to learn and practice them as we ceaselessly praise the Lord Jesus.

To Him are due glory, power and worship, both now and through all the ages. Amen.

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The Entry into the Temple of our Most Holy Lady,  
the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary  
Which the Holy Church Celebrates on November 21.

## SAINT MARK THE ASCETIC

Comments on “Those Who Think That They Are Saved By Works” #144-149.”

Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth  
For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.  
When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear,  
then shall ye also appear with Him in Glory

Col. 3:2-4

Our selected texts from Saint Mark the Ascetic abound in consolations; we can begin our visit with Saint Mark with a consolation from Saint Paul:

[For He hath said: I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee](#) (Heb. 13:5).

The indwelling of our Christ, received in our Orthodox Baptism, is our starting point. Why do all those who serve in the altar wear a Sticheron? The Bishop, priest, deacon and the servers all wear a Baptismal Sticheron. It is, of course, not the same one in which they were Baptized. It is cut and tailored to be appropriate to their service before God in the altar. No one is allowed to approach God who has not received Orthodox Baptism into the “Holy and Blameless Faith of the Pious and Orthodox Christians” (Vespers). Those who serve in the altar represent those in the Nave of the Church. We are, in our God-given order, brethren before our God Who has pledged Himself to us forever. Let these words sink into your ears: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

Since He has pledged His faithfulness to us, let us respond in our struggles to be faithful to Him.

All those who have received the Orthodox mystery of holy Baptism may abide eternally in Christ and He abides in those who struggle to place all their hope in Him alone. In this Living mystery, all that God is lives in all that we offer by faith to Him. We can grow in the uncreated power of this divine gift of faith. Saint Mark puts his finger on the heart of it: everything lies in our willingness “always to endeavor to transcend sensible things” (#146). Our Gentleness, our Saviour, asks us always to “humble ... [ourselves] as this little child” (Mt. 18:3). As a little child, we live in hope. The gift of discernment empowers us to follow Saint Mark when he reminds us (#149) that “Faith is the substance of things hoped for” because the uncreated power of faith carries us along to hope. Hope is our complete reaching out to God, our settled resting in God for all things.

Do we put our children to bed at night without the silent assurance that we, and all that we mean to them and can bring to them, will be there for them in the morning? Is not this the hope of a child? Put a different way, “If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone?” (Lk. 11:11). Is not the child’s hope the substance of his unquestioning faith in his parents?

As Orthodox Christians we rise and fall in “our endeavor to transcend sensible things” which admits us, bit by bit, into a growing “knowledge of the truth” (#145). Standing on our Baptism, still wearing, if

you will, our Baptismal Sticheron, have been given the divine uncreated energy to take that step of hope which fulfils our faith as our soul devotes “itself to spiritual hope” (#148).

That the Church is “to transcend sensible things” is celebrated in the prayers before the main prayers of the Divine Liturgy. We hear the choir as it echoes the prayer of the priest:

“Let us who mystically portray the Cherubim,  
and chant the thrice-holy hymn  
unto the Life-creating Trinity  
lay aside all earthly care  
that we may receive the King of all  
escorted invisibly by the angelic orders.  
Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.”

The Church on earth joyously, ecstatically unites herself with the Church in heaven in a spiritual chorus as we portray the Cherubim in our divine calling “to transcend sensible things” in the stillness of the childlike act of our reception of the Lord God, our Christ Almighty, as He visits us in the splendor of His created angelic escorts.

In the next exchange between the priest and his flock, God’s call to the transcendence of sensible things continues to work our divine transfiguration as the priest exclaims, “Lift up your hearts!” “Become divine, embrace your deification which was begun in holy Baptism. Lift up a sensible thing, your hearts, your very life, so that in your hope, you may become all that God is except for identity of essence.”

We respond, “We lift them up unto the Lord.”

“Let all mortal flesh keep silence and with fear and trembling stand,” as we chant on Great and Holy Saturday, transcending sensible things by the incomprehensible power of the Holy Spirit, we stand on earth, not as if we were in heaven, but we stand on earth which has become heaven. The uncreated gift of divine Grace draws us, in the Liturgical Mystery, face to face with the Lord of Heaven and Earth; we know neither where we are, nor how we were brought to this place. With Jacob, we only know “I have seen God face to face, and my soul is saved” (Gen. 32:30 LXX); do not we all have a great longing “through hope to cling to God”?

Such are the fruits of our resolve “to transcend sensible things.” Experienced by the Church, these are things “the angels desire to look into” (1 Pet. 1:13).

Saint Mark speaks of those souls which lack possessions. In his turn, St. Paul admonishes “they that buy, [are to live] as though they possessed not” (1 Cor. 7:30). So all of us are called “to transcend sensible things” (#146) “for the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor. 7:31), and “through hope alone to cleave to God” (#146).

Such is the general outline of our goal which, once again, is “through hope alone to cleave to God.”

The enemies, however, do not even want us to have faith in God, much less to pray to God, to say nothing of “through hope alone to cleave to God.” Saint Mark, once again, goes straight to the point as he clearly lays out the field of combat for all of us Orthodox Christians to survey. “If you understand what is said in a mystical sense by St Paul, that ‘we wrestle...against spiritual wickedness’ (Ep. 6:12), you will also understand the parable of the Lord, which He spoke ‘to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to lose heart’” (Lk 18:1).

Although it might appear that we have arrived at an impasse, Saint Mark still offers us assistance.

He writes, “Prayer is called a virtue, but in reality it is the mother of the virtues: for it gives birth to them through union with Christ “(#35). This incorruptible “union with Christ” given to us in Holy Baptism is the rock upon which we can always stand. Nevertheless, it is easy for us to become disoriented. In “The Way of the Pilgrim” we read:

“Many people reason quite the wrong way about prayer, thinking that good actions and all sorts of preliminary measures render us capable of prayer. But quite the reverse is the case; it is prayer which bears fruit in good works and all the virtues. Those who reason so take, incorrectly, the fruits and results of prayer for the means of attaining it and this is to depreciate the power of prayer. And it is quite contrary to Holy Scripture, for the Apostle Paul says, ‘I exhort therefore that first of all supplications be made’ (1 Tim.2:1). The first thing laid down in the Apostle’s words about prayer is that the work of prayer comes before everything else: “I exhort therefore that first of all...’ The Christian is bound to perform many good works, but before all else what he ought to do is to pray, for without prayer no other good work can be accomplished. Without prayer he cannot find the way to the Lord, he cannot understand the truth, he cannot crucify the flesh with its passions and lusts, his heart cannot be enlightened with the light of Christ, he cannot be savingly be united to God. None of those things can be affected unless they are preceded by constant prayer. I say ‘constant,’ for the perfection of prayer does not lie within our power; as the Apostle Paul says, “For we know not what we should pray for as we ought’ (Rom. 8:26). Consequently, it is just to pray often, to pray always, which falls within our power as the means of attaining purity in prayer, which is the mother of all spiritual blessings. ‘Capture the mother, and she will bring you the children,’ said St. Isaac the Syrian. Learn first to acquire the power of prayer and you will easily practice all the other virtues. But those who know little of this from practical experience and the profoundest teaching of the

holy Fathers have no clear knowledge of it and speak of it very little.”<sup>8</sup>

Saint Mark advises us to proceed along just the same lines as are outlined above. Keep prayer first and the enemies will not dare to approach you. Let down your guard for a moment, or, in other words, slacken “the endeavor always to transcend sensible things and through hope alone to cleave to God,” which *endeavor*, beloved ones is, in a word, *prayer*, and you have failed and the enemies begin their advance. But, as St. John Chrysostom says, “Your problem is not that you have fallen, but, having fallen, you refuse to rise.” The holy Fathers warn us that because of our composite nature of flesh and spirit, we can expect to go through a never-ending series of ups and downs throughout our lives. Our struggle is ever with us until we close our eyes in death. Since “sin hath reigned unto death” (Rom. 5:13), there is no struggle with sin in the grave. As the Pilgrim has said above, in the freedom of our wills we can be consistent in our efforts to pray but perfection in prayer is a gift of God.

The new wine comes last in the feast at the wedding in Cana and for Saint Mark the new wine is served last, too. Not only is the wine itself the occasion of comment, it is also why, after having run out of wine, did the governor of the feast keep “the good wine until now”? (Jn. 2:10). How do we come “to have the grace of the Holy Spirit energizing the heart, and so, in proportion to this energizing, to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven” (#149)?

We can truly say that since we have been baptized into Christ and have put on Christ, and that since after His baptism, “He saw the heavens opened and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him” (Mk. 1:10) so do we who are in Him, who have put Him on, who eat His flesh and drink His blood enter, in our own baptism, into a heaven newly opened to us in Him and are enabled to receive limitless, eternal, uncreated gifts of the Holy Spirit. With our hearts full of thanksgiving that this is so for each one of us Orthodox Christians of true confession, may it still not be just what Saint Mark has in mind?

Our God “took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. “As He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening” (Lk. 9:28, 29). As our Christ is praying He is changed before the eyes of the three chosen to be on the Mount with Him. The eyes of the three are accommodated to this sight by the Holy Spirit. Otherwise they would have been like those on the valley floor below whose eyes saw the noonday sun but not the uncreated light of our Lord’s Transfiguration (Mk. 9:1) when His face “did shine as the sun” (Mt. 17: 2).

The three chosen Apostles had been prepared to see the Lord in glory and did see Him because, in those moments, the Kingdom of God was within them. Before they went up the mountain our Christ had told them, “there be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Kingdom of God”

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<sup>8</sup> *The Way of A Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*. tr. R.M. French © 1965 by Mrs. Eleanor French. Harper Collins Publishers, 10 East 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York NY 10022.

(Lk. 9:27). They then saw our Christ as He prayed, Himself being—as He is eternally—the Kingdom of God, standing before them in uncreated light.

Our Christ tells us that “the Kingdom of Heaven is within you” (cf. Lk. 17:21), those, that is, baptized in a true confession of Faith dwell in the uncreated light of the Kingdom of God. As our years roll by, we are all called to nurture this incomprehensible gift. Saint Mark the Ascetic warns us, “Without remembrance of God,<sup>9</sup> there can be no true knowledge but only that which is false” (#147) but we can stay on track by using the Prayer to purify the conscience and by allowing our conscience to sharpen our prayer through self-reproach (“A good conscience is found through prayer, and pure prayer through the conscience. Each by nature needs the other”)<sup>10</sup>. In this way we can “prove” ourselves and avoid being reprobates, or, in other words, ‘false’.

Have we any better approach to the redeeming power of uncreated Light in our hearts and the threat of spiritual dalliance with anything else than the words of Saint Gregory Palamas:

“We believe what we have been taught by those enlightened by Christ—which they alone know with certainty—“My secrets are for Me and those who are Mine,” as God said through the Prophet (Esaias 24:16 LXX cf. Dan. 2:27ff). So, rightly believing what we were taught, and looking towards the mystery of the Lord’s transfiguration, let us make our way towards the radiance of that light. As we long for the beauty of unchanging glory, let us cleanse the eyes of our understanding from all earthly defilements, despising every delight and beauty that is not lasting, for sweet as it may be, it procures eternal suffering, and though it may enhance the body, it clothes the soul in that ugly robe of sin, on account of which the man without the garment of incorruptible union was bound and taken away into outer darkness” (cf. Mt. 22:11-13).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Remembrance of God’ is the Jesus prayer. This prayer is often simply called ‘The Prayer.’

<sup>10</sup> “*On the Spiritual Law Two Hundred Texts*” #198. The way Saint Mark the Ascetic in this text shows us how The Prayer and our conscience couple to reinforce each other in providing an ongoing ground for spiritual growth appears to be unique in the annals of Orthodox spirituality. Should a new Leo Tolstoy pose such a question as, “*What Significance Does Faith in Jesus Christ as God Have for our Moral Life?*” (Orthodox Companion, 1896), we can enlist Saint Mark the Ascetic’s text #198 as an adequate response. “He who has ears to hear let him hear” (Mt. 11:15 and eight other instances in the Gospels). What else do those of us who have fallow acreage in our hearts need to hear that the plough of prayer may be inserted in those dormant fields so as to see green shoots of new growth springing up in the heart?

<sup>11</sup> *The Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas* © The Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, Essex, UK, 2004, Homily Thirty-Four, p. 144.

“For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ,  
in them that are saved, and in them that perish:  
to the one we are the savour of death unto death;  
and to the other the savour of life unto life.  
And who is sufficient for these things?

2 Cor. 1: 15, 16.



Saint Mark the Ascetic's laconic style may help to draw the reader's attention to the rigorous discipline he exercises in his use of words. Most of his sentences are pithy; some may call them 'one-liners.' There may be those of us who, after sitting down with Saint Mark, realize that they fall short of where they could possibly stand. Our weakness in prayer may be seen as an index of a conscience which lacks training. But is it not prayer, The Prayer, which trains the conscience, just as the conscience sharpens and deepens The Prayer?

Christ is “the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (Jn. 1:9). The holy Fathers identify this light with the conscience of each individual human being.

“If you want spiritual health  
listen to your conscience,  
do all it tells you,  
and you will benefit”  
(*On the Spiritual Law* #69).

Through the prayers of our holy Fathers  
Lord Jesus Christ our God have mercy on us. Amen.

Please refer to this link for a helpful perspective on the Church's Ascetic writings. The Virtual Parish is thankful to Protopresbyter Nektas Palassis for this information.

[http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@texts2/1980\\_kal-ware/07\\_hesyc-ren.htm](http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@texts2/1980_kal-ware/07_hesyc-ren.htm)

