

PARADISE
OF
THE SPIRIT

Part 1
Secon Edition

By
His Grace Bishop Youanis
Late Bishop of the Province of Gharbia,
Tanta, Egypt

PARADISE OF THE SPIRIT

Part 1
Second Edition

By

Bishop Youanis

**Late Bishop of Gharbia
Tanta , EGYPT**

- 1. Repentance**
- 2. Confession**
- 3. Communion**
- 4. Humility**
- 5. Pride**
- 6. Honor**
- 7. The Life of Purity**
- 8. Anger**
- 9. Speaking Out and Keeping Silent**
- 10. Some Sins of the Tongue**
- 11. Condemnation**

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(Picture of)

**Saint Mark the Apostle
Founder of the Coptic Church of Egypt**

(Picture of)

**His Holiness Pope Shenouda III
117th Pope of Alexandria
Patriarch of the See of St. Mark**

(Picture of)

**Anba Youanis
Late Bishop of Province of Gharbia
Tanta, Egypt**

FOREWORD

Bishop Youanis wrote over 20 books in Egypt in the Arabic Language between 1960 and 1987 when he rested in the Lord. These books are considered a great wealth to the Coptic (Egyptian) Orthodox Church and indeed to the whole Christian Church. The first of these books is "Paradise of the Spirit" which he wrote in three parts.

Part 1 of "Paradise of the Spirit" deals with the 'Life of Repentance' and contains 11 chapters on: Repentance, Confession, Communion, Humility, Pride, Honor, Purity, Anger, Speaking and Keeping Silent, Some Sins of the Tongue, and Condemnation.

Part 2 of the same book deals with the 'Spiritual Means' and contains 8 chapters on: Praying, Fasting, Alms, Spiritual Readings, Holy Bible, Spiritual Exercises, Retreat, and Service.

Part 3 of the same book deals with the subjects of 'High Spirituality' and contains 10 chapters which are on: Love of God to Man, Love of Man to God, Love of Man to his Brother, Faith in God, Faith in the Miracles of the Lord Jesus, Hope, Life of Peace, Life of Submission, the Narrow Door, and the Kingdom.

St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Chicago translated into English the 3 parts of this book 'Paradise of the Spirit'.

The present book is the second edition of the English translation of part 1.

May this book become a blessing to our lives and help us to grow in the love of God.

April 2001

**Introduction of Part One of
Paradise of the Spirit
by
Monk Priest
Shenouda El-Soriany**

who later became

Bishop Youanis

THE STORY OF THIS BOOK

This book, first and foremost, is one of the fruits of pain. Pain, about which St. Paul said "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29). This state of pain went back to the time when I had to leave the Monastery for the world because of my illness, and ended by me serving in the Theological College in 'Anba Rowais' (Cairo, Egypt), where I was asked to teach the subject of 'Spiritual Theology', beside the spiritual supervision of the students.

When I started teaching this subject, I could not find books in Arabic, or even in other languages, which deal 'in detail' with 'Christian Virtues', except perhaps some booklets which included scattered glimpses of this subject. I was eager to present to the students of the Theological College, the 'Christian Virtues' defined in a frame, not just as preaching or meditating words.

About four years ago (1956) this idea began growing and my effort continued to grow with it until it ended with a modest result about a year ago (1959). At the end of that year, I had to leave the Monastery and return back to the world for treatment of an acute medical case and I stayed in bed for two and a half months. This last period was a great blessing to me, for in it I wrote this book in its final form, which is now in the hands of the reader, and I felt that the grace of God was very much overpowering my weakness.

I give thanks to God from the bottom of my heart for His Grace which accompanied me, and for His right hand which I felt was holding my right hand in whatever I was writing. Truly, I felt His grace intervening in every stage of producing this book.

I give thanks to God also for the grace which He gave to one of His faithful servants - the most reverend H.G. Anba Thawfilos, Bishop and head of the Monastery of St. Mary (known as El-Soryan) who participated in the uplifting of the monasteries in this generation. He supplied the library of the monastery with hundreds of books, among which were books about the Church Patristic and teachers which he imported from Europe and America. In this library and with the books which Anba Thawfilos imported, we studied. Hence we may truly and fairly say that this

book is also considered one of the fruits of the effort of this constructive enlightened Bishop. May God keep him for the sake of His Holy name.

I also give thanks to God for my fathers the monks of El-Soryan Monastery for their prayers, kindness and advice, specially a certain father who contributed greatly to the subject of this book by his own writings and with his valuable advice which was an important factor in presenting this book in the present form. We wanted to mention his name, but in self-denial he refused. May the Lord God compensate him and write his name in the everlasting book of everlasting life.

I cannot forget to express my sincere thanks to our dear Professor Dr. Wahib Attalla who kindly - in spite of his increasingly busy schedule - reviewed this book.

As I put this modest book into the hands of God Who loved and directed us, I ask Him to make it a blessing to all who read in it the words of Spirit and Life, and Whose grace I ask to be with me in producing parts 2 and 3 of this book.

May God be glorified in our weakness, and to Him be all glory for ever. Amen.

Monk Priest
Shenouda El-Soriany

14 July 1960
7 Abib 1676

Remembrance day of Anba Shenouda, the first hermit

Preface

Dear reader: In this book, we offer you the second edition of the English translation of the first part of the book "Paradise of the Spirit", by the late Bishop Youanis, Bishop of Gharbia, Tanta, Egypt, who slept in the Lord in November 1987.

(Picture of)

Father Samuel Thabet Samuel

May this book be a blessing in your life and help you to grow in the love of God, by the prayers of the father of fathers **His Holiness Pope Shenouda III**.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you

Father Samuel Thabet Samuel
St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Chicago

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**ALL BIBLE QUOTATIONS ARE FROM "THE NEW KING JAMES" VERSION
EXCEPT THE APOCRYPHA
WHICH ARE FROM "THE NEW ENGLISH" VERSION**

CHAPTER 1

REPENTANCE

“But unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

(Luke 13:5)

- A) What does sin do to us?**
- B) What does repentance do?**
- C) Our merciful God Whom we worship**
- D) How do I repent?**
- E) Virtues characterizing the repentant**
- F) Questions about repentance**
- G) Models of repentant people**
- H) From the sayings of the Fathers about repentance**
- I) A prayer for repentance**
- J) A prayer to decide living with God**

God created man pure and holy in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). Because of man's disobedience to the Creator, he sinned and fell. His nature changed and he lost many blessings. He was expelled from the paradise where he used to enjoy God's presence. He lost his peace, his joy and his authority over the creation and was left with sin, the consequences of which he suffered. Of his own free will, he deprived himself from the light and warmth of the Sun of Righteousness.

Before we ride the boat of rescue to go through the sea of repentance on our way to the port of salvation, let us pose a very important question:

What is Sin?

Sin, no matter how lightly thought of or considered as trivial, is still a transgression and disobedience to God. (James 2:11). Sin is a rebellion against God. It is death itself. The Lord Jesus has said that the prodigal son, "was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found." (Luke 15:32)

Sin is weakness, defeat and failure. Man could not control himself but instead submitted himself to the authority of sin and its bondage.

A) WHAT DOES SIN DO TO US?

1. Worry and Loss of Peace:

As a result of his sin, man lost his peace and inherited worry. Therefore, worry is associated with sin; man loses his inner peace which is God's best gift and which St. Paul described as the peace which surpasses all understanding. (Philippians 4:7) The Prophet Isaiah said, "**The wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest,** Whose waters cast up mire and dirt. "**There is no peace,**" Says my God, "**for the wicked.**" (Isaiah 57:20-21) What a description the Prophet gave about the wicked that "they cannot rest." Even if the wicked wants to rest, he cannot; for peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and worry is a fruit of sin. There is no fellowship between darkness and light.

The evil person has an enemy, which bothers him. This enemy is the conscience, to which our Lord Jesus asked us to agree with. “Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him.” (Matthew 5:25) That was evident in Cain’s life after he had killed his brother. He screamed to God saying, “From Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me. And the LORD set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him.” (Genesis 4:14) This mark caused Cain’s conscience to bother him more.

As long as man is away from God, he is a victim of worry until he returns to Him. This is the way God wanted that we should never find complete comfort and peace in this world; so we come back to Him. That is like the dove, which Noah sent out and did not find a comfortable place in the world so it returned to the ark. Again when Jonah escaped from God, he was in trouble in the sea and could not find any way of salvation except by returning to God. He prayed while he was in the whale’s belly and God rescued him.

We read about many criminals, who after the police fail in arresting them, surrender themselves of their own free will and confess their crimes even many years later. This is because they prefer to confess and be punished rather than hide and be bothered by their conscience.

In fact, there is nothing in the world that takes away our peace except sin. Job lost his cattle, sheep; camels and all his children, all in one day yet his catastrophe was not as great as David’s after he had sinned. Job’s temptation could not take away his peace for he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” (Job 1:21) But after David had sinned, we hear him saying, “I am weary with my groaning; All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears.” (Psalms 6:6)

2. Sorrow and Distress:

Sorrow and distress accompany sin. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, (Galatians 5:22) but sadness is a fruit of sin. When the Israelites were in the Babylonian captivity, they sat by the rivers of Babylon surrounded by beautiful willows. But all that magnificent nature could not make them forget the bitterness of captivity from which they were suffering. They mingled the river waters with their tears and instead of joyful songs; weeping and crying voices were heard. They hung their harps upon the willows, for there is no joy in captivity. “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion.” (Psalms 137:1) This psalm reminds us of the spiritual captivity and gives us a picture of the individual who is captured by the devil away from Jerusalem, the city of the Great King, (Matthew 5:35) to Babylon, the city of adultery. (Revelation 14:8, 18:2) That individual has lost his peace and joy saying, “How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land?” (Psalms 137:4)

3. Loss of Hope:

As we have read, worry, sadness and distress are all fruits of sin. These fruits can grow until they reach the point of despair and committing suicide.

4. Bad Relationships with People:

Sin deprives me of my peace with God and fellowship with Him. **Moreover, it deprives me of my peace with people.** Love is the bond of perfection that binds people together; and sin has the opposite effect, for sin in itself is transgression. “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” (1 John 3:4) Sin is transgression against God’s commandments and against people too. What shall we say about the murderer, the thief and the adulterer? Are not their sins considered transgression against others?

5. God's Wrath:

Sin brings God's wrath on people. God cursed the earth which He had created. He told Adam after he had eaten from the tree of which he had been forbidden, “Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil shall you eat of it All the days of your life.” (Genesis 3:17) God burnt Sodom and Gomorrah because of sin and even the intercession of Abraham did not succeed in saving them. God destroyed the ancient world with the flood because of sin, saving only Noah and his family. (2 Peter 2:5-6) Also, God destroyed in one day twenty-three thousand Israelites because they had sinned with the Moabites. (1 Corinthians 10:8) Sin made David cry day and night, wetting his bed with his tears.

Sin deprives man from God’s help. When Achan, Carmi’s son, sinned, God did not help His people and they were defeated in front of the small village of Ai in spite of His previous help to them when they conquered many nations. (Joshua 7) Sin separates us from God and hence He does not hear our cries. “Behold the LORD’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you. So that He will not hear.” (Isaiah 59:1-2) David also said, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, The LORD will not hear.” (Psalms 66:18) Sin deprives us of God’s blessings. “Your iniquities have turned these things away, And your sins have withheld good things from you.” (Jeremiah 5:25)

6. Sin Brings Forth Disease and Shame:

Nothing brings shame to the soul and failure in life except sin. “Righteousness exalts a nation. But sin is a reproach to any people.” (Proverbs 14:34) If you want to know how sound these words are, look at the adulterers and the drunk. **Moreover, sin can cause diseases to the body** as Jesus said in the Bible to the sick man of Bethesda who had been sick for thirty-eight

years, “See, you have been made whole. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.” (John 5:14)

7. Sin Brings Forth Fear:

Man inherits fear and shame from sin, it deprives him of his control even over himself, and he becomes enslaved to bad habits. He becomes afraid of even trivial beings such as weak animals and small insects. That is after he used to live in the paradise with wild animals unharmed by them because they were all under his dominion. (Genesis 1:26) Man lost this dominion of his own free will when he sinned. Consequently, fear entered his life. But through repentance, he struggled to reach a state of righteousness which Adam enjoyed before he sinned. This explains why many saints were able to live with the beasts.

B) WHAT DOES REPENTANCE DO?

Repentance is the message of Christianity. John the Baptist, who prepared the way before the Lord Jesus, called the people to repentance. (Mark 1:4) The Lord Jesus Himself preached “the Gospel of Repentance.” and commanded His disciples to call people to repentance. “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The word "**Metania**" is a Greek word, which means repentance. In its original linguistic meaning, it means the changing of the heart and the changing of one's life. Repentance in the Orthodox understanding is a new life. St. Paul said, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Christianity calls for the renewal of everything and teaches that “No man puts a piece of a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins.” (Matthew 9:16-17) These words of the Lord Jesus explain the correct understanding of repentance. It is a complete change of the whole life, not just putting a new piece on an old garment.

Many saints have spoken about repentance. They said, “**It is a reconciliation with the Lord, second baptism, remission of sins, and a returning to God.** It repairs what sin has damaged and builds up what evil has destroyed. It renews the heart of the sinner and dresses the wicked with the clothes of righteousness. It removes all works of darkness and evil. It heals those who are sick with sin. It raises up those who are dead with transgressions. It is a sea in which all sins are washed away. It attracts those who are living in sin to the kingdom of heaven.”

When we sin, we lose our talents, virtues and blessings, and when we repent, we get them all back. Penance is an open door to salvation. It never closes, for it is God's compassionate bosom: “The one who comes to Me, I will by no means cast out.” (John 6:37)

Penance slows God's wrath. It saved Nineveh's people after the king, men, women and children felt sorry, put on sackcloth and sat in ashes.

C) OUR MERCIFUL GOD WHOM WE WORSHIP

1. The Prophets and Apostles Spoke About God's Mercy:

God's mercy is the basis for the concept of repentance. Because God knows our weak nature, He made this point very clear through His continuous promises in the Holy Bible. In the Old Testament, God said to His people, **"The LORD God is merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."** (Exodus 34:6-7)

David praised God for His great and abundant mercy. In one of the psalms, he was so enthusiastic about God's mercy that he said, "Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies. **The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.** He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him, For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust." (Psalms 103)

David praised God in another psalm saying, "The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works." (Psalms 145:8-9) He said in a third place, "The earth, O LORD, is full of Your mercy." (Psalms 119:64) Also, "For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes." (Psalms 26:3) and **"Your lovingkindness is better than life."** (Psalms 63:3)

Jonah, the prophet, who warned the people of Nineveh that their city would be destroyed because of their sins, became so annoyed with God's mercy that he said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore, I fled previously to Tarshish; for I knew that **You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.**" (Jonah 4:2)

God's great mercy became a subject of meditation for all the saints. Jeremiah, the prophet, says, "Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23) He saw and felt God's mercy new every morning.

These proclamations are given in the Old Testament. **For the New Testament, the covenant of grace and salvation is predominant.** The Bible shows God's great mercy in the

free salvation that God offered us. God's salvation is based on God's mercy because **without mercy, God would not have redeemed us, "He loved us for no reason." He loved us for his great mercy..**

Zachariah, being filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied saying, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, Through the **tender mercy of our God**, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us." (Luke 1:76-78)

St. Paul said, "But God, who is **rich in mercy**, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." (Ephesians 2:4-5) He also said, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but **according to His mercy** He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5) St. Peter said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to **His abundant mercy** has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3)

2. Mercy and Redemption:

What is the relationship between redemption and God's mercy? This relates to the issue of forgiveness in general. For without God's mercy, there would have been no forgiveness and no repentance. I repent to receive forgiveness, for if, God does not forgive me, what is the use of repentance? Let us, then, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we shall die.

How can God forgive my sins? Is there a contradiction to God's justice, which states that "The wages of sin is death?" (Romans 6:23) This could have been true if God's mercy had not interfered. But God's mercy has met God's justice and that is what David stated, "**Mercy and truth are met together**; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other." (Psalms 85:10) God's mercy did not contradict His justice, but it found a solution. That solution is based on God's death to redeem man who sinned. God, who is unlimited takes a human body like us to save man who deserves an unlimited punishment because he disobeyed God's commandment. No angel, nor prophet could have done this deed of redemption.

3. The Merciful God Promises Forgiveness to those Who Repent:

Surely, we can say now that we live in the age of mercy, me. Let us go to Him repenting, confessing our sins, believing in the truth of His promises that He is opening His arms calling everyone, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) "The one who comes to Me, I will by no means cast out." (John 6:37) **He is ready to forget our sins and never remember them**, as the prophet Micah says, "Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. He will again have

compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast our sins Into the depths of the sea.” (Micah 7:18-19)

How numerous are God’s promises, which encourage us to go to Him repenting. He promised that He would forget all our sins and make us new creatures. The Lord says to us by Ezekiel, “But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. “Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord GOD, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?” But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:21-24)

God also says by Isaiah, “Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.” (Isaiah 55:7) St. Peter said, “Repent therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” (Acts 3:19) and “Not willing that any should perish but all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

All these divine sayings comfort the burdened souls and give rest to the troubled hearts. The most important parable which shows God’s great mercy to sinners is that of “the Prodigal Son” (Luke 15) St. Luke started this chapter saying, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them”. (Luke 15:1-2)

Actually the parables which Jesus told, answering the complaints of the Pharisees and scribes and showing God’s great love to the sinners are three: **the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the prodigal son.** Each one of them speaks of God’s great love and His abundant compassion to sinners to such a great extent that one eventually submits to God’s call to repentance and says with Paul before his renewal, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (Acts 9:6) Let us now meditate on the parable of “**The Prodigal Son**”.

4. The Parable of the Prodigal Son:

The son who left his father’s house is an example of the souls who forsake God and His house. That son went to a far off country where he wasted his money in riotous living. Then he began to be in need. So he worked feeding the swines and he wanted to fill his belly with the husks that the swines did eat. **All this gives us a picture as to what sin and living away from God might lead to.** But as soon as that son felt how bad his situation was, he arose and came to

his father asking forgiveness. This parable shows us the steps toward repentance. The Lord Jesus said regarding that son, “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20)

How explicit this illustration is by which the Lord Jesus wanted to show His great love and compassion to sinners. “But when he was yet a great way off.” What do these words show us except waiting? The father, emotionally moved, waits for his son who had forsaken him and asked for the portion of goods that falls to him, without being ashamed of himself. If this is the case with the physical father whose life is full of weaknesses, how much then of the feelings of the Heavenly Father toward His children? He said to us saying, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:11)

What was the reaction of the father upon seeing his lost son? “He had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.” The father did all that toward his son even before the son uttered one word of apology or proved his sorrow. All these steps are not very appropriate for the father. Is not this more appropriate for the son? But that is love which forgets all sins. If the physical father showed that great love toward his sinful son, how much greater is God’s love toward His children whom the devil has enslaved under his authority? He is the One Who said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. For I did come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” (Matthew 9:12-13)

How did the son act toward his father? While the son was in the far off country, he promised himself to apologize to his father, saying, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.” (Luke 15:18-19) However, it happened that when he met his father, he uttered those words but the father did not let him say the last sentence which is, “Make me as one of your hired servants.” This behavior on the part of the father has a very important significance in our relationship with God for we never lose our sonship to the Heavenly Father, no matter how many sins we may have committed.

Therefore, our church, through which we become children of God, holds that baptism should never be re-administered, even if one denied the faith and repented. We should never forget the fact that we are the children of God. He paid His precious blood as price for this sonship. “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without Spot.” (1 Peter 1:18-19) The expression "Our Father" is a beautiful one, which the Lord rejoices in hearing. That is why He asked His disciples to use it. “When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven.” (Luke 11:2)

What happened after the lost son apologized and repented? The father ordered his servants to “Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on

his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; **for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.**” (Luke 15:22-24) The son became naked by sinning and the father put clothes on him. (Genesis 3:7) We might ask ourselves, Does not the older son, who spent his life obeying his father, deserve all that? But this is the compassion of the father, for the father pities the sick son more than the rest of his brothers. Likewise, the Heavenly Father pities the spiritually sick more than the ninety-nine who do not need a doctor.

The ring put on his hand is a sign of the covenant between the father and his son. He does not remember his sins anymore. All that the father cared was to cover his son’s nakedness so that he might look like a son again, as if he had not done any evil. All that the son offered his father were his feelings expressed in some words. But the father rewarded him with all his blessings. Likewise in our relationship with our Heavenly Father, we need only offer Him our feelings and some words and tears, and He will accept us and give us of His abundant richness and spiritual gifts to compensate all that we lose by sinning.

D) HOW DO I REPENT?

1. Examine Yourself:

The first step in repentance is to sit with yourself and examine it as the Prodigal Son did. Think how miserable you are and how you have lost your peace. Tell yourself, “How many hired servants of my Heavenly Father have bread enough to spare (spiritual gifts) and I perish with hunger (spiritually)? How did I lose my happiness, my comfort, my joy and peace? What have I gained from my dark life by living in sin? If you are frank and sincere with yourself, you will end up in a deep prayer from a heart full of shame and eyes full of tears, and you will start beating upon your chest in sorrow saying the same words, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before You and am no more worthy to be called your son, make me as one of Your hired servants.”

Truly, examining oneself is one of the major factors in building up the spiritual life. All the saints have talked about its importance. You may be ashamed to tell others about what is inside you, and you may not accept others to rebuke or direct you, but you are not ashamed of yourself when you rebuke it and be strict with it.

Examining oneself does not consist of looking at the negative factors only, that is remembering your sins, but at the positive too, that is, the virtues. He who does not continuously struggle may be indifferent in his emotions toward God; like a flying bird, it cannot go upwards if it does not flap its wings.

The purpose of examining oneself is to overcome one's mistakes and trespasses that one is enslaved to. Remember all the persons, circumstances and situations that caused you to sin. Then put the blame on yourself for your failings.

Example: If you get nervous frequently, ask yourself: Why did I lose my temper when such a person was talking to me? Why did I not accept his words with a simple heart? Even if his words frustrated me, why did I not endure him like Jesus Who endured all the evil doers? Are these insults like the ones Jesus endured? Am I a faithful disciple to the Lord who said, "A servant is not greater than his master, nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him." (John 13:16) The reason for losing my temper was my lack of love for that person, that is why I did not accept his words with love and I reacted in a rush.

The purpose of examining oneself is to find a cure for your sins and to be circumspect in your spiritual life. "See then that you walk circumspectly." (Ephesians 5:15)

Warning: Remembering our sins is beneficial but we need be warned here of something the devil might use to harm us. Sometimes, when one remembers his sins, the devil leads one back to the atmosphere of sin and excites his emotions. This happens in the case of the following sins: lust of the flesh, wrath, hatred and vainglory. Our church prays in the Divine Liturgy, "Purify us from all lust, deceit, hypocrisy, all evil deeds, and the memory of evil that entails death." As soon as you realize that the devil is fighting you in this respect, stop such thoughts immediately. If the devil fights you again, stop this method and use a different one.

When Do You Examine Yourself? The best time is:

1. Immediately after sinning so you would feel sorry and repent right away.
2. At the end of the day, so that you may start a new life the next day.
3. Before confession in front of the priest, so that your confession may be complete.
4. At the end of the week, so on the weekend you might have rest for the body and comfort of the soul.
5. At the end of the year: If we had behaved in God's fear and felt how much He helped us during the year, we say thankfully, "You crown the year with Your goodness, And Your paths drip with fatness." (Psalms 65:11) But if our life had not been acceptable in His eyes, and the tree of our life carried only leaves and not fruits, we remember the voice crying in the wilderness, "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 3:10) We supplicate the Lord saying, "Sir, let it alone this year also." (Luke 13:8)

St. Gregory the Theologian mentioned that the Christians used to do their yearly self-examinations during Epiphany because they renewed the covenant, which they had made with God when they were baptized.

End self-examination with a Prayer: After you sit with yourself to examine it, lift up your heart to God either confessing your sins and asking for forgiveness, or thanking Him for His grace and help - asking Him to help you to the end. When you examine yourself immediately after you committed a sin, lift up your heart to God either in sorrow and repentance or in thankfulness even if you are in a public crowded place.

2. Think of the Consequences of Sin:

Think of the consequences of sin that we have talked about previously in this chapter. **You have to realize that sin insults God, separates you from Him,** deprives you of your peace, and brings God's wrath upon you. That is why the saints used to weep for their sins. David, a great king, used to wet his bed with his tears every night because of a sin, which he had committed. He, the great Psalmist, said, "My sin is ever before me." (Psalms 51:3)

Sometimes we try to forget our sins and comfort ourselves by outer artificial means such as going to a recreational place. Remember your sins and cry and repent. Your tears will wash your sins. St. John Chrysostom said, "If you remember your sins, God will forget them; but if you forget them, God will remember them."

3. Comfort and Salvation Are Found Only in Jesus:

Know that true comfort and perfect joy and peace that passes all understanding cannot be obtained except from Jesus Who said, "**Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**" (Matthew 11:28) He gave His disciples perfect peace and left to all believers a permanent holy gift, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." (John 14:27)

Be sure that salvation from sin and its dominion is only through Jesus Christ, by believing in His name, His power, His help, by hoping for His mercy, and by using all the means of salvation which the church has laid for us. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) No matter how much you struggle against sin or try to overcome your bad habits, you cannot succeed without the help of Jesus Christ Who said, "For without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5)

Hence, do not depend on your will, your wisdom or your spiritual knowledge, but on the strong hand of God. Let God be everything in your life and remember the words of the Psalmist, David, "Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain." (Psalms 127:1)

4. Think How Trivial And Vain the World is:

You have to realize that the world is “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 1:2) **Use the world but do not let the world use you.** Live in the world but do not let the world live in your heart. Many great people and kings departed, but where are they now? If you go to the graves, can you distinguish the bones of a king from the bones of an ordinary man?

Do not let the glory of this vain world distract you from the salvation of your soul or tempt you. The devil dared even to tempt Jesus. “He showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and said unto Him, “All these things will I give You” Jesus said unto him, “Away with you Satan!” (Matthew 4:9-10) The glory of this world is compared to a lamp, which attracts the beautiful butterflies, which dance merrily around it, but soon they fall inside it and are burnt. Remember the parable of the foolish rich man who told himself, “Eat, drink and be merry.” The Lord told him, “You fool! This night your soul will be required of you” (Luke 12:19-20)

5. Know How Valuable Your Soul Is:

If you knew the value of your soul you would not neglect its salvation nor postpone your repentance. Your soul is worth more than the whole world. Jesus said, “For what is a man profited, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26) The price of your soul is the blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed for your salvation. It is pathetic that some people do not care for their souls. If their shoes or clothes get dirty, they hurry to clean them, but they never care about cleaning their souls and straightening their ways. We live now in the age of mercy, but tomorrow you shall be in the age of justice. If you insult justice here, you may ask for mercy; but if you do not care for mercy here, what will be your status there?

6. Do Not Postpone Repentance:

Never postpone your repentance for there are many in hell now, who had departed from this world while they still had the hope of repenting sometime in the future. Beware of doing like the five foolish virgins whom when the bridegroom came and found not ready, and the door was shut, they cried in vain, “Lord, Lord open to us.” The answer was, “Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.” (Matthew 25:11-12) Remember also the rich man, who as his ground brought forth plentifully, thought of enriching his barns and never thought of his salvation. He said to himself, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” (Luke 12:16-20) God’s immediate response was, “You, fool, this night your soul shall be required of you.”

Solomon said, “To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under the heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1) When is then the time for repentance? It is not old age, for salt is put on meat to preserve it, but what is the use of salt after the meat has been spoiled? It is of no use postponing repentance until you get old, after the smell of sin has been diffused It is

mentioned that one of the skillful photographers began drawing the picture of a human being starting from his feet. But soon he realized that the space provided was not sufficient to include the head, so the picture appeared without the head. Likewise, some people postpone repentance, which is the head. Neither a picture without a head is expressive nor life without repentance acceptable? One of the fathers said, "Repentance is the mother, look after the mother, it will produce children." He meant virtues.

One might say, "Why not postpone repentance?" The answer is that probably during the period in which you postponed repentance, you discover new ways of sinning which you come to like more and you might not become enthusiastic about living a holy life any longer. How do you know that your eagerness to lead a pure, holy life will remain with you in the future? During that period, your ideas and outlook on life might change and you might think that it is very hard to apply the Christian principles in this world. Again, during that period, your will power might weaken.

7. Beware of Despair:

Sometimes, when you remember your sins, the devil may lead you to despair. Look to your Master in His love to sinners. Remember His picture opening His arms, calling everyone to comfort, regardless of his sins, to free him from the bonds of the devil. Do not be afraid "for you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15) Ask God to grant you repentance. "Restore me, and I will return, For You are the LORD my God." (Jeremiah 31:18)

The request surely acceptable to God is the request for the salvation of your soul. This request is according to God's will as St. Paul says, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God, our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:3-4) I might make requests to God but He does not answer them as He knows that they are not good for my salvation, even when these requests were for certain virtues. God knows that such virtues are above my spiritual status and will lead me to pride, which God does not want. However, God will always accept the prayer for your salvation because this is His will. Mar Isaac said, "There is nothing more favorable and acceptable in the sight of God than a person praying for the forgiveness of his sins."

We have seen one kind of despair. Another kind is the one by which the devil tries to complicate God's way, tempting us with monotony and boredom. Nevertheless, we have to know that God's way is not covered with roses. It is enough that Jesus described it as narrow and straight, "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads unto life." (Matthew 7:14) At the beginning of the life of repentance, many might retreat. God led the Israelites out of Egypt, but as soon as they arrived in the wilderness, they started thinking back of the material blessings they had in the land of Egypt. They preferred the garlic they ate in the land of bondage to the food of the angels as they were free in the wilderness.

In our spiritual life, there is an important principle; the principle of “Struggle”: do not expect comfort and ease. If this were so, one would have not fasted, prayed or struggled in spiritual battles. Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent takes it by force.” (Matthew 11:12) Also, St. Paul said, “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.” (Hebrews 12:4) The more we struggle in the life of repentance, the more God’s help is granted to us. Mar Isaac said, “As much as one struggles and overcomes himself for the sake of God, as much as the divine help surrounds him and makes his struggle easy.”

God’s way does not remain that difficult, for God’s promises encourage us and His inner voice supports us. When God sees our perseverance in overcoming our weaknesses for His love, He fights for us and stops all the temptations. St. Macarius, the Great, said, “The more one strives for God’s sake, even if he forces himself unwillingly to do God’s will, the more chances that one day he will do it willingly and happily.” St. Sefemeeky said, “Those who want to follow God’s way have to struggle greatly at the beginning and eventually they will be very joyful; like the ones who want to start a fire, at first their eyes will be full of smoke, but later, they will enjoy the fire.

8. All Sins Can Be Forgiven:

Every sin, no matter how evil it is, can be forgiven as long as one has a sincere intention to repent. **“Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemes they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation.”** (Mark 3:28-29) Blaspheming against the Holy Spirit which is never forgiven is not a sin by itself. It is a spiritual condition, which a person reaches. He wants to do evil and keeps being stubborn, not listening to the rebukes of the conscience and the Holy Spirit.

It is different from committing adultery, killing, or stealing. Any person may commit the worst sins or he may even blaspheme against the Son of God unbelievably. St. Paul did that before God renewed his life. All this can be forgiven by the influence of the Holy Spirit Who leads us to repentance. But he who refuses the work of the Holy Spirit does not listen to the voice of his conscience will not be granted the forgiveness of his sins forever. He has refused all the means which rebuke him. “And when He (the Holy Spirit) has come, He will convict the world of sin.” (John 16:8) The Holy Spirit reproves me of my sins. Hence, if I refuse His work or blaspheme against Him, I will never repent and will never be forgiven. **Mar Isaac said, “There is no sin that cannot be forgiven except the one without repentance.”**

9. Beware Of Carelessness:

After having discussed God’s great mercy and His love to sinners and His readiness to accept even the worst of them, we now draw your attention to an important point: Do not take advantage of God’s great mercy and kindness, lest this should lead you to carelessness. **God is**

not only merciful, but He is just as well. “His tender mercies are over all His works” (Psalms 145:9) yet He is still just.

St. John Chrysostom said, “You who do not believe in eternal punishment, tell me who killed with the flood all the people in Noah’s time? Who burnt Sodom, Gomorrah, and seven other cities? Who drowned Pharaoh and all his soldiers in the Red Sea? Who killed the six hundred thousand Jews in the wilderness? Who burnt Abiram? Who ordered the earth to open its mouth and swallow Korah, Dathan and Abiram? Who killed seventy thousand in David’s time? Who killed eighty-five thousand of the Assyrians in one night? Therefore, never take advantage of God’s mercy. Remember what Jesus said about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, and about the eighteen upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3)

We live now in the age of mercy, but tomorrow we will be in the age of justice and there is a big difference by which God treats people in both ages. God was incarnate and granted us eternal redemption; and He is coming again in His glory to judge the living and the dead and to reward everyone according to his deeds.

In His first coming, “He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:7-8) In His first coming, He came as a shepherd seeking the lost sheep; but in His second coming, He will come as a judge, in His glory and the glory of His Father surrounded by all the angels and saints.

In His first coming, no man shall hear His voice in the streets; a bruised reed shall He not break and smoking flax shall He not quench. However, in His Second Coming, He will come in His glory with the song of the trumpet and the falling of the planets. In His first coming, He was long suffering, kind to sinners, did not condemn them, although He is the Judge. He even said to the adulterous woman, “Neither do I condemn you.” (John 8:11) When a man asked Him for dividing the inheritance with brother, He answered, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” (Luke 12:14) He endured the blasphemers, forgave those who insulted Him. However, in His Second Coming, He will come as a just judge giving everyone according to his deeds.

In His first coming, He came as a Bridegroom to Whom we were all engaged. He said to everyone in love and meekness, “Listen O daughter, Consider and incline your ear, Forget your own people also, and your father’s house, So the King will greatly desire your beauty.” (Psalms 45: 10-11). He compared us to the virgins who are waiting for the Bridegroom and He paid His precious blood as an expensive dowry. In His Second Coming, He will come as a King conquering the rebellious. He had sent apostles and missionaries of peace. The sinners did not listen to them and killed them. In the Second Coming, He comes to judge the world. “For the hour is coming in the which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and shall come forth –

those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." (John 5:28-29)

On this day, what will the sinners do? "And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:15-17).

But thanks be to God Who is very patient with us and Who gives us a chance to repent and bring forth fruits. He lifted the axe kindly on the root of the tree and said, "Leave it another year." Let us all repent for the days are evil and let us all wake from our carelessness for the day of our life is far spent.

E) VIRTUES CHARACTERIZING THE REPENTANT

The life of repentance is a special life which has its own characteristics and its virtues which spring out of the repentant's heart. If such virtues do not exist in the life of the repentant, we cannot consider him a true repentant. **Some virtues are:**

1. Broken Spirit:

A repentant is a person who rises up from sin; all his sins and evil thoughts are not forgotten but they remind him of his weakness and of his evil heart. All his sins remind him of his inability to resist sin, the devil, the flesh and the world - all of which are shameful to him. Therefore, he develops a broken spirit inwardly and a humble appearance outwardly. He is like a person who woke up from his sleep and found himself empty in front of God. He has not done a single good deed and whenever he looks at his life, he feels so ashamed of himself. His past is full of sins and his future is unpredictable - he might fall again as he did before.

A broken spirit and remembering one's sins are two important matters in the life of repentance. If one forgets his sins, his broken-spiritedness gradually cools down. If one remembers his good deeds, he loses his broken-spiritedness. Happy is the man who remembers his sins, and keeps them in front of him all the time. His tears bring him humility and forgiveness. St. Antony said, "If we remember our sins, God will forget them, and if we forget our sins, God will remember them."

Two repentant persons with broken spirits are reminding themselves of their sins. The first one has led a long life of repentance, forgotten his sins but reminds himself of them. He struggles and leads a new life and do good deeds. Yet, he keeps reminding himself of them until he goes back to his broken-spiritedness. The second person has not forgotten his sins. They are constantly in front of him. Neither the time nor the good deeds can make him forget his sins. This is what happens to the sensitive person with a good conscience. As time goes on and more opportunities for growth in the holy life are available, he feels how awful and bad his sins are and regrets more having committed them. He sees his sins above his good deeds, so he does not remember his good deeds but constantly remembers his sins.

Blessed is the repentant who examines himself everyday and reminds himself of his sins and confesses them to God and prays with tears. Blessed is he if he reminds himself of his sins every time people or the devil praises him.

Blessed is the repentant who grows in grace and constantly examines himself and discovers his weaknesses every day. Blessed is he because he never forgets his sins but rather discovers new sins in himself daily. Blessed is he because he evaluates himself and finds

himself still deficient. Whenever he reads about a new virtue or commandment in the life of a saint, he tries to train himself to acquire it.

Blessed is he who realizes that a broken spirit is a virtue not only for beginners in their early life of repentance, but it continues throughout the repentant's life. St. Paul continued to remember his sins, although it was due to ignorance. Even after having been caught up to the third heaven, having seen a revelation of the Lord, having heard and seen things which cannot be told or uttered, and after many years of performing miracles, he still said, "I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." (1 Corinthians 15:9)

2. Tears:

The tears of a repentant are always present. Whenever he stands in front of God, he cries. Whenever he remembers his sins, he cries. Moreover, whenever he sees others' sins, he cries. In his quiet time, in his readings, in his prayers and sometimes in his talks, his tears are always present. The prophet David said, "I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears." (Psalms 6:6) also, "I have eaten ashes like bread. And mingled my drink with weeping." (Psalms 102:9)

The tears of the repentant are not tears of fear, but tears of sensitivity, tears of sorrow and feeling deficient, tears of a person who feels that he has despised his Beloved and made Him sad. In spite of the forgiveness of his sins, the sensitive person cannot imagine how he did all that to his Beloved and feels very sorry; so, he weeps.

A person can think before he does any action, and if he does not like it, he is free to refuse doing it; but if he has already done the action, he is not free to choose. He has nothing to do, if the action was wrong, except to weep - the weeping of a crippled who cannot undo a wrong action which has already been done. A person can apologize or do a good deed to make up for the bad consequences, but he cannot undo the action since it has already been done. Then, when all doors are closed, the door of tears opens so he enters through it in order that he might find some comfort.

The tears of the saints are plentiful. Some of them are tears of love, tears of joy, or tears of emotions, and some are tears of repentance. An example of how sensitive a person is in the life of repentance is the following story, which St. Bebenouda related about himself. He said, "When I was young, I saw a cucumber falling from a camel on the ground. I picked it up and ate it. Whenever I remember that incident, I weep." This happened when he was a boy. When he grew up, he became a monk, grew in grace, and performed miracles. He succeeded St. Macar and became the father of many monks and still whenever he remembered that incident, he wept.

3. Taking the Last Seat:

A person with a broken spirit is humble inwardly as well as outwardly because his inner feelings are reflected in his behavior. In his inner self, he certainly knows that he is a sinner and the worst of all people. In his eyes, his sins are the biggest burden and are more than the sins of all people. Therefore, he does not condemn anyone and whenever he sees any person sinning, he wishes that his own sins were that light and not as awful as they are. Hence, he realizes that he is the least of all people, he takes the last seat considering himself unworthy of even that last seat.

Whenever he is invited by God's blessed people to a meeting, a special party or a spiritual gathering, he attends it while he is ashamed of himself and he tells himself, "Who am I to sit with those saints? Blessed is the Lord who did not reveal my sins to them lest they prevent me from attending." He enters the meeting place and never sits in a front seat but rather in the back, still thinking that his presence is spoiling the beauty of this gathering. He rebukes himself saying, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Whenever he enters the church, he does it hesitantly and in fear, then stands in an unnoticed place while praying, "Let not your anger come on this holy place because of me." In spite of his not sitting in the front seat or not daring to enter the altar or to raise his voice, he remains in his last seat fearing that any of his old friends might see him and wonder about his presence in the church saying, "How could this evil person dare enter here?"

This last seat accompanies him everywhere and in every behavior. For example: if people talk, he remains quiet feeling that he is not worthy to talk. If people ask him to give his opinion, he tells himself, "How can I give my opinion about good deeds while I am an evil person? It is better for me to keep quiet." If he has to talk, he is the last one to talk, saying to himself, "Who am I to talk?"

In his entire behavior, he prefers others to himself, and gets away from all opportunities, which give him glory. He respects everyone, big and small, considering himself the least of them all. He tells himself, "All those people will enter the kingdom of heaven before me, and will be better than me if I am worthy to be with them." He respects even the sinners and never condemns them but is kind to them because he has experienced sin and has known how severe it is. He feels that all sinners are better than himself because they have not fallen to the extent he has fallen.

People might say that he is a humble person, but in fact, he does behave like that to be humble but because of his feeling of unworthiness. If people ignore him or neglect him, he does not feel that he is being humiliated, but he tells himself, "I have been treated fairly and I do not deserve anything except that."

He also forbears others and feels, deeply in his heart, that he deserves any insult from others and tells himself, "This was because of my sins. Therefore, he is never angry with anyone

and says with the right hand thief, “We fairly deserve this.” He always blames himself assuring himself that his sins are the cause of it all.

4. Humility

Such person, who has a broken spirit, who feels that he deserves all blame, is certainly a humble person. He can never be proud or praise himself. He never talks of his good deeds because he remembers his awful deeds. He does not feel it is right to give others a distorted idea about himself by talking about his good deeds and not showing his awful sins.

Whenever he is tempted to talk about himself or about his new spiritual experiences, he says, “Can I tell people about the rest of my life and reveal to them my awful sins?” As he refuses to praise himself, he refuses to accept praise from others too. He tells himself, “Anyone who is a sinner like me does not deserve to be praised by others, or else he is a hypocrite who does not show others the truth about himself.”

He never excuses himself and does not defend himself even if he is unjustly accused. If he is tempted inwardly, he tells himself, “Why do I complain when I am accused of an evil deed which I did not do and I did not complain when people praise me for virtues I do not possess or good deeds which I did not do? Moreover, this evil deed which I am accused of is nothing compared to the numerous sins I have committed in my life. Even if I am not guilty this time, I did commit sins before, so I fairly deserve this accusation.”

5. Caution:

A repentant, who has experienced sin and knows its pressure on him and his own weakness to overcome it, is very cautious. He fears that he might fall again, so he is cautious even with trivial matters because he is afraid they might lead into major sins. In his repentance, he never thinks he can overcome sin, but always thinks he is weak at overcoming the smallest sin; therefore, he escapes from sin and the ways leading to it.

This extreme caution is one of the major factors, which made the saints never go back to their sins.

6. Mingling All His Virtues With the Spirit of Repentance:

The virtues of the repentant are characterized by a special spirit. They are all mingled with a broken spirit and a feeling of unworthiness. For example: he fasts not only to bring his body into subjection, but also because he feels his unworthiness to eat food. He sometimes tells himself, “Many have committed evil sins like mine and are now in prison; they do not have the freedom to eat whatever they want and here I am free and enjoying food. This is because my sins are not known. Those prisoners are better than me because their sins are apparent and they have

received their due punishment, but my sins are not known and I have not received my punishment. The least I do is to deprive myself of enjoying food.”

This story is about a soldier who repented and became a monk. When people tried to honor him, he deserted that place telling himself, “Let me go away and eat the food of the beasts since I have committed evil sins like the beasts.” This applies not only to fasting but also to prayers, tears, etc.

F) QUESTIONS

1. Are There Stages In Repentance?

The repentance of some of the saints, like St. Augustine and St. Moses the black, were sudden and perfect because of God’s grace and the readiness of their hearts. However, the common procedure is that the repentant go through certain stages.

The first stage: Contrition for sin as we discussed earlier.

The second stage: Struggling with sin. When someone is sorry for his sins, this does not mean that the devil will not tempt him any more. The devil will fight him but all his attempts will fail. The devil will try to remind him of his previous sins and his past life. The repentant have to be very watchful for all the temptations of the devil during this stage. He has to surround himself with a pure environment. If he is tempted by sin, he should get away from it. St. Paul called this stage, “The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another.” (Galatians 5:17)

The third stage: Mental victory over sin. We mean that he is convinced that sin, with all its means and ways, is wrong. No doubt, this is considered victory for him.

This does not mean that the repentant has completely rid himself of sin, but there may still be an inner struggle to forsake it from his heart. In this stage, the repentant needs certain kinds of struggle and spiritual exercises upon which he trains himself under the guidance of the spiritual father.

All of these steps do not mean that the repentant have reached a perfection of repentance, for this means the hatred of sin. This is what St. Paul said, “Abhor what is evil.” (Romans 12:9)

2. Life with God is characterized with joy, while that of repentance, by regret and sadness because of sin. Is there contradiction between the two?

There is no contradiction between being joyful and being sorrowful in the life of the repentant. He is sorrowful but hopeful at the same time. He is happy because he is returning to

God. Hope is a great Christian virtue besides faith and love. (1 Corinthians 13:13) The sorrow of the repentant should be mingled with hope and hope produces joy, peace, and quietness.

The repentant is sad because he feels he has insulted God and has met His great love with ingratitude, but at the same time, he put God's promises of accepting the sinners joyfully and that Jesus Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

Moreover, the joy that fills the heart of the repentant is the result of his feeling that he has reached God himself, God who has revealed Himself to him and has rebuked him on his sins and lit for him the road of life. When the repentant reads St. Paul's words that he was earlier a persecutor of the church, and the words, "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more," (Romans 5:20) he feels embarrassed in front of God's great love and compassion and how he had treated God's blessings with his sins. Therefore, his eyes are filled with tears, that of a broken heart from God's great love, and that of joy for His wonderful salvation.

G) MODELS OF REPENTANT PEOPLE

1. David the Prophet and King: (2 Samuel 11-12)

David looked at a woman who was bathing and his heart was filled with lust and he could not resist sin. Sin enslaved him without pity and made him fall in two terrible crimes: the sins of adultery and killing. However, God's great mercy interfered and sent him Nathan, the prophet, to rebuke him. David then confessed his sin in humility and with a broken heart. God accepted his true repentance by forgiving him. Nathan told David, "The LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die." (2 Samuel 12:13) **In spite of that, David wept for his sins and wet his bed with his tears.** He cried out saying, "My sin is ever before me."

2. St. Moses the Black (Fourth Century):

He started his life as a murderer, a robber and a gang leader but ended his life as a great saint and a spiritual leader to thousands of saints. One day, while he was walking in the Nitria Valley, probably escaping from the authorities, he found himself in front of an old saint. He was bored from his life of robbery and murder so his heart was open to the words of the saint. He decided to repent and stay in the wilderness of Sheheat. He longed for the monastic life, so he went to his spiritual father, St. Isidoros, and confessed his sins. He struggled in his ascetic life. He was very harsh on himself, trying to make up for what had passed from his life in sin and evil. Even his spiritual guide used to advise him to be less severe in his struggle. Many became his disciples and he was well known all over the wilderness. His body lies beside his spiritual father in the Baramous Monastery.

3. St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.):

He was one of the greatest teachers in the East and West. He was an author, a writer, a philosopher, **a bishop and the saint whose repentance had exceeded his sins and his holiness exceeded the ignorance of his youth.** His mother was a righteous Christian who taught him the principles of Christianity and spiritual life since his early childhood. However, as soon as he finished his preparatory school years, under the influence of atheist teachers, he started forgetting the principles of religion. In addition, his reading of many books by atheist philosophers influenced his life greatly until he deviated and indulged in adultery. After he repented, he said, "I used to be ashamed of not doing evil." However, his righteous mother did not stop praying with tears for him. When St. Ambrose saw her weeping, he told her, "The son of these tears cannot perish."

He knew God's way at the age of thirty-three and started the life of repentance and tears. His mother died after she rejoiced at the repentance of the fruit of her womb. Then he sold his possessions and distributed the money to the poor and became a monk. He started the ascetic life, prayer, study, writing and ministry of the Word and Church. He was ordained a

priest, then a bishop of one of the cities of North Africa and became one of the greatest philosophers of Christianity and very famous in Bible commentary. He also struggled in defending the faith and answering the heretics. He became an authority in the Christian dogma in his generation. His numerous books are in our hands. In one of his famous books, "Confessions," we read his excellent phrase, "Lord, You have created us for You and our hearts will remain restless till we find our comfort in You."

4. St. Baiesa (Fourth Century):

She was born in the town of "Menouf" in Egypt, from rich, righteous parents. She followed their example in righteousness. When they died, she made her house a refuge for strangers and the needy. She spent all her money on the poor. However, some evil people influenced her to change her house into a house of prostitution. The elders of Sheheat heard about her and were very sad, so they sent St. John the Short to her. As soon as he saw her, he said, "Why did you insult your Lord Jesus Christ and bring this evil matter to your house?" She was troubled from his words and her heart was touched.

Then St. John looked to the ground and started weeping. She asked him, "Why do you weep?" He told her, "Because I see the devils playing on your face." She asked him, "Can I repent?" He said, "Yes, but not in this place." She answered, "Take me wherever you want." She hurried after him until they entered the wilderness. When it was dark, he told her, "You stay here," and he went farther away from her.

While he was praying at midnight, **he saw a pillar of light descending from heaven to the earth and the angels of the Lord carrying her soul.** He approached her and found her dead. He wanted to know whether her repentance was accepted by God and that she was saved. He prayed to God to reveal her secret to him. **Then he heard a voice telling him, "Her repentance was accepted on the same hour she had repented more than those who repented for many years and did not show such fervent repentance."** After the elders buried her body, he told them what had happened and they glorified God. The Coptic Church celebrates her departure on 2nd day of the Coptic month Misra.

5. St. Mary the Egyptian (First half of the fifth century):

She left her father's house at the age of twelve to live in sin and evil in the city of Alexandria. She lived seventeen years in adultery. One day she saw a ship sailing to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Cross. She went on just to satisfy her dirty lusts.

In Jerusalem, she tried to enter the church to receive a blessing from the holy cross, as other Christians were doing. She felt an invisible hand preventing her from entering the church.

She tried several times but all her attempts failed. Suddenly, she felt how terrible her life was and she started crying bitterly in front of St. Mary's icon and promised God to devote the rest of her life to worshipping God in the wilderness. Then she was able to enter the church and receive the blessing from the holy cross.

She left this church and went to another where she confessed to the priest and received communion. When she was 29 years old, she went to the wilderness of the Jordan. She lived there a life of repentance for 47 years, worshipping God very piously fighting the devil who was tempting her very harshly. She progressed in the spiritual life and God granted her to prophecy and know the future. She did not meet any person until the last year of her life when she met father Zosima who gave her the Holy Communion before she departed.

6. Deacon Habib Farag (1941):

I have known this man who was a servant in Sunday school. **He started his life away from God but ended his life a righteous man who wrote in his diary the date and hour of his departure.** He started his life a stubborn person completely against religion, who lived to the world and for the world. One of the youth kept inviting him to attend the Bible Study meeting at St. Antony's Church in Shoubra, but he refused constantly. Finally, one day he accepted to go to the church on condition that no one would ask about him if he did not want to attend the meeting again.

He was touched by the words he heard at the church meeting and he saw a strange vision that night. He saw St. Mary taking him to Hades where everyone was suffering and crying. He became terrified and asked to get out of that place. Then St. Mary took him to the Paradise where he saw the saints shining. St. Mary started pointing at the saints, saying: "This is our father Abraham, this is David the Prophet, this is St. Antony, etc. He noticed that the saints were sitting on strange lighted chairs. One of these chairs was empty. He asked surprisingly, "Who left his chair empty?" St. Mary answered him, "This is your chair if you follow Jesus Christ."

He woke up determined to repent and to reach that chair which was waiting for him. He started his spiritual struggle very severely. He worked in the government and stayed there until he departed at a young age. God was glorified in his short life by many miracles. Many saw a great light surrounding him while he was praying in his own room and his hands lifted up were like lit candles. Finally, he departed at the age of twenty-seven.

H) FROM THE SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS ABOUT REPENTANCE

1. Mari Afram the Syrian:

My fathers and brothers let us hear a saying, which saves our souls. Let us buy the salvation of our souls. Let us find eternal life. Fill your eyes with tears, then the eyes of your minds will open. Come, all of you, rich and poor, employers and employees, old and young, girls and boys, anyone who wants to be saved from the eternal punishment and inherit eternal life.

Let us say with David; "Open my eyes so I may see wonders out of Your law." "Enlighten my eyes lest I die." Let us cry with the blind man, "O Son of God, have mercy on me." If people try to stifle us, let us scream louder so that Jesus opens the eyes of our hearts because He is the Giver of Light. Draw near Jesus, come closer to Him and be enlightened and your faces will not be ashamed.

Let us repent, my brethren, as long as we have time. You have heard what Christ said, "There is great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents." O sinner, why are you late, do not lose hope. If there is great joy in heaven if you repent, why are you weary? The angels will be happy, so why are you slow? The Lord of the angels wants you to repent and you flee away! The Holy Trinity to Whom is the worship, is calling you and you are still late!

Everyone will be rewarded according to his deeds at the day of judgement. Everyone will reap what he sowed. We all have to stand bare in front of the throne of Christ and everyone has to give an account for himself and no one can help the other in that hour. The parents cannot help their children or the children their parents, nor friends or brothers nor husbands nor wives can help each other.

Why do we not get ready while we still have time? Why do we neglect the Holy Books and the words of Christ? Or do you think His sayings and the sayings of the saints will not condemn you on that day if you do not keep them? You have heard what the Lord said to His disciples, "He, who hears from you, hears from Me. He who does not hear from Me, I do not condemn him but the word itself will condemn him on the last day."

Blessed are those who are thirsty and hungry, for they shall be filled. Woe to the full for they shall be hungry and thirsty. Blessed are those who are poor and mourn for they shall be comforted. Woe to those who laugh now for they shall weep. Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Woe to those who have no mercy.

He who came down from the bosom of the Father and became a Way for salvation teaches us repentance by His divine voice, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repent.” (Mark 2:17) These are not my sayings, but they are the Lord’s sayings, so why do you neglect your life? If you know that your thoughts and deeds are evil, why do you keep hiding your wounds? From whom are you afraid? From the Physician? He is not severe nor without mercy. He does not use a bitter medicine because he cures by mere words. If you want to come to Him, He is full of compassion and kindness. He came for you from the Father’s bosom. He was incarnated for you, so you may proceed to Him without fear. He became a man for you to cure your hidden wounds. By His great love, He calls you, “O sinner, come and be cured easily. Remove the burden of your sins.” Supplicate God with tears, for this Good Heavenly Physician cures your wounds by tears and prayers! Do you know what hour the Heavenly Physician will close His door? I beg you to proceed and be cured, for He wants the Heavenly hosts to rejoice at your repentance.

O friend, until when are you going to serve the carnal desires and be enslaved to them? Till when are you going to do what pleases the devil? Listen to my advice and you will live. Purify your soul and body. Proceed to the Savior with a fervent repentance. Get away from the scorpion that bit you. Flee the serpent that you have experienced its poison for he, whose feet stumble twice, are blind and cannot see what should be avoided. Look at Nineveh, which was full of sin, how God had ordered its destruction. However, when He saw the people wearing ashes and ashes, in hunger, fasting and weeping, he had compassion on them, forgave them, and saved them. He preferred to go back in His words rather than to punish them.”

2. St. John Saba (The spiritual elder):

O great mercy, how abundant you are! O Lord, can anyone not marvel from Your mercy? Can anyone not confess Your Grace? You came that we be born from the womb of repentance as You were born from the Blessed Virgin Mary Your mother. We have lived in evil and wickedness but repentance can purify and enlighten us.

Adam can bear children from Eve, which resemble the physical world. Likewise, Jesus, from baptism and repentance, can bear children who resemble the spiritual world. He says to us, “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” How can we find repentance if it is close? **Repentance is the mother of life, blessed is he who is born from it, he will never die..** Christ calls everyone to repent, but the devil prevents people from hearing that calling. Repentance saves those who are captives to sin.

Repentance changes adulterers to celibates. It is fire, which burns the weeds. It is the water for the holy plants. It is the intercessor of the captives. **Who is he who does not love you, O repentance; you carry all the blessings? Only the devil hates you for you have taken away his wealth, properties and made him empty from his inheritance which he once plundered.**

No one who puts his hope in you ever fails. No one ascended to heaven without you. Who can see God without repentance? Who repented and did not reap the fruits of joy? Who did not wipe his face with the tears of repentance and did not see God in his heart? You have saved David from sin and the people of Nineveh, even after God's judgement on them.

Blessed are you O mother of forgiveness (Repentance). God has granted repentance to be the intercessor of sinners. God will never close His door if you ask Him, for He has given you the keys of the kingdom.

I) A PRAYER FOR REPENTANCE

By

Saint Shenouda the Archimandrite

O God, forgive me, I am a sinner, for I cannot raise my eyes up to You because I am ashamed of my many sins. O God, forgive my sins and have mercy on me in Your kingdom. My Lord, I supplicate You and ask You for my wretched soul and body.

Lord, grant me to do Your will and let Your mercy guide me. My Lord and God, forgive my sins and hide my iniquities, save me from Your wrath and anger. What shall I say when I come between Your hand and what will justify me when You judge me? Lord Jesus, direct and shield me from the snares of the devil. Place Your peace and Your Holy Name in me, O Lord Who dwells in Heaven, so Your mercy might come and shield me. Do not deliver me in the hands of the enemy.

I have put all my worries on You, Jesus, Son of God, do not leave me. If I lean towards evil, do not forsake me and do not let me walk according to my evil desires. Do not delay rebuking me until the day of judgement. Do not punish me according to my sins. Cover the shame of my nakedness before Your fearful throne. Purify me, so I will not be defiled when I come before Your hands. O God, Lover of mankind, fortify my soul with Your precious blood. Lord, subdue my desire to sin by Your fear. Awaken me from the slumber of negligence that springs out of the sin. Keep me from going astray and the slip of my lips.

Let Your angel expel the blasphemies of sin. Prepare me so Your Holy Spirit might find me a temple for Him. Grant O Lord, my soul and spirit to praise You all the days of my life. Answer me O Lord according to Your great mercy and accept my prayer and supplication. Save

me from sinning against You and grant me the way to do Your will. Do not take away Your blessings from me and do not keep me away from Your help.

Keep me a holy temple for You. Purify my heart, tongue and all my senses. Take away from me the stony heart and grant me a contrite one to worship You. Do not refuse me, for You have called me . Have mercy on me, You Who have the authority to grant mercy. Make me worthy to praise You all the time until my last breath.

Confirm Your holy words in my heart and soul. Save me from all the snares of the evil one. Direct my life to the way it pleases You. Have mercy on me and listen to my cry. Answer my supplication and accept my prayer. Accept my prayer and do not keep away Your mercy from me. Let my prayer reach Your presence. Listen to my voice and let my cries come to You. Let my prayer be upright before You as the aroma of sweet incense in Your Hands. Do not judge Your servant for no one is faultless before You. For Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the Glory, forever. Amen.

J) A PRAYER TO DECIDE LIVING WITH GOD

O Holy Father, Who does not wish anyone to perish but all to repent, I thank You for Your long suffering with my many sins and for bringing me to this hour.

How many times I promised to live in Your obedience, and not to insult Your holy name but I broke my promise and went against Your commandments.

O merciful Lord Who made known His great love for the sinners in Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, grant me the blessing to please You and to live in Your obedience to the end. Strengthen me, my God, for I am weak before my many enemies surrounding me. Lord, You know everything, You know that I love You, although my love is lukewarm.

Lord, I find no peace away from You, no rest except in living with You. There is no security or permanence for anything in this world for all pass away. Blessed are You O Lord Who is faithful in Your love and who does not change.

O Heavenly Father, in my weakness, naughtiness, and reckless thinking, I put myself into Your hands confident of Your protection, believing that You are capable of keeping me until the end. Seal, O God, my covenant with Your blessings and keep me undefiled until Your second coming for Yours is the Glory from now and forever. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

CONFESSION

**"And many who had believed
came confessing and telling their deeds."
(Acts 19:18)**

- A) Importance of Confession and Its Blessings**
- B) The Three Elements of Confession**
- C) General Guidelines**
- D) Prayers Before and After Confession**

A) IMPORTANCE OF CONFESSION AND ITS BLESSINGS

Now that we have discussed the life of penance, its value and blessings, we can proceed with the first practical step, which is confession.

The Sacrament of Confession has many blessings and is of great importance in building the spiritual life. Our blessed Church has been performing it faithfully since the Apostolic Age. (Acts 19:18) It is also mentioned in the writings of the early fathers like Deyonasios (St. Paul's Disciple), Erianaos, Athanasius, Basil and St. John Chrysostom. Famous theologians such as Tertilian and Oregon spoke of the importance of confession.

In this chapter, we are going to discuss the spiritual rather than the dogmatic aspect of confession, its blessings and usefulness to the faithful.

If the church was performing the Sacrament of Confession in its early stages when faith was at its peak and life was simple and free of all complications, how much more can the need be in this day and age where life is so complex!

When we speak of the significance of the Sacrament of Confession, we are not being theoretical. **All those who practice confession faithfully and correctly experience its practical benefits - spiritually and physically.**

Advantages of Confession

1. From the Psychological Point of View:

Human nature has a need for expressing its shortcomings and it finds rest in confessing its fault. The conscience pushes us to confess our sins. We gain relaxation and comfort only when we do so. Confession helps us in ridding ourselves of psychological worries.

Through confession, the soul becomes clear - it sheds all its burdens. Our world is full of problems and confession helps us in dealing with them. These problems may have deep psychological effects on individuals, such as hatred for the society, developing hysteria or even committing suicide.

2. From the Spiritual Point of View:

a. When we confess, we receive through Jesus Christ, the gift of forgiveness of sins. We cannot get this gift through any other way.

b. Through confession, we are made worthy of receiving Communion and of dwelling in Jesus Christ, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him." (John 6:56) Without confession, we are not worthy of this gift, as St. Paul said. (1 Corinthians 11:29)

c. In confessing, we examine and purify our soul, thus, we improve our spiritual life. Careful self examination as well as the spiritual remedies offered by the priest, guide the confessor step by step in his spiritual life.

d. When you reveal all your thoughts to the priest, this helps us in getting rid of them. There is nothing the devil likes better than for us not to reveal our thoughts to the priest, because this is an indication that we need. Solomon said, "For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has not one to help him up."

(Ecclesiastes 4:10) St. John Casian said, “He who admits his thoughts cannot be deceived.” He also said, “Sin will stay as long as it is hidden in the heart.” Once sin is admitted, it is erased even before the priest gives an answer. When a serpent hiding in a hole is found, it escapes immediately. So do evil thoughts, when revealed, escape instantly.

St. Macarius the Great once asked the devil how well he was doing with the monks in the desert. The devil answered, “Very badly. Every evil thought I tell them, they admit to their priests, except one monk, who is my friend because he never confesses his thoughts to the priest.” St. Macarius went straight to advise the monk to confess all his thoughts to the priest. The monk obeyed. Later, St. Macarius met the devil and asked him, “How well are you doing?” The devil answered, “Very badly, even that friend of mine is no longer my friend.”

e. Through confession, we find solutions to our problems. An Egyptian monk once had a problem; he prayed and fasted for a solution. At the end, he decided to ask an elder. On his way, an angel met him, gave him an answer to his problem, and told him, “God gave you an answer to your problem because of your humble heart when you decided to ask that elder.” When Jesus healed the ten lepers. He told them, “Go, show yourselves to the priest. And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.” (Luke 17:11-14) Therefore, God wants to teach us that He is pleased when we submit to other humans who are appointed as God’s representatives. So, let us hurry and confess all our thoughts to our priest. In other words, let us complain about our enemy, the devil, to our father. Let us be like the little child, who, when bothered by someone, would say, “I will complain to my father.”

f. Another great spiritual benefit is the discipleship. Christian life is based on discipleship. The last commandment of our Lord Jesus was: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20) Jesus taught us this principle for us to follow when He chose His twelve disciples.

Discipleship has many blessings because spiritual virtues cannot be attained through reading books or by listening to a speaker, but by being a disciple to a spiritual father who can guide and train. St. John Casian said, “When we look at physical sciences and the subjects that require skill we find that it cannot be attained without the training by their masters.” Likewise, spiritual aspects of soul salvation and its growth to perfection need a spiritual father to guide, teach and train.

3. From the Social Point of View:

Confession relieves the individual psychologically and saves him from spiritual mistakes that might make him non-adaptable to society. He will adjust better, be more cheerful toward life, doing his best at work and his production in society will multiply.

4. From the Physical Point of View:

Confession also has many blessings for our body, for we know from the Bible that sin is the cause of some illnesses, as in the case of the sick man of Bethesda. (John 5:14) Our church teaches that the sick person, to whom the priest will perform the sacrament of unction, has to

confess his sins in order to be cured. In addition, modern science confirms the deleterious effects of psychological problems on the general health. As a result, a new branch of medicine called “Psychosomatic Medicine” has been established and taught in medical schools.

Hence, confession cures the body as well as **the spirit**, frees those who are tied with bad habits, and cures those who have psychological problems and those who cannot adjust well to the society. In short, it frees from the consequences of sin.

Some governmental agencies now appoint social workers in schools and other institutions to try to restore the deviations in the behavior of youth. In addition, the number of psychiatrists has increased tremendously to help those who are psychologically sick. Our church has known and performed what modern science now realizes. Our church has known and performed the Sacrament of Confession 18 centuries before psychoanalysis was discovered. The knowledge of the church about the Sacrament of Confession was merely based on obeying the commandments of God who created man and knows his inner soul and how to cure it.

Confession is not only a psychological treatment, it is an important church sacrament and psychological treatment is one of its advantages. Forgiveness of sins accompanies this sacrament. This gift cannot be offered by any psychological clinic in the world, even if its doctors are experts and believers.

Duty of the Church:

Since confession is of such great importance, tremendous responsibilities face the church today concerning the problems of its children, especially teenagers and youth.

Tradition in our church does not allow any priest to implement the Sacrament of Confession, only those who have certain characteristics that qualifications to lead and guide others. When the bishop feels that a certain priest has reached that state where he can listen to confessions and can counsel people, he gives him permission. Certainly, age is one of the factors that affect his personality, as he will be more experienced and spiritually knowledgeable.

Abba Isaiah (the 4th century) in his teachings to the beginners said, “If an elder asks you about your thoughts, reveal them to him very frankly, when you are assured that he is faithful and does not reveal your words. Do not look only at his age but depend on his spiritual knowledge and experience, lest he multiplies your sickness instead of curing you.”

St. John Casian also said, “Anba Moses commanded us not to hide our thoughts but to reveal them to spiritual elders who have knowledge and discrimination and not only to those who are old. Many have gone to old priests who had no spiritual knowledge and fell in despair instead of being cured.”

Special studies should be offered in the seminaries to equip spiritual fathers with needed knowledge and experience. There should be centers for confessions in big cities where the priest is completely devoted to confessions and relieved from other responsibilities. Confession during the liturgy loses many of its advantages.

B) THREE ELEMENTS OF CONFESSION

First: Between Me and Myself.

The Importance of Repentance:

Confession is the first practical step in repentance; being sincerely sorry for your sins should precede confession. The Sacrament of Confession, in our church, is called the Sacrament of Repentance. **Hence, confession is not just words you say to the priest, even if these words are truth, but rather it is repentance.** Some people who want to have communion go to the priest and ask him for forgiveness and when the priest asks them for their sins, they say, “Thank God, we have done nothing wrong,” or “We took communion last week or three days ago,” as if one does not sin in three days.

St. Kebryanos (the 3rd century) **admonished those who came for communion without true repentance**, saying, “How do you receive communion without a true repentance and confession and the priest has not laid his hands on you?” We are not talking here about those who receive communion frequently and do not confess every day, but we are talking about those who do not care about confession and say, “Thank God, everything is alright.”

Those who hide their sins do not know themselves and are lying to God. St. John said in his epistle, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.” (1 John 1:8-10) Those people do not benefit from the prayer of Absolution and furthermore, they add another sin which is taking communion without repentance **We have to be sure that the Absolution Prayer without confession and true repentance will not grant us forgiveness of sins.** When God sees our true repentance, He grants us forgiveness. King Solomon, after finishing building the Temple said, “Then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know.” (2 Chronicles 6:30)

Therefore, repentance is an important step in the Sacrament of Confession. The confessor should feel that he has sinned against God Who loved him, he comes with a humble heart to ask forgiveness, promising not to sin anymore, asking God for power and help. David said, “I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin.” (Psalms 38:18) Jeremiah said, “A voice was heard on the desolate heights, Weeping and supplications of the children of Israel; For they have perverted their way, And they have forgotten the LORD their God.” (Jeremiah 3:21)

Sit with Yourself. A perfect confession, which is accompanied by true repentance, needs preparation before going to confess. This preparation is called, “examining yourself.” Sit

in a quiet place and examine yourself. Compare how many blessings God has given you with how many times you have denied Him. Compare your life with the life of the saints.

Remember St. Peter's words: "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:18) And say in your heart, "Yes, where shall I, a sinner, appear?" All this will give you a broken spirit and will renew your need for the grace of God. Examining yourself will also help you remember your sins so you will never forget them. David, after he sinned, said, "My sin is ever before me." (Psalms 51:3)

Sometimes we do not realize our sins; either we have forgotten them or because we do not examine ourselves and confess frequently, or because of carelessness in our spiritual life causing us to sin without feeling that we are sinning. In this case, we have to pray to God to reveal our sins for us. Ask the Holy Spirit to shine the light of His grace upon you and pray with St. Augustine saying, "Lord, grant that I know who You are and who I am." Our compassionate Lord who is anxious for the salvation of everyone, Who is eager for the tears of the lost sheep, will then grant you to remember your sins.

At the end of this chapter, we have a list of questions, which may help you to confess. If you are that type of person who forgets easily, it is better for you to write down your sins on a piece of paper. If you are afraid somebody might read it, write down symbols not the details. After confession, tear that piece of paper because the Lord has torn away your sins.

Sit with God: When you feel the burden of your sins, pray to God with tears and sorrow. Confess to Him in detail. He knows all your sins before you even do them, but in confession, you admit your mistakes. David said, "When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin." (Psalms 32:3-5)

In your prayer, speak to God in detail. Talk to Him in a singular form; not plural for this will make you sense your mistakes more, instead of feeling that others also do the same mistakes. For example, when you pray in a personal relationship, do not say, "Lord forgive us our sins for you know that we are sinners and we are often weak and fall in sin." Instead say, "Lord, forgive me my sins, for You know I am a sinner and I am often weak and fall in sin."

Second: In Front of the Priest:

Shyness: One of the main factors that hinder people from confession is being shy of admitting their sins in front of the priest. We have to overcome that obstacle, for confession is very beneficial in our spiritual life. As long as you were not shy in sinning in front of God, why are you shy now to admit your sin in front of God's chosen one? **Although shyness is a difficult feeling, it is beneficial for you,** as it makes you feel how bad and shameful sin is. This feeling is important, for as long as you have enjoyed doing sin, it is better that you suffer in confessing your sins. Our fathers have said, "The Sacrament of Confession prevents us from sinning again." Jesus Ben Sirakh said, "Do not be ashamed in admitting your sins."

From Who are you shy? Why are you shy? You have to know that priests have heard these and similar sins several times before from other people. The confessor should realize that the priest is used to hearing the bad rather than the good. **Shyness may cause some people to ask: “Why do we have to confess to a priest? Why not confess to God directly?”** One reason for such a question is pride. A person may appear as a saint in front of others and is so concerned with portraying a righteous character. Also, what we have mentioned earlier about the importance of the Sacrament of Confession can answer that question. This is a trick from the devil that wants to deny us the blessings we receive from confession. So, do not listen to him and put away all shyness and pride, and let our main concern be how to obtain the great blessings of confession, which we cannot receive otherwise. .

How to Confess?

1. When you sit with the priest, forget your relationship to him and remember that he is God’s representative, God’s steward to whom you are turning in the account of your sins. Remember that you are approaching to perform a sacred sacrament, which will renew your life. Do not mention your sins as if you are telling a story, but with awe and sorrow.

2. Confess all kinds of sins: Sins of deed, thought, or feeling, etc. **Remember that every sin you do not confess will remain worrying you even if you become a saint.** In brief, empty your heart from every sin. Jeremiah said, “Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord” (Lamentations 2:19)

A good illustration which can explain how we should empty our hearts of our sins is when you empty an oil jar or a honey jar. There always remain some particles at the bottom of the jar. When you empty a vinegar jar, the smell remains at the end. However, if you empty a jar full of water, nothing remains, not even the smell. The same way when you empty your heart during confession, no sin should remain.

3. Say the details of sin: This helps to show how shameful your sin is. Mention the place and time where you sinned, and if any, the person with whom you have sinned. If you confess in general without mentioning the details, this will not help you much. For example, you may say: “My father, I have not prayed as I am supposed to and I do not love people as God wants me to and I have not come for communion with proper respect.” This type of confession will not tell the priest what kind of person you are because all persons, even the saints, can say such words, for any person who is growing in his spiritual life says such words.

Again, there is a difference between saying, “Father, I have looked with lust toward a girl,” and “I have looked with lust toward a girl while I was in church.” There is a difference in saying “I became angry when a person told me a word I misinterpreted” and “I hate that person, and I cannot stand him.” The second confession reveals another sin, which is hatred, besides getting mad.

Therefore, telling the details of sin is very useful because the priest will better know your bad habits and behavior and will offer you the right advice and remedy.

4. Emphasize also the duration of the sin: Confess how often you do that kind of sin. Ask yourself, “Did I do that sin once only or it has become a habit, which I cannot control?”

5. Confess your feelings while sinning: Were you enjoying the sin or rejecting it?

6. Do not give yourself excuses during confession: Do not say, “The devil tricked me,” to show that the devil is guilty and you are innocent. Do not forget that any sin you do, you do by your own free will. Do not say, “That person annoyed me, therefore I became furious.” If he had made you mad, why were you not patient and where is your compassion that endures everything?

7. Be honest in your confession: Do not put your sin in a different light than what it actually is. For example, if a person, when asked what his religion is, denied that he is a Christian, he cannot consider that sin as a lying sin. There is a great difference between lying and denying your faith.

8. Put emphasis also on the negligence in the positive aspects of your life and not nourishing your virtues. St. James said, “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” (James 4:17) As a Christian, you should grow spiritually until you reach perfection and “the measure of stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13) If you are not growing, this means there is sin, which is hampering your growth. Therefore, you have to ask yourself if you are growing in Christian virtues like love, self-denial, chastity and worshipping. Find out how much you have neglected these virtues and confess your negligence.

9. Do not think confession includes only your spiritual life. It also includes other aspects of life. Jesus wants us to be perfect in everything. “You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48) He also wants us to be faithful unto death. (Revelation 2:10) A student who is lazy in his studies should confess his laziness and an employee who is not giving his employer his money’s worth should confess his laziness.

10. Confess your sins even if you know how to overcome them. Never try not to confess some sins because you have heard much advice from your priest and you know the solution. Sometimes the devil tries to convince us that as long as we know the answer, there is no need to confess. **However, we still need to confess, even if we know the answer,** until we get rid of it. The river waters of Syria and Iraq seemed much better for Naaman the Syrian, but they were not as good to heal him as the Jordan waters which Elijah has told him. **God gives special power to the words of the priest that they may benefit the confessor.** Confession is not only for counseling, but also for receiving forgiveness.

11. You have to be honest with your priest and tell him everything frankly, even if it concerns him. For example, if he is fast in doing that sacrament and you do not like that, you should mention that to him, in a polite way.

12. Listen well to the advice of your spiritual father and accept it. If any of this advice troubles you, discuss it with him, as the patient should tell his doctor if the treatment made him well or did not help.

Third: The Absolution from Sin:

Prayers of Absolution: After you have made a complete confession before the priest, kneel in awe and respect saying, “Absolve me my father from the sins that I already confessed and the hidden ones too.” Probably there are sins that you forgot to mention. Then the priest puts the cross on your head and prays the absolution.

It is useful that we record these prayers in this chapter in order to meditate on the beautiful meaning of these prayers. Then when you bow your head under your spiritual father, you feel the power of these words. **Prayers of Absolution are divided into three parts:**

The First Absolution

Yes, Lord, **You have given authority** unto us to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy. Crush his heads beneath our feet speedily. Scatter before us his **every design of wickedness that is against us.** For You are King of us all, O Christ Our Lord.

To You we send up the glory, the honor and the adoration together with Your good Father and the Holy Spirit the Life-Giver, Who is of one essence with You, now, and at all times, and to the age of ages. **Amen.**

The Second Absolution

You, O Lord, who bowed the heavens, You descended and became man for the salvation of the race of men. You are He Who sits upon the Cherubim and the Seraphim, and beholds them who are lowly.

You also now, our Master, are He unto Whom we lift up the eyes of our hearts; the Lord Who forgives our iniquities and saves our souls from corruption. We worship Your unutterable compassion, and we ask You to **give us Your peace,** for You have given all things unto us.

Acquire us unto Yourself, God our Saviour, for we know none other but You; Your holy name we do utter. Turn us, God, unto fear of You and desire of You. Be pleased that we abide in the enjoyment of Your good things; and those who have bowed their heads **beneath Your hand,** exalt them in their ways of life. and adorn them with virtues. And may we all be worthy of Your kingdom in the heavens, through the goodwill of God, Your good Father, with Whom

You are blessed, with the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver, Who is of one essence with You, now, and at all times, and unto the age of all ages. **Amen.**

The Third Absolution (The Absolution of the Son)

Master, Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son and Logos of God the Father, Who has broken every bond of our sins through His saving, life-giving sufferings; Who breathed into the face of His holy disciples and saintly apostles, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you will remit, they are remitted to them, and those which you will retain, they shall be retained.”

You also now, our Master, through Your holy apostles, have given grace to those who for a time labored in the priesthood in Your holy church, to forgive sin upon the earth, and to bind and to loose every bond of iniquity.

Also, we ask and entreat Your goodness, O Philanthropic One, for Your servants, (here he signs the people once and twice) my fathers, and my brethren, (here he signs himself) and my weakness; those who **bow their heads before Your holy glory**. Dispense unto us Your mercy, and loose every **bond of our sins**, and, if we have committed any sin against You, **knowingly or unknowingly, or through anguish of heart, or in deed, or in word, or from faintheartedness**, do, O Master, Who knows the weakness of men, as a good and Philanthropic One, O God, grant us the forgiveness of our sins; (he signs himself).

Bless us, (he signs the clergy) purify us; make us absolved, (he signs the congregation) and all Your people absolved. (Here he remembers those whom he wishes to remember.) Fill us with Your fear, and straighten us unto Your holy, good will, for You are our God, and the glory, honor, the dominion, and the adoration are due to You, together with Your good Father and the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver, Who is of one essence with You, now, and at all times, and unto the age of all ages. **Amen.**

Comments:

The repentant feel that he is bowing his head not under the hand of a man, but under the hand of God. The priest says in the second absolution, “**Your servant who is bowing his head under Your hand.**”

The priest declares that he performs this sacrament only because of the Divine authority given to him when he says, “You have granted the clergy the power to forgive sins on earth.”

In the three absolutions, the priest does not ask for the repentant only, but also for himself. The priest asks that God grant the repentant many spiritual blessings, which are:

1. To remove the roots of evil from our souls, “Crush the heads of the enemies beneath our feet.” Head means its beginning.

2. To grant us His peace which we have lost by sin. Sin destroys the peace of man as fire to the straw.

3. To fill us with God’s fear. We notice here that when the priest asks for peace he says, “**Grant us Your peace,**” and when he asks for God’s fear he says, “**Fill us with Your fear.**” St. Antony said, “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.” When light enters a dark house, it casts away its darkness. Likewise, when God’s fear enters the heart of man, it casts away his ignorance and teaches him all virtues and wisdom.

4. To bring back to us the desire to live with God. “**Bring us back to the path of fear and love for You.**” The taste of spiritual matter changes by sin as the taste of good food changes in the mouth of the sick person. Hence, the priest asks God to bring back this desire for God to become attracted to Him and not to sin. “Lead me away! We will run after You.” (Song of Solomon 1:4)

The results of these absolutions are:

1. **Forgiveness of sins:** committed intentionally or unintentionally.
2. **Forgiveness of sins:** all kinds of sins, whether in deed or word.
3. **Forgiveness of sins:** which we committed under all circumstances “through the agitation of our hearts or through littleness of heart.”
4. Blessing, purity and loosening of all the bonds of sin and its authority.

After the absolution, be sure that God has forgiven your sins as Nathan the prophet told David after he confessed, “The Lord has put away your sin.” (2 Samuel 12:13)

Proceed in love and submission and kiss the cross in the hand of the priest.

C) GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. After Confession:

Following confession, it is better to go home alone thinking of what the Lord has done for you, and benefiting from this spiritual experience. A common mistake many people do is to go to confession in a group and spend the time before confession joking and in a silly mood. That is not thinking of their sins and feeling sorry. Then after confession they walk home discussing the same things and not staying quietly with themselves.

The confessor has to obey all the priest has told him with accuracy and faithfulness because this advice is like medicine that the doctor prescribes to a patient. There is no use for a sick person to go to a doctor and not taking the medicine that the doctor has prescribed.

Do not lose hope if you sin again after confession, but go and confess again, for it is written, “A righteous man falls seven times And rise again.” (Proverbs 24:16) God, Who knows how weak our nature is, gave us the opportunity to go and confess again every time we sin. **The door of repentance will remain open to the end of our lives, and blessed is the man who enters from it.**

2. One Spiritual Father:

Our church teaches that every person should have only one priest to go to for confession. Every confessor should continue confessing to that priest unless there are circumstances that prevent him, such as travel or the like. In this case, the confessor has to take permission from his priest so he can confess to another priest. Therefore, you have to be very careful in choosing your priest. **You have to care only about your spiritual benefit. Never try to get away from your priest for an unholy reason or because you failed in overcoming sin.**

3. Changing the Spiritual Father:

Sometimes, the repentant do not benefit from the spiritual advice, which his spiritual father gives him. Here the person asks, **“Can I change my spiritual father, or is this not allowed according to the church rules?”**

The spiritual father is like a physician. A sick person may not benefit from the treatment of one physician and he may go to a different physician. Moreover, the physician may ask the sick person to see another physician. Likewise, since the goal of confession is to benefit the repentant spiritually, he may change his spiritual father. As well, some priests refer their children with special problems to other priests so that by special grace they may help them with their problems.

In this case, the repentant have to take the permission of his spiritual father as a matter of courtesy.

This permission may create another problem because the repentant is shy to ask to change his spiritual father, after he had realized all his weakness. How can he face his father with that request?

If the repentant is the shy type, he may change his spiritual father without personal contact, but he may send him a letter telling him all the circumstances that lead him to that decision and ask for his permission and for his prayers.

In the case of changing the spiritual father, do you confess again all the previous sins that you have already said before your previous father?

The repentant have received complete absolution from all the sins that he had already confessed; therefore, there is no need for him to confess again. There is one exception: when the

previous sins have connection with his present sins, or if he wants to give his new spiritual father a true picture about his life in order to receive from him the correct treatment.

4. The Sin You Forgot to Mention:

What happens if you forget to mention a sin to your priest or if you have committed a sin after confession and before communion?

Either you confess it before communion to any priest available at the church even if he is not your priest, or you may receive communion then later go to your priest and confess it. Anyway, this matter has to be arranged between you and your priest. We would like to remind you that this issue depends on the seriousness of the sin. If you are in doubt, it is better to wait until you have a chance to confess to your priest.

5. The Spiritual Guide:

One may choose a spiritual guide beside his father of confession. A spiritual guide does not have to be a priest; he can be a layman who deals with general spiritual topics like prayer, humility, and condemnation, without getting into the details of your sins. A spiritual guide is like a teacher. He cannot grant you forgiveness of sins like the priest. You ask him about a specific issue or how to overcome a sin without confessing that you have committed that sin.

6. Forgiveness of Sins:

Are all your sins forgiven after you confess, even if they are very serious? Of course, the answer is yes, as God's promises are clearly stated "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) St. John Chrysostom said, "Have you sinned? Enter the church, confess and your sins will be erased. Repent any time you sin. If you sin again, repent again and never lose hope, for the church is a hospital and not a court; He does not condemn us for our sins."

7. We emphasize that complete confession cannot be performed during the Holy Eucharist, but it has to be during special scheduled hours in order that the confessor will have ample time.

8. The intervals between confessions may be determined between the priest and the confessor, according to the spiritual needs and the circumstances of the confessor. Of course, this interval should never be too long.

9. Immigrants and Confession:

How can immigrants confess if they are in cities where there are no Coptic Orthodox Churches and no Orthodox priests?

No doubt, confession should be verbal in front of the priest who is God's steward, because often confession needs to be discussed and clarified so the priest can give the right solution and cure. However, in some cases, where immigrants are in places where there are no

Orthodox Churches and no Orthodox priests, they still have to examine themselves and write their confessions in letters to their priests. This is very beneficial for them and when they meet any priest, they ask him to pray for them the absolution to receive forgiveness of sins.

A guide for examining one's self before confession

A complete true confession is when you reveal yourself completely in front of your priest and when you feel that you have not hidden anything that you know about yourself from your priest. Hence, you have to examine yourself very thoroughly and accurately before confession. **These are some questions, which may help you to know and examine yourself before confession. They are classified into topics: some concerning worship, relationships with people, and others concerning the kinds of sins.**

A. Concerning Worship:

Prayer:

1. Do you neglect your prayers or are you regular in your prayers? Do you neglect them sometimes or completely? Why? Have you thought of a solution for it? What was the result?

2. When do you pray? When you wake up in the morning? Before sleeping? Before and after eating? Before leaving home? Before you start any work? In any trouble you face? Do you pray while you are on the road? While you are with people?

3. Do you have long private prayers where you have a private conversation with God? Are you regular in these prayers? Are these prayers growing or diminishing?

4. Do you pray with the psalms? Do you pray all the prayers of the Agbeya or some of them? Which ones do you pray? If you do not pray with the psalms, why?

5. Do you memorize the psalms and litanies from the Agbeya? Is this memorization growing or diminishing?

6. Do you pray with a fervent heart? Do you pray with tears at times? Do you feel the presence of God while praying? Are your prayers lukewarm or sometimes hot and sometimes lukewarm? Why?

7. Does your mind wander during praying? During which kind of prayers does your mind wander? In which kind of topics does your mind wander? Does this continue for any length of time? What have you done to remedy this problem?

8. What is the posture of your body during prayer? Do you stand and lift up your hands to God? Do you kneel? Do you bow? Do you have any other posture? Do you stand respectfully in front of God? Do you bend your feet or lean your body against a wall? Do you move your hands or do your eyes look at other things?

9. Are there any special topics that occupy your mind during praying? Do you pray for your sins and your spiritual life? Do you pray for others? Do you pray for those who bother you? Do you have material requests?

10. Do you give God your best time while you are fully active? Do you pray while you are physically and mentally exhausted?

Fasting:

1. Do you fast all the fasting days of the church or just some of them? Which fasting days do you practice regularly? Do you fast Wednesdays and Fridays of every week? Are there any obstacles, which hinder your fasting? What are they?

2. Do you abstain from food during fasting? For how long?

3. Do you desire special kinds of food? Do you fulfill that desire? Do you ask that special kinds of food be prepared for you?

4. Do you spend much on food, in general and on its luxuries, specifically?

5. Do you eat between meals?

Giving Alms:

1. Are you faithful in giving your tithes to God?

2. Do you only give your tithes or do you give generosity?

3. What is your feeling when you give? Is it a feeling of pride or a feeling of love toward Jesus' brothers?

4. Do you get annoyed sometimes by those who ask you for alms? Or do you give cheerfully?

Communion and Confession:

1. Are you regular in receiving communion? When was the last time you received communion?

2. Are you regular in confession? When was the last time you confessed?

3. If you are negligent, what is the reason?

4. Do you feel that there is something you want to hide from your priest?

5. Do you prepare and examine yourself thoroughly before confession?

6. Are there repeated sins in your confessions? What have you done to overcome them?

Reading:

1. Do you read the Bible regularly? Do you read in sequence?

2. Do you meditate in your readings? Do you write these meditations or just think about them?

3. Do you study the Bible? Do you read any commentaries?
4. Do you read other religious books? What kind do you read (spiritual, lives of saints, dogma, etc.)? Do you read regularly?
5. Do you read inappropriate books or magazines? Do you sometimes read topics that make you stumble?
6. What is the average time you devote to spiritual readings every day or every week?
7. Do you try to apply what you read to your life or do you train yourself with spiritual exercises?

Matanias:

Do you do matanias, that is, **bowing before God while asking for forgiveness**? How many do you do? Are they accompanied by short prayers?

Going to Church:

1. Do you go to church and attend the Divine Liturgy regularly? If there are obstacles in your way, what are they?
2. Do you attend the Divine Liturgy while fasting?
3. Do you come early to the Divine Liturgy? Do you attend all of the prayers?
4. Do you attend other meetings besides the Divine Liturgy, like the vesper service, sermons, youth meetings, Sunday school, etc.? Do you attend them regularly?
5. Do you serve in the church? Are you faithful in your service? Are there any problems that bother you?

Spiritual Exercises:

1. Do you have spiritual exercises? What are they? Are you successful in applying them? If not, what are the reasons for your failure?
2. Are there any virtues, which you would like to attain?

B. Your Relationship with People:

1. Do you have good relations with people, old, young, family members, colleagues, or others? If not, why?
2. Have you been angry with someone? For what reason?
3. Was your anger suppressed or apparent? Did you raise your voice? Did you say any words that hurt others? Did you insult them or fight with them?
4. Did your anger go away fast or did it remain for a long time? For how long? Did you have bad thoughts because of your anger? Did your anger leave any bad feelings toward any person? Did this anger change to hatred for a period? Did this anger remain in your heart as enmity with someone?
5. If you were angry with someone, have you reconciled with him? Did you initiate this reconciliation or did others interfere? How long did this enmity last? Is everything alright now?

6. Is there anyone who offends or makes you angry? What is your reaction toward him outwardly? Inwardly?
7. To what extent do you have virtues such as perseverance, longsuffering, forgiving, and loving your enemies?
8. Do you sometimes hurt others even by joking, through ignorance, or by being forgetful? What have you done to overcome this matter? Have you apologized to those whom you hurt?
9. Do you hurt others with the excuse of defending the truth? How did you hurt them?
10. What are the obstacles toward the virtue of meekness in your behavior?
11. Do you abuse the rights of anyone? Do you perform all your duties toward everyone faithfully, whether in the family, at work, in church or in your social relations?
12. Do you keep bad company? With whom? What sins do you commit because of this bad company? Do you have friends who drive you away from the church and from God's love?
13. Are your financial relations with people good? Were you unjust with anyone? Did you cheat anyone?
14. Do you perform your financial obligations toward God; the virtue of giving alms? What is your reaction toward tithes the first fruits and participating in the needs of the church?
15. Are you humble in treating other people or do you treat anyone with pride?
16. Do you behave violently toward others or treat them unkindly? On the other hand, are you calm, merciful and moderate? Are you passive? What kinds of sin do you commit due to your passive nature?
17. Do you love to have people praise you? Do you seek that? How? What is your feeling if someone rebukes you, ignores you, rejects you, or does not treat you appropriately?
18. Do you try sometimes to pretend before people to be the opposite of what you are?
19. Is your behavior an obstacle to others?
20. Do you serve others and tire yourself for others' comfort?

C. Some Kinds of Sin:

Sins of the Tongue:

1. What are the sins that you commit with your tongue? Do you lie, judge others, "blaspheme, swear, insult, humiliate someone, bad humor, silly discussions, or any inappropriate talk, etc."?
2. With whom have you sinned? And to whom? How many times (if possible) and for what reason? Did this matter become a habit?
3. Have you thought of overcoming those sins? How? What was the result?
4. Are you very talkative? Do you talk about subjects that you do not understand? Do you feel that you waste your time in useless talking instead of talking about something more useful?
5. Do you sing worldly songs? Do you sometimes use words that are inappropriate for God's children to use?
6. Is your voice loud or harsh? Do you think before you talk? Do you interrupt during discussions? Do you make mistakes while discussing something?

7. Do you interfere in other people's business? Do you give your opinion even if you are not asked? Do you like to be always critical of others, rebuke and advise others, even those who are older than you, those who are strangers or even who do not accept your advice?

8. Have you trained yourself to be silent? What are the results?

Sins of Thought:

1. What kinds of sins do you fall into by your thoughts? Is it adultery, lust, thoughts of wrath, hatred, revenge, judging others, thinking evil, pride, envy, blasphemy, doubt or daydreaming?

2. Does this thought stay with you for a long period? For how long?

3. Does such thought come to you from outside and you do not like it but try to cast it away or do you welcome the thought, enjoy it, and try to build on it other thoughts?

4. Does the thought change into lust and tempt you to actually sin? Every time you sin by thought, do you also sin by deed?

5. Is your mind occupied with cares of this world, its many problems and worries?

Sins by Senses:

What are the sins that you fall into by your senses; by sight, hearing or touch? Do you fall in adultery by your senses? Do you desire what others have? Do you spy on others? Do you listen to dirty jokes and words?

Sins of the Heart:

1. Are there any desires and feelings of your heart that do not please God? Is there in your heart any envy, jealousy, hatred, desire to be rich, desire for high positions, love of authority, pride, love of the world vain glory, love of the flesh, or love of revenge?

2. Is there in your heart any wrath, complaint, provoking, despair, or sadness?

3. Do these feelings and desires appear in your daily life, in your thoughts and your dreams?

Sins of Deed:

1. What are the actual sins you have committed? What commandments have you broken: adultery, stealing, killing, fighting, and drinking, rebellion, negligence, bad habits, etc.?

2. How many times have you repeated sin? With whom have you sinned and to whom?

3. What are the bad consequences of your sin? Have you treated them or are they still existing?

4. Are there constant causes that lead you to sin? What are they? Are there occasional causes or have they become a habit? What have you done to avoid these causes?

5. Have you tried to repent and forsake these sins? Have you succeeded or failed in repenting?

Note:

These questions are meant to help the beginners in their spiritual lives to examine themselves accurately so their confession may reveal what is inside them.

However, those who are advanced in their spiritual lives should examine themselves from the positive aspects, which are the virtues they neglect to possess.

We are all required to be perfect and holy and we all have to grow in the grace and virtue as St. Peter said, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18)

Therefore, those who are spiritually growing should examine themselves from both aspects: the negative and positive in such a way that these may be an incentive for their continued growth in the holy life with God.

D) A PRAYER BEFORE CONFESSION

O Holy Father, Who longs to the sinners’ return, Who promised to accept those who repent, look at a soul that was long lost in the valleys of disobedience. I have long tasted the bitterness of misery, being away from the source of salvation. Now I come back to You to be purified, accept me and do not reject me, for when You look at me with mercy and compassion, I will be cleansed and saved. But if You turn away from me, I will perish. Grant me, O Lord, Your blessing to strengthen my will to come closer to You in faith and hope, to confess my sins, and detest returning to them. Let Your Holy Spirit remind me not to stray. Enlighten my heart O God, so that I can see the graveness of my sins and negligence and have the will to obey your commandments and live for the glory of Your Holy name. **Amen.**

A PRAYER AFTER CONFESSION

O Father, I am grateful for Your goodness and love for mankind. You did not wish that I perish but awakened me from my sleep and guided me to your way. You saved me from the valley of death to the protection of Your strong fortress. Fill me with hope and faith. I come to You like the sick wishing to be healed, like the hungry seeking to be filled, like the poor to the source of riches, the sinner to the redeemer and like the dying to the origin of life. You are my salvation, my health, my life and my strength. With You, I find consolation, happiness and comfort. Help me, protect me and surround me with Your goodness. Teach me to put my will in Your hands and live according to Your will. Remove my weakness so that I may be firm and honest to You to the end. **Amen.**

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNION

**"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood
abides in Me and I in him."**

(John 6:56)

A) Honor and Work of This Sacrament

B) How Do We Benefit From This Sacrament?

C) What Is Communion?

D) General Topics about Communion

E) Prayer Before and After Communion

A) HONOR AND WORK OF

THIS SACRAMENT

Many are the blessings of the Almighty, abundant is His grace, strong is His might, and deep is His love... Truly what St. Gregory said in his Divine Liturgy, "Holy, Holy, O Lord and Holy in everything, indescribable is the power of Your wisdom, and **no manner of speech can measure the depth of Your love of mankind.**" St. John Chrysostom said, "How many of you say, "I wish to see the appearance, looks and clothes of the Lord." Here, you see, touch and eat Him. You still desire to see His clothes although He gave you Himself, not only to see, but also to touch, eat, and take inside you!" Meditate then on that great honor, the food that God offers you to enjoy! We eat Him and with Him we unite, He is Who the angels wish to see but do not dare to look at because of His shining glory."

All God's works are full of majesty and glory but the Sacrament of Communion is the greatest of them. If God has granted us spiritual weapons with which we fight and overcome as the Apostle mentioned in Ephesians 6:11-16, **certainly this sacrament is the strongest of all in strength and effect. It is the extension of the sacrifice of the cross** by which the Son of God redeemed the world and defeated the devil and death. St. Macarius the Great said, "Through this sacrament you are protected against the devil, and if anyone abuses this sacrament, the power of darkness will win over him."

Through the Holy Communion, we have the power to overcome the causes of sin, especially inner desires, the devil's temptations, and lusts of the world. The church calls it "the food of the strong." It is written about Jesus, "For power went out from Him and healed them all." (Luke 6:19)

St. John Chrysostom said, **"We, who are sick, let us partake of this sacrament with faith, for those who touched His garment were healed; what about those who eat Him all."** He also said, "After eating this spiritual food, let us turn into lions which frighten the devils, inflamed with the fire of love." St. Ambrose said, "Let the Lord Jesus be your guest, Who will immediately drive the devil away and shut off the doors which lead to temptations."

Our weapons get their power from the Divine Grace received from the Blood of Jesus, which in this sacrament. Using other spiritual weapons, we fight the devil with the power of Jesus, but **in this sacrament, Jesus Himself fights our enemies.** He said, "Whosoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him." (John 6:56) St. Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20) The Revelation says, "They overcame him (the devil) by the blood of the Lamb (Christ)." (Revelation 12:11) or as David prophesied, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." (Psalm 23:5) This is the holy table, which the Lord prepares for us by which we defeat our spiritual enemies.

The Holy Communion is food for our spirit and life. "The Lord has made His wonderful works to be remembered; The Lord is gracious and full of compassion. He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant." (Psalm 111:4-5) St. Augustine said, "He who wants to live with You and loves life, let him proceed and eat Your Body." **As the Israelites were fed with manna in the wilderness until they entered the promised land, so does this Holy Communion feeds our souls and protects us in the world until we enter the heavenly Jerusalem.**

Let us meditate in Jesus' promises as He established this sacrament. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood **abides in Me and I in him.**" (John 6:56) How does this abiding in Jesus occur? We do not know. All that we experience are the blessings and effects of that abiding. Jesus said, **"I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."** (John 15:5-7) Therefore, through the Holy Communion, we abide in Jesus and He abides in us and we can say with St. Paul, "Your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:3)

When the Lord descended in the past on the Mount of Sinai with His glory, the mount was blazing with fire and smoke. “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with an arrow. And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.” (Hebrews 12:20-21; Exodus 19:12-13; Deuteronomy 9:19)

O Lord, in the Old Testament, they could not dare touch the mountain upon which You descended with Your glory. In the New Testament, the priest carries You in his hands as the Blessed Virgin Mary carried You in her arms. Moreover, we all eat You to abide in You and to live by You. It is written, “You are a Consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:29) So how does this fire which devours the evil ones change to fire which purifies us from sins, burns all evil planted inside us and inflames our hearts with Your love?

The blessings of this Holy Sacrament extend not only to this life but also to the life to come. The Lord Jesus said, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood, **has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.**” (John 6:51,54)

St. Erynaos said, “How can they say the person who eats the Lord’s body and drinks His blood will perish and will not have eternal life? Let them then change their opinion or abstain from the Eucharist.” St. Cyril the Pillar of faith said, “He gave us His body and blood so that the power of corruption would disappear. He would live in us with the Holy Spirit and we would become partakers of His holiness and be more spiritual than the heavenly creatures.” He also said, “Because of Adam’s disobedience, our bodies became subject to corruption and death. However, because **Christ is inside us with His body**, we will undoubtedly rise in perfection, for it is impossible that “the Life” does not raise those in whom it is dwelling.”

When you partake of this Holy Sacrament, you receive Christ in your heart. Whenever Jesus enters a place, He blesses, sanctifies, and purifies it. He entered St. Mary’s womb and made her Queen of heaven and earth. He entered Zacharias’ house and filled John the Baptist with the Holy Spirit, while he was still in Elizabeth’s womb. He entered the manger in Bethlehem and made it a sanctuary and a paradise for the angels and humans. He entered Egypt and broke down its idols. He went into the Jordan River and sanctified its water. He entered Peter’s house and cured his mother-in-law. He entered Jairus’ house and raised his daughter from the dead. He entered Zacchaeus’ house and saved him. He entered the house of Mary and Martha and they became saints.

If people have been able to preserve fruits and vegetables for longer periods without rot, can’t the body of Jesus and His blood preserve our life from the corruption of sin?

B) HOW DO WE BENEFIT FROM THIS SACRAMENT?

So far, we discussed some of the blessings of this great sacrament, but we might wonder and ask, “Why do we not feel all these holy blessings whenever we receive the Holy Communion?” The answer is clear. It is because we do not prepare ourselves well enough to receive this great sacrament. We do not spend the time or the effort in this preparation.

Noah had spent a hundred years in building the ark in which he was saved with his family. King Solomon spent seven years in building God’s temple and made a feast to sanctify it which lasted eight days, and offered one thousand sacrifices. However, we do not spend even half an hour to prepare ourselves to receive this great blessing!

We shall point out to some of the spiritual practices, which help us with the grace of God to enjoy the blessings of Holy Communion. It is preferable to start these practices the night before communion. These practices are to be followed in addition to examining ourselves and confessing.

First: Stir Your Emotions and Prepare Yourself.

Sit with yourself quietly the night before communion to stir in your heart holy desires and emotions for your beloved Jesus Christ Who offers Himself to you in this Holy Sacrament. The more you prepare yourself, the more you feel God’s comforts and blessings filling your life after the Holy Communion.

When the disciples asked Jesus, “Where do you want us to prepare the Passover?” He asked two of them to go into the city to find **“A large upper room, furnished and prepared.”** (Mark 14:15) Jesus Himself had chosen the place where He ate the Passover with His disciples and established the Sacrament of Eucharist. He had chosen an upper room, furnished and prepared. Let us think about each of these characteristics.

Jesus established this sacrament in an upper room, that is, in a place, which is upstairs, referring to elevating ourselves up to heaven. Likewise, in the transfiguration, when Jesus wanted to show His glory to three of His disciples, He took them to a high mountain. (Mark 9:2) Again, anyone who wants to encounter God’s glory has to lift himself upward by meditating. The upper room was furnished and prepared. The Lord wants our hearts to be prepared and decorated with virtues ready to receive Him. It is not enough to clean the streets whenever we want to receive great dignitaries, but we also have to decorate them. It is not enough to clean our hearts from sin and evil, but we also have to decorate them with feelings of love and humility.

Sit with yourself and meditate on how your Savior desires through your participation in this sacrament to prepare a place in your heart so that He may be united with you and help you overcome all your enemies. His desire to unite with us because of His great love for us. Why

does He love us? We do not know. All we know is that He loves us for no reason. He said, “My delight was with the sons of men.” (Proverbs 8:31)

By establishing this great sacrament, God lowered Himself from His glory, and offered Himself as food to satisfy our souls. He said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.” (Matthew 5:6)

As Moses had made the tabernacle with impeccable wood covered with pure gold just to contain the two stone tablets of the commandments, how much more should our souls be free from the vice of sin and be decorated with the gold of divine virtues!

Joseph of Arimathea put the body of our Lord in a new sepulchre where no one had been buried before to honor Him so that the Holy Body would not be in a place where there were decayed dead bodies. Then, how can a Christian accept the Lord in a heart full of hatred, love of the world, or evil lust?

Never proceed to this holy table while you are not ready; without the garment of the feast. Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from death and gave her food to eat. Likewise, after repenting from the death of sin you should eat this heavenly food. The manna that God gave to His people in the wilderness was a symbol of His holy body and precious blood. In the wilderness of this world, we too should eat this spiritual manna. The manna was given to the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt, the land of slavery, and their crossing of the Red Sea. No one deserves to eat this spiritual food unless he has been freed from Pharaoh - that is, the devil - and has crossed the sea of repentance.

Second: Meditate on God’s Great Love:

Meditate on the great love, which God displays to you in this sacrament. God did not only create you in His image, send His only Son to save you from the bondage of the devil and restore you to your original image, but He also gave you His body and His blood as food for you, a cure for your spiritual ailments.

Think carefully **“When did God start to love you?”** Did He love you at the same time you started loving Him or when you were yet a child and your angel was always looking at the face of the Father in heaven? He loved you even before that. He loved you before your arrival in this world, even before its creation!

Before you became a son of God, He had been preparing for you all your needs and blessings. “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love. Therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn you.” (Jeremiah 31:3)

The Lord Jesus did not only grant us salvation and redemption, but He also gave us an eternal promise that He would be with us even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20) His presence with us is apparent in this sacrament whereby His body is in the midst of His people. His name is “Emmanuel”. It means, “God is with us.”

King Ahasuerus, of Persia, once prepared a great feast that lasted for six months, and invited all the prominent people in his kingdom. That was the talk of the entire world. On the other hand, the Lord Jesus prepared for us, a feast that lasted two thousand years and will continue to the end of the world. King Ahaseurus offered earthly food to his invited guests, while Jesus Christ offers Himself. No one ever in the history of mankind has fed his children his own flesh.

The love of the Lord Jesus is very evident if we consider the circumstances in which He established this sacrament. It was while the people were plotting to kill Him in a horrible way. He was busy showing His love by giving them the Food of Life! As the carpenter was making His cross, the blacksmith preparing the nails which would thrust His flesh and others were gathering the thorns which would pierce His holy head, Christ was preparing for them the Food of Life; His body!

St. John Chrysostom said, “Which shepherd feeds his sheep his body?” We hear of mothers who give their babies to nurses to feed them. Jesus did not want to do that with us; instead, He fed us His blood and united us with Him.

Third: Meditate on His Great Humility:

If you have meditated on God’s love while preparing yourself to partake of the Holy Sacrament, you should then meditate on the most astonishing humility of your Savior. **He did not only reveal His love, but He also revealed it in humility.**

As he was dying, St. Jerome looked at the priest who came to give him the Holy Communion and said, “How great is Your humility, O Lord! You come to a sinner like me to feed me Yourself?” Meditating on the humility of our Lord Jesus creates in us a feeling of unworthiness to have Him in our weak temple. He said, “Learn of Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart.” (Matthew 11:29) As the almighty God humbled Himself for me, should not I humble myself to be worthy of His presence inside me?

How great is Your humility, O my Master? Heaven is not pure in Your eyes and You call me, the sinner, to come close to You and be united with You! Who would believe these words had you not said them? When Your mother St. Mary visited Elizabeth, she said in humility, “But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord come to me?” (Luke 1:43) How should my feelings be when I receive not St. Mary but her Lord Himself, Creator and Savior? The pagan centurion found himself unworthy of having Jesus enter his house to heal his servant. He said, “Lord I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word and my servant will be healed.” (Matthew 8:8)

Let us meditate in what St. Paul said, “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away to renew them again in repentance” (Hebrews 6:4-5)

Fourth: Exercises Before and After Communion:

The previous exercises should be performed the day before communion. It is preferable that you sleep early that night so that you may wake up early the next morning. If you wake up during the night, fill your heart with holy words so that you may prepare yourself to receive the heavenly Bridegroom Who watches over you while you are sleeping and offers you precious gifts.

1. On The Morning Of the Communion Day:

Before going to church that morning, examine your mind and remember all the times you strayed from the Lord and sinned against Him since the last time you had communion. Remember how much you have insulted your Lord every time you sinned.

However, Do not lose hope, fill your heart with hope for the great gift you are about to receive. Proceed to the Lord in humility in your heart. He will come into you and rest, not with Moses and Elijah as was in the Transfiguration, but with you revealing His glory so that you may say, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Try to close the door of your heart to anything except the Lord Jesus.

On your way to the church, struggle hard to keep your mind and heart on the Lord and on the great Sacrament that you are about to receive. Say the psalms that are said as one goes to the house of the Lord. Stir your emotions and heart toward the love of God and His humility as mentioned earlier.

2. During the Holy Eucharist:

In church, stand in a quiet place. When communion time approaches, **think deeply and humbly: Who is Jesus Who will abide and unite with you and who are you to receive Him?**

He is the Son of God in Whose presence the heaven and all its hosts tremble. He is the Holy of Holies. In His great love, He made Himself of no reputation taking the form of a servant, although He is God carrying everything by the word of His might.

Who are you? You are nothing. You are the worst of all creatures due to your evil and corruption. You are very weak, as the devils laugh at you and trick you. You have insulted your Lord and Creator. Instead of thanking Him for His blessings, you have trodden over His priceless blood shed for you. (Hebrews 10:10)

After all this, He is still calling you to receive this Holy Sacrament because of His great love for you. Moreover, **His great love reaches a stage whereby it obliges you to partake of it**, for He said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53) As He never shuts the door of his mercy; moreover, He never turns His face away from you even if you are enslaved to all evil desires.

3. The Sacred Moment:

After you have warmed up yourself with His love and mercy proceed to the Holy Communion in awe and reverence saying, “My Lord, I am not worthy of receiving You for I have often displeased You by my sins over which I still have not wept. I am not worthy of receiving You, O Lord, for I did not purify myself of all evil. St. Mary bore You because she was full of grace, but I am full of evil, hypocrisy and lust. O my Almighty God, make me worthy to receive you in my heart, for I have come to you in faith.”

At the moment of communion, when you open your mouth to eat the pure Body, say to the priest, “I have sinned, absolve me father.” Then proceed in complete faith, love and hope to the One Whom you love. Put the handkerchief on your mouth with eagerness and cautiousness as if you want to hide a great treasure, the treasure hidden in a field and the unique pearl of great value which the merchant found. (Matthew 13) You also want to hide this great grace in your heart as David said, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.” (Psalms 119:1)

4. After Communion:

In church: After you have received communion and drunk water, choose a quiet place in the sanctuary and shut yourself completely to all surroundings. Then pray deeply from your heart saying, “O my King, the almighty in heaven and earth, what made You enter my unworthy heart? I am poor, blind and naked! O great and incomprehensible love! What do you want from me a sinner? Nothing except that I love You and that the fire of Your love be inflamed in my heart, that fire which burns out every unwanted love and unholy desire. Lord; Listen to the promises of my heart. Look at me, and let my desire and will be the same as Yours. As You have given me Yourself, I submit myself completely to You so that I may be in You. I am weak and cannot do that with my own power, but I am confident that You will help me.”

Even after the priest gives the congregation the final benediction to leave, do not leave the church right away to avoid meeting your friends and talking nonsense and useless conversation. Instead, stay behind for a while until everyone has left the church. **Try to spend the day of communion in quietness and make good use of the grace you received.** Try to store inside you a spiritual riches so that you may benefit from this great sacrament.

For example, we do not advise students and employees to have communion before going to work unless it is urgent for them to do so, because the nature of their work does not provide the desired quietness. It is the wisdom of the church to prohibit some physical practices such as spitting, or taking anything out of the mouth on the communion day so that her children may remember the grace they have received for a longer period of time and may lift their thoughts to heavenly matters.

At Home: Return home directly, and if possible, try not to get busy doing any physical or worldly work. We exclude studying for the students and spiritual ministry. Do not hurry to eat, but rather keep alone and pray to God to preserve your life and to help you start a new one, free from disdain, abasement, and shame.

Try to spend your day in quietness and be careful of even the simplest annoyances that you may encounter, for the devil always wants to trick you and tempt you. He is like a snake awaiting the hatching of an egg to snatch it. He is watching you since the time you had this great blessing and armed yourself with this strong and mighty weapon. Struggle to increase your faith in that great sacrament so that it may make you more blessed and holy. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)

St. Basil the Great describes the responsibility of the one who takes communion, based on St. Paul's words, saying: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:26) This death suffered by the Son of God for all the people including the partakers of the Holy Communion means that they should live not for themselves but for the One Who died and rose for them. (2 Corinthians 5:15)

Therefore, all those who proceed to take communion must be ready to be faithful to God’s commandments, not live for the world, but for the One Who they have received inside them. Never be like the people of Jerusalem who accepted Jesus joyfully on Palm Sunday singing, “Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord,” then rejected Him a few days later. In the morning, they spread their garments in front of Him, and in the evening, they plotted to take His clothes off. Be faithful in your love to Him and be loyal to Him; ask Him to keep you steadfast in the road of grace and to keep your garment pure.

C) WHAT IS COMMUNION?

“What is Communion, what is the objective of Communion?”

1. Communion is a Covenant:

Communion is a holy covenant between God and His people. Through it, God becomes their Lord and they become His children. “This cup is the new covenant in My Blood which is shed for you.” (Luke 22:20) St. Paul also said, “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because **they did not continue in My covenant**, and I disregarded them, said the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their mind and write them on their hearts and I will be their God, and they shall be Me people. **For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.**” (Hebrews 8:8-12) This covenant implies privileges as well as duties and responsibilities.

The first covenant, which God made was with the Israelites, when He took them out of the land of Egypt, was by the “Passover Lamb”. It was a symbol of “Jesus the Lamb of God” in the new covenant that He was going to constitute by the sacrifice on cross. As we know, the Holy Communion is an extension to the sacrifice of the holy cross.

2. Communion Means Membership in the Church:

It is our membership in the holy church; that is, we are all members in the Body of Christ, which is the church. (Ephesians 1:23) St. Paul said, The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many are one bread and body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10: 16-17) **Therefore, the believers take the Holy Communion so that they may have a covenant with one another and be united as members in the one flesh.** “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26) St. Basil’s Liturgy says, “Make us worthy, O Lord, to partake of this Holy Sacrament and purify our souls, bodies and spirits so that we may be **one body and one spirit.**”

3. Communion is a Spiritual Grace for Righteousness:

It is a great spiritual grace, which grants us the gift of life, of abiding in Christ and of growth, which supersedes all other spiritual means. We mentioned this point earlier. The priest prays in the sanctification part of the liturgy saying, “He decreed this **great sacrament for our righteousness**” The priest also prays secretly in St. Basil’s Liturgy after the fraction saying, “We ask and entreat Your goodness, O lover of mankind, that You may purify us so that we may partake of this Holy Sacrament to be filled with Your Holy Spirit, abiding in Your right faith, to be filled with Your true love and to speak of Your glory all the time.”

D) GENERAL TOPICS ABOUT COMMUNION

1. Partaking Regularly of the Holy Communion:

Partaking of the Holy Communion has a great honor, blessing and effect on our lives unequalled by all other spiritual means. We should be regular in receiving this Holy Sacrament.

Nothing prevents you from receiving this gift; the holy table is close to you. Many abstain from taking communion either because they are afraid of it or because they neglect the salvation of their souls. We shall discuss these two points.

It is necessary for the believers to partake of this great sacrament regularly. We are asked for nothing more than spiritual preparation and we should always be prepared. **In early ages, that was what all the Christians did.** They used to partake of the Holy Communion every Sunday. The Book of Acts says about the Christians of the early church, “They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer.” (Acts 2:42) By being regular in receiving the Holy Communion, we feel our attachment to God and live a pleasing life to Him. This is known from the canons set by the Apostles and the church fathers. St. Eustinas the martyr said, “The holy Body was carried by the priests to those who could not attend the church because of difficult circumstances.”

Hence, we should partake of the communion regularly every week, once every two weeks, or at least once a month.

One might say that receiving the Holy Communion frequently will lead to lessening our reverence and honor of the sacrament and will weaken its moving effect on the soul.

To answer that we say that the spiritual preparation that precedes communion and the spiritual secret effect of communion will awaken our spiritual awareness. If this theory is true, we should stop praying for a while not to lose the feeling of reverence. The opposite is true. The more we pray, the more our hearts are inflamed with the holy love for God. The Bible asks us to pray all the time; “Men always ought to pray.” (Luke 18:1) and “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

2. Partaking of the Communion on Certain Occasions

Some Christians do not receive the Holy Communion except on special occasions they set for themselves such as Holy Thursday or Saturday before Easter. It is good to receive the Holy Communion on such occasions. Yet, we should take communion at regular close intervals so that we may keep the holy covenant with our Lord.

Another group of Christians; students for example, take communion before their exams, so that God may help them. Others receive communion on their birthdays. There is nothing wrong in seeking God in times of difficulty for He said, “Call Me in trouble and I will save you so that you may glorify Me.” It is also good to remember your Creator on your birthday so that you may have a good start for your new year. Yet, **true penance and thorough confession should precede communion so that our sins would not block God’s mercy when we make that material request.**

There is a tradition in our church for the two fiancés to receive the Holy Communion before the Sacrament of matrimony. The main point is that no one should proceed to have the Holy Communion without true repentance and complete confession. Hence, if the two persons do so, they will overcome all the marital problems that may lead to separation or divorce. There is nothing wrong in this tradition; yet, if it is done in a superficial way without repentance and confession, then it is not beneficial.

Besides, if one of the fiancés confessed-certain problems just a day before marriage, there will neither be neither enough time nor the opportunity to overcome them. If one of the fiancés is confessing for the first time, we cannot expect a complete and open confession in this case. We recommend that the fiancés practice the Sacrament of Confession from the beginning of their relation if they are not already doing so.

3. Meaning of “Worthy to Partake of Communion”

Many refrain from partaking of the communion although they have the desire. That is because of their fear of the sacrament or because they do not understand what it means to be ready to partake of the Holy Sacrament. The words of the priest in St. Basil’s Liturgy may scare them; “O Lord, make us worthy to partake of Your holies in purification for our souls, bodies and spirits.”, “Holy to the holies.” and the words of the deacon right before communion, “Pray for the worthy communion of the immaculate heavenly, and holy mysteries.” What is the state of being worthy of the communion?

Is it that you proceed when you have no sin and your life is free from all evil? One of the basic principles of the Christian faith is that being righteous is due to the divine grace, not due to one’s own struggle. St. Paul says, “If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” (Galatians 2:21) If we wait to become righteous before we proceed for the communion, this means that we want to become righteous by our own efforts.

On the contrary, we should proceed with all our weaknesses and imperfections so that God would make us righteous like the prodigal son. He went to his father with his dirty, worn-out clothes, and his father was the one who put on him the new robe, shoes on his feet and a ring on his finger. In short, our life will not be complete unless we are united with God.

The right preparation for communion is true repentance from the heart over all our past sins and a hearty determination to submit all our life to God, to live with Him in holiness and righteousness, and to get rid of all our weaknesses which hinder our relationship with God.

To be worthy to partake of the communion means to proceed in awe, reverence, and appreciation of that great sacrament with the feeling that we are not worthy of that great honor. Therefore, the Christian proceeds as a sick person who needs the medicine to cure all his diseases.

St. John Chrysostom comments on what the priest says in the liturgy, “Holy to the holies,” by the answer all the people give, “We are not holy, but we are sinners not worthy of that name. The only Holy and the Holy of holies is Jesus Christ Who was crucified for our salvation. Thus, the people respond by saying, “One is the Holy Father, One is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

When the deacon says, “Pray for the worthy communion of the immaculate heavenly, and holy mysteries” he warns those who dare to proceed for communion carelessly and without fear.

As St. Paul said, “He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgement to himself, **not discerning the Lord's body.**” (1 Corinthians 11:29)

He also said, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28) It is most important to examine ourselves and see if we made an honest confession. St. John Chrysostom says, “Let no one proceed to the Holy Communion with laziness or negligence, but let all go to receive it with enthusiasm and preparation so that we may not be punished. Do not be guilty of His body and blood as those who crucified Him.”

Sometimes, after we determine to lead a holy life with God, we revert to sinning, not deliberately or carelessly, but owing to our weak nature. **Do not be alarmed** and lose hope. St. John said, “My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.” (1 John 2:1-2)

4. Physical Purity for Partaking of Communion

As partaking of the Holy body and blood needs preparation and spiritual purity, it also requires physical purity.

1. For a male person, nocturnal emission (wet dream) is not considered fasting so you should not partake communion on that day. If this act is repeated, you should confess it to your father, as this might be a war by the devil to prevent you from communion, and the priest will guide you to what you should do then.

2. For a female person, during menstruation and after delivery she should refrain from partaking communion - 40 days following delivery of a baby boy and 80 days following the delivery of a baby girl.

3. Husbands and wives should refrain from marital relation the night before communion for it is considered not fasting.

4. One should take a bath or a shower before communion and proceed with clean clothes.

5. The Priest and the Sacrament

The devil puts doubts in the minds of some believers to prevent them from the blessings of this Holy Sacrament. Some people refrain from taking communion with the excuse that the priest is a bad person or has many faults and therefore they doubt the holiness of this sacrament. Moreover, they do not go to another priest, in whose righteousness they feel confident, but rather restrain from communion because they have doubts about all priests.

Obviously, this is a trick of the devil to deprive those people of the blessings of this great sacrament.

The question is: **“Is there a relation between the holiness of the priest and the fulfillment of this sacrament? Does the changing of the bread and wine into the holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ not happen except when a holy priest prays?”**

Of course, the priest should be a righteous person full of faith, worthy of this great service. However, the wholesomeness of the sacraments does not depend on the faith or righteousness of the priest administering them. In other words, **the power of the sacrament and the grace it grants do not depend on the worthiness of the priest. It only depends on the worthiness and the will of our Savior Jesus Christ Who is granting this grace.** Jesus said in the “Last Supper”, “This is My body, this is My blood”, by His power, it is always the same. He said in the past, “Let there be light,” and it was and is still existing and will remain until the end of the world. Thus the seven sacraments of the church, including communion, do not depend on the righteousness of the priest but on the work of the Holy Spirit, on Whom the priest calls.

Therefore, the priests are only visible instruments by whom the Lord fulfills His sacraments to reach His believers in an invisible way. Again, if the faith of the priest and his holiness were essential matters for the sacraments to be real, this would cause many doubts in the church and would hamper reaping the fruits of the Holy Sacraments. The people will always be in doubt about the righteousness of the priests, only God the examiner of the hearts knows. Moreover, the priest may be holy today and evil tomorrow, like all the other human beings.

St. Gregory the Theologian said regarding Baptism, “I have two seals: one made of gold and the other of iron, each bearing the same royal picture. Each one makes a print on wax. Is the print made by one seal distinguishable from that made by the other seal? Nothing makes it distinguishable. If you think yourself extremely clever, tell me which is the picture printed by the golden seal and which by the iron one and why both pictures look alike. Similarly, look upon each of the priests who baptize you, one might be more spiritual than the other, but the power of baptism is the same.”

John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus was, “This is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” (John 1:33) We compare this with what St. John wrote in his gospel, “Jesus Himself did not baptize but His disciples” (John 4:2) That means, if Peter baptizes, then Jesus Himself would be baptizing. If Paul baptizes, it is still Jesus Who is baptizing. If Judas baptizes, it is still Jesus Who is baptizing. The given power does not differ from one minister to the other; John the Baptist said, “He (Jesus) is the one Who baptizes.”

St. Paul also wrote, “So then neither he who plants anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.” (1 Corinthians 3:7) The power and effect of the sacrament are due to Jesus and not to the priest who only administers it.

Again, St. Augustine wrote in his third book, “It makes no difference as to who administers the sacraments, a righteous person or a sinner, this is like the seeds in the hand of the farmer. Whether his hands are clean or dirty, the seeds will bring forth fruit.”

We conclude that the priests are mere instruments in the hand of God Who sanctifies this sacrament and all other sacraments by the power of the Holy Spirit. We should proceed with

praise and confidence thanking God for His love, mercy and compassion, having prepared “this great sacrament for our righteousness.”

6. Communion and Fasting

The person partaking of the Holy Communion should be fasting with the church in its fasts. The healthy person should fast with the church in joy, love and eagerness without giving excuses not to fast. He should feel that fasting is a blessing to his life.

The church has put in its consideration whose circumstances prevent them from fasting such as pregnant or nursing mothers, the sick and the old. The spiritual father will advise them, to fast or not. The length of the fast and the way of fasting are according to the physical and spiritual circumstance of each person.

Period of Abstinence: The period of abstinence is the period before communion in which the person refrains from eating and drinking. It is known that this period is nine hours that start from midnight of the day of communion except in other special circumstances. After communion, one should be careful not to take anything out of his mouth the rest of the communion day.

7. Communion and the Orthodox Belief

Is it allowed for non-Orthodox believers to partake of the Holy Communion in the Orthodox churches? It is definitely not allowed. The truth cannot be divided or compromised.

Another question: Is it allowed for the Orthodox believers, including the immigrants, or those in countries which have no Orthodox churches, to partake of communion in non-Orthodox churches? The answer is no. It is the church’s responsibility to extend the service to those people wherever they are. The laws of the church prevent its children from attending meetings which the church considers heretic.

A final point, the communion partaker should attend the Matins absolution, the absolution of the ministers and must attend the Gospel reading. It is not allowed for the person who comes to the church after the Gospel reading to partake of the Holy Communion. Early attendance of the church has special blessings as the Psalmist says, “GOD, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water.” (Psalm 63:1) Also Solomon said, “Those who seek me diligently will find me.” (Proverbs 8:17) Let us say with the church, “My eyes have awakened before the morning watch that I may meditate on Your sayings.”

E) PRAYER BEFORE COMMUNION

Lord, I am not worthy that You enter under my roof for I am a sinner. Just say a word and my soul will be healed. Tell me, “Your sins are forgiven.” I am empty of all righteousness. I

am depending completely on Your abundant compassion, Your mercy and love to mankind. You humbled Yourself from Your unlimited glory, and accepted to be born in a manger. So please my holy Savior, do not refuse to come to my poor soul who is eagerly awaiting Your presence. You did not refuse to enter the leper's house to heal him, so please come into my soul to purify it. You did not forbid the sinful woman to kiss Your feet so please do not deprive me from coming near You to partake of Your holy body and Your precious blood. May this Holy Communion banish my impurities and mortify all my evil desires. Help me O Lord to keep Your commandments, for the purification of my soul and body from every sin and for the acceptance of Your gifts and blessings. Let Your Spirit abide in me and unite me with You so that I may live for the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

My heart is filled with joy and my tongue with rejoicing. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. I have come to You, O Lord, so You may clothe me with purity that I may be worthy of Your joy. Let my union with You today be everlasting for it makes me grow in virtue and strengthens my faith and my hope. Let this communion be a symbol of my salvation, a robe for my new birth and for the purity of love. Let it be an everlasting joy for my soul and an answer to my prayers before Your fearful altar.

I yield myself to Your arms. Let me be one with You. Direct me according to Your will. Awaken my heart and conscience. Fight the devil for me. Tell the storm to stop. Walk with me. Quench my thirst. In flame the fire of Your love in my heart. Overcome all my weaknesses. Abide with me for the day is far spent, for You are my goal and my happiness, only You, Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

HUMILITY

"Whoever does not want to enter through the door of humility, would not find the Divine Pasture, and who wants to enter from another door is a thief"

(St. John El-Dargy)

- A) A general word about humility**
- B) Humility in the life of the Lord and His saints**
- C) Humility is the basis of all virtues**
- D) What does humility do?**
- E) How do we possess humility?**
- F) Acquiring humility**
- G) Your life in the light of humility**
- H) Humility in relation to some other virtues**

A) A GENERAL WORD ABOUT HUMILITY

WHAT IS HUMILITY?

Humility is not the mere outer appearance of a person, such as dressing in rough clothes, talking with a soft voice, or walking with a bowed head. Also it is not merely expressed by words a person repeats to others saying that he is a sinner, wicked and not worthy. Neither it is expressed by words one repeats to God declaring his triviality, humiliation and spiritual poverty. It is not just this, because, if so, then it is possible for everybody to become a humble person. **Humility is a life one lives between himself and God, in which he feels he is nil and nothing, even less than nothing, and whatever good or righteousness he has, is from God, and without God he is but dust, darkness and evil.**

St. Isaac once said "A person who mentions his pitfalls and sins to humble himself, though this is very good, is not called a humble person. A humble person is he who comes nearer to humility and tries to reach it. A truly humble person does not need to convince himself or force his thoughts to have the feeling of humility, or invent reasons for that. But it is natural that he counts himself normally as nothing". **St. John El-Dargy also said** "It is not he who insults or blames himself that is the humble person, because who can not bear himself? But the truly humble person is he who stands the blames and the insults of others without diminishing his love for them".

Thus, humility is not an easy simple matter, but it requires us to control our will, crush our stray inclinations, and mortify our bodily desires. "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all" (Mark 9:35) [All Bible quotations are from "The New King James" version, except the Apocrypha which are from "The New English" version]. This is how our Lord taught us by His life and by His sayings, and no matter how humble a person becomes, he finds Jesus is still more than him in His amazing humility. One might strive to become even more humble, but he finds that it is impossible to reach the degree of humility of the Praised and Holy Jesus in what He did to raise us to the Father.

Again, humility is not a virtue which stands by itself, but it is the basis of all other virtues, and without humility, we cannot possess a virtue, and any virtue without it is void, rejected by God and is counted against us, not for us.

Humility - or self denial, as we like to call it - **is not achieved by just reading books, listening to spiritual talks about it, or even by living together with saints, but it is a close life of the soul with God,** which does not end, in which a person strives to free himself from the prison of the body and from the ties of deceitful sin.

Humility is the narrow door which the seekers of heaven must enter, the rough road upon which they must tread, and it is the Cross which the faithful disciple carries, following

the steps of his Teacher and Master, in His way to the city which has the foundations which are made and laid by God. Is there a restriction, difficulty and a cross, heavier than a person defeating his own desires, and bearing humiliation, poverty and defame?!

Humility is a critical test for the seekers of God. **The wise Jesus Ben Sirach said "For gold is assayed by fire, and the Lord proves men in the furnace of humiliation"** (Sirach 5:2).

This is how our saintly fathers understood humility, and explained it in their sayings; each according to his experience. St. John El-Dargy summarised some of them and added by saying: "About humility, some said it is forgetting every good deed a person did, and another said it is the person counting himself the greatest failure, the least and more sinful than other people. Another said it is the mind knowing its weakness. It is also crushing one's soul and refusing one's will. I say, humility is grace in the soul, which no one knows unless he possesses it". The Lord said "Learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). That is, not by an angel, or a human, and not from a book you learn humility of the heart, but from Me, and He continued "and you will find rest for your souls". That is rest from pains and evil thoughts.

THE HONOR OF THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY

1 - If pride is considered the worst vice, the mother which begets, surrounds and strengthens many serious sins, **then without doubt, humility is the top mothering virtue, which begets virtues and saves from many sins.** But it is considered - as we shall see - absolutely the basis of all the virtues. Hence, he who masters humility, lays a good strong foundation for the building of his spiritual life. It is described by one of the fathers as "The tree of life, whoever eats from it never dies".

2 - Humility is especially honored, **because it was the Lord Jesus Himself who taught it, in the forefront of his teachings, by the example of His life, His deeds, and in His divine teachings.** The Lord Jesus did not say "Learn from me the work of miracles, healing the sick and raising the dead", but He said "Learn from Me for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29), because true humility is stronger than haughtiness, and worshipping God with humility is better than doing miracles and signs.

Our teacher St. Paul calls the mind of humility "the mind of Christ", as he says "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:5-7).

St. Pachomius the founder of the coenobitic (communal) monasticism said "**Seeing somebody with humble and pure heart, is better than any scene, because through him you see God the unseen**". Once, a monk said to St. Timothy the hermit "I find that my mind is always with God". The saint replied "Better still is to see yourself below all creation, as there is no fall from humility".

3 - The honor of this virtue results from its effectiveness: St. Augustine said: "Humility attracts God to it, though He is Haughty. As you humble yourself He comes down to you, but if you become proud, He leaves you all together". He also said: "O holy humility, how high is your superiority and your distinction from pride"! **Pride expelled angels from heaven, and humility made the Son of God come down from heaven to be incarnate on earth. Pride led Adam out of paradise, and humility admitted the thief to it.** Pride confused the language of the mighty (at the tower of Babel), and humility gathered peoples with different tongues. Pride transformed Nebuchadnezzar into a wild beast, while humility raised Joseph to be the controller of all Egypt, and put him in the forefront of the people of Israel. Pride drowned Pharaoh in the Red Sea, while humility lifted and elevated Moses.

4. The honor of this virtue comes also from its relation to other virtues. Once St. Macarius the Great, the father of the monks was asked "Which is the greatest virtue?". He replied "If pride is considered the worst of all vices, to the extent that it cast a host of angels out of heaven, no doubt humility is the greatest of all virtues, because it is able to elevate the humble, even if he is a sinner".

5. The great honor humility gains, is due to the Divine Graces which accompany it and result from it. St. John El-Dargy once said "If you hear that somebody acquired in a short time, a great gift, such as lack of suffering, or making miracles, be sure that he acquired that through humility". **Also St. Isaac said "Gifts are not offered for the good deeds themselves, but because of the humility by which they are done"**.

6. What gives humility greater honor is that God loves and looks at the humble "Though the Lord is on high, Yet He regards the lowly" (Psalm 138:6), but even He lives with them "For thus says the High and Mighty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones"" (Isaiah 57:15).

7. Humility is the holy robe the saints put on and wrap themselves with "God gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5), and the road they walk "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1,2). Our teacher Paul also said "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, **humbleness** of mind, meekness, longsuffering" (Colossians 3:12).

8. In the world to come, the humble will enjoy a special distinct status and will be considered the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Our Lord of Glory said "Whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4).

9. Finally, it is the Christian virtue which the world scientists and great philosophers do not practice or teach. It was said that the great philosopher Aphilatone made a party and invited some other philosophers who are known to be ascetic towards world glories, among them was the

philosopher Diogenes. For the party, Aphlatone decorated his house with carpets and costly covers. Diogenes entered the house with dirty shoes and worn out clothes and started to tread upon these carpets and covers. When Aphlatone questioned his behaviour, he answered "I tread upon the pride and arrogance of Aphlatone". When Aphlatone heard this answer he said "It is true that you tread upon the arrogance of Aphlatone, but you do that by another arrogance".

B) HUMILITY IN THE LIFE OF THE LORD AND HIS SAINTS

HUMILITY IN THE LIFE OF THE LORD JESUS

Humility is the beautiful robe, truly amazing, which our Lord put on and in it He manifested Himself to us!! It was not possible for earthly people to see the Lord of Lords and God of gods in the glory of His Divinity. In the past, He said to His elect Moses the prophet "You cannot see My face; for no man can see Me, and live" (Exodus 33:20), and when in the past He descended with His glory on Mount Sinai, the mountain was blazing in fire smoking (Exodus 19), and this was the case "Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast", (Exodus 19:12, 13) and so terrifying was the sight that Moses said: "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling"" (Hebrews 12: 18-21).

In the Old Testament, the Israelites did not dare come near the mountain upon which Your Glory descended, but in the New Testament - the Testament of grace and humility - Your holy mother carried You and Simeon the elder took You up in his arms (Luke 2:28). You ate and drank with the people, and You gave Yourself a living food for them, to abide in You and You in them. It was said that You are "A consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). How did this fire which consumed Your opponents and destroyed the cities (2 Peter 2:6), change to peace which fills the mind, thought and heart, until it is said about You that "You Yourself are our peace" (Ephesians 2:14)!!

It was not possible for the people to see "The Holy Who inhabit the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:3), except in the robe of humility. For this reason, St. Augustine paired the incarnation with humility, and in that he says that the Son of God became incarnate to make peace between man and God, and to cure the heart of men from the illness of pride. He realised the first aim by His death and the second by His humility. Thus the life of Christ was love, humility and pain.

St. Basil the Great displayed the life of the Lord Jesus from His birth to His death, and concluded that Christ by all His deeds, taught us in particular the virtue of humility :

The Lord revealed His humility by sharing our nature when "He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of man" (Philippians 2:7). He also showed it in His birth from a poor mother in a dismal place, lower than the poorest places in this world. He showed it in His escape from the face of the tyrant Herod as if He was weak, while He is the port for the tired and the haven for the escapee, and in His submission to His pure mother and to Joseph the carpenter (Luke 2:51).

The Lord showed His humility also when presenting Himself to John the Baptist to be baptised by him, as one of the sinner and in His elected life of poverty which St. Paul expressed by saying "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Again, He showed it in His submission to the Law and in the manner of His entering Jerusalem "Behold your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey" (Matthew 21:5), and in the many insults He received from the Scribes, the Pharisees and the head priests, which ended in His death on the Cross, the death of shameful and cursed people (Psalm 22:6, 69:9, Isaiah 52:3). This is expressed by the Apostle saying "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8).

The two saints Augustine and Eronimos noticed that the Lord Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount by talking about humility by His saying "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3) and thus He started His preaching with the subject of humility, and in humility He walked all His life and ended with it to His death.

The Lord Jesus lived poor, even less than the birds of the air and the foxes of the field and He said about Himself "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20).

The Lord used to hide His glory and display His shame; He showed His glory on the mount of Transfiguration to only three of His disciples, while He displayed His shame and death to many nations. The reason for His crucifixion was written on His cross in the three main languages of the world at that time. Even the three disciples to whom He exposed His glory, He commanded them - as he came down from the mountain - to tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead (Matthew 17:9). When the multitude wanted to make Him their king, He departed by Himself hiding from them (John 17:9), while when they wanted to insult and despise Him, He gave Himself to them by His own will, when the people and the demons were praising Him, He rebuked them and did not allow them to speak (Luke 4:41), and when He was reviled He was silent and did not open His mouth! (1 Peter 2:23).

The first sin which caused the fall of our race was pride and no wonder we see God treats it with humility.

Perhaps the most distinct and most fascinating picture in the life of the Lord of Glory, is when He bent down and washed the feet of the disciples and wiped them with the towel with which He was girded (John 13:3-5). When John, the meek disciple, recorded the glory of the Divinity of the Saviour by saying "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God" (John 13:3), he then recorded His amazing humility and said "He rose after supper and laid aside His garment, took a towel and girded Himself. After that He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded" (John 13:4-5). What does the behaviour of the Lord of Glory indicate when "He took off His garments, washed the disciples' feet and wiped them"? . **Taking off His garments points to discarding personal dignity and self glory, washing the feet is putting down the self to the greatest extent in humble service which denies its toil; and wiping the feet shows compassion, care, in deep humility.**

After washing their feet and wiping them He followed it by the spiritual command saying to them "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them" (John 13:12-17).

HUMILITY IN THE LIFE OF THE SAINTS

* "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24).

* "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27).

Denying oneself is considered a first condition for Christian discipleship. Those who loved the Lord, those who feared Him and His saints understood these golden words and kept them in their hearts printing them with letters of light. With them, they enlightened themselves and lightened to others the road to glory. They strived to deny themselves following the footsteps of their Saviour in His amazing humility. In their ears echo His divine words "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant is above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master" (Matthew 10:24-25), and they obtained great divine glory.

The saints understood that humility is the cornerstone of their spiritual live building. They concentrated all their efforts to obtain it. All other ascetic deeds could not stand without humility, they would even be **rejected. This is well expressed by mother Theodora who said "No asceticism, striving or fasting can replace complete humility"**. It was said about a hermit who used to cast out bad spirits, that he asked them: How are you casted out? Is it by fasting? They answered: we eat nothing. Is it by striving? They said: we never sleep. Is it by leaving the world? They answered: We live in the desert and uninhabited places. He said how are you then casted out?

They answered: "There is nothing **that crushes us other than humility**".

The Saints despised themselves to an extent which amazed the devils and destroyed their weapons against them. Some saints used to have the devils fight them face to face and they were victorious by the weapon of humility and poverty in the spirit. It was said about **St. Anthony's** striving, that the devils used to fight him in person. He used to tell them "You are strong, what do you want from me, a weak person, what kind of strength do I have that make all of you gather against me? Don't you know that I am but dust, dirt, nothing and unable to kill the weakest among you?" He then used to throw himself on the ground crying "Lord help me and strengthen my weakness. Lord do not leave me. Do not let any of them be stronger than me, as they think I am something. You know Lord that I am unable to stand against the weakest among them". After hearing this prayer, which is full of life and humility, the devils used to run away, unable to come near him,

The Saints were giants in the spirit. Yet they felt they were sinners, or even chief sinners. Their lives were full of tears in repentance for the smallest sins they did as humans. They did not force themselves to moan or to weep, but these were their feelings when they discovered the reality of themselves in the light of the greatness of God, His humility and His love. This is what we realise in their sayings.

Abraham in the past said about himself "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord" (Genesis 18:27). And when John the Baptist was asked "What do you say about yourself and your message?" he said: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the Lord"" (John 1:22-23). **The great St. Paul considered himself** "as the filth of the world, the offscourings of all things" (1 Corinthians 4:13), even he called himself "the chief sinner" (1 Timothy 1:15). In fact they were not as they said they were, but their self denial raised them in the sight of God and their feeling of their extreme lowliness accentuated their virtues.

In this, the saints resemble a tree loaded with many fruits, whose branches lean towards the ground, unlike the empty branches which stand haughtily upward! They are also like lit coal covered with a layer of ashes veiling the fire. This however does not hide the heat and warmth radiating from the coal, from which people get warmth.

The saints in their humility did not stop striving and could not feel they strived enough, as long as they were in the flesh, in spite of what they achieved from high spiritual levels. Their lives were thus continuous striving in the road to Christian perfection, with steady steps by which they ascended the stairs of heaven. From the expressions of a saint to one of his disciples is "If your thought praised you, ask it why do you praise me?, I am like a sailor in the sea. Even when it appears calm, it might turn rough, and I am in danger of drowning as long as I do not reach my destination. Many were very close to the port, but they perished".

The Saints reached high spiritual status for which they deserved divine graces and gifts. Yet they were careful to refer all glory, all deeds, and even everything, to the might of

God. In one of the miracles of **St. Macarius the Great**, he posed a question to a dead man about a certain matter and the dead man answered him. When he saw his disciples amazed, he told them "This matter happened not for my sake because I am nothing, but God did that for the sake of the widow of this man and his orphan children".

The Saints were also very careful to hide their virtues. As a kind of teaching or instruction to their disciples, when they were obliged to mention a miracle they did, or a divine power God performed with them, they did not allow themselves to mention that it happened to them, but they referred it to others.

Their conduct in the road of humility lead them to a high spiritual degree, which they called "The death to the world". That is how they lived dead to the world, but alive to God in Christ. Hence they withstood insults, curses and humiliations, and this was obvious in their lives and teachings. **St. Macarius the Great wanted to give a lesson to a brother who asked his advice.** St. Macarius told him to go to the graves and curse the dead there. The brother went and cursed and stoned the dead. St. Macarius then asked him "Did they answer you back?", he answered "No". He told the brother "Go tomorrow and praise the dead instead". Again he went and highly praised them. St. Macarius again asked him if they answered him back, he said no. Then St. Macarius told him "If you have really died with Christ and were buried with Him, be like those dead people, because curses or praises do not affect the dead. This is how you can be saved".

C) HUMILITY BASIS OF ALL VIRTUES

The Saints agreed that humility is the basis of all virtues. St. Kibrianos calls it "Basis of holiness" and St. Eronimos calls it "First Christian Virtue". They describe it as the root of a plant or a tree. **Humility to other virtues is like the root to the tree. The tree could not grow, bear fruits or live unless its roots are established deep in the soil.** The taller the tree is, the deeper its roots are into the ground. **The fathers also described Humility as the foundation of the house.** They also said that the foundation of a small house is not like that of a huge house. If we wanted a taller house, we need to dig deeper for its foundation. Likewise is humility which carries the building of our spiritual life. **The flower withers if it is cut from its tree. Likewise virtue dries up quickly if it is separated from the foundation of humility.**

Father John Cassian said "It was accepted by early ascetic fathers as a principle in spiritual walk that it is impossible for anyone to attain purity of heart or perfection of one of the virtues unless he believes first that his striving and his whole toil is not sufficient for what he is asking for. But they are void without a special help and grace from God, and this is humility itself. Hence the Saints ruled that this is the basis of all virtues".

Humility is considered not only the basis of all virtues but also their supporter and helper, and because of it, the help of God overflows immensely over the humble person. Father Isaac said "Know that your progress in chastity and virtue is not the result of your prudence and

your virtues, but of Divine Grace which carries you on the palm of its hand else you move and slip. Remember that always. Also if you get a haughty thought, cry, be sad, fall on the ground and remember your transgressions, in the hope that you are delivered from this thought and attain humility. As soon as your mind is filled with the thought of humility, your sins are forgiven without deed. How many big and difficult sins, humility was able to get rid of?"

Is there any conflict between the saying that humility is the basis of the virtues and the saying that faith is the basis? Not at all. Laying the foundation of a building requires two jobs; digging until we reach the rock bed then laying down the foundation. The role of humility is the digging and the deepening until one reaches the rock, Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Hence the first stone is laid down. You dig the ground well through humility, knowing yourself well, getting rid of what is inside of falling dust, which is depending on the self. Hence, the foundation is strong for the faith.

We here display some examples for different virtues to see how humility is the basis of all of them, and without it they cannot stand.

(1) Faith: Faith needs humility; as proud thought does not easily accept faith. The Lord Jesus said "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another?" (John 5:44). Humility is not only necessary for attaining faith but also for keeping it. For a good proof, heresies result from pride. Our teacher St. Paul said "In the last days perilous times will come: For men will be ...boasters, proud, blasphemers" (2 Timothy 3:1,2).

(2) Hope: Hope needs humility to support and strengthen it. One does not hope for what he sees, but for what he does not see. The person who depends on his knowledge and thinking, does not accept what he does not see. Hoping for the unseen requires humility of the mind.

(3) Love: Humility and love support and strengthen one another. St. John El-Dargy said "Nothing is superior to humility and love, because humility raises as the Lord said and love holds up as St. Paul said "Love never fails and does not vanish" (1 Corinthians 13:8). When we talk about love we mean our love to God and to one another.

Our love to God is supported and strengthened by humility. When man realises his many sins and bad reputation and beside that he feels that God is still faithful in His love and caring for him, his feeling of humility results in inflaming his heart with the love of God. The same feelings used to and still move the saints to the love of God. This is how St. Mary sang her everlasting praise "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant" (Luke 1:46-48).

Concerning our love to one another, it is in great need of humility. Hate, quarrels between people, evil thinking, condemning one another and envy, all result from pride. A humble

person is not unhappy if he is not praised or if another person is praised. He wishes everybody well and feels that others deserve honor more than him, or as John the Baptist said about Jesus "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). This is also expressed by our teacher Paul "Being of one accord, of one mind ..., but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:2, 3). Such nice feelings will without doubt strengthen the ties between people. St. John the beloved said "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16).

More than that people dislike the behaviour of the proud person with them. If he errs he does not admit his error, he does not obey others and does not forgive, he considers that a weakness of his. He is always angry, insists on his ideas and does not stop talking, thinking that this adds to his personality. But a meek and humble person is the complete opposite of that. The deeper a well is, the purer is its water. Likewise, the more humble a person is, the more he is loved by all people.

If we have talked about humility as an important factor to establish love, we should not forget to say that love also from its side strengthens humility and establishes it. This phenomena is the same in our relation with God and with people. The strong love of God to us increases our lowliness. When we meditate on the love of God which made Him give His Divine self for us, and how He withstood insults from man to whom He gave "life, breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25), all that move us to lowliness and humility.

(4) Prayer: Prayer becomes empty of strength if it lacks humility, it is even rejected. Ben Sirach says "**Prayer of the humble penetrates the clouds, persists until it is there, and leaves when visited by the almighty**" (Sirach 32:17). Also the lowly Judith, sitting down on her bed clothes in sacks and sitting in ashes, cried loud to God saying "**For thy might lies not in numbers nor thy sovereign power in strong men; but thou art the God of the humble, the help of the poor, the supporter of the weak, the protector of the desperate, the deliverer of the hopeless**" (Judith 9:11). Our Lord was also pleased with the prayer of the tax collector (Luke 18:13, 14) and praised him.

(5) The Rest of the Virtues: What we have said about the relation between humility and the above mentioned virtues, **is also said about the rest of the virtues** such as choice of poverty, obedience and chastity (purity). We shall see when we deal with the subject of "life of purity", how that the wars of sexual immorality may intensify in a person for sometimes, to chastise him because of the pride of his heart, and how humility and petition in front of God lifts these wars.

D) WHAT DOES HUMILITY DO?

Humility has many blessings. Where humility is, the meek Lord descends with His blessings and graces and He is our best support in our spiritual striving. **St. Aphram El-Soriany said "Who wishes to move a rock from its place, places a lever under it not above it. Hence he shifts it easily, and this is a model for humility"**. We can realise some of the blessings of humility from the following:

1 - Humility Takes Man Back to His Original Status:

Pride was the first fall of man. No wonder if humility takes him back to his original status before fall, by the Divine Incarnation. Pride expelled the first man from the paradise and humility is able to bring him back. By pride, man fell, lost his dignity and lost control over himself and over all the creatures which were created for him to be under his dominion (Genesis 1:28).

By humility, man gets up, regains his dignity and his control over himself and over all the creatures.

St. Paul the simple, the disciple of St. Anthony, started his ascetic life after the age of sixty. In a few years he acquired great grace and he performed miracles which St. Anthony the great did not do. He performed them through humility supported by the prayers of his aged teacher and his obedience to him.

St. Anthony said to his disciples "My children, why did the Lord Jesus take off His garment, girdle Himself, pour water and washed the feet of those who were less than Him? Does not He teach us humility by what He did? All those who want to regain their original nature, cannot do that except through humility".

2 - By Humility You Defeat the Devils:

This is a natural consequence. The proud Satan who fell through his pride cannot tolerate to see a humble person. Satan who let our whole race fall through pride, is scared of a person who fights him with the weapon of humility and runs away with shame!

The Saints reported this fact in their striving. They left their spiritual experiences to us, as well as what they saw from revelations and what they heard from the devils - as unintended confessions - concerning the devils' weaknesses and the secret of the saints' victory.

It was said about St. Anthony, that he saw the traps of the devil laid down on the whole earth. St. Anthony sighed and said "Lord who can escape from all these traps?". He then heard a voice from heaven saying "The humble can". **It was also said about St. Macarius the Great** that the devil met him once and said "Woe to you Macarius, whatever you do, I likewise do: you fast,

and I do not eat. You strive and I do not sleep, but you defeat me by one thing. St. Macarius asked "By what?". The devil answered "By humility only you defeat me". One of the old pious monks said "If a monk with humility asks his brother to forgive him, the devils burn down".

A strange story is mentioned in the book "The Paradise of the Monks", which confirms what we mentioned: Two monks were living in the desert in a saintly manner which urged the devil to try to disperse them. One evening the younger monk lit a lamp and put it up on the stand. By a devil's movement, the lamp fell and the light was put out. The older monk got angry and hit the younger monk. The younger monk humbly told the older monk "Be patient with me my brother and I shall light the lamp once more". When God saw the patience of the younger monk, He tortured this devil till the morning. This devil went and told the chief devil who was meeting with a priest of idols. The loving Lord willed that the priest hear what this devil was saying to his chief. When the priest of the idols heard how the devil was tormented from the humility of this monk, he himself left every thing, believed and became a monk. Also from the beginning of his monastic life he practised complete humility and used to say "Humility can defeat, tie and untie all the power of the enemy. I heard the devils talking to one another saying "Every time we try to sow enmity among the monks, we find them receive that with humility, and ask forgiveness of one another, which cancels our efforts"".

3 - Humility Preserves God's Grace in Man

Humility is the best preserver of God's grace in man. It is the right climate which keeps grace alive and working in us. The person who advertises his virtue for the love of appearance, weakens and eventually loses it. Ashes keep the heat of the burning coal and covers it up as if it is not burning. Likewise humility keeps our spiritual warmth and hides our virtues to preserve them. Egypt's Pharaoh used to kill all male children born to the Hebrew women at the time Moses was born. But Moses was not killed because his mother hid him for a while. Likewise, the virtue, which is born in the soul, if it is not hidden from the spiritual Pharaoh, i.e., the devil, it would not grow and live.

4 - God Exalts the Humble

St. Peter said "Be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to **the humble**. Therefore **humble yourselves** under the mighty hand of God, that **He may exalt you in due time**" (1 Peter 5:5-6). St. James the apostle said "**Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up**" (James 4:10). In the past, God said by Isaiah the prophet "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). **St. John El-Dargy said** "If the devil had fallen from the sky by pride alone, then humility alone raises man to the sky". God said "Whoever exalts himself will be abased, and who humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12).

The gentile centurion who with humility described himself as being unworthy for Christ to enter his home, was preferred to the Jews and was praised by Christ who said "I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" (Matthew 8:10). But **the Pharisee** who had virtues and good

work, and prayed in the temple proudly enumerating his virtues saying "I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess", he was not justified. On the contrary, God preferred the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18: 9-14).

Again John the Baptist who said that he is unworthy to loose Jesus' sandal strap (Luke 3:16) became beloved of Jesus, and the same hands of which he said unworthy to loose Jesus' sandal straps, God honored by letting them laid on Jesus' head in the Jordan river. That was when Christ came humbly to John to be baptised from him saying "For thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15).

Hannah, mother of Samuel the prophet, said "God raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory" (1 Samuel 2:8). David the prophet expressed the same meanings in his psalm (Psalm 113:7,8). St. Mary said in her everlasting Magnificat which she recited to her relative Elizabeth "God has shown strength with His arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty" (Luke 1:51-53).

St. Paul, after describing the amazing humility of our Lord Jesus Himself said "But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth" (Philippians 2:7-10).

Humility exalted the young boy David, and made him a king over Israel. Likewise, humility exalted so many unknown saints to the seat of honor. St. Aphram El-Soriany said "We are in need of humility to attract to us the mercies of God, as it is written, because of our humility, God remembered us and delivered us from our enemies" (Psalm 136:23, 24).

5 - Humility Reveals God's Mysteries and Qualifies for His Gifts:

God reveals His mysteries to the humble. David the prophet said "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant" (Psalms 25:14) and Solomon said "But His secret counsel is with the upright" (Proverbs 3:32). Our Lord Jesus Himself after He rebuked the city of Capernaum for its pride said "Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight" (Matthew 11: 23-26). The babes here are none other than the humble. **St. Isaac said "Gifts are not offered for good works themselves, but for the humility by which they are done"**. He also said humility is born from sadness, and gifts are given for humility. Thus gifts are not given for good works nor for the sadness but because of the humility which is born from it". He said also "Pride precedes fall and humility precedes obtaining the gifts".

6 - Fruits of Humility Are Joy and Peace in the Heart:

From the fruits of humility are comfort for the soul, peace for the heart, and indescribable joy. The Lord of Glory said "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). David the prophet said "My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; **the humble shall hear of it and be glad**" (Psalms 34:2). He also said "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness" (Psalms 30:11). **St. Pachomius the founder of the Coenobitic (communal) monasticism said "Be humble in order to be joyful, because joy goes hand in hand with humility"**.

Anxiety and unrest are in the hearts of the proud and anger fills these hearts. An example of that is Haman who saw Mordecai in the king's gate, where he did not stand or tremble before him, and he was filled with indignation against Mordecai (Esther 5:9). Among the means which give comfort to the soul is confessing one's error. This distinguishes between the humble and the proud; who because of their pride refuse to acknowledge their mistakes, thinking that this is against their dignity. This in turn is reflected in their lives as a result of their dishonesty in not practising the sacrament of confession, because of their pride hiding behind their shyness.

7 - Humility Gives Wisdom:

Solomon in his wisdom said "When pride comes, then comes shame; **but with the humble is wisdom**" (Proverbs 11:2). Also he said in the Book of Wisdom about wisdom itself "Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun" (Ecclesiastes 7:11). Also David the prophet said "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalms 19:7), and the simple here are the humble. Also Jesus Ben Sirach said "**A poor man with wisdom can hold his head** high and take his seat among the great" (Sirach 11:1), and a poor man here means the humble.

St. John El-Dargy said "Meekness is the key to the door of wisdom, because God teaches the meek His ways", and **St. Aphram El-Soriany said "Inside the meek and humble man, the spirit of wisdom rests"**. St. Pachomius said "Be humble so that God guards and strengthens you, because He says that He looks to the humble. Be humble so that God fills you with wisdom, knowledge and understanding, because it is written that He guides the humble and teaches His ways to the meek".

8 - Humility Gives Patience and Endurance:

The proud person grumbles all the time, is unhappy in his life, feels he is treated unjustly and others do not value him. On the contrary, the humble person knows his weaknesses, is patient when misfortunes strike him, blames himself in every thing and does not care about the opinion of others about him because his aim is to please God. He cites prophet Micah when he says "Therefore I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him" (Micah 7:7, 9). Hence we see that humility teaches us patience and endurance. Jesus Ben Sirach said "My son if you aspire to be a

servant of the Lord, prepare yourself for testing. Set a straight course, be resolute and do not lose your head in time of disaster. Bear every hardship that is sent you; **be patient under humiliation**" (Sirach 2:1-4).

9 - Humility Helps and Saves in Time of Trouble:

We saw how humility trains us to be patient and have endurance. Beside gaining their rewards, patience and endurance help in the times of difficulties and hardships we go through, those which are from God to test and purify us and those which God permits for our chastity. Moreover, humility gives a kind of comfort to those in trouble, as St. Paul said "Nevertheless **God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us**" (2 Corinthians 7:6), and even saves from the troubles as David the prophet said "**I was brought low, and He saved me**" (Psalms 116:6).

St. Isaac said "God permits us to go through troubles and hardships - even the saints - so that we continue being humble. If we harden our hearts in the time of trouble and hardships He makes them even harder. **But if we meet the troubles with humility and lowliness in the heart, God will mix the difficulty with mercy**". He also said "If grace finds the heart of a person starting to have haughty thoughts and self reliance, it leaves him for a while, in order to test him as he stands alone with the difficulty facing him". Another father saint said "**Humility saved many people without effort, while any effort of a person is useless without humility**", because many have toiled, and as a result became proud and hence perished.

In the wars of sexual immorality and desire, we find that humility is one of the most important factors for overcoming them. St. Augustine said "The greatest means in obtaining and keeping chastity is being sure that we are unable to gain it by ourselves and our effort, because whoever depends on himself and his effort deserves to lose it". Solomon also said in the Book of Wisdom "I saw that there was no way to gain possession of her (purity) except by gift of God, so I pleaded with the Lord, and from the depths of my heart I prayed to Him" (Wisdom 8:21). For this, the historian Paladios mentioned about St. Balamone who was quite old and while in his seventies he was not spared the difficult struggle with the thoughts of adultery. He fought these wars for twelve years as the attacks remained strong. One day when he thought that God has neglected him, he heard a voice from heaven saying to him "Know that the reason why God allowed these wars to remain is for you to know your weaknesses, your poverty and the little you have. So get rid of your self-reliance, be humble in front of Me and come to Me for everything". This voice gave St. Balamone great comfort and the wars stopped.

10 - Humility Keeps Away God's Wrath and Answers Prayers:

The Bible gives many examples about that. It was said about Hezekiah king of Judah "**Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah**" (2 Chronicles 32:26). It was also said about Manasseh king of Judah - who did evil in the sight of the Lord - and was captured by the soldiers of the king of Assyria who took him with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon "Now when he was in affliction, he implored the Lord his

God, and **humbled himself greatly** before the God of his fathers, **and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication**, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom" (2 Chronicles 33:12).

Job also spoke to God with humility at the end of his affliction saying "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, "Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; you said, I will question you, and you shall answer Me. I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. **Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes**" (Job 42:2-6). After these words the Lord restored Job's losses and blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning (Job 42:9, 10, 12).

There is no stronger than the command of God Himself which He gave to Solomon son of David, which is "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

E) HOW DO WE POSSES HUMILITY?

There are people who are humble by their own nature. Among them those who are born as simple people, as simplicity strengthens humility and let it grow. Other people acquire humility through spiritual striving and spiritual exercises. In any case, everyone can become humble by the means which leads to it. We do not deny that it is a difficult road. But it is the same difficult road with the narrow door through which few enter. Our comfort is that this road leads to the City of Joy, from which all distress, sorrow, and sighing have fled.

It is a long road - and without doubt - going into it requires continuous exercises, conquering one's will, and controlling the desires which harm the body and soul. Exercising for attaining humility is difficult in the beginning, but soon the soul will enjoy it after tasting its sweetness. **St. John El-Dargy said** "In the beginning we hardly dislike the praises from others. Then as humility grows with other virtues, one considers all good he does as nothing, even disliked, else we add to our sins. Hence, the mind is preserved with humility, and avoids to listen to or to see what is complimentary. As humility grows to a mature level, it becomes difficult to elucidate. It is like a plant which does not stop growing as long as it is watered by the water of pure virtues".

Let us now deal with some means which help us to gain this virtue. We wish to mention that what we say here is complemented by what we will say in the subjects of pride and honor. These three subjects form one unit which leads us to the life of self-denial.

(First) Perpetually Observing the Humility of Our Saviour:

There are countless blessings in the perpetual looking to our Saviour. St. Paul urges us to do so by saying "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2), and by saying

"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Gentleness and lowliness in heart are among the first blessings we get from looking to Christ. The Lord Himself invites us to that by saying "**Learn from Me**, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). **St. John El-dargy said** "The Lord said learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart. It is not from an angel, a man, or from a book you learn lowliness of heart, but from Me". That is how we learn humility; from the meek Lord.

St. Aphram El-Soriany said "What can we say to God, and whichever thing we needed and He did not do for us? Did we not see God Himself humble in the image of a servant, so as to teach us humility in order that we become humble? Did we not see His Holy face which nobody can describe, spat upon, so that if we were sworn at, or harshly spoken to, we do not get angry or object? Did we not see His back stretched and whipped, so that we submit to our superiors? Did we not see His face slapped, so that, if we were rejected, we do not protest? Did we not hear about Him that He never argued or insisted on His opinion, so that we should also not insist upon our opinion and answer back? Did we not hear Him saying that He does not do anything from Himself (but from His Father), so that we do not act with our own will and our own power? **Did we not hear Him say "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart", so that we ourselves become gentle and lowly in heart!!"**.

(Second) Knowing One's Self:

What attracted the saints to the life of self-denial is not the beauty of humility as a holy virtue by itself, but also - which is more important - the discovery of their own selves in God's light. The particles of dust could not be seen in a dark room unless the rays of the sun enter the room. Likewise our selves - with whatever sins they have - could not be seen without God's light. Hence, the fathers said "Knowing one's self is the means of knowing God". Such wisdom confirms what the ancient philosophers used to say "Know yourself". I therefore need to know myself first, and when I know it well, I will humble myself. There is no humility as such before I know myself.

We do not learn humility from mere reading books, listening to teachers, nor imitating saints. If we do that - without knowing ourselves - our humility turns out to be a false one or a kind of hypocrisy. **St. Isaac said** "Blessed is the person who knows his weakness, as such knowledge is a good principle and a source of every good thing. Because if he knows his weakness, he avoids slackness and asks for God's help and relies on Him".

Meditating on the next points help us to know our selves.

(a) Meditating on One's True Self.

We got our existence freely from God and we also were saved freely by Him "and were by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). God Himself "called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We thus became beloved, even children. This is not our right which we ever merited, but it is from God's goodness and mercy. He still keeps and supports us with His mighty hand, in every thing, so that we do not return back and fall.

Then who am I? I am but dust, a nonentity and nothing. At one time, the world existed and I had not existed. God created dust first, then He created me from dust. I am but less than nothing, and "nothing" is better than the sin which I commit which defiles myself and by which I offend God. God created me and He is able to guard me and He still cares for me. Prophet David said "You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me" (Psalm 139:5). It is God's hand which keeps and cares for me so as not to return to the nothingness from which I first came. The moment in which God ceases to care for me - even for a short moment - I become nothing. St. James asked in the past "What is your life?", and he answered "It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). **St. James described our life, in its reality it is "vapour", and in its duration "appears for a little time" and in its end "it vanishes away"?** .

Man's beauty, his mind, his strength, his build, his wisdom, his might and his dominion, are all from God. Man himself, in spite of all the advances he achieved in the circles of science, culture and civilization, is himself but dust from the earth. "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastics 12:7). Even the body with which man boasts, is but putrid in which worms will flourish. Job who realised this fact said "I say to corruption, you are my father, and to the worm, you are my mother and my sister" (Job 17:14).

Knowing one's self is realized in the lives of God's saints, their sayings and their behaviour. Jacob spoke with God and said "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies" (Genesis 32:10). **Also Moses who knew his weakness,** when God gave him the responsibility of leading his people out of Egypt, said to Him "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). Then he returned and said "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:10).

David, the prophet and king said in his farewell prayer in his old age "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You. For we are aliens and pilgrims before You, as were all our fathers; our days on earth are as a shadow, and without hope. O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand, and is all Your own" (1 Chronicles 29:14-16). St. Isaac said "Do not depend on your strength, else you will be left to your weak nature, and know your weakness from your fall. Realise that any matter one boasts with, the mighty God allows it to diminish, so that one feels humble".

(b) Meditating on One's Sins:

Knowing one's self is also realized by knowing one's sins, shortcomings and weaknesses. St. Augustine used to pray saying "Lord, grant me to know myself and to know You". What helps us in acquiring this knowledge **is to measure ourselves in the light of the perfect measure which is God's Holy Book.** It is the lamp to my feet and a light to my path to the Kingdom (Psalm 119:105), and it was written for our learning (Romans 15:4). We make sure that we are asked to keep all God's commandments given in the Holy Bible for our benefit and welfare. Among these commandments is to live a perfect Christian life (Matthew 5:48), and to pursue holiness "without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

What leads me to know myself is to compare myself with those who are better than me, such as the departed saints whose life stories we read or the godly people who are still alive amongst us. As I compare my striving with theirs, I cannot but cry from my heart "if the righteous is hardly saved, where shall I, a sinner, appear?". **Also what shows me myself and my sins, is sitting quiet with myself keeping accounts with her. Finally, which leads me to know myself is keeping in contact with spiritual people who live careful spiritual lives.**

(c) Meditating on One's Changing Self:

Among what you should know about yourself, is that she is deceitful, and you can no longer trust her. Do not be deceived by some of her outside appearances, even if you have attained some virtues, and have acquired some high spiritual degrees. **St. Moses the black once said "Do not put trust in yourself as long as you are in the body, until the powers of darkness have left you".** The saints kept this advice and gained spiritual glories.

Among the impressive stories which illustrate this fact to us is what St. Sisoury of Upper Egypt said when he was on his death bed. This old father fell sick and was dying. He was surrounded by other monks who heard him as if he was talking to a group of people - whom they could not see. They asked him about what he was seeing. He said that he sees a group of people who came to take away his soul and he is pleading with them to give him sometime to repent. One elder monk then asked him "Would you succeed in your repentance if they give you sometime to do so?" The saint answered "If I can not do any thing, I sigh and weep". The fathers around him told him that his repentance is completed. He answered "Believe me, I do not know by myself if I even started to repent yet". When he said that, his face shone like the sun and the monks surrounding him were frightened. **He then uttered his last words saying "Look, the Lord said: Bring me the repentant of the desert", and he gave up his soul and the place was filled with a beautiful perfume.**

(Third) Rejoicing in Insults and Despising:

As a person grows in his spiritual life as a whole, he also grows in every virtue. **Humility, like other virtues grows by striving and by practice.** Rejoicing in insults is not attained by a person in one step. At the beginning, when a person is insulted, he gets annoyed, or may be gets

angry or furious. In the next step, when he is insulted, he gets annoyed but controls himself not to get angry. Next he goes up to a higher step and keeps his inner peace, and by striving he reaches a degree in which he rejoices in the insults. It is mentioned about the Apostles when they were beaten because they were preaching the Word of God "They departed rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41).

An even higher degree, is that the person not only rejoices in insults, but seeks them. It is said about a striving monk who was living in the desert, that he went to a monastery in Upper Egypt which was full of saintly fathers. After he stayed a few days in this monastery he went to the chief monk asking his permission to let him go. When the chief monk asked him for the reason, he answered "There is no toil here, all the fathers here are saints, **and I am a sinner, I wish to stay in a place where I meet insults and reproaches. A sinner is saved by insulting and despising him**". The chief monk was surprised and permitted him to leave, telling him "Go and be strong". We should then be patient when insulted or despised, even should rejoice, knowing that they save us from vainglory, and increase our humility. For this reason, our teacher St. Paul said "**Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches**" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

(Fourth) Avoid Boasting of Spiritual Gifts:

This degree - in humility - even exceeds the latter degree. Obviously, a sick person feels his sickness, a poor person realises his poverty, and an offender knows about his offence. But it would be strange for a rich man to equate himself with the poor and the saint who - is honored by all - to count himself as the chief sinner!!

It is as if the saints, with what they acquired of gifts and graces, are saying what the twenty four priests are saying to Christ Who is sitting on His throne "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (Revelation 4:11). Or in St. Paul's expression "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5), "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

The saints - as this is the case - feel that God is the source of every good thing, and that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). They felt that the secret of their lives and their continuous spiritual growth, is in Christ, as He said "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4). **Thus they related everything in them from spiritual gifts and graces to God.**

The Lord Jesus Christ warned His disciples, when they returned with joy after the demons were subject to them, by saying "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:18, 20).

We need a special divine help to keep in us the grace of humility while having spiritual gifts. St. Ambrose of Alexandria said "Nobody can keep and perfect this matter by himself, without a special very great grace". In this regards St. Paul says "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:12). Father John Cassian said "The human eyes, though healthy, cannot see without light. Likewise, a person, though a good one, cannot do good unless assisted by the light of grace". "Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Psalms 127:1).

(Fifth) Practical Practices for Humility:

Such as dressing in simple humble dress, avoiding luxuries in clothing, food and drink; doing jobs which nobody would like to do, submitting to our superiors and those who are older than us in age and position, in true love and humility, being quick to apologise to whom we did wrong, with sincere feeling and true humility, ... etc.

These practices have great effect in acquiring true humility in two respects: **(a)** virtues are not attained except by work and **(b)** the fact that the outside behaviour affects the inside human feelings. The Lord Jesus Himself when He wanted to teach us humility, He did that in a practical way, as he bent down and washed the feet of His disciples; He also commanded them to do likewise.

St. Basil the Great said "Sciences and professions are not learned without practice. Who wishes to learn Philosophy, Literature, or one of the professions, needs to practice working at it in order to perfect it. Likewise, humility and other decent virtues cannot be perfected without practice". Also **St. Augustine said** "The inside and the outside of man are united one to the other, and each one is fond of the other to a great extend. So that when the body becomes humble and lowly, the heart gets inner feeling of humility. Hence if you bend down to kiss your brother's feet, the humility in your heart is moved or is strengthened if it already existed. External humility in front of the brethren, such as serving them and kissing their feet, simple dressing, and menial jobs, all these give birth to humility in the heart, and keeps and strengthens it, if it is already there.

(Sixth) General Advice:

(a) Do not utter in front of others that which make them praise you, even if what you say in its appearance shows humility, such as belittling or disdaining yourself. Some people do that - by words or deeds - in order to be praised by others.

(b) If somebody praises you for some good deed, be quick and give thanks to God Who helped you in this deed and gave you grace in the eyes of others. But if you start to experience the feeling of greatness, remember your sins which God hid so that others do not know about. Then you realise that you are not worthy of the praises of others.

(c) Do not pretend to do a deed that others will observe and praise you for. The Lord of Glory said "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them" (Matthew 6:1). Whatever you do, do it for God from Whom you expect the best reward.

(d) Do not justify yourself for the wrongs you do. The Psalmist said "Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies" (Psalm 141:4). **Do not give excuses for yourself like the people of the world do,** as Job said "If I have covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom" (Job 31:33). Be frank with yourself, honest in dealing with her and be quick to apologise to God and to others.

(e) Esteem all other people better than yourself. "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:3).

(f) Do not choose the best places or the front places. The Lord rebuked the Pharisees and the Scribes as "they love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues" (Matthew 23:6).

(g) If you were in a gathering, do not be quick to speak before others, as if you were wiser or of better understanding than them. If possible, be the last to speak, feeling that there are others who are better than you and have the right to speak before you. St. Pachomius said "Be humble in every thing, and if you know all the wisdom, be the last to speak".

(i) Do not daydream with ambitious thoughts, even if they appear they are for the sake of the glory of God and the spread of His Kingdom. Such as when somebody imagines that he became a bishop who oversees the matters of the Church diligently, and does great improvements. Beware of these thoughts, as the 'devil of pride' is hides behind them.

F) ACQUIRING HUMILITY

1. Deeds of Repentance:

Deeds of repentance in general help us in the life of humility. Humility - though the basis and supporter of all other virtues - itself feeds on and grows by the other virtues. Hence St. John El-Dargy said "There are relations between these three: repentance, mourning and humility. First, the soul is ground by the striving of repentance, like wheat. Then it is kneaded with the water of weeping, the mourning water, like the dough. Then it is baked like bread with the fire of humility which is donated by God. Hence comes the salvation from the pains as the Prophet said "I was brought low, and He saved me" (Psalm 116:6) and also "Repentance raises the person, mourning knocks on the door of Heaven and the lowliness of thought opens the door of the Kingdom".

2. Feeling As A Stranger:

St. John El-Dargy said "The feeling as a complete stranger realises humility". A person who feels as a stranger in this world does not care if he is not known by others, their cares or praises. The feeling of being a stranger creates in us the feeling of "death to the world", and this by itself is a big support to humility. A person who feels as a stranger, feels that he has no place in this world and asks diligently for the everlasting one, repeating the words of the Psalmist "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech" (Psalm 120:5). Moreover, the life of a stranger has its help from God. The Psalmist says "The Lord watches over the strangers" (Psalm 146:9). Our teacher St. Paul also says "God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:16).

3. Withstanding Difficulties with Patience:

We mentioned earlier when we talked about the blessings of humility, that humility delivers and saves us from difficulties. We here add, **that withstanding difficulties with patience helps our humility to grow.** St. Isaac said "God holds tragedies and temptations to those who love good, in order for them to realise their weakness. Hence, difficulties create humility, maybe heart breaking through physical pain, by people's insults to them, or through poverty, sickness or need.

Some other times humility comes through defeat when the devil fights people with foul thoughts, that they may realise their weakness and become humble. In the past God spoke about His people saying "I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised **hearts are humbled**, and they accept their guilt" (Leviticus 26:41). St. Isaac also said "It is true Lord that You keep humiliating us with all kinds of temptations and troubles until our souls are humbled". He also said "**Through difficulties we come near to humility, and if one stays without sorrows** or temptations, he finds the door of haughtiness and pride opened in front of him"

4- Deprivation:

The love of ownership in all of its shapes and forms, increases a person's tie to the world and binds him to it. Deprivation from this wrong deviated love, releases us from the bonds of the world, and makes us live with "liberated spirit". No doubt that **the deprivation from ownership creates in us the spiritual humility** which God praised and with which He initiated the Beatitudes on the

mount saying "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). For this reason, the saintly fathers advised us to live the life of deprivation which leads us to humility. St. Isaac said "Who is controlled by the matters of this vanishing world, even by a part of it, cannot be humble or be of pure heart. Because the humble person is dead to the world, and the world is dead to him, and his heart would not tend to like any thing in it. So **if you want to be humble, first of all free yourself from the matters of the world**, and follow God with hope, faith and love, and you will obtain an everlasting life instead of the world which you have left"

G) YOUR LIFE IN LIGHT OF HUMILITY

We now view some spiritual practices in our lives in the light of this virtue. We mean to show that the virtue should not remain just some theoretical knowledge, but becomes part of us, we acquire and live in it and by it. Obviously we could not view all practices in life, but we give examples to some, and you may use this as a measure for the other practices in your life.

1- In Praying:

Often we feel conceited as a result of practising some spiritual activities. For example, a person who is regular in his prayers, may feel that he became a saintly person, just because he prays regularly. His feeling might be even stronger if God gave him for example the grace of shedding some tears when he prays. Praying thus becomes a subject for conceit, instead of for being a blessing for him. Do not be conceited in your prayers, as it cannot measure up to the prayers which God left for us as examples, when He used to pray all night long up on the mountain, or when He struggled in His prayers in Gethsemane at the beginning of His suffering. It also cannot measure up

if compared to the prayers of those whose whole lives were prayers.

Where are you, compared to St. Arsenius the Great, who used to pray Saturday nights with his back to the setting sun, and stay like that all night long, in communion with God, until the sun rises in front of his eyes the next morning - and by that alone - he knows that the night ended and feels sad that the natural sun ended his communion with the Sun of Righteousness!! **Where are you compared to St. Bishoy who used to tie a rope to the hair of his beard, whose other end is tied to the ceiling of his room**, in order to overcome sleep and his physical nature.

Where are you compared to the young saints Maximus and Domitius, the son of a Byzantine Emperor, who despised the world with great courage? The prayers of one of them used to appear as a pillar of light which reached from his mouth to the sky, while fire used to go out of the mouth of the other, as was seen by St. Macarius the Great. **Where are you compared to St. Tegi (St. Rowais)** who meditated for a period of 8 hours on the phrase "Our Father Who art in Heaven"?! , **or to Elijah the prophet** "he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain" (James 5:17, 18)??!

In its reality, prayers are not standing in front of God in certain periods of time, but it is a whole life by itself known as "Life of Prayer". For this David the Great said "But I give myself to prayer" (Psalm 109:4). The Lord asked us to pray earnestly, all the time, and "without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Are you like that in your prayer?

What about the prayers of faith and "the prayers with the spirit and with understanding" (1 Corinthians 14:15), and to "continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2), and the other elements of prayer which we should fulfil so that our prayers be acceptable.

Even so, if we completed all that, should we feel proud or gloat with our prayers? In that you are "An unprofitable servant" (Luke 17:10), even if you did what you are commanded. **You did not stand to pray until the Spirit of God moved you to do that**. Have you not read the words of St. Paul "The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26)? The mind of prayer with which you pray is not from yourself but from God, and the words of prayer are but the "Gift of Uttering", and that is all from Him, and the feeling of love is from Him also. **In total every thing is from Him because "from Him and by Him and to Him is every thing"** (Colossians 1:20).

Hence **when you stand to pray, feel poor and lowly, present your petition with feeling of lowliness. If we are accustomed to ask for something from a great person in this world, with meekness and lowliness**, should we not do like that when we ask the Father of the Spirits? This should be a beautiful experience for us to freshen our prayers. Before you start your prayer, keep quiet for a while, standing, kneeling, or worshipping under the feet of the Saviour. Think of how vile you are, and it is God's love which made you worthy to raise your voice and join the unseen heavenly hosts in their praises. If you did that you shall feel the comforts of God falling upon you in

this prayer. **Nobody asks people for a donation if he is well dressed, else people refuse him. Likewise, when you ask God, do that in humility and lowliness, so that He be compassionate to you.**

2-In Fasting:

Christianity in its greatness and spirituality did not impose praying and fasting on us, but it taught us that they are the secret of conquest and the key of victory, according to the teaching of Christ "This kind (the devil) can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29). Hence when you fast do not feel that you are doing a deed which deserves a pay or an award from God. You do not fast for God's sake but for your own sake. It is to control your troublesome body, so that it would not betray you in front of the people. Your fasting is not for your spiritual strength but for the sake of your weakness. Depriving yourself from food for a long time should not make you feel proud, but it is for straightening your devious self. Besides, fasting is performed in all religions - even the atheistic - and it has no value if it is not accompanied with spiritually and with fasting to sin.

Moreover, your fasting could not be compared if measured to the fasting of the saints who overpowered their physical nature in an amazing way and scored high in fasting to get closer to God. Where are you compared to the real fasting people. **Where are you compared to Moses who fasted forty days on the mountain, and from St. Bishoy who used to fast every twenty days together?.** Where are you compared to **St. Macarius of Alexandria** who, in the forty days of Lent, used to eat a leaf of boiled cabbage every Sunday, so as not to discourage the beginners in their monastic lives? And where are you compared to many saints who used to completely fast from food in the Holy Lent?!!

Even, if you completed all that, your fasting would not be acceptable unless you fast from sin, or as expressed by the Church in the Holy Fast "Let us fast from every evil, with purity and goodness".

3-In Giving Alms:

What is your feeling when you give alms? When you present your tithes to God, do you feel that you did your duty which God commanded you, and that you paid His right?

From the point of quantity, know that giving the tithes is the lower limit in giving and it was particular for the Old Testament. But in the New Testament, the testament of grace and giving, we are asked to "Sell what we have and give alms" (Luke 12:33), and "Having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Timothy 6:8), and "Be rich in good works ready to give" (1 Timothy 6:18), and to give cheerfully, "For God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

From the point of how: "Take heed that you do your charitable deeds, present your giving

and alms with self denial, in order to take your complete reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1). Do not give alms for the sake of others to praise you, and "Do not sound a trumpet before you" (Matthew 6:2), so that people speak about your righteousness and mercy, else you had your reward (from them).

Money from which you give alms is not yours, but is God's, and He did not give you this money to be rich for yourself (Luke 12:21), but to "Be rich in good deeds" (1 Timothy 6:18). "Naked you entered this world and also naked you shall leave it" (Job 1:21).

After all, whatever you give, and be generous in your giving, you only give part of your money, while many others gave all they have, and with it gave themselves to the Lord. As an example, **St. Anthony**, the Father of Monasticism, who gave away all his wealth **and the two saints Babnoudah Al-Motarady and Botros the Worshipper**, who sold themselves and gave the price as alms.

The famous saint **Abraam** Bishop of Fayoum in Egypt, maker of miracles, was a living example for his mercies in his generation. Also the great, **Moalem Ibrahim El-Gohary**, was an example in his mercies. To the extent that some beggars, one day challenged each other as to who can provoke him with excessive asking for alms. In one morning, one of them took alms from him 18 times, and each time this beggar intended to let himself known that he was the same person who took alms a short while ago. Finally, this beggar cried out wondering to all the alms he took from him. The answer from Moalem Ibrahim was "Whatever money I have is but a safekeeping given to me by Christ, and I do not deny it when He asks for it?". He loved giving alms so much to the extent that after he died, he appeared in a dream to a needy man asking him to go to a certain person and take an amount of money, Moalem Ibrahim lent this person before he died. This actually happened.

H) HUMILITY AND SOME OTHER VIRTUES

DOES HUMILITY CONTRADICT BEING OF GOOD REPUTATION?

Is there contradiction between being humble and of what a person should attain from good reputation?

No contradiction exists. As mentioned before, humility does not mean putting on old clothes, relating some bad deeds or faulty behaviours to one's self. Humility is a life we live within ourselves, which takes some external appearances, not intended to be seen by others, but initiated by inner thoughts. Without doubt, we are all asked to be examples in every thing including humility. Naturally, we try to present our humility as example to others, otherwise it is not humility!

Hence, enjoying good report is not in conflict with being humble, provided that one

does not work to attain this good reputation. We are asked to enjoy a good reputation and also be humble as each is a divine command. Our teacher St. Paul said "Avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us, providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Corinthians 8:20, 21). He also said "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-- meditate on these things" (Philippians 4:8), and also said "We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God" (2 Corinthians 6:3, 4). St. Peter said "Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12). The Lord Jesus said before all of those "That they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

If we were absolutely obliged - as ministers for example - to speak about some of our toil in the service for example, we may do so provided that we give the glory to God. This is what St. Paul did in his epistle to the church of Corinth, when he defended his Apostolic authority, for the sake of the service.

When St. Paul was obliged to speak about his toil and labour in serving the Word, he said "I laboured more abundantly than they all". Then he continued by saying "Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me", and at the same time said "I am not worthy to be called apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Corinthians 15:9, 10). He also said in his second epistle to the Corinthians "**If so, I also may boast a little, I boast in my weaknesses. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong**" (2 Corinthians 11:16-33, 12:9, 10).

DOES HUMILITY OPPOSE THE SPIRIT OF ADVANCEMENT?

We previously mentioned that "death to the world" and "deprivation" feed humility and strengthen it, and that is obvious. Who died to the world, does not fear anything, and he who deprived himself from the love of worldly desires and possessions, does not subject himself to anything. In this regards, St. Augustine said his famous saying "I sat on the top of the world when I felt that I desire nothing and fear nothing". Thus humility would be an important factor in strengthening the spirit of courage and advancement.

The person who denies himself so that God appears in him and by him, has his sign "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). If Christ is alive in me, would I fear anything?, or would I be a coward? **The secret of our humility is our realisation of our weakness, and the secret of our courage is from He Who said "For My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Thus by our humility we lean on the strength of the Saviour.**

Solomon said in his Songs "Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?" (Songs 8:5). This verse explains an important principle; that in all our deeds we lean on our Saviour. St. Paul said "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, **yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me**" (1 Corinthians 15:10). The last part of this verse "Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" is the leaning on the beloved. He also said "I can do all things **through Christ who strengthens me**" (Philippians 4:13). Again the last part of this verse "Through Christ who strengthens me" is the leaning on the beloved. Leaning on the arm of the Lord Jesus gives courage and strength. **For this, Isaiah said "But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).**

A humble person trains himself for all conditions and circumstances. He knows how to keep quiet when he should keep quiet, speaks up when it is needed, and takes up leadership when it is necessary. St. Paul said "For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Philippians 4:11, 12). He also said "By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed" (2 Corinthians 6:8, 9).

CHAPTER 5

PRIDE

"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"

(James 4:6)

- A) Reality of pride and its essence**
- B) What does pride do?**
- C) Causes which lead to pride**
- D) One's pride in front of himself**
- E) Some features of pride**
- F) Pride concealed within virtue**
- G) How does one deal with his own pride?**

A) REALITY OF PRIDE AND ITS ESSENCE

VAST AREAS FOR THE WAR AGAINST PRIDE:

Do not think, dear brother, when we write to you about 'pride', that this subject does not concern you. Read this subject well until you discover yourself in its light. Then strive to get rid of the sin of which the Wise Jesus Ben Sirach said "The origin of sin is pride, so persistence in it brings on a deluge of depravity" (Sirach 10:12, 13).

In short, pride is realised when one blasphemes, speaks too much about himself, relates good deeds to himself, or feels that he is counted among the saints. If this is not the case for us, it does not mean that we are free from this chronic illness. This illness might be in your body and you do not feel it. It resembles a malignant disease, which has no symptoms in the beginning.

Father John Cassian said "The 'devil of inflated ego and vain praises' inflicts acute pain. Because the pain is acute, it is not quickly controlled, and its beginning and aim can not be discerned. Other pains are apparent, clear, and are immediately felt. Thus it is simple and easy to fight them if one is diligent in striving against them. **But the fight against the inflated ego and vain praises is hard and difficult because it is a fight against every shape and form and extends to every matter of life: in walking, speaking,** eating, in keeping quiet and in keeping awake, in fasting, praying, even in reading and in singing praises, in long-suffering and in patience. This devil does not keep quiet, but directs his arrows towards every one who lives in virtue, hoping to deny him the reward of his striving. If not in the beauty and quality of clothes, he catches him in the poor and old clothes. If he does not get him through dignity, he gets him through enduring indignity and poverty. If he does not hit him with good talk, logic and proofs, he tries to hit him with calmness and quietness. If he does not satisfy him with more food, he seeks to praise him for his fasting. In short, he stands in the way of every striving person in every deed and in every arrangement, whether for the body or for the soul, in order to trip him and spoil it for him. If he does not hit him with the left hand, he does that with the right hand".

If you were walking in the road of virtue, do not count that this will immunize you from this illness. Getting ill from it happens to those walking in the road of virtue and to those striving in the life of the spirit, more than it happens to others. Or as expressed by St. John El-Dargy, the head monk of Tour Sinai monasteries "The 'devil of hopelessness' rejoices in increasing sins, and the 'devil of inflation and vain praises' rejoices in increasing virtues".

Father John Cassian also says "The 'devil of greatness' is a wicked spirit, does not attack except those who matured in the spiritual stature in order to destroy the tower of their virtues. All pains are killed in their beginnings, except this wicked pain as it attacks at the end. For this reason, its hurt is great and its harm is immense. It is known that the desire of the stomach is controlled by fasting, sexual immorality by purity, the love of wealth by deprivation and poverty, and anger by modesty. But the wickedness of pride, if it takes hold of a miserable soul, it is like the revenging commander, when he surrounds and conquers a great city, destroys it to its foundation".

Pride is like a thief who in the dark keeps going unseen to the inner room, misleads his prey, and catches her while asleep, or like the killer who deceives his enemy and kills him, or like the spy who works for the enemy. Duty implies that we know its means, uncover its ways and deliver it to the King of our lives, in order not to be counted as betrayers of Whom we really belong to. He should dominate our minds, hearts and bodies, and even on all our lives.

Pride is a serious illness which needs great examination and excessive alertness. Or as expressed by the fathers, it requires discernment, in order to understand it and labour to get rid of.

If you wish to initially know yourself, and look for her safety before studying this subject, answer these simple questions:

Do you feel pleased when somebody praises you, and feel annoyed with those who rebuke or scorn you, or at least feel uncomfortable with them or with what they say? Do you shout and get angry as the rebuking and the directing increase?

What is the extent of your obedience?

What is the extent of your acceptance of the advice, directions and instructions of others?

What are your feelings towards people whom you surpass in education, wisdom, virtue and wealth? Are they feelings of kindness compassion and pity, combined with feelings of thankfulness, gratitude and praise to God Who granted you all these graces, and beatified you with these virtues, or are they feelings of flourishing and adornment because you are better than them?

Perhaps now, your estimation of yourself started to change in the light of these few words. Then follow with care the subject of this serious sin.

REALITY OF PRIDE

1 - Without doubt, it is the greatest of all sins and the most dangerous. The teacher Origen said in his book "The Principles": "One might ask which sin is the greatest. It is obviously believed that the greatest sin is adultery, impurity, or any other defilement resulting from desire. It is true that these sins are ugly and terrible, but they are not like that sin which the Holy Bible denounces and counts as the greatest of all sins. We ought to be aware of it. Hence, which is the greatest sin? Without doubt, it is the one which caused the downfall of the devil. And what is this sin which echoes such greatest? Pride, arrogance and exaltation. It is the devil's sin. Because of it he fell from heaven to earth as "God resists the proud" (James 4:6).

2 - It gives birth to many sins. It is not a sin by itself, such as stealing or lying, but it is a mother which gives birth to sons for the devil. St. John El-Dargy said "I have bound this wicked (pride) with the ties of obedience, and flogged her with the whip of contempt, so that she tells me about herself. She said: "**I am the head and mother of all pains**, nothing bosses me, and nothing opposes me except humility and obedience. **My children are anger, rivalry, condemnation,**

shouting, arguing, blasphemy, and the convincing of one's self by his own opinion. Vain praises is my wagon, but modesty and blaming of one's self laughs at the wagon and the rider, and sing saying : We sing to the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea" (Exodus 15:1) of humility.

3 - It is a tower in which many sins barricade themselves. This becomes clear from the above saying of St. John El-Dargy. The proud person for example does not confess his sins else people say that he made a mistake. He does not apologise, else they say that he is weak. He does not obey others, else they understood that he has a weak personality, and that his opinion is inferior to others'. Again, he can not be modest and peaceful, else people think he is weak. He wants to be angry so that others know that he stands for his rights. He usually speaks nonstop so as not to be accused of ignorance or cowardice.

4 - Pride is a stubborn enemy, it continues to fight us until the last breath of our lives. It does not follow particular circumstances in the life of a person. The wars of desire intensify for example during the ages of youth, and decline or weaken after that. But pride does not weaken at all. It caused many saints to fall after they reached the highest degrees of monasticism!! It is said about St. Macarius the great, that when his soul was leaving his body, the 'devil of vainglory' came and kept praising him hoping to trap him. The devil said to him "Blessed are you Macarius because you reached your destination". The saint replied "I have not arrived yet". The devil kept fighting him until his soul arrived in heaven. Then the saint said "Now by the grace of Christ I arrived". It is also true what St. John El-Dargy said in this respect "**Keep guard from this thief (vain praises) which does not leave you until death**".

5 - It is a truly strange sin as it conceals itself within the virtue and it is not easy to distinguish it. After a striver overcomes and conquers a lot of sins, the 'devil of vain praises' comes to him. St. John El-Dargy says some wonderful words in this meaning "**If I fast, I like fasting, and if I do not fast in order to hide my virtue, I admire my wisdom. If I put on new clothes, I like my outfit, and if I put on old clothes, I admire being ascetic. The same if I keep quiet or I speak, if praised or if insulted and was patient. It is like the thistles, whichever way it is thrown to the ground, it is upright.**

6 - It is strange that other sins dare not appear in the open in front of the people. But pride appears clearly everywhere, even in churches and places of worship. Adulterers, killers, and thieves for example, shy away and are afraid if their deeds are known. But proud people do not care, because they do not realise their errors and weaknesses, and they always like "the first places" and to be first in every matter.

7 - More than that, all sinners like the company of their kind, except the proud. The drunkard, adulterer, and the thief are glad to be with their kind. **But the proud does not like anybody to share his vainglory,** and always likes to be the only one honored, praised and beloved. No two proud people can share a dwelling together. **Hence, the proud is deprived from good relations with the rest of the people.** On the contrary, a person who denies himself has good ties with others. In the past Jesus Ben Sirach said "**Arrogance is hateful to God and man**" (Sirach 10:7).

THE ORIGIN OF SIN:

Jesus Ben Sirach said "**The origin of pride is to forsake the Lord**, man's heart revolting against his Maker" (Sirach 10:12). The relation of a man to God is like the relation of a child to his father. A child always needs his father, and cannot live without his care and shepherding. Man's forsaking God indicates that he is not in need of God. If a believer feels that God gives him life, soul and everything, as by Him we live, move and exist (Acts 17:25, 18), then how can he allow himself to be far from God? Is this not considered pride?!

Moreover, getting closer to God shows love, and keeping away from God indicates dislike. How do man dislike and hate God? Does not he fear Him? Abandoning God confirms that he does not love nor fear Him. What do we call that? This is nothing but pride.

Ben Sirach said in this context "**The origin of sin is pride**" (Sirach 10:12). How does this happen?

* The origin of sin is pride, as it is the first sin which entered the world by the envy of the devil, and made our first parents Adam and Eve fall.

* The origin of sin, meaning the chief one: Pride as we saw, is one of the greatest sins, a mother, or even the worst sin.

* The origin of sin, meaning the first sin: Attaining virtue is either by fearing God or by loving Him. Either means keeps me from sin. A person who fears God is careful not to disobey Him, and those who love Him keep His commandments. Hence if I do not keep His commandment for fear or for love, I am a proud person who challenges God, forgetting His words in the past to Saul "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5). What the Spirit said to the angel of the Church of the Laodicean confirms this meaning "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. **Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing**" (Revelation 3:16, 17). What do these words indicate: "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"? They indicate the pride of the soul.

Thus pride has another meaning in the eyes of God, other than what many understand. It is not only haughtiness, greatness and the love of praise, but includes many other meanings, summarised by the words of Ben Sirach: "Is to forsake God".

Beware then my brother, else by being lukewarm in your spiritual life, or forsaking your Creator, you show yourself proud in front of Him, not needing Him, while "you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17).

B) WHAT DOES PRIDE DO?

If the sin of pride is so hated by God, it is because the proud person resembles a daring and a rude thief, to the extent that his recklessness made him steal God Himself. He steals the glory, honor and greatness which are only due to His Holy Majesty. God is very jealous for His glory and says in the tongue of Isaiah "I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8). He said that again "I will not give My glory to another" (Isaiah 48:11). St. Paul also said "To God who alone is wise, **be honor and glory** forever and ever" (1 Timothy 1:17). St. Augustine said "Lord, a person who wants praise for the good which is from Your gifts, and does not aim for Your glory in the good he does, but to the glory of himself, he is but a thief and robber, like the devil who tried to steal Your glory".

No wonder then, that God hates this sin more than all the other sins. If He hates evil in general because it is against His good nature, He has a special attitude towards this sin which is like a fortress in which many sins fortify. St. James explained this matter by saying "**God resists the proud**, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). This verse shows the extent of God's hate to the proud. It is not sufficient that He shows His hate to their sin, but also declares that He resists them. As this is the case, pride has very bad consequences:

1. A proud person - because of his pride - Divine Grace departs from him, and he falls into the worst sins. The fathers said "The proud by knowledge falls into the sin of blasphemy, and the proud by asceticism falls into the sin of adultery". The church history keeps for us the names of the chief blasphemers, such as Arius the priest who was great in knowledge and philosophy, Macedonios and Nestor who each was a Patriarch on the See of Constantinople, and Otachi who was the head of a monastery in the vicinity of Constantinople. The history of the ascetic people keeps the names of some saints who fell in the sin of adultery, among them were some hermits. It is known that being a hermit is the highest spiritual stage. Many of those fell because of their pride, and also for their chastising.

2. The proud person does not only exalt himself over people but also despises the word of God Himself. "When Jeremiah had stopped speaking to all the people all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, all these words, that Azariah the son of Hoshaiiah, Johanan the son of Kareah, and all **the proud** men spoke, saying to Jeremiah, "You speak falsely!" (Jeremiah 43:1, 2).

3. Pride empties the heart from mercy, kindness and compassion. It covers the ears from hearing the cries of the poor, closes the eyes so as not to see their misery, and hardens the heart so as not to be kind to them. The Psalmist said "The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor" (Psalm 10:2).

4. It causes strife between people, ignites and stirs it. The Wise said "By pride comes nothing but strife" (Proverbs 13:10), and also said "He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife" (Proverbs 28:25).

5. A person by pride, wants to be great and big, but what he reaps is contrary to that. As God resists him - as was previously said - he will never succeed. The Lord of Glory said "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled" (Luke 14:11). The reason is that **the proud "exalts himself", not God. Since it is he who exalts himself, his exaltation does not stay, and soon falls down.** "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly" (Luke 1:52), and the Wise said "A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor" (Proverbs 29:23).

6. God does not dwell in the proud heart, but abandons it and it becomes desolate. The Lord Jesus said to the inhabitants of Jerusalem after they rejected Him "See! Your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:38). The Psalmist said "For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when You awake, you shall despise their image" (Psalm 73:3, 19, 20). The Wise said "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18), and also said "Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility" (Proverbs 18:12).

7. If a man perfected all the virtues, but presents them to God mixed with haughtiness and pride, they are rejected from Him the Almighty. They are like frankincense mixed with dust and dirt. When put in the burning coal, soon, there comes out a bad smell which repels the nose and aggravates the eye.

PRIDE AND THE FALL OF MIGHTY MEN

We saw how God very much hates the sin of pride, and no wonder that He resists the proud, abases their exaltation, and casts a horrible ending to their might, to make them lessons to others.

David the prophet said "For You will save the humble people, but will bring down haughty looks" (Psalm 18:27). The Wise Ben Sirach said "The Lord overturns the thrones of princes and enthrones the gentle in their place. The Lord pulls up nations by the roots and plants the humble instead" (Sirach 10:14, 15). God said on the tongue of Isaiah "Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible" (Isaiah 13:9, 11).

God was able to humiliate the mighty Pharaoh by severe natural disasters, by large animals, or dangerous beasts. But instead, He sent him frogs, lice and flies, such small amphibians and tiny insects, so that Pharaoh knows his own worth (Exodus 8). In the same way, the Lord dealt with

Peter His disciple, as He abased Peter's pride in front of a slave (Matthew 26). Also mighty Goliath who was so proud, disgracing the armies of the living God, God humiliated him through a young boy, a shepherd, David, with no weapon, but fortified by the power of the Lord of hosts, which he deserved because of his meek spirit, which cried continually saying "I was brought low, and He saved me" (Psalm 116:6).

We present in this context, two examples from the Holy Bible:

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylonia who thought it was he who established his kingdom, boasting proudly. God took the kingdom from him, drove him from men, his dwelling was with the beasts of the field, made him eat grass like oxen and his body was wet with the dew of heaven (Daniel 4:31-33). And at the end of the time which God allowed for his chastisement for the pride of his soul, his understanding returned to him and he blessed the Lord saying "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. **And those who walk in pride He is able to abase**" (Daniel 4:27-37).

Herod the mighty and powerful king, the angel of the Lord struck him, after he inflated himself with exaltation, hearing the divine features related to him and "Did not give glory to God" (Acts 12:20-23). And he was eaten by worms and died.

C) CAUSES WHICH LEAD TO PRIDE

Is a person during his life subjected to situations which lead him to pride?

Yes, there are causes. But this does not mean that these causes definitely lead to pride. What happens is that the devil uses these situations as weapons with which he fights man. We may summarize these causes in the following:

1. Personal Causes:

Such as beauty, intelligence, bodily strength and health, etc. It is strange when such gifts become causes for pride to enter our selves. They are intrinsic gifts which God offered us, and we have no input in having them. But we take these gifts and make them subject for His contempt!! While often these matters become subject for our glory, St. Paul says "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31). He also says "If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity" (2 Corinthians 11:30).

Dear brother, do you have any input for having good looks, bodily strength or an intelligent mind?! These graces were born with you, and for what results from them from worldly prosperity or material success, we should thank God, Who granted them to us. And if you have a beloved and

attractive personality, that people love and feel comfortable with, do not be deceived, thinking that this comes from your cute thinking, your rare intelligence, your excessive activities and your knowledge of the psychology of the masses. Be sure that this is also owing to God Who gave you grace in the eyes of the people.

Moreover, you cannot be sure of keeping these graces and gifts which are the subject for your haughtiness. This beauty may be marred or diminished due to illness or a certain accident. One may also lose his intelligence with which he glories. The evidence of what we say, is the presence of some great scientists as inmates in mental hospitals. You could not distinguish between them and the street person who suffers from their illnesses in regards to their mental cases. The concern about general health and the safety of body members and senses, is obvious. How many diseases there are which have attacked strong and healthy people, and made them, in no time weak and frail.

Then assume that all these divine gifts stayed with you until the end of this worldly life - all these worldly decorations - will they benefit you in front of the just pulpit of Christ in the last day?, when you stand up stripped from anything which may help you. The reward will be according to the inner state of your heart, without any external attributes.

2. Worldly Causes:

Such as riches, position, wealth, influence, etc.

These are green pastures for the 'devil of pride', and fertile soil which produces for him abundant crops in the world of darkness. They are also like a far away arena to which he attracts his preys where he satisfies their conceit, while he prepares to get them. Our teacher St. Paul said "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For **the love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. **But you, O man of God, flee these things**" (1 Timothy 6:9-11). The Lord also said on the tongue of Ezekiel the prophet "**You have increased your riches and your heart is lifted up because of your riches**" (Ezekiel 28:5).

Did such people who are misled with much riches, positions, wealth or influence, know that God is the source of all of these, and that He alone gives the strength to get and collect them? Hannah the mother of Samuel the prophet said "The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes" (1 Samuel 2:7, 8). The Divine Inspiration also said "You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18). Again how beautiful is the song of the meek Virgin in the ears of her relative Elizabeth "He has shown strength with His arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty" (Luke 1:51-53).

How nice to be rich for God, and to be rich in good works. This was the advice of St. Paul for his disciple Timothy "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty,

nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works" (1 Timothy 6:17-18).

It is not certain that one can keep such material riches, as material things, are subject to world events and changes. One of the best examples the Bible mentioned, was about Job. It is said about him "This man was the greatest of all the people of the East" (Job 1:3). This Job had lost all his wealth, his sons, his daughters and all his servants, all together. So the Wise said "**For riches are not forever**" (Proverbs 27:24). **And even though you made sure to keep it in this world, you would not be able to take any of it in the life to come.** Perhaps people value you, respect and hold you in high regard for your riches, or for your social position, but it will be different in the next life. There, you will be naked and stripped, like all creatures. How true what Job said "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there" (Job 21:1). Also the rich man, at whose gate Lazarus full of sores was laid, his wealth did not help him in the other world. Father Abraham said to him "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented" (Luke 16:19-25).

Hence, do not put your heart on collecting wealth, for the sake of collecting it, thinking that it will benefit you, strengthen, or earn you fear and respect. But beware to discover the "Hidden treasure" and possess "The one pearl of great price". Possess Christ and you have the world and all there in as the Apostle says "As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:10). Ask yourself frankly, to where your treasure is, as the Lord Jesus said "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34).

3. Pious Causes:

We said that what makes the sin of pride more dangerous, is that it conceals itself within the virtue. No wonder that pious matters may be causes for pride. As **examples of pious causes, possessing of some spiritual virtues, or some special gifts, such as the gift of teaching, preaching, or having a beautiful voice for chanting or for proclamations, etc.**

Wicked are all our pious practices, and rejected by God, if they are mixed with exaltation, pride and self-righteousness. God wants the broken heart, about which David said in the spirit "A broken and a contrite heart-- these, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17). The pharisee leaning on his self-righteousness, had prayers, fasting, alms and other virtues which he kept counting in his prayer to God in the temple. But these were all rejected, because he presented them with an exalted heart and haughty soul (Luke 18:9 -14).

We owe all our lives to God, both physical and spiritual lives. He alone cares for our bodies and nurtures our spirits. Yet in us (that is, in our flesh) nothing good dwells (Romans 7:18). How much we offend God with our exaltation and conceit, we who are dishonored (1 Corinthians 4:10)!!

You did not come to know God by yourself, but it is He Who proclaimed Himself to you. You did not call Him, but He called you. He renewed your life and purified your thoughts. He separated you from the world to be His, and He chose you in Him before the foundation of the

world, that you should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Ephesians 1:4). He prepared a kingdom for you to inherit from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34). Do you realise that without His grace upon you, you would have drowned deep in sin and in filth?

If you have pure thoughts, the excellence is not of you, but of God who granted you these thoughts. As a whole if you are feeling some power in your spiritual life, read what our teacher St. Paul says "For it is the God Who commanded light to shine out of darkness, Who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:6,7).

Whatever you have of goodness is from God, and whatever you have of evil is from you yourself. The shining moon you see, known for its beauty, is by itself a dark body, with no light in it. But its light comes from the light of the sun. Is it proper for the moon to boast over the sun? What happens if the sun hides its light from the moon? Jesus is the sun of righteousness and He is "The light of the world" (John 8:12) and He called us "The light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). We are enlightened so that we shine. What if He hides His light and concealed His shine from us? Immediately we become darkness.

We are branches in the true vine, and the life of the branch depends on the sap of life reaching it from the origin. What if the sap stopped travelling to the branch? No doubt, it would soon wither and fall down. Rivers do not flow by themselves, but from their sources. The rivers of living water which overflow in the bellies of the faithful (John 7:38) come from God by the power of the Holy Spirit. What then if God does not feed these rivers? Would not their flow stop and their water dry out? Did you not read, dear brother, that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17)?, as well as the saying of the philosopher of Christianity St. Paul "If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise" (1 Corinthians 3:18)!!

It is worthy, dear brother, to thank God from all your heart -for these spiritual gifts - so that He keeps them for you and increases them. "There is no gift without abundance, except that which lacks thanksgiving". Thank Him from all your heart, realising your weakness, because all that you have of goodness is from Him the Almighty. Sing in your heart the everlasting song which St. Gregory the Theologian sang by the Holy Spirit, in his Liturgy addressing God the Son **"You granted me the gift of speech. You gave me the learning of Your knowledge. You have bound me to all the remedies that lead to life. You blessed my nature in You. And fulfilled Your Law on my behalf. You have shown me the rising from my fall"**.

St. Paul the Apostle who had spiritual gifts, and saw visions and revelations said about himself "It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 12:1). When he wanted to give the Christians an idea of what he saw in the third heaven to which he was caught up, he did not speak about himself as the person to whom these revelations were revealed, he spoke with exquisite self-denial saying "I know a man in Christ -- such a one was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). He continued by saying "Yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities" (2 Corinthians 12:5). In the same place he also said "Therefore most gladly I will

rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10).

Have you seen, dear brother, what this great Apostle who saw visions and revelations said? How he denied himself? He boasted in his infirmities so that the power of Christ rests upon him!! How much should we imitate him so that the power of Christ rests upon us and we become worthy of more and higher gifts.

4. Social Causes:

Such as the praises of others, their admiration, excessive honor and respect they give us.

These are powerful nets which the enemy lays in the way of the labourer to catch their souls. St. John El-Dargy said "**Great is he who refuses the praises of people, and greater is he who refuses the praises of the devils**". By accepting praises, we fall into the sin of vain praises, which leads us to pride.

You may say, defending yourself, I do not think much about myself, and I cannot stop people from admiring and praising me, with what it brings from behaviour of honor and respect. On the other hand, this is life. You praise a giver in order to encourage him to give more.

I agree with you. You cannot control the feelings of others towards you, but you can control your own feelings. What are your feelings when you listen to the praises of others and their admiration of you? Do you get inner joy accompanied with pleasure in what you hear? Do praising phrases have special resonance in your ears and echo in yourself which make you love those who praise you, even if you say that you are poor, a sinner, nothing, and it is God who works in you?!!

The matter may not stop here, but may develop to an extent where a person sometimes asks for the opinion of others about a deed or a service he did, under the cover that he would like to avoid any mistakes or shortcomings in what he did. Again when he hears the phrases of praise, he is pleased. Yet he utters intense words expressing his humility and poverty in the spirit. Remember dear brother, that is the 'devil of vain praises' himself moving you or at least making use of these situations. Beware and realise that the tares of pride started to sprout in your heart.

In order to know the importance of such praises, as a tool in the hands of the devil to make you fall, hear the words of an experienced person. St. John El-Dargy said "I wondered about the devil as I saw him sow some thoughts in a brother, then he went to another brother, reported these thoughts and warned him from them, in order to praise him as a good person who knows the unknown, so that the brother feel exalted". In other words - because the devil uses this weapon, as a two sided weapon - he does not wait for others to praise us and then uses the praises to enter pride into ourselves. He rather fabricates the causes, and push others to direct the praises to us, in order to fulfil his wicked purpose.

For this reason, the saintly fathers were very aware of this matter, that they said "Whoever

praises his brother lays down nets for his feet". In explaining that, they said "Do not praise some body to his face, else conceit may enter him, and do not praise him in his absence, in order not to excite the envy of the devil towards him". To that extent, our fathers were aware of the 'devil of vain praises'.

Let us now escape from that and be like the dead to the world which "is passing away, and the lust of it" (1 John 2:17). Do not care for people's praises nor for their scorn. Do not be pleased if they praise you and do not get angry if they scorn you. Their praises or scorn change nothing in your life. They may only cause you some hurt. Yet enduring offences, insults and despises, save us from vainglory. For this reason the saints hastened and entered from the narrow door, and endured the difficult road. St. Isaac said "If you do not meet an offence in any day, do not count it a day in your life".

After all, who are you to accept praises and glory from others? Your Master and Teacher says "I do not receive honor from men" (John 5:41). If He, the Holy and without vile, the perfect who knew no sin, said that, what do I say, knowing that "I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother bear me" (Psalm 51:5).

Do you not know that people admire you and praise your deeds and life, because they only see in you your good side? But your bad deeds, your sins, your scandals and weaknesses, they do not see. That is because God hid them away from them, because He loves you and has mercy upon you. For this reason we thank Him in the beginning of "the prayer of thanksgiving" saying "Let us give thanks to the beneficent, ..., for He has covered us". This reason for which we thank Him comes before other reasons "supported us, preserved us, accepted us unto Him, had compassion on us, sustained us, and brought us to this hour". If this is the case, dear brother, why do you forget yourself and accept praises from others?!!

5. Devilish Causes:

These result from the wars of the devil to make us fall. We mentioned that the 'devil of pride' fights us via virtue, hides in it or puts on its robe. Somebody might have laboured against many sins and conquered them. The 'devil of pride' comes to him - in his spiritual struggle - not making war, but praising him for his striving, exalting his endurance and sacrifices, so as to deprive him from all the fruits of his previous labour. The saintly Fathers were very careful to expel this dangerous enemy with the other enemies. It was mentioned about one father that the devil appeared to him in the shape of an angel of light and said to him "I am Gabriel, sent to you". The father answered him immediately "Perhaps you were sent to someone else, as I am a sinner". It was mentioned about another father who used to see demons in person, and saw the devil defeated from him. One day the devil appeared to him as a figure of light, saying "I am Christ". The saint closed his eyes. The devil asked him "I am Christ and you close your eyes from me". The saint answered "I do not want to see Christ here".

In both stories, the 'devil of pride' could not stand the humility of the saint, or his discernment, and disappeared at once.

6. Relative Cause:

Pride may also be caused by comparing one's self with others who are less than him.

This is a serious weapon with which the enemy keeps attacking us, until we give up and stop striving, satisfied with what we have achieved in our spiritual life, or spiritual knowledge. We ask you dear brother, why do you measure yourself with those who are less than you in holiness, righteousness, virtue, knowledge, ... etc? Why do you compare yourself with evil and ignorant people, and not with the saints and the learned? This comparison not only diminishes your ambition, but also weakens your striving and limits your activities.

God asks us to be perfect and holy, not as an advice but as an order as He says "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48) and "As He Who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15). We surely know that without holiness, no one can see God (Hebrews 12:14), that "The righteous one is scarcely saved" (1 Peter 4:18), and that the life of lukewarmness and carelessness is hated by God. "So then, because you are lukewarm, ..., I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:16). Why then do we cease striving, and be content with what we have of weakness and lukewarm, thinking proudly that we are better than others, and "thanks be to God"?!!

Put in front of you the personalities of the great saints, the preaching apostles, the striving martyrs, and the ascetic worshippers, such as apostles Paul and Mark, St. George and St. Mena the martyrs, Demiana and Barbara the martyrs, Paula, Anthony, Macarius, Arsenius, Pachomius, and Shenouda the ascetic monks. If one puts these saints in front of him, sees their holiness, love and asceticism, his heart will be filled with zeal and holy love. His own self will appear small in his eyes, and he will cry in modesty saying "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where shall I, a sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:18).

D) ONE'S PRIDE IN FRONT OF HIMSELF

In the previous section we presented some of the causes which lead to pride. Pride may exist in the heart of a person, while he has an outward pious appearance. Or it may appear on the outside of one's life. In this section, **we speak about the inner pride of the heart.**

We are in need of the grace of discernment about which St. Anthony, the father of all monks, said it is superior to all the virtues. It is like the light of the body which enlightens all of it.

However, the saints said that the grace of discernment is not attained except by humility. Let us be humble under His high hand, so that He elevates our faces to Him and shows us the reality of our selves. Let us also turn to our spiritual guiding fathers who give us the right advice, by the command of the Spirit of God Whom they follow. There are some points with which we may know ourselves in their light. Be candid with yourself and answer the following questions frankly, in order to be aware of the reality of yourself.

*** Do you feel in your heart that without God, you are but darkness, void, nothing, and all you have of worth and goodness is from Him?**

*** What is your feeling when you stand in front of God to pray,** whether you are alone, with others in a prayer meeting, or in a general prayer? Do you feel you are not worthy to stand in front of God, like "the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!"" (Luke 18:13)?

*** If you were among those who serve in the church,** do you feel that you give or that you take? Do you feel that you sacrifice your time and effort for the service of God, or that you thank God Who permitted you to carry His word and His teachings to others, and serve the cause of reconciliation? That somebody like you should not teach but rather should be taught, and that you sat on the chair of the teacher at the time you should sit beneath the feet to be taught?

*** What is your feeling when you fast?** Do you get the feeling of exaltation, or comfort in the heart that you fast without food to a late hour of the day, or you think that you fast because you are in need of fasting with which you control your troublesome body, not to make you a laughing stock in front of the people? That your fasting is not for your spiritual strength but for your weakness, and that refraining from food to a late hour, is not a subject for exaltation, but a means for straightening yourself, which is deviating more than the rest of the people? And that your fasting cannot measure up to the fasting of others who truly fast, ..., and what about fasting to sin, and the like?. Do you do that?

*** What is your feeling when you give alms?** From your offering, do you give your tithes to God, and do you feel that you did your duty which God commanded you, and satisfied His rights? From the point of the cause, do you give your offering, for the people in order that they praise you, and speak about you with gratitude? That "you sound a trumpet before you, ..., that you may have glory from men", or that "when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (Matthew 6:1-4).

*** From the point of quantity:** Do you know that your tithes are the lowest limit in giving, and it was particular for the Old Testament? But that Christ in the Testament of Grace, has taught us to "Sell what you have and give alms" (Luke 12:33). That is to sell what we have "Food and clothing, with these we shall be content. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:8, 7). The Apostle also asked us to be generous in our giving: "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully, ..., for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward

you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever" (2 Corinthians 9:6-9).

Also this wealth from which you give alms is not yours, but God's "from whom, by whom and to whom all things are", and He gave it to you. You do not possess anything in this world, because naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there (Job 21:1).

And where are your alms and offerings beside the offerings of those who not only gave all their wealth but also gave themselves to God, and lived destitute, afflicted, and wandering about in the deserts, on the hills, in caves and cracks of the earth. Those to whom the Divine Inspiration witnessed by saying "Of whom the world was not worthy" (Hebrews 11:37, 38).

As a whole, keep account of yourself, examine the movements of your heart and inner feelings, and pull out the plant of pride from its roots, so that the plant of virtue grows and produces many fruits. Jesus Ben Sirach said "Never be roused by violent passions; they will tear you apart like a bull, they will eat up your leaves, destroy your fruit, and leave you a withered tree" (Sirach 6:2, 3).

E) SOME FEATURES OF PRIDE

We mentioned in the previous section, that the heart of a man might waver with feelings of greatness, entailing haughty thoughts. Yet he appears from the outside as a meek person. **But it happens sometimes, that the effect of pride reflects on his outer behaviour,** such as the way one walks, the excessive care of dressing smartly, the high voice, and talking to others in the form of orders, ..., etc.

Before discussing this matter, we wish to attract the attention to three points:

First: We should not judge others according to their outside appearances. This is utterly wrong. The Lord Jesus warned us against that by saying "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

Second: The devil might take advantage of the way a person talks, to pull us to the sin of condemnation which is the daughter of pride.

Third: When we say that pride might take an outside appearance, **it is not necessary that every person who appears proud, is a proud person. We meant that the features of pride appear in the behaviour of a person.** We ought to examine ourselves in order not to cause others to stumble, and not to lose their friendship and love to us, as a result of repelling them when we behave in this manner.

Pride might take an outside appearance **in the way one walks**, as one walks in a haughty way elevated above the rest of the human race. When you walk on the ground, you should feel that you walk over the bodies of other humans like yourself, whose bodies turned to dust, hundreds of years ago. The poet rightfully said:

"Walk gently as I think that
you walk on these bodies"

The day will come when your own body whose grace, beauty and splendour, you show off, also turns to dust. The Wise said "What has man to be so proud of ? He is only dust and ashes" (Sirach 10:10).

Pride may take an appearance **of luxurious dressing**, excessive smartness and many non-essentials. The Apostle said "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Timothy 6:8), and he did not say for example "And having nourishment and dressing, with these we shall be content". The food is what fills our hunger, and the clothing is what covers our nakedness, and what a difference between the two expressions. Like a meek son, imitate your meek God, Who did not own two dollars to pay the temple tax (Matthew 17:24-27). He Himself is the owner of heaven and earth, Who preferred poverty of His own will, and had nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20).

Sometimes, pride shows its appearance in talking. We do not mean the meaning of the words themselves, but the way one talks, as if he talks with authority, in an ordering manner. Also in the tone of his voice, being very high, officious. Account for yourself, and imitate your Teacher about whom they said "He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench" (Matthew 12:19, 20). Do not speak to anybody with authority, but instead be meek, even in the situation which requires you to give orders. Purify your words from the errors in the situation of necessary anger, as it is said "Be angry, and do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26).

F) PRIDE CONCEALED WITHIN VIRTUE

We mentioned earlier what increases the danger of pride is that it disguises itself in virtue or hides behind it. Consider for example:

(1) The Good Example:

The devil might fight a person who labours in the life of virtue, tries to deprive him of all rewards for his deeds and striving. He tries to convince him that he is asked to be a good example and light to the world. The devil will produce some Biblical verses to support his deceit such as "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). **Once that person gets convinced with this rotten advice, the devil makes him shape his behaviour, what he says and does, so as to appear a good example to the people.** He feels - while fulfilling this command - that he helps in spreading the kingdom of God on earth, to the letter of the verse. It is clear that **it is the 'devil of pride' who leads us into this temptation, so that all our devotion be for the people, and not for God.** Since our devotion is for the people, it is suitable to accept their appreciation and praises, but meanwhile we have already received our reward.

Do not be confused in your mind as to what this person does, and count it as hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a different sin from what we are talking about. The hypocrite is a man who pretends to be virtuous, and dresses in its robe, while his inside is full of sin, and he knows that. Or as the Apostle sees it "Having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:5).

The case we are mentioning is that of a man who loves virtue and truly strives for it. Yet instead of offering his worship to God, asking for His pleasure, he deviates by the deceit of the devil, to please the people under the cover of being a good example. Our teacher St. Paul said a frank saying in this matter "Not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from

the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:22-24).

If the 'devil of vain praises' fights you in this manner using Biblical verses, as he dared previously in the tempting of your Master, hit him with the arrows of humility. Fight him with "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). In the past the Psalmist said "Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them" (Psalm 127:5). Similar arrows were used by the saints. St. John El-Dargy said **"Do not agree when the 'devil of vain praises' hints to you to expose your virtues for the benefit of those who see them. Remember the saying of the Lord "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26)".**

(2) Not to Be A Stumbling Block to Others:

The 'devil of pride' may hide under the cover of caring that you should not trip others by certain behaviour. In this case our refraining from evil and not committing sin, is due to our care not to trip others instead of for pleasing God Himself (it pleases Him also not to trip others). When we do good we should do it for goodness sake, and because God - the Great Good - commanded us to do it, even that others benefit directly from what it produces, or as a good example. Also when we avoid evil, we do that because it is not suitable - as the children of God - to do evil, because God is our Father - Who detests evil, hates it - commanded us to refrain from evil. Evil may hurt some people as a direct result of its outcome, or as a stumbling block. Hence, our avoidance of causing others to stumble ought to be that tripping others is not suitable in itself. Again what we said in the previous point concerning being good example, we say here also, which is that avoiding evil should be for the sake of God, not the people.

There is another matter which is included under this title. It is **"Defending one's self for the sake of avoiding tripping others"**. **There exists a person who when blame is directed at him, or an error related to him, he becomes furious in defending himself, pushed by inner pride. In reality he wants to appear without blemish in front of people.** However, he might struggle with his conscience which tries to prevent him from defending himself for the sake of humility. Yet he tries to deceive his conscience hiding behind the virtue of avoiding being a stumbling block to others. The real scale with which we measure the virtues of the heart in this case, is the answer to our question to him: Is your desire not to trip others, the only reason for defending your self? Or is there another desire, which is your care to appear without fault in front of the people, for the sake of your spiritual reputation and your dignity? Do the two reasons exist together? If so, which is the stronger reason? Which is the chief and only one, while in most cases, the reason is just a false cover, or a self deception which adds to the sin of pride another sin!

Dear brother, this is the deceit of the 'devil of pride', do not listen or respond to him. Put in front of you the picture of your Master, and your Holy Teacher, about Whom it is said "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

Also put in front of you the pictures of the saints who truly denied themselves, accepted

accusations patiently, and did not defend their honor and reputation, and by that defeated their strongest enemies. **Among them is St. Macarius the Great.** A young woman accused him of committing adultery with her and said she was bearing a child by him. The Saint suffered greatly from this untrue accusation, from insults, curses, and beatings. During all that, he kept quiet, and never defended himself. Finally, by the help of some wise people, the family of the young woman let him go, on the condition that he pays maintenance to the child when it is born. The Saint doubled the work of his hands and used to say to himself "Work hard Macara (Macarius), as if you now had a wife". However, when time came, the pregnant woman had great difficulties to give birth to the child, and had no comfort until she confessed the truth, and that she sinned against the Saint. The people of the village were very surprised at the endurance of the Saint and his self denial, and were very sorry for what they did to him. Their wrath against him turned to desire to honor and apologise to him. They went to where he stayed, but could not find him, as he had fled to the desert away from the vainglory.

As we mention this story, we do not ask you to imitate it, as there is no divine command which prevents you from defending your self in an untrue case, when there is a need for that. We mentioned it to present you with a superb picture of our Saints who despised themselves in order to escape from the vainglory. Then after that, you should not be furious, or spend much effort in defending yourself in trivial matters, or the like, responding to the 'devil of pride' who hides behind such thoughts.

(3) Defending the Truth and Principles:

As the 'devil of pride' pushes someone and excites him to defend himself, in order not to trip the rest of the people, likewise, he moves him to be obstinate, insistent, haughty, and arrogant, under the cover of defending the truth. The behaviour of a person in defending the truth, is what shows him that he is untruthful. The truth defends itself without arrogance, noise, or shouting. As the sun rises up from a dark night, the troops of darkness fly away. The style of a person when he speaks, may indicate his self pride and conceit. But when he is confronted, he pretends that he is defending the truth. He might have sincere intentions, but still he is deceiving himself.

Under the same point comes the manner in which a person defends some principles. This is felt in spiritual circles, the circle of ascetic life, and in religious services. It is good and useful to follow a certain spiritual principle in the general spiritual life. But it is wrong for somebody to feel that he alone is right and all who are against him are wrong. This is but pride of a special kind, we call it the "**pride of principles**". God does not have just one way for us to reach Him, and serving Him could be in different ways, and in most cases all these different ways complement each other.

(4) The Glory of the Religious or the Social Position:

It happens sometimes that some of those who occupy important positions, either in the Church or in the Society, think that they should appear in a dignified manner for the sake of the

positions they occupy. In fact, it is the 'devil of pride' who owns this idea. If humility raises us to heaven, would it not raise us in the eyes of the people? If the Apostle says "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6), does not He give us this grace in the eyes of the people, and they submit to us in love and honor us in gratitude?! **We did not know God as such, until He was incarnate in the flesh, put on the robe of humility as a dress to hide His Divinity. Yet in spite of that everybody feared Him. Some times they dared not ask Him. It never happened that the humility of the Lord Jesus wavered His reverence or erased His honor.**

If humility was necessary for everybody who occupies a principal position, in general, it is especially necessary to those who occupy positions in the Church. In that the teacher Origen says **"In most cases, pride results in a person because of his ignorant of the meanings of clerical orders, the degrees of priesthood and deaconry. How many priests forget humility after they are ordained, as if they were ordained in order to stop being humble!!** They rather increase in their humility when they gain their degrees, according to the words of the Holy Bible "Increase in humility, as you increased in greatness" (Sirach 3:18). As the Church elected you, bow down your head in humility. You became a chief, so do not elevate yourself, but be like any one of them. It is essential to be humble, it is essential to insulted, and it is essential to escape from pride the head of all evil".

Pride does not earn the chief or the director, respect or regard. It is spirituality which does that, especially in the clerical orders. But pride pulls down the religious chief or the church minister, because it does not suit the nature of his office.

GENERAL CAUSES FOR PRIDE:

As pride is created in us for personal reasons, it is also created for general or collective reasons. We mean that someone might not feel proud of himself or his character, but of some general thing such as his family, his town, or the religious organization to which he belongs (society or Sunday School). It is clear that our glory in these matters indicates pride working in ourselves. That is beside the superficiality of our thinking and the lack of depth in our spiritual life. In the past our Teacher St. Paul rebuked the Corinthians saying "For when one says, "I am of Paul", and another, "I am of Apollos", are you not carnal? ... Therefore let no one boast in men" (1 Corinthians 3:4, 21). He also said to the Galatians "For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing **in himself alone, and not in another.** For each one shall bear his own load" (Galatians 6:3-5).

Do not glory dear brother, except in God. The Apostle says "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31). Do not glory in joining a famous religious organization, or that you serve in a well known Sunday School. Do not glory in that, as this will not save you, and does not benefit you in front of the fearful and just pulpit of Christ in the Last Day. But always glory in the Lord, imitating the sweet Psalmist David who used to say "My soul shall make its boast in the Lord" (Psalm 34:2).

The reason for our true glory is that we are the children of God. Our glory increases when

we see His Holy Name hallowed in the mouths of many, after He reign on their hearts.

G) HOW DOES ONE DEAL WITH HIS OWN PRIDE?

When we were dealing with the causes of pride, we spoke about some remedies to these causes. We here complement them by the following:

1. Ratio of Goodness to the Work of Grace:

Feel that whatever goodness you have is from God, Who when He perfected man, "Saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). Repeat with prophet Daniel "O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face" (Daniel 9:7). Do not be taken by the deceitful glory of the world, nor by its momentary sweetness, since sourness and bitterness follow. Be ascetic in the world, and all that is in it. It is going to end also its desire.

2. Hiding the Virtues:

If God has helped you and offered you some virtues or gifts, do not speak about them in front of others, even if you attained them after a long and difficult effort. Always let your feeling in your striving be the saying of the Lord God "When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do"" (Luke 17:10). **Hide your virtues so that they grow. They are like the treasure which when uncovered, becomes prone to be stolen.** The mother of Moses (the prophet) hid her child for three months. Likewise, virtue which is born from the soul, if not hid from the spiritual Pharaoh, who is Satan, will not grow. **The Saints behaved in this manner in their lives and hid their virtues. Sometimes they used to behave in certain ways or say special words aiming to hide their virtues.** When they had to speak about matters they experienced in their spiritual lives, they told them as if they happened to others. If you expose your virtues for the people to praise and exalt you, know well that you have received your reward here on earth. Abraham, the father of all the faithful said to the rich man "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things" (Luke 16:25). The Lord Jesus when He spoke about the hypocrites who gloried in their virtues "that they may be seen by men" said "Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward" (Matthew 6:5).

3. Great Awareness, Especially by Church Ministers:

The ministers of the Word, whether the priests, preachers, or Sunday School teachers, and in general **all those who are busy in the service of saving souls, are in need, more than others to be extremely aware from the 'devil of vainglory'. That is because of what sometimes accompanies these services from blessings, helps, graces, miracles and might. The 'devil of vainglory' uses them to let pride enter into the souls of those ministers.** We need to understand two matters:

First: The grace which God gives us in our services, is not necessarily because of our holiness, but may be for the benefit of the souls which we serve, whom He loves and He died for.

Second: God shows Himself in His work in order to glorify His Holy name. Hence the work of God is not constrained by the goodness of the workers, but "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). A clearer evidence of that is what the Lord Jesus said "Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness!" (Matthew 7:22, 23). The minister may be a factor for saving of many souls, and in spite of that his own soul may perish as St. Paul said "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

As ministers, and as we feel the grace of God, we should give thanks and praises to God, knowing that it is not we who serve, but it is God working in us, with us, and by us. As the Apostle says "So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase... **For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field**" (1 Corinthians 3:7, 9). Also "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God **were pleading through us:** we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). **Hence, you are but a fellow worker with God, He preaches through you. It is He who preaches, even when it is through you.**

Hurry after the service and give thanks to God, by praying for His help and work with you. So that when the 'devil of vainglory' comes and plants tares in your thoughts, and finds a place in you, you push him away by saying - as one of the Saints used to do - "you are late, I have offered every thing to God".

We find this attitude clear in the personality of the minister **St. Sarabamone Abu-Tarha**, Bishop of Monoufia, Egypt, in the last century. God granted him the gift of healing and of exorcism. After he did a miracle, he used to go to his room, and people could hear him struggling with himself, which is moved by the 'devil of vainglory'. People used to hear him talking to himself saying "You Salib (his name before his monasticism), you who are nothing and rotten, you who used to sell oil (his former profession), you make miracles!. It is Christ Who makes them". He used to do that until the 'devil of vainglory' departed from him.

In our ministry, God Himself wants us to be humble in order to be worthy of more grace from Him, and to be shielded from the sin which made hosts of angels, and our original parents fall. God appeared to Moses on Mount Horeb, in the bush, gave him a message to deliver

to Pharaoh, and made him a leader for his people by means of the miracle which God would do at his hands. God made a miracle before Moses' eyes, which was that the rod in his hand turned into a serpent, then to a rod again. God told Moses "Now put your hand in your bosom". And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. And He said, "Put your hand in your bosom again". So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh (Exodus 4:2-7). **The aim of God in this last miracle, was to give Moses a spiritual lesson in self denial, in order not to become haughty due to the miracles which God will make at his hands. That was to teach Moses a practical lesson; the hand which, a moment ago, did a miracle, can become leprous in an instant.**

Hence, let us not put our trust in our minds which think, our mouths which talk, teach and preach, nor in our hands which work and build, knowing that it is God Who is the Worker in us and by us.

4. Remembering Sins:

That is knowing one's self and remembering his past sins, which makes him feel ashamed and embarrassed. The purpose of that is for ourselves to be humble in our own eyes. The fact that God forgave me and wiped away my sins, means that at one time I abused and insulted Him. It is good then that I remember my sins and wrong deeds to humble myself. For this David the prophet said "For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me" (Psalm 51:3). That was even after Nathan said to David "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Samuel 12:13).

5. Knowing the Right Measure of Greatness:

The right measures of greatness in the eyes of the children of the world, were, and still are, the material measures, such as fortune, greatness, influence, riches, wealth, worldly positions, and scientific degrees, ..., etc. This was the first error committed by the first man, and for which he was driven out of paradise and lost many blessings, and for which he still misses very many graces.

To correct the situation, the Lord Jesus illustrated the fallacies of these worldly measures by His sayings. He also displayed by His Holy Self and in His life when He was in the flesh, that denying one's self with all that it entails of poverty in the spirit and denial of worldly glory, is the measure of real greatness.

At the time when He opened His arms to accept evil people into His bosom, forgave the adulteresses, and said to one of them caught in the very act "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:2-11), we find Him speaking harshly against pride and the proud in the personality of the Scribes and Pharisees and enumerating the woes to them (See Matthew 23). He also disapproved of pretentious worshipping, the love to lord over others, and of first places. In that He said "For whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:13). He also said "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11). When the mother of Zebedee's sons came asking Him to grant that her two sons may sit, one on His right and the other on His left in His Kingdom, and as a result, the ten were moved in indignation, Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it

over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; **but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave**--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:20-28).

The personality of John the Baptist, which is witnessed by the Lord Jesus as the greatest among those born from women (Matthew 11:11), explains the secret behind this greatness. This was given in the announcement of the angel to his father Zacharias "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord" (Luke 1:15). **Hence real greatness is the greatness "in the sight of the Lord". It is the greatness of virtue, and the Holy communion with the Heavenly Father.** It is the greatness of the life of the spirit, the life of deprivation, asceticism in the world and its glory. It is the greatness of good spiritual examples, led by self-denial.

What about John the Baptist, the greatest among those born of women? What about his position, strength, honor, dominion, wealth, and his culture? All of these were not in accordance with the understanding of the society. But he was "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight" (Mark 1:3). He did not dress in luxurious or lavish clothes, he did not eat at the tables of kings or of great people, and he had no wealth inherited from his ancestors, or a position handed to him by his father. In spite of that, the king dreaded him, the chief priests feared him, and the multitude respected him as a great prophet. The multitude used to come to him to be baptized, confessing their sins. As a whole, he was great in front of the people, because "he was great in the sight of God". Perhaps, the secret of his greatness is him denying himself, and depriving himself from what most people want, but even spend their lives to get.

Again, what about Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, and the Philosopher of Christianity? Paul the great who was caught up to the third heaven, and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Corinthians 12:4). Paul the great, the maker of miracles, who even when handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, the diseases left them and evil spirits went out of them (Acts 19:12). Paul the great missionary who had laboured more abundantly than any of the apostles (2 Corinthian 11:23-33). In spite of that he used to say it is not proper for him to boast and "If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity" (2 Corinthians 11:30). Paul the missionary who had a giant spiritual personality, who when he was a prisoner, his judge was trembling from him - Felix the ruler - as he was listening to Paul telling him "About righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). Paul the preacher of salvation, was so admired by the multitude, that they declared him a god, and wanted to offer sacrifices for him, but he tore his clothes (Acts 14:11-14).

The secret of the greatness of St. Paul was self-denial. He counted himself as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all (1 Corinthians 4:13). **He forgot every thing: his knowledge, his philosophy, his acquaintances, his ministry and his toil. He refused every worldly honor presented to him. He admitted his weaknesses and so the power of God descended on him, declared his ignorance and so took wisdom from God "Not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing" (1 Corinthians 2:6).** No wonder, it is enough for him what he heard from God saying "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9)

This is the secret of true greatness: is to be great for the Lord, great in piety and virtue, great in the life of the spirit, and great in elective asceticism and deprivation.

CHAPTER 6

HONOR

"Whoever runs after honor, honor escapes from him, and whoever escapes from it knowingly, it follows him and directs people to him"

St. Isaac

A) Christianity and a person's honor

B) Why should I flee worldly honors ?

C) How do I acquire honor?

The word 'honor' is used in everyday life to express different inner emotions and feelings.

Among the good uses are such as giving honor to God, His ministers, parents, teachers and to those who exceed us in age, position and level. It is necessary to give honor to them. Among the bad uses of honor are such as the artificial honor we give to others, with or without right, or the fabricated honor, in its name one commits horrible offensive deeds, such as beating or killing for a received insult, or to wipe out the shame which resulted from an immorality of a relative.

The wrong meanings of the word 'honor' have confused many people and deprived them of their peace, tranquillity, and happiness, and robbed them of the spirit of forgiveness, replacing it with the spirit of anxiety, displeasure and discontent in life. This may lead them into trouble with justice for crimes they foolishly committed.

It is not our intent in this subject to talk about the different kinds of honor, but we limit our talk to personal honor, which one seeks to get for himself by all ways and means. This is the wrong type of honor because of its reasons.

IMPROPER HONOR; DAUGHTER OF PRIDE:

No doubt, improper honor, in its understanding and purpose is one of the daughters of pride and exaltation, because it always aims at honoring the self and defending it. **The true Christian person has taken off the robe of worldly honor, and put on the robe of humility, imitating his Lord.** He does not give any weight to the honors of the world as the Apostle says "We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! (1 Corinthians 4:10).

Because of the wrong kind of honor, a person becomes furious, and quick in wrath which "Does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). He thus loses his meekness and becomes far from his meek Lord, Who asked us to learn from Him, "And will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). Also in the name of the wrong kind of honor, he persists and insists on his position, because it is not suitable for him to give away part of his rights, else this abates his honor. In its name he is also quick in wrath beyond control against anybody who makes a fool of him, or takes away part of his rights.

A) CHRISTIANITY AND A PERSON'S HONOR

From what we said, does Christianity abolish human honor, or lower its value in the sight of people and society, so that one should not get angry for honor's sake or defend his humanity?!

Christianity honors man greatly, and raises his value as the crown of all creation who has the sole dominion over it. But it is a spiritual religion which aims to create a religious society, eliminating the spirit of evil in man, to bring him back to his first state before the fall when God made him in His image and according to His likeness (Genesis 1:26). When Christianity asks us to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us (Matthew 5:44), it does that to elevate the state of all parties that they become no more enemies but friends. In doing that, it does not convert us to passive fearful people, but to good and active people. It gives us a powerful weapon by which we defeat our enemies. It is the weapon of goodness which eliminates evil from its root "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Hence, withstanding is out of strength and not of weakness, for "He who rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32).

The matter is very clear in our own lives, in fulfilling such commandments - which some consider as lowering to human honor - one gains honor and tribute via humility and love, and not via roughness and haughtiness, and he converts enemies to friends.

This does not only concern the personal life, but also the general and political lives. Ghandi, the great leader of India, proved beyond doubt, that such superb principles can be applied in practice and they bring forth the best results. And if you do that, you make a miracle, which brute force cannot do. **Nobody said, or will ever say, that he who shifts the mountains of hatred from inside the human soul, erases their traces, and prepares the hearts for love and humility, has lost his honor, and destroyed his humanity. The contrary is true.** Nobody said about the leader Ghandi, who believed in such principles, that he is a weak man or a mad person; but they raised him to a sacred level, after he and his followers, barehanded without weapon, at the end, won over the mighty British Empire.

If feelings moved in a man with jealousy and pride against a virgin related to him, who did an error, or a woman who went in a wrong moral path, and he killed her, pretending that he is erasing his shame with her blood, to keep up the honor of his name and his family, he commits a serious wrong. It shows that, he was in a hurry and amputated a sick member which could have been treated. He corrected an error by doing another error. **Jesus our Lord behaved differently in His dealing with some of the fallen adulteresses, opened the way for their repentance, and thus created from them useful members in human society, and they were converted to saintly ministers.**

GOD TAKES REVENGE FOR THE HONOR OF HIS CHILDREN:

We talked so far about human honor, in the light of Christian teachings on forgiveness. **We refused, to follow the people of the world in insisting on the wrong meanings of honor. We rather build souls and gain greater honor. This is from the spiritual personal side.**

There is another side, the divine one, which makes us stop asking for our personal honor.

God Who cares for the honor of His Children - without us asking Him to revenge on anybody - takes revenge on our behalf. He punishes who resist us, humiliates our enemies and those who hate us, and returns back our honor several times over. There is no wonder in that, as He says "He who rejects you rejects Me" (Luke 10:16). If He considers our rejection and humiliation - for His sake - rejection and humiliation of Himself, does not He bring back our honor when He gets angry for His honor?! Our teacher St. Paul said "Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you" (2 Thessalonians 1:6). In the past also a Cushite came and announced to King David saying "There is good news, my lord the king! For the Lord has avenged you this day of all those who rose against you" (2 Samuel 18:31). In the past also Moses told his people before crossing the Red Sea "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. ... The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:13, 14). **Do not go after honor and let heaven declare your honor.**

A STORY:

Contemporary history tells us a story about a saintly priest, who was living in one of the villages in Upper Egypt, during the first world war. He went to the mayor of the village and asked him for a specific favour. The mayor who was foolishly fanatic met this Father in a rough way and treated him badly, and even slapped his face as a kind of revenge. The Father went back with hot blood from the slap and entered the church which was named after the Martyr St. Georges, where there was a religious service awaiting him. While the Father was praying in the church, the mayor was walking in one of the roads of the village. The mayor was met by a knight on a horse who stopped him, asking him for the reason why he insulted the priest. And before getting his answer slapped him so hard that the mayor lost one of his eyes. And suddenly, the knight disappeared. He was none other but St. Georges himself.

ANOTHER STORY:

This happened in the beginning of this century also in one of the villages in Upper Egypt. This was in one of the nights of the Coptic month of Kiahk, when the church celebrates the Kiahk chanting (known as 7 and 4). The church in this village was named after St. Marcorios (Abi Sefein, of the two swords), and its priest was old and was a very simple man. While the priest was walking from outside the village on his way to the church, a criminal by the name of 'Bilal', stopped him demanding to take all the money the priest carried. As the priest had nothing, the thief wanted to search him, but the priest refused. The thief searched him by force, and as he found no money he slapped him and left. The priest went right away to the church where he found the chief chanter and some deacons, chanting and waiting for him. The priest started the Kiahk praises as usual. But after a short while the sound of a gun shot was strongly heard. People asked and were told that "Bilal was killed by a gun shot". Knowing that, the priest continued his chanting with enthusiasm. It was also strange that the security forces in investigating the accident could not locate any source for this gun shot which killed Bilal. The matter was an obvious miracle which God did for the honor of his minister.

Dear brother, you have seen how God returns back your honor, while you are holding your

peace. He returns it back to you many times over, and in a way you cannot comprehend.

MAN IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

Never count dear brother, that you are a negligible quantity in the sight of God, but you are a beloved creature He has, and He honored more than all the other creatures.

(1) Man is the greatest among all creation:

You are the only creature, who is created in God's own image and likeness (Genesis 1:27) and the everlasting creature who will never perish. You are greater than the universe and what is in it, but even you are its lord, to whom all the seen creatures are subdued. The whole creation was created in order to be under your service "Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28). You did not lose your dominion over the beasts and savage animals until you have lost your dominion over yourself by sin, and still can gain it back by freeing yourself from the yoke of sin, as we see in the lives of the saints who can tame the beasts.

You are the only creature whom God beautified by the gifts of both mind and speech. You are the one with whom God delights (Proverbs 8:31). You are the one whose feet God washed. To you God gave His Flesh and Blood, which is what the angels desire to look at, so that you abide in Him and He in you (John 6:56).

You are the one on whose heart God knocks, and wants you to open for Him, in order to come in and dine with you, and you with Him and make His home with you (Revelation 3:20, John 14:23). You are the one who - by faith - orders the evil spirits and they obey you. You are - if you are a priest - one who has dominion over heaven, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 18:18). You are one of those He said to "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2, 3). You are the one who sits in the feast of the King and are in His company "And where I am, there My servant will be also" (John 12:26). You are about whom the Apostle said that the members of your body are members of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:15). You are the only one about whom is said you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you (1 Corinthians 3:16). You - by faith in the Son of God - the works that Jesus did you will do also; and greater works than these you will do (John 14:12).

(2) For man God was incarnate and suffered:

You my Lord Whom Heaven, with its vastness, cannot contain, descended to the womb of the Virgin, for my sake ... "You were born in my image in order to give birth to me in Your image. You were born in a cave like those who have no home or a place to go to, while You are the creator of heaven and earth, and the refuge of all the world. You were wrapped in rags and laid on the dust

in the manger like the poorest of the poor in this world, and You are the source of wealth and the pride of life. They carried You as a child and escaped from an unjust person, and You are the haven of the tired and the refuge for the escapee. You were persecuted like somebody who deserves death, and You are who give life to everybody. You were baptised in order to sanctify me, and You are the holiest Holy ... You were insulted to honor me, and You raised Yourself in order to raise my head. You drank the vinegar and myrrh in order to offer me sweet for my throat after I drank the myrrh by my own will from the hand of the enemy" (from a prayer for St. John Saba, known as the Spiritual Elder).

You stood against mocking and shame in order to honor me, and tasted death by Your will to shelter me. You Who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in You (2 Corinthians 5:21).

(3) Man is the son of God whom angels serve:

Dear brother, you are made in the likeness to the image of God "That He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). You are beloved of God, Who honored you by calling you a brother to Him, and He said to Mary Magdalene after His resurrection "Go to My brethren and say to them ..." (John 20:17). You have an angel to guard you. You have the angel of the Lord encamped all around you, and delivers you (Psalm 34:7), and to you all ministering spirits sent forth to minister you who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14). You are who the angels love and rejoice over your repentance (Luke 15:10). You are for whom the angels were exultant for your salvation and gave the Good News to the country shepherds (Luke 2:8-14). You are the one who has the angels at your service, to deliver you from difficulties, to close for you the mouths of lions, to put out the flames of fire, and to intercede for you.

Now dear brother, did you know the value of yourself, and your honor? Do you realise now that Christianity honors your humanity greatly, even in ways which differ from the ways of the world, because you are not of the world (John 15:19)!!

B) WHY SHOULD I FLEE WORLDLY HONORS?

It is clear from what we previously said that there are two kinds of honor: Divine honor and worldly honor. **What is the reality of the worldly honor, and why should I escape from it?**

(1) Because they are trivial and vain:

The honors of the world, with its different shapes and sizes, are nothing but deceit. It is like the mirage in the desert of this world, one sees it ahead, and aims for it, comes nearer, and runs towards it, but no matter how hard he seeks it, he will never reach it; like his shadow, he will not catch it.

They are trivial matters, if measured with the real honor which God gives us. Thus says the Wise Ben Sirach "Do not ask the Lord for high office or the king for preferment" (Sirach 7:4). **The honor with which the world presents us, in either clanging words, in sounding titles, in tempting positions, or hugh wealth,...., is vanity.**

Solomon son of David, king of Israel, experienced all these vanishing glories, of whom the Book witnessed that there shall not be anyone like him among the kings all his days (1 Kings 3:13). He expressed all his experience about life and its vain trivial honors in his everlasting words "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity ... I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. **I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind**" (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14).

He also said "I communed with my heart, saying, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me ... I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow" (Ecclesiastes 1:16-18). Again he said "Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, ... Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labour in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:10,11).

Have you seen brother what Solomon said? Or do you think that however you increase in your position, wisdom, or riches, you shall reach what he reached?

(2) Because they are temporary:

The honors of the world are short lived. The devil showed the Lord Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world **in a moment of time**" (Luke 4:5). Yes in a moment of time. This gives us the feeling that the glories of the world are quick to vanish!!

They celebrated the Lord Jesus as a king on Sunday and shouted "Hosanna", and after four days they shouted in front of Pilate "Crucify Him, Crucify Him". How short-lived are the honors of this world!! It is not only short-lived but also temporary. The honored people, in parties, put on the finest clothes they adorn. But once the evening is over, and it is time for rest and sleep, they have to take them off. For us too, the night of our lives will arrive - death - and we have to take off these temporary things unwillingly. It is thus better and more honorable that we do without them willingly while we are alive in the body before they do without us through death. St. Anthony stood in front of the dead body of his father, while still in the house, looked at him and said "You left the world unwillingly, but I shall leave it by my will".

The honors of the world do not go with us in the world to come. We cannot take from them in our next life. The narrow door of heaven only allows me to go through it naked. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, **and naked shall I return there**" (Job 1:21). If we are going to stand naked in front of the throne of the Judging Christ, please tell me if you can distinguish between the

king and the tramp, between the learned and the illiterate, or between the rich and the poor, ... !!

(3) Because they are surrounded by dangers:

St. John Chrysostom said "The head has many pains", and also said "I shall be surprised to see a chief saved". That is because of the many dangers which accompany the honors and glories of this world, the big jobs and the main positions. As the social position of a person goes up, as he is promoted, the greater are his duties, responsibilities and lack of time. He finds himself bound by many ties, that are difficult to get rid of. It is easy to realise that these different and numerous ties make it difficult for a person to care much about the salvation of his soul. And with the honors which accompany the big positions, come the complicated problems also. They are like the thorns which try to choke the person spiritually. With them also the wars against pride and vainglory intensify.

The dangers of the world's honors do not stop here, but also extend to the next age. **St. Eronimos said "It is very difficult for a person to enjoy present and future benefits, and to go from the temporary to the permanent everlasting joys, and to expect to be honored here and there"**. When Joseph presented his two sons Ephraim and Menasseh to his father Jacob Israel to bless them, he put the older who is Ephraim on his right, and Menasseh who is the younger on his left, which is the custom in the world in honoring the older. But Jacob crossed his hands and put his right hand on the head of Menasseh and his left hand on the head of Ephraim. This is what God does at the end of the world, advances the young, the poor in the spirit, and the abused in this world, ... God clarified that for us in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The situation reversed after their death. After Lazarus "desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table", the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue.

How many are the dangers which threaten our lives as a result of seeking worldly honors ... !

(4) Because they deprive us from God's blessings:

Our teacher St. Paul said "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). **Many times the lights of this world's honors shine in the eyes of the children of God, and bring them to danger. They are like the torrent which we fear to come near, else it will wash us with it. It is like the strong magnetic pole, if we enter its field it attracts us to it, and we gain new characteristics different from our original ones which are of the children of God.** This is exactly what happens to the piece of iron when it enters a magnetic field, it is attracted to the pole which was created, and it gains new properties, but even it becomes magnetic! Likewise, the honors of this world may be the cause which deprive us of the blessings of God.

Many Jews at the time of Jesus believed in Him "But because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they be put out of the synagogues; **for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God**" (John 12:42, 43). Also Pilate condemned Jesus to death, while he sought to release Him, and was convinced of His innocence, as he was afraid to lose his position (John 19:12,

13). Herod also massacred the children of Bethlehem, in order to get rid of the Saviour, and the rule remains for him (Matthew 2). Again, Felix the governor in Caesarea, in spite of the fact that he trembled while Paul reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come (Acts 24:25), he left Paul bound because he wanted to do the Jews a favour (Acts 24:27).

St. Pachomius the founder of communal monasticism, said "If somebody honors you, let not your heart rejoice, but lament. Paul and Barnabas, when people honored them, they tore off their clothes, and Peter and the rest of the disciples when they were wrongly accused, and were whipped, they rejoiced, because they were worthy to be abused for the sake of the Great Name". He also said "As Eve sought divine glory, she was stripped of human glory. Likewise he who seeks human glory, is denied God's Glory".

C) HOW DO I ACQUIRE HONOR?

(1) By acquiring God Himself:

Solomon the wise said about Wisdom (Christ) "I am Wisdom ... Riches and honor are with me" (Proverbs 8:18). How wonderful this saying is, how profound and correct it is! Christ our Lord has the riches and honor, because He is "In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3)!. Thus who wants to acquire real honor, **should acquire** Christ first in whom all desires are. He is the hidden treasure in our inner being of which we are not aware (Matthew 13:44).

What honor, dear brother, you get when Christ is present in your weak temple, when you carry Him as His mother Mary carried Him. When He is with you, you realise that Who are with you are more than those who are against you (2 Kings 6:16), when He gives you "A mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist" (Luke 21:15)??!

The Lord honors His pious people whom He chooses. The Apostle said "Glory, honor,

and peace to everyone who works what is good" (Romans 2:10). The Lord honored His saint John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople because of his piety, zeal, and ministry. He had a great name in the whole Church, and was greatly loved by his people, and acquired honor, which the king and queen of his time could not acquire, to the extent that anybody who had an accusation against them went to St. Chrysostom. The Apostle Paul was right when he said "No man takes this honor to himself" (Romans 5:4).

Sometimes, we think that the world neglected the children of God, forgot them, even discarded them from its consideration. But God comes back at the right time and shows them to the world. Are they not the light of the world, the salt of the earth?, (Matthew 5:13,14). Also "We are to God the fragrance of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15). Can the world live in darkness, doing without light, or without salt which stops its rot, when there comes from it the smell of impurities and sin? **Life on earth cannot straighten without the presence of the pious and the saints, who are always the minority among people. People need them even when they persecute and humiliate them.**

The young boy David was attending the sheep, forgotten by his father, as God took him from the pasture and made him king over His people. John the Baptist disappeared in the desert, but God gave him honor and glory as he testified about him "Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11).

There is not enough time for us to talk about the divine gifts which God gave to His pious, chosen and saintly people. They made miracles, healed the sick, raised the dead, moved mountains, closed the mouths of lions, went through fire and were not burnt,... Is there honor greater than these?

Blessed is the man who acquires God in his heart. He becomes the throne for his Lord and a holy temple for His dwelling.

(2) With humility:

The Wise said "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life" (Proverbs 22:4). **The honors of the world are but a mirage or a shadow. It is not possible to catch it or get hold of it.** In other words, this shadow will not be under you, except in one case; when you lay down. **Likewise honor, you cannot acquire except with humility.** This is expressed by David the prophet when he said "My soul clings to the dust; revive me according to Your word" (Psalm 119:25). The Wise also says "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, **and before honor is humility**" (Proverbs 15:33). He also said "Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, **and before honor is humility**" (Proverbs 18:12).

Have you seen, dear brother, how did John the Baptist deny himself. When they asked him if he were Christ, he answered "One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose" (Luke 3:16). **When the Fullness of Time came, in order for the Lord to begin His missionary work, He went to John the Baptist to be baptized by him. There, the Lord honored his beloved. He took his hand, about which he said is not worthy to loose His sandal**

strap, and put it on His head in the water of river Jordan!

Have you seen how God honors the poor man sitting in the dust: "He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap. That He may seat him with the princes of His people" (Psalm 113:7, 8)? The Lord of Glory gained honor by what He endured from abuses by His free will "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9).

(3) By being ascetic towards honor:

If we practise asceticism regarding the honors of the world for the sake of God, God loves and honors us. St. Isaac said "Be ascetic towards the world and God will love you, be ascetic to what is in the hands of the people and the people will love you". He also said "If you humiliate yourself for the people to honor you, God will expose you. But if you detest and despise yourself and your deeds, truly in your heart for the sake of righteousness, God will inspire all creation to honor you".

God said to Solomon son of David, the king of Israel "Because you have asked this thing (wisdom), and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. **And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days**" (1 Kings 3:11-13). **When God saw the asceticism of Solomon towards the world's glories and its honors, God gave them to him without him asking for them.** Even after Solomon got these honors and experienced every thing concerning them, he said as an experienced person "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has a man from all his labour in which he toils under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever. ... All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again" (Ecclesiastes 1:2-7).

Again, where are "The rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing" (1 Corinthians 2:6)? Where is Alexander the Great, Claudius Caesar, Napoleon Buonaparte, and Hitler? Where are they now? If you do not know, ask the graves to tell you and the dust to inform you!! But the holy people of God who deprived themselves from the honors of this world and its glory, their remembrance is still alive. The Apostle said about such people "And through it he being dead still speaks" (Hebrews 11:4). Their remembrance is still alive and makes miracles among people, either by their good example and their holy lives or by their intercession in front of God.

Moses the prophet despised the glory of Pharaoh and his palace "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Hebrews 11:26), so God made him a counsellor to the people of Israel, but even made him god for Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1).

(4) By Escaping from the honor:

The honor which the saints acquired, was not acquired either by rest or by labour, but by fleeing and escaping from it. In this **St. Isaac says " Whoever runs after honor, honor escapes from him, and whoever escapes from it knowingly, it follows him and directs people to him"**.

When you feel that the honors of the world surround you, and people have started to praise you much, then escape. The Lord Jesus, when they wanted to make Him king, He escaped from them and departed again to the mountain by Himself alone (John 6:15), while He was the best King in His rule and justice. Adam the first desired honor and it was taken away from him, but Adam the second - the Lord Jesus - escaped from the honor, ... "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9).

History is the best witness to that: **The saints who escaped from the honors of the world, obtained from God a greater honor and their names were preserved, not only in earth but also in heaven.** Constantine the Emperor of the Roman state, when he heard the news of St. Anthony, he sent to him asking blessings for himself, his children and for his empire. St. Moses the black, before his repentance and his monasticism, was a chief to a band of thieves. One of the rulers of Egypt sought to see him in the desert. The saint Anba Sarabamone Abu-Tarha, Bishop of Fayoum, Egypt, in the last century, who before his monasticism used to walk beside an animal selling oil, the ruler of Egypt - Mohamed Ali Pasha - sought him asking him to heal his daughter who had an evil spirit.

Among the best examples is that of **the history of the saint Anba Mettaous, the 87th Patriarch**, who was one of the greatest patriarchs of the See of St. Mark, Egypt, in his holiness and his spirituality. When he was promoted to the degree of Priesthood when he was 18 years old, he left the monastery escaping from the vainglory, and went to the monastery of St. Anthony. There he denied himself and did not present himself as a priest but as a simple deacon. But the honor from which he escaped followed him and God showed it with a miraculous power. One time during the Divine Liturgy, a hand went out from the altar and gave him incense three times when the Bible was being read. When some of the old saintly monks saw that, and realised it, they informed him that he must become the next Patriarch. When he heard that he was very sad, and left the monastery for Jerusalem, escaping from the honor. There he worked as a hired labourer earning his food. But honor followed him again in this new place: he knew by the Spirit the hiding place of an amount of money which was stolen from a foreign monk who was complaining to him, and he brought the money to the monk. This was an event which caused his story to be known in that area. Again he escaped from the vainglory to the monastery of St. Anthony and then to the El-Moharak monastery.

When the chair of the Patriarch was empty after the death of Pope Ghobrial the 4th, the elders of the people were unified in nominating him to the chair of the Patriarch. He escaped from them and went to a boat docking at the shores of the river Nile, wanting to travel to the southern cities. But God made a young boy speak and direct the elders to the place of his hiding. They went and caught him. He tried by different means to avoid this position and its honor. When he found that there was no more escape he took a scissors and cut the tip of his tongue in order to make himself dumb. But the Lord who untied the tongue of Zechariah, untied his tongue also. At last he had to bow his head in obedience and submission and accepted to be the Patriarch, in spite of his reluctance.

This fantastic story and the like from the history of the saintly fathers, is a living picture, that **to escape from the honors of the world is an important means for acquiring them. This supports the saying of St. Isaac "Whoever runs after honor, honor escapes from him, and whoever escapes from it knowingly, it follows him and directs people to him."**

CHAPTER 7

THE LIFE OF PURITY

"Who conquers his body has conquered his nature, and who conquered his nature became above it, and who became above the human nature, has shared the nature of the angels"

St. John El-Dargy

- A) The honour of the life of purity**
- B) Youth and the life of purity**
- C) Causes of the sins of youth**
- D) How do we attain purity?**
- E) After the fall**
- F) Dreams and body discharges**
- G) Important instructions**

A) THE HONOUR OF THE LIFE OF PURITY

Divine Inspiration said in the Book of Wisdom "How good is the chaste generation" (Wisdom 4:1). St. Paul said to the Thessalonians "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in

holiness" (Thessalonians 4:3, 7). Holiness here is chastity or purity which is the opposite of sexual immorality or impurity. Our teacher the apostle Paul also said "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Purity is the life of angels in heaven as the Lord of Glory said "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). The martyr St. Kevrianos talking to some virgins confirming this meaning said "You have started now while you are in this life, to enjoy what shall be in heaven after the resurrection. Because you kept your virginity, you have resembled the angels". Father John Cassian said **"There will be no virtue which make the human resemble the angels like the virtue of chastity, because the human live with chastity - while still in the body - as if they have no bodies, and as if they have free spirits as the Apostle said "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit" (Romans 8:9). But, the human who lives in chastity and purity is higher than the angels who live without bodies which desire against their spirits"**.

God has honored this virtue. When He wanted to send His only Beloved Son in the flesh born from a woman, He did not want Him to be born except from a celibate virgin who vowed her life to chastity and purity. The two saints Eronimos and Augustine said that the Lord loved His disciple John more than the rest of the disciples for his celibacy. We thus read what Solomon the Wise said " He who loves purity of heart ... , the king will be his friend" (Proverbs 22:11). This was explained, applying it to John the celibate disciple whom Jesus loved more than the rest of the disciples. He was so close to Jesus that he had leaned on His bosom at the Last Supper, and asked Him what other disciples dare not ask: "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" (John 21:20). And when Jesus showed Himself again to some of the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, after His Glorious Resurrection, nobody recognized Him except John the celibate disciple who said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" (John 21:1-7).

St. Eronimos commented on this event by saying "Nobody recognised Him except John, because it was only the celibate who knew the Celibate, the Son of the celibate". Finally in the most critical and difficult moments, we see the Lord honors celibacy, chastity and purity, in the person of His celibate mother and His disciple John the celibate. He did not charge His mother except to His celibate disciple, and did not command His celibate disciple to take care except of His celibate mother (John 19:26, 27).

In his revelation, John the celibate showed us the superiority of chastity and purity in heaven. He spoke about the one hundred and forty-four thousand celibates whom he saw standing on the heavenly Mount Zion, singing a new song which nobody could learn except those only. Those are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they were virgins. Those are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes (Revelation 14:1-4). There is no display to the honour of the life of chastity and purity better than having a special song which belong to them alone and that "they follow the Lamb wherever He goes".

If the virtue of chastity and purity has this high worth to God, we find the contrary is true for the sin of sexual immorality and impurity. Because of it God wiped out the old world by the Flood, burned down the two cities Sodom and Gomorrah, and killed in one day twenty three thousands Israelites in the desert after they committed adultery with the women of Moab. Also

because of this sin, David was at great loss, and his son Solomon worshipped the idols. In summary, in the past God got angry with His people "for the spirit of harlotry is in their midst" (Hosea 5:4). No wonder the Apostle tells us that because of this sin "The wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:5, 6). **The power of God and His help leave the person who is enslaved to this sin.** As the pigeon which Noah let loose returned to the ark when it found no place among the dead corpses, the same is with the Spirit of the Lord - Which resembles this pigeon - Which never dwells in the impure, but in the pure bodies.

B) YOUTH AND THE LIFE OF PURITY

There is no doubt that what hinders youth from living the life of virtue and spiritual growth is the sexual problem. Some think that the life of purity for youth could be almost impossible. The reality is not that. We have many examples in the Holy Bible and in the Church history which affirm this thinking.

Man was created pure in the image of God and God wants him to be pure. Hence He gave him all the possibilities to help him live the life of purity. How can man then doubt in these possibilities? **In fact if we searched all the sins of youth, we find that one falls in them by himself due to his deviations and the exposure of himself to excitements. In that St. Filoxinos says "The desire defeats us not because it is stronger than us but because of our inability and our carelessness. It dares not fight you unless your will permits it, or it may fight you in a natural way without your will".**

THE SECRET OF THE POWER OF YOUTH:

The potential of the power of youth is in its purity and chastity. A victorious youth in his sexual life is victorious also in almost all the other sides of his life. But a youth who gives himself as a prisoner to his desires, is also a failure in almost all his life. The Holy Bible, Church history and our daily observations in the society, all, give us live examples of the truth of what we say.

Samson of the supernatural strength dealt cunningly with the Palestinians and he killed hundreds and hundreds of them. Yet when he surrendered to his desire at the knees of Delilah, he fell in the hands of his enemies, who plucked out his eyes, degraded him to the level of animals, and made him turn a grinder instead of the mute animal (Judges Chapter 16).

But chaste Joseph, who was in his purity faithful to God, and to his master Potiphar - was saved by God from his difficulty; He took him out of prison to become a counsellor to the people of Egypt, and their supporter, and even the supporter to other neighbouring nations (Genesis Chapters 39-41).

Pope Mettaous the 87th Patriarch, used in his youth to shepherd the sheep, when the devil tried to make him fall in the sin of youth. The devil moved the heart of a woman from the place where he often went, to mock him. When he asked her about the secret of her admiration of him, she answered "it is your eyebrows young man". He went aside, shaved off his eyebrows with great courage, and took them to her saying "woman, here are the hairs of my eyebrows which you desired". The woman looked at him, and was horrified at his strong devotion to purity.

A STORY:

History preserves for us the story of a chaste virgin living quietly in her house, when the devil moved the heart of a youth to desire her with an impure love. He did not stop visiting her house. When the virgin realised that, she was deeply saddened. One day, he came as usual and knocked on the door, when she was sitting at the loom. When she realised it was him, she went to the door with the weaving needle in her hand and asked him "Man, what makes you come here?". He answered "Loving you, lady". Then she asked "What do you love in me?". He said "Your eyes overwhelm me, and when I look at you, my heart gets inflamed". She then entered the weaving needle in one of her eyes, firmly plucked it out, threw it at him, and was going to do the same with her other eye, but the youth held her hand, and she entered her house and closed the door. When the youth saw that she took out her eye, he was very sad, and was sorry for what happened to her because of him. He left and went right away to the desert and became a monk.

A SECOND STORY:

When the Arab armies were invading Jerusalem, the invading soldiers attacked one of the convents for virgins, caught a beautiful nun and presented her as a present to their leader. When he wanted to do evil with her, she said to him "Give me a little time, because I have a profession which I learnt from the virgins, and only a virgin can do it". He asked her "What is that?". She said, "It is a lotion, if anybody is rubbed with it, a sword or any weapon cannot affect him, and you need that because you are at war all the time". He asked her "How can I be sure of that?". She took oil and looked at him saying "Rub your neck and give me the sword to hit you with". He answered "No, but rub your neck first and let me hit you with the sword". She gladly accepted and quickly rubbed her neck and said "Hit it very hard". He took the sword which was very sharp, while the saint stretched her neck, which he hit with all his might. Her head rolled on the ground and that is how the bride of

Christ accepted to die by the sword, rather than defile her celibacy. The leader was very saddened, and cried bitterly as he had killed such a beautiful image, and knew that she deceived him to escape from impurity and committing sin.

A THIRD STORY:

At the time of the Roman persecution of the Copts in Egypt, the Roman atheistic rulers were completely astounded at how the Copts held firm to their faith, to the extent that they preferred death - but even asked for it cheerfully - rather than deny their faith. The rulers searched for the secret of this power, until they found out that the secret of the strength of the Copts is in their strong hold on their chastity and purity. Since then, the rulers tried to spoil the purity of those who refuse to submit to their orders to deny the Christian faith.

From among those was a Christian youth who refused to deny the faith. So they tied him on a bed with ropes and brought him a woman to mock him and excite his desire and lessen his strength. But when this hero could not find a means of escaping, and the woman was persisting in her evil, continuing to mock him, he could not find a free member in his body except his tongue. He put it out of his mouth, tore it with his teeth and spat it in the face of the evil woman where lots of blood flew. The woman, on seeing that, was terrified and immediately escaped. The youth preferred to cut his tongue rather than defile his body and destroy his purity.

A FOURTH STORY:

This is a story of two heroes who were martyred for the sake of the life of purity at the time of Diocletian. These are the martyrs Theodorah and Didimos. After the ruler failed to convince the girl Theodorah to burn incense to the idols and to destroy her virginity, he put her in one of the brothels. But a Christian young man by the name of Didimos was able to rescue her from this house. By a trick he changed her clothes and took her out of the house in the uniform of a soldier and stayed in her place. When he was discovered, the ruler ordered to cut his head and throw his body in the fire. While the soldiers were taking him to the place of execution, Theodorah was seen to run after him, and said to him in a rebuking manner "Brother, why did you steal my crown?". She also was discovered and the two were martyred at the same time in the year 302 A.D.

These were some examples of the heroes of purity who stood in front of the rulers and astonished them by their dare and bravery, for whom the rulers bowed their heads in admiration and appreciation. They were able to control themselves and conquer their desires. The Wise Solomon was correct when he said "He who rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32).

C) CAUSES OF THE SINS OF YOUTH

St. Filoxinos says "Guard yourself from the causes which attract you to the desire. Close the windows from which it enters to you. Because if you eliminate the means from which pains are born, you would have strengthened yourself well. **The desire may start from the body, or it may start from the wandering thoughts, or from outside causes.** We thus should distinguish the causes, eliminate them and try to close their intakes".

This saint has summarised the causes which attract us to the desire in three categories:

(First) The Body:

Meaning the heat of the body, its slackening, or its sickness.

(a) The heat of the body is created either naturally because of age in the stage of youth or adolescence for example, or from too much eating and the presence of energy in the body in excess to its natural need. It is also created from eating certain food with spices which excite the nerves, and from drinks which exhaust the nerves.

(b) The slackening of the body comes from laziness, too much sleep and from giving the body rest in excess of its needs.

(c) By the sickness of the body, it means bad functioning of some glands which result in exciting sexual organs, when these glands do not secrete properly. This case needs special medical treatment. This disease may have been caused from an increase in the sensitivity of the sexual system resulting from previous exhaustion, perhaps from excessive practising of this sin. Such body may be more susceptible for the slightest causes, than other bodies.

(Second) The Thought:

Which means the impure thoughts which aggravate the person and persist with different degrees in its ugliness. Mostly because the mind is occupied with these thoughts and not basically with good or useful thoughts. It might also be a war of the devil against the pure saints, so that they lower their thoughts and bargain with him, or enjoy what defiles them. This point enters into the next item, which is the external causes.

(Third) External Causes:

Which are the stumbling blocks which come to us from the senses.

The senses are the intakes of knowledge for the human. They are also intakes of stumbling

blocks. The eye for example looks at exciting pictures and the ear hears bad exciting words as well. In both cases, the sight and the hearing connect with the thought and from here sin arises.

(1) The sight:

It is an important door through which the sins of youth enter. St. Augustine considers it the first ring in the chain of falling. The sins of the sight are due to staring at the other sex without reservation, or from looking at obscene pictures (in the cinema, television, magazines or the like), or from reading dirty books, and looking at cheap magazines which aim to excite the senses of youth, and also the books which deal with sexual subjects in the wrong way.

(2) The hearing:

This sense also has a strong effect. Listening to stories, jokes and impure talks from perverted people (evil friends), contaminate our thoughts and as a result move our sexual desire.

(3) The touch:

We realise the danger of this sense in very crowded places. It is also considered the strongest point in the problem of masturbation.

We come out from all that, that our presence in the place of sin, where our spiritual resistance weakens or crumbles, leads us to completing it. The piece of wrought iron for example, when enters a magnetic field, must get attracted to the pole which creates this field. This is a must. As a result, this piece of iron gains new properties by becoming itself a magnet which has the properties of the original magnet. The only way to bring back this piece of iron to its original properties is to take it out of the magnetic field. **In the same manner if we put ourselves in the field of the desire, we will be attracted to it because we are only human subject to excitement. The only way to get rid of these new effects which influenced us or the new features which we gained, and to return back to our original pure and clear nature, is to get away from the field of sin.**

The saint known as 'The Spiritual Elder' said "This is the sequence of the senses of the man of God in discernment: prevent your sight from looking to the vanishing human beauty, that is by looking towards God. Prevent your ear from listening to every bad hearing, that is by listening to the secrets of the Almighty. Beware from smelling the evil scent and guard your mouth from every worldly taste, and from every vain talk, and be satisfied with speaking to God, and talking to your Creator. The fifth sense, I mean the touch, deliver it to the vigilant keeper, and ask for chastity in all your movement and your touch, so that God guards you from impure thoughts ...".

(Fourth) Causes Other Than Those Mentioned by St. Filoxinos:

1 - The Most Serious Case:

When the sexual state becomes a desire in the heart, we mean the permanent fixed desire which enslaves the whole of man, it goes out from the heart to the thought and enslaves him for its satisfaction. He either goes for what he has in front of him from excitement, or he invents excitement of sexual pleasures, uses imagination in an unclean way, authors stories, imagines visions, manages talks, and the desire goes from the heart to the senses and defiles him also. Hence he loses his simplicity, and imagines impurities in everything even in innocent matters which pass by his senses. By that the feeling is inflamed, the whole body is defiled, and excites in him coveting actions.

The Lord Jesus says "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). **He did not say "Whoever looks at a woman has already committed adultery with her", as the main factor in this sin is the desire which "When conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:15).**

In any case there is collaboration between the four sources from which the desire issues, whether the heart, thought, sense, or the body. From whichever the desire starts, if the thought is defiled, the heart, sense and body may be defiled with it, and if the sense is defiled, the thought, heart and body may be defiled with it, and so on.

The ugliness of the sexual sin surfaces - as it matures in its actual state - when it includes the whole person in his body, thought, senses, and everything in him. Hence when he falls, his fall is great, as not one stone in him shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down. Our Teacher St. Paul said "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

2 - Pride:

This cause is outside the whole of the sexual circle. **So, what is the relation between pride and sexual immorality?**

The answer is clear and it is **that Divine Grace departs from the proud person because of his pride and he falls into sin. God permits that in order for him to humiliate himself and realises his weakness and leaves his pride.**

There is no greater sin which humiliates a person with inflated ego in his spiritual life as the sin of sexual immorality, so horrible that it is sometimes known as the sin of impurity. St. John El-Dargy said "If you are not purified from the glorification, you will not overcome the pains of sexual immorality or any of the other pains". He also said "No one overcomes his body except he who crushes his heart, and no one crushes his heart except he who died for his desires". The saintly Fathers said "Who brags with his piety falls in the sin of sexual immorality, and who brags with his knowledge falls in the sin of blasphemy".

"Condemnation" hides behind and is fortified by pride. Do not allow yourself to

condemn someone falling into sexual sin, but have kindness and compassion for him. Do not be enraged or mock him, but pray for him that the Lord raises him. Let his fall be a cause for you to be modest, knowing that you are human like him, very weak, and you could be blown into sinning like the dust on earth. Tell yourself "He fell today, and I might fall tomorrow". If you are quick to condemn others and despise them, know that God will give you a lesson you will not forget, in order to realise your weakness, and God may permit you to be tempted with the same temptation of your brother. The Apostle said "**Do not be haughty, but fear**" (Romans 11:20).

Look out to yourself dear brother. You may be walking in the Divine Road diligently, except for the sexual attacks, for which you know no sexual causes which justify your labour. They may be due to pride in the soul which made God's Grace leave you.

TWO GENERAL CAUSES:

There are two vital factors related to the sexual problem, which are love and energy.

* For each person there is a love emotion. When it is not utilised properly, the devil may make use of it and bind it to the body, where it deviates and goes in the circle of sexual love, and is defiled by the desires of the body. **Therefore those who fulfilled their love emotion, in a good spiritual manner, are very content from the sexual side on this point.** Among the proper utilization of the love emotion are the following:

(1) Visiting the sick: By which love takes an elevated form of tenderness and kindness. For those it is unlikely that they are tempted by sexual desires.

(2) Visiting the poor and the widows and caring for the orphans in the orphanages or wherever they are, and the other different social services.

(3) The different spiritual services, in alleviating the suffering of those who are in difficulties, sympathising with the grieving, and visiting the prisoners, ... etc.

(4) Teaching services, as in Sunday Schools for example, and what that accompanies from the feelings of fatherhood, and pastoral emotions, ...

(5) Friendships: An inward looking person who has no friend, who does not find anyone with whom he exchanges love and safekeeping for his secrets, most probably becomes a prey to sexual attacks and falls, as he might find in them love which satisfies his empty heart. We thus advise the person who wishes to avoid such falls, to make himself a reservoir of love which overflows over his pure friends who exchange with him love with love, and not to search for a

substitute in the sexual circle.

(6) In this context, are those who satisfy their love emotion by the love of their nation, or by a hobby, such as writing poetry, playing music, or the like, in many different fields.

*** Every person has energy and heat, which if not used in a useful way, may deviate to harmful sexual practices.** A person who exhausts his body energy in studying, or some social work, or even in physical sports, does not have excess body energy which fights him, to the contrary of his colleague gives his body excess rest.

STAGES OF SIN:

The sexual problem goes through stages which differ in its strength and depth, and each needs a special and suitable treatment. There is still some general advice which is useful for all cases. These stages are :

(a) A state of war on the outside, while the heart on the inside is pure.

(b) A superficial response to sin, with shallow thought.

(c) A state of total inflammation, in thought, senses and heart. It is divided into two parts. One part has the material of sin at hand and it is possible to commit, and in the other part the material of sin is far away and the person tries to get hold of.

(d) The fourth state is where sin becomes a habit.

D) HOW DO WE ATTAIN PURITY?

There are several means which are summarised in three items:

First : Protective means, which prevent the person from falling, and gives him immunity against sin. They are outlined in escaping from sin and its causes, and on the other hand strengthening one's spiritual life so as to repel sin by his nature.

Second: Treatment means, in case a person actually confronts sin, either by a passing thought, or by a persisting one for a light or for a strong desire.

(FIRST) PROTECTIVE MEANS

(1) KEEPING FAR FROM THE FIELD OF SIN

You know the doors from which sin comes to you. Do all you can to close these doors. Also be far away from all kinds of excitements and causes of sin, specially those which concern the senses of sight, hearing or touch, or which concern different improper readings, evil meeting or mixing, or the places which encourage sin or which carry special impure memories.

You should know that man is a creature who is prone to be affected by one of the two states, good or evil. Never think in yourself that you are strong enough and able to resist. You are not stronger than prophet David of whom God Himself said "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart" (Acts 13:22). In spite of that, he could not withstand one scene and he fell (2 Samuel Chapter 11). You are not stronger than Samson, a man of super strength, who knew of the deceit of Delilah, but could not stay away from her, and for her sake he broke his vows, and destroyed his honor and dignity. You are also not stronger than Solomon who was the wisest man of his time, and yet women (his wives) turned him away from God. About this particular sin, Solomon said "She has cast down many wounded, And all who were slain by her were strong men" (Proverbs 7:26).

Dear brother, never think that fleeing is a kind of cowardice or fear. Fleeing is the first and basic treatment to these impure wars. Remember that Joseph the righteous, a model of chastity and purity, escaped from the wife of Potiphar, and that his fleeing was a kind of heroism. Nobody said, or will ever say, that his escape affected his integrity.

Jesus Ben Sirach says "Never trust your enemy" (Sirach 12:10). As well never trust your body. As it is natural for iron to rust, evil desires are born from the body. **Do not trust the body even when it appears calm. In one moment or in one hour it sometimes completes what it did not do in several years. It always plans quietly its readiness to attack!!** St. John El-Dargy said "When the cunning fox wants to catch a bird, it pretends it is asleep or even dead. Once the bird comes near, it jumps on it to kill and eat. Likewise, the 'evil of sexual immorality', stops its attacks

on the body in order to deceive the soul from watching it, and it falls. **Do not trust in the nature of the body, until you meet Christ.**

Beware of a right hand blow from the devil. First he deceives you, and then hits you with it. With it he portrays for you false heroism, using poisonous logic, by saying "If you were a real hero, come down fight and win". No, dear friend, it is a lost cause. You may use all your might as the war intensifies, and you still fall down. Listen to Solomon the Wise - concerning the sin of impurity -when he asks in astonishment "Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? (Proverbs 6:27, 28).

Even if you win a superficial victory and do not actually fall, do not imagine that you have won a complete victory. You might have been contaminated during your fight, certain thoughts might have settled in your inner mind or in a hidden corner in your memory, which will come to haunt you when you are weak or tired. A person who enters the room of a wheat grinder in clean clothes, and does not come near anything in the room, comes out of the room with his clothes covered with tiny particles of ground wheat, without him realising that. Also if a man dressed in white and wrestles a man covered with coal dust or mud, even if he wins and wrestles him to the ground, the result would be that his whole beautiful white robe is contaminated with the coal dust or the mud. **That is how the exposure to youthful excitements, certainly affects us as they leave their traces behind.**

* Solomon the Wise calls the man who is aware of, and avoids the causes of sin, a wise man, and calls the person who trusts himself as an ignorant man. He says "**A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident**" (Proverbs 14:16).

Once an elderly teacher was passing by a monastery with his disciples when he discovered a certain stumbling block. He refused to spend the night in that monastery. His disciples asked him "Even you father are afraid?". He answered "By nature I do not fear, but why fight a rotten fight".

Know dear brother, that the causes of sin and its fields, if they do not leave immediate effects on the person who mixes with them, may leave a slow and insignificant effect, which grows in him unnoticed, and appears later on. The will which does not fail suddenly, it may weaken gradually. Do not touch an impure object "Escape for your life! ... Do not stay anywhere in the plain" (Genesis 19:17).

When we advice a person to flee from stumbling blocks and excitements, we mean perpetual fleeing. Some people started a life of purity with a crushed soul feeling its weakness. They used at the beginning to flee and be very cautious. But when they went a long way on the road of purity and felt they were strong, they thought they are immune enough against sin, and may be less cautious, and should not fear the stumbling blocks and the excitements. They then started to enter into the field of sin unafraid, and without feeling it, sin crept to their souls, and discovered that they lost their first resistance.

There is another way in the return to mixing with the fields of sin - not via feeling strong - but by compulsion, as a counsellor and a teacher. This kind of person starts by listening to the sexual problems of others, their stories of how they fell, and how they are fought. He might

also add to that some special study to this subject. As a result of all that, his mind might be filled with sinful thoughts, and impious memories which contaminate and trouble him. We advise those people not to carry burdens which they are not spiritually qualified for, and we advise them to be frank with themselves.

This subject needs to be discussed in a teaching convention and come to an agreement upon a policy to deal with. We here suggest as one of the solutions, to refer such problems to qualified people such as the priests to whom people confess, or elderly ministers whose strength and circumstances guard them from stumbling. It is also possible to find people in the different areas of ministry, who give answers to the subjects which others can not deal with. For example, not everybody can give answers to complicated questions on theological problems, which require accurate presentation and sound theological understanding. We rather refer such questions to a specialised person who masters the subject or the like. The same could be applied for many of the sexual subjects.

(2) AVOID SPARE TIME

Spare time is very useful for a person who is advanced in spiritually. He who is successful in prayers, meditation and contemplating in divine matters, gets rid of worldly affairs and gives more time to his spiritual deeds. **But for a person who is fought sexually, and is tired from this matter - for him - spare time is a dangerous enemy and should be avoided.** If his mind is not occupied with sexual desires, at least, it wanders about from one thought to another, and from remembering one subject or the other, until among these he meets a sexual subject, for which he stalls to meditate in. He might deviate in these thoughts, and his mind finds pleasure in sin and he falls. **If you wish to avoid entering into a sexual war in which you may fall, avoid spare time, and continually occupy yourself, so that if the devil comes to you to plant his impure thoughts, he finds no time for him in you.**

If you occupy yourself with a useful matter, you would have won a double benefit: getting rid of sexual attacks and what accompanies them from defiling and troubles, and also the benefit of doing a good deed with which you occupied yourself. **One may occupy himself with the following:**

(a) Being Sincere in His Work:

A hard working student for example, fills his mind with his academic subjects. This benefits him in many ways: scientific superiority, gaining the trust of his teachers, his family, and his friends, preparing himself for a bright future, and satisfying his conscience towards his studies. In addition to all that, he spares himself many sexual attacks and keeps clean thoughts. We notice that the students during their examination weeks, are not subject to sexual falls, as they are in the rest of the year. What we say about the student, we say also about the employee.

(b) Readings:

A person who is always reading, is filled with knowledge, broadens his background, has active thinking, and at the same time avoids spare time in which he is tempted with sin. We do not mean spiritual readings only, but readings in all kinds of knowledge in general. By nature, the mind thinks about what it reads, and gets occupied with what it thinks, **as readings enlighten the mind. St. Anthony says "Tire yourself in reading books as it saves you from impurity".** St. Isaac says "Diligently read books and the lives of the saints. Because continuous study, looking in books, and reading about the fathers' manners, improve the quality of your thoughts, and it becomes easy to do what is fearing God in your eyes, and difficulties are solvable".

We also - in this point - want to occupy the mind with any useful subject which prevents him from thinking in sin. Concerning what is to be read - specially at the times when sin seems approaching from far - one should read deep subjects, since light readings may divert the thoughts to other subjects, and may not prevent the sexual thoughts - which jump to the mind also and occupy during his superficial readings. But reading deep subjects require concentration, as the reader collects his thoughts and attention in order to understand what he reads.

Among the most successful readings are those which look for a solution to a problem, which present a story the mind is eager to know its ending, a subject which is vital for a person to know, or new knowledge which increases the mental wealth of a person. These four kinds of readings differ in their suitability from person to person, according to whether the subject is religious, scientific, social or literal. They differ also according to the age of the reader, and his mental and spiritual capacity.

Among the religious readings for example, which may benefit in preventing the sexual thoughts, are subjects in comparative believes, whether between Christianity and other religions, between Orthodoxy and other Christian denominations, or even between Christianity and science. These subjects, cannot be read superficially, but require concentration in both thoughts and attention, and also stimulate religious enthusiasm and zeal in the heart. They do not only occupy the mind but the heart also and consume some of the stored energy.

We advise those - when left alone, would not read anything - to organise their readings according to special programs, certain obligations, or spiritual exercises, or by joining some evening classes,

(c) Social Activities:

Reading might be a gift of different degrees for different people. While it is of great help to some people, it might be of little or of no help to others. For this reason we suggest other kinds of activities beside reading, of which **social activities** are recommended. **We mean the service of the poor, the sick, the orphans and the widows, helping different kinds of troubled people, and ministering to the needy villages, Sunday Schools, and teaching in general.**

(d) Hobbies:

One may occupy his spare time with useful hobbies according to his gifts, such as drawing, photography, different kinds of hand works, and pastime games. We can add to that writing poetry, playing music and hymn singing, provided that they have proper spiritual directions. The person who studies the church chanting for example, takes time in learning them from the leader, repeating them by himself and with others. They take hold of his heart and emotions, and are special comfort to him when he is alone. They give him a chance to integrate with the church and the practical participation in the general worship. They also introduce him to religious circles and new friends with whom he spends spiritual occasions. In all that he would have spared himself from occupying his mind with wrong sexual thoughts.

(e) Sports:

Our teacher St. Paul said "For bodily exercise profits a little" (1 Timothy 4:8). No doubt that from this little profit, there is a part for those who are fought in the sexual side. Some of whom may have large spare times, in which they do not read, nor practise special hobbies, but may find in sports their useful hobby which occupies their minds and times, spends much of their excess energies, and keeps them away from loneliness which accompany the devil. This is good and let them do sports. Yet, we advise them to chose the good sports' atmosphere with pure colleagues who understand the true sports' spirit. It is worthy for religious organisations to open sports' clubs which present pure atmospheres under the supervision of spiritual persons.

(3) ACTIVE PROTECTION

Active protection from falling in sexual sins does not only centre on the love of chastity, but also on the advancement in the spiritual life in general. The person who advances in his spiritual life, in general, hates sin as a whole, grows in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and feels the vanity and conclusion of the whole world. Among other things, he will rise above sexual errors, and other bodily desires. On the contrary, the person who loves the world and all it has of different enjoyments, will yield to sexual pleasures, concluding the bodily desire which he seeks by all means.

We thus advise - for the protection from the sexual sin - to practise the elevated spiritual life, which is expressed by our teacher St. John when he says "Do not love the world or the things in the world" (1 John 2:15). This is what we notice in real life as the youth who attends church, listens to her preaching and instructions, thinks seriously in changing the course of his life to walk in God's road. After improving many aspects in his life, one day he reaches this point which is resisting his sexual errors. The more he loves God, the more he rejects the world and its desires. Again, the more his heart desires the world to come and the everlasting life after resurrection, we - definitely - see him rise above the desires of the body, and his sexual powers elevate, and is able to consume his stored energies in a useful and spiritual manner.

MATTERS WHICH HELP THIS SPIRITUAL COURSE:

(a) Practising fasting in the ideal way in which the person resists his bodily desires, and exercises to control his body to succeed in preventing it from desiring certain kinds of food, or in general not eating for a period of certain hours every day, in spite of its craving for food. This practice also increases the will power of the person and his control over his bodily desires, which leads to his success over his sexual side. **However, those who practice fasting and think they have succeeded in it, but still realise apparent failure in their sexual side, we advise them to reexamine themselves and their fasting. They might be fasting just as a tradition without training themselves to control their bodily desires** concerning food. St. John El-Dargy said **"He who fights his sexual desires and does not control his stomach looks like a person who puts off a fire by oil and straw. And he who fights his sexual desires by fasting alone without humility, is like a person who swims in the great sea with one hand"**.

(b) Practice praying: Gives the mind a kind of a reserved attitude, which makes the person feel ashamed of himself if he submits to an impure thought, and feels ashamed from God when he stands to pray with a sexually contaminated mind. **We advise you dear brother to increase in praying in order that this holy shyness increases in you, and that your thoughts are enlightened by God.** Also by prayers you may gain a special help from God against sexual attacks.

There is also a vital reason; by prayers you remember the tie between you and God, and feel the presence of a covenant between you and Him which is to live for Him a holy life. Every time you fall in the impurity, you feel that you have broken this covenant. Some people feel ashamed to pray after they have fallen, and gradually they stop praying. But we tell those people that this is a device from the devil by which he wins a second battle. But you the man of God, **do not leave the prayers because of the impurity of the body. Do not wait to be pure then you pray, but rather pray so that by prayer you attain purity.** If you are ashamed to pray, then know that this shame is useful for you, because it faces you in front of your conscience, in front of God, and in front of what you ought to be, and you come back and rise up.

Occupying the thoughts in meditating into theological subjects, repeating Divine verses, reciting known psalms, and also chanting praises, hymns, and religious chants, is a good exercise in this case. In that St. Isaac says **"Much talks about the meaning of virtue, renews every hour the desire of the soul to attain virtue"**. He also says "Such as the continuous sparking creates fire, the perpetual meditating in Divine subjects, creates heat". Again he says "If you neglect meditation in the righteousness, the desire for it diminishes in your eyes".

(c) Meditating in the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he bore for us, and in his giving life wounds for our salvation, create in us shyness and reverence. Meditate in these sufferings and tell yourself "How can I enjoy these impure desires and "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5)". Say what Uriah said to David "The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing" (2 Samuel 11:11). **St. Augustine said "There is no remedy against sexual immorality thoughts like meditating in the suffering of my Lord Jesus Christ and His death"**.

(d) **Practising confession in the ideal way** which we spoke about in detail in the subject of confession. Do not be ashamed to unveil your thoughts to your spiritual father. By doing that you receive great Divine help: First, because the 'devil of sexual immorality' is defeated when he is exposed, and secondly via the advice and instructions of your spiritual father and his prayers for you, and thirdly, due to humility in front of God when you confess your weakness which makes God's help arrive to support and accompany you.

(e) With confession, it is very useful **to have communion from the Divine Sacraments**, if your spiritual father permits you to do so. **By communion the person who struggles against the attacks of the desire, receives a great power over his enemies. St. Macarius the Great said "By communion you are guarded from the enemies and he who neglects this sacrament, the powers of darkness overcome him"**. St. John Chrysostom said "Let us return from this table (the communion) as lions with hearts full of the fire of love, from which the devils tremble". We have already spoken in length about the subject of communion in the chapter about communion.

(f) It is very useful for the life of purity **to read the lives of the saints**, because it gives you ideal examples of superior quality. One is affected by their lives and is attracted to their traditions, his soul will rise by itself above the bodily desires and will walk in purity without toil. Reading sexual stories excites this desire. But, reading the lives of the saints work in the opposite direction as it inspires in the reader the love of virtue and of pure life. St. Isaac says **"Very desirable in the ears of the humble**, is listening to the life stories of the saints, like the water to the newly planted plants. It should be pictured to you how God cared for them, like good medicine for the eyes. Remember them all day long, meditate and think about them, and you learn to be wise like them".

(g) It is also useful **to read books about the ascetic life and despising the vanity of the world, and spiritual books in general**. They direct the wishes of the person and his aspirations towards a heavenly holy course, make him hate sin, and search for the salvation of his soul. **The benefit would be more if these readings accompanied spiritual exercises**.

(h) **Readings about eternity and the last judgement** are also useful. A person who is not bound by love to God, may be bound to Him by fear. Even though, fear is lower in degree than love, but is suitable for our subject as a first step. The Psalmist said "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10). St. Augustine said "Fear prepares a room for love. Thus if there is no fear, it is not possible for love to enter". St. Anthony also said "The fear of the Lord is the head of wisdom. When light enters a dark house, it disperses the darkness and lightens the house. Likewise, the fear of the Lord drives away ignorance when it enters the heart of a person, and teaches it virtues and wisdom".

For this reason dear brother, read about death, last judgement, the life to come, and the punishment of the wicked. Read about the soul, its future and its state in the place of its stay awaiting the last day. Read the Book of Revelation, and the fathers' commentaries about it. Attend funerals, walk in the processions for the dead, and go and give condolences to the mourning families. Do not quickly lose the deep effect on your soul from all that, but rather remember it when you sit with yourself. Think about your own prospect, and do deeds which bear fruits worthy of repentance.

(i) What is useful also for the life of purity for a person, **is reading the stories of pure personalities, who were tempted by sin, but refused it with amazing strong determination. They did not allow themselves to submit to sin**, not dismissing it because of harsh circumstances pressing on them, but resisted to bloodshed, striving against it (Hebrews 12:4), and obeyed God till death. We referred to some of these stories in this subject, not for the reader to imitate them to the letter, but to present for him images of superb characters.

We add to this kind another super kind, which **are the saints whose families forced them to get married, but lived with their wives as their sisters, and left this world without touching a woman**. Some of them stayed like that for tens of years, such as St. Macarius the Great, St. Amoon, St. Yehness Kama, St. Dimetrious El-Karram the Patriarch, and others. Among those who were forced to get married by their masters are St. Samuel the confessor who was kidnapped by the barbers. His atheist master tied him to a woman slave to shepherd the camels together, and stayed like that for years. Another example is St. Malkhos whose story was written by St. Eronimos.

(j) In this context, it also helps to read the stories about repentance. We mean the stories of men and women who repented after living impure loose lives. Such as the story of St. Maria, daughter of the brother of St. Ibrahim the hermit, St. Mariem the Egyptian, St. Bilagiah the hermit, the loose woman who was rescued by St. Bisarion the disciple of St. Anthony, St. Jacob the striving, St. Augustine and others.

(k) It is also useful **to read the stories of the saintly women**, either the martyrs, the nuns, the stewardesses, women doing religious or social activities, or famous women in general who are known for their heroism, courage, and holiness. We meant from this kind of reading to alter one's opinion about women. Some men are so much troubled by sexual problems to the extent that they cannot imagine women to be but for mens' use. This kind of reading may change their opinion about women and make them realise that women are capable of achieving great goals in many areas, just like men.

(l) **Practice humility**, and you will save yourself from the attacks of sexual immorality, which result from the departure of the Divine care because of pride. Humility defeats the devil, and we mean humility from all sides, in front of God, people and yourself. Some brothers posed a question to St. Aghathon concerning the attacks of sexual immorality. He answered "Go and cast your weakness in front of God and you find rest". St. John El-Dargy said "Whoever wants to conquer his body by fighting it, his fights are in vain. Because if God does not demolish the house of the body and builds the house of the soul, the person strives and fasts in vain. But strive, know your weakness, go to God to help you, and you will receive the grace of chastity from God".

(m) **Satisfy your emotion of love in a noble way**, in order to escape from the sexual attacks which result from satisfying the deprived needs of love for the heart in a perverted way. You may do some social services, be kind to everybody, enjoy pure sincere friends with whom you exchange co-operation and sacrifices, or by the full spirit of love which tie you and the members of your family, or even by being merciful to animals, or by joining active societies which serve the public like the society of first aid, ... etc.

(n) Increase in making the sign of the cross on your chest, forehead and your heart. It is the sign "of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). It is the sign from which the devils tremble and escape. It is not enough to make the sign of the cross from the outside, but make it with faith, and you will feel the tremendous power which accompany it.

(SECOND) TREATMENT MEANS

We have advised the reader to escape from the attacks of sexual immorality by all his powers, and to keep far away from them. But what does he do if he meets the attacks at a time: because of his carelessness, or when they come across him out of his will? **We here present the treatment which suit the stage of sin presented to him:**

(1) STAGE OF SLIGHT OUTSIDE ATTACK

The measure by which we know if the attack of sexual immorality is strong or light, is in the heart, and the hand controlling it which is the will. The thought of sexual immorality comes via the senses, from the inner mind, or casted by the devils. If it does not find response in the heart, it passes away like smoke, without leaving traces. Up to here, the person is pure and no sin is committed. The thought could not excite the movements of the body nor the pleasures of the senses, or arouse the feelings of the heart. Yet this passing thought might intensify and persist frequently to the person's mind. Such intensified attacks are still from the outside and do not result in impurities yet. The person can drive all of them out as the Apostle says "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

In the beginning of the attack, the thought of sexual immorality, wants to discuss and negotiate, to give itself a chance to grow. This negotiation with the thought is a mere willful act for which the person is spiritually responsible. The key is in the hand of the will. While the thought knocks on the door from the outside, the will may drive it away or may let it in. The wisdom and the whole wisdom is to drive this enemy away, as it is dangerous for the safety of the heart, mind and soul, all together.

The devil may deceive the person by saying "Search all matters and choose the best. What is wrong in that? You do not need to enjoy the thought but discuss it, to know from where it comes, what does it want, what is its destination, does it pose a danger, think of what happens if you allow it in your heart and then drive it away". ... Beware my friend from this poisoned logic. Not every matter is for searching. There are obvious matters, not for searching. You do not need to examine a scorpion in your hand in order to know that it is a scorpion. You only need to observe it from far away to realise it is a scorpion. Wisdom dictates that you do not examine it, but to kill it, or at least flee from it quickly. If you hold it in your hand to examine it, it will bite you and throw its poison into your body. That is exactly the thought of sexual immorality. **St. Aphraam El-Soriany said "As you drive a dog away, it is your same response to the 'devil of sexual immorality'".**

These thoughts of sexual immorality which knock on the door of the mind may and may not be known to you. They will soon unveil their nature. This kind of thoughts require

caution, awareness and realisation.

A person has no excuse in not driving away and quickly the clear unveiled thoughts of sexual immorality. But the veiled thoughts, one should drive them away as soon as he realises what they hide. Every one has his own experience, and is able in many cases to know the thoughts which enter his mind in an innocent robe, far away from sexual immorality, but soon develop, model and change until they becomes plain sexual subject. One should learn from his past experiences and his previous attacks. How wise was this elder who said "I do not remember the devils beat me twice, for one matter".

As an example to these thoughts, a certain personality you know which the enemy fights your desires with. With this personality you have normal, clean and unclean memories. The devil might start by reminding you of the virtues and good deeds of this personality. Then little by little he leads you to the unclean memories and the attacks of the desire start. If you know from your past experience that the starting thoughts are but introductory to the thoughts of the desire, and each time you get these thoughts from the devil, they end with the same conclusion, you ought to repel all the introductory thoughts which do not appear from the outside as unclean. But it is your duty to repel all the thoughts which come to you about this personality, as long as they lead you to the dark point in your relations.

We said that the key is in the hand of the will, and it is free to repel the thought out or to invite it in, whether it is passing by or persisting. We add that the wills differ in their strengths and in their weaknesses. There is a will that can get rid of a passing by thought, but if persists and keeps on knocking, it weakens and opens the door for it. Our advice to this kind of will which cannot resist the thought is to flee from it. The means of fleeing are discussed in the following section.

(2) STAGE OF MILD INSIDE ATTACK

This kind of attack begins by either of two means: In the first means, the outside thought comes to a person's mind, and finds in his heart a potential desire. It mixes with and begets from it sensual pleasure. By that sin would have started in its early stages. In the second means, this thought does not find in the heart any desire. Yet it does not despair, and keeps persisting and knocking on the door of the person's mind asking to negotiate with it. If the will weakens and opens the door, it enters and casts down its goods, which are the objects for pleasure to the senses, and the sexual desire is aroused. The two kinds whether caused by a potential desire or by an outside desire, having reached this stage, will end to one result, which we shall now describe and show how to resist.

This passing sensual pleasure is very weak at the beginning, and can be repelled and got rid of by the will. It might be just a pleasure for the thought, outer or inner sensual pleasure, or a desire in the heart. ... It starts as a pleasure felt by the person, who also feels he is erring and should resist it. Up till here, the attack is a mild inner one, and could be avoided by a little courage of the mind and some might in the will.

We Have the Following Advice for this Case:

(a) If you get this sensual pleasure from a particular thought, right away, change the course of your thoughts: either by thinking in something else, by reading, praying, chanting a tune, hymn or a praise, or by any other means which takes you away from this thought. If you are changing this unclean thought by thinking in something else, choose a kind of a deep thought which occupies you, attracts your attention and lets you forget the first thought. Obviously, if you think in an unimportant subject, your mind will wander back to the unclean thought. If you have chosen reading, or praying to flee from the unclean thought, let it also be done profoundly, and do not worry if you could not concentrate at the beginning. The matter may need a transition period, until you forget the sexual thought, or be occupied away from it. Continue reading and praying even with un-concentrated mind until you collect your thoughts. If you prefer a chant, hymn or a tune, let it be a "sad" tune, or the hymn which requires attention to control its musical vibrations, or the kind your soul loves, desires and sticks with.

(b) If none of the above means help you, and the thought keeps haunting you and the pleasure increases, leave the place and search for other things which may occupy you. If this is also not useful, mix with people, listen and talk to them, and necessarily you shall get rid of the haunting thought, as you cannot reckon the two matters together.

(c) If the thought attacks you when you are with others, break your silence, and talk to them.

(d) If the thought attacks you from reading a certain subject, leave the reading at once, even if it is religious reading.

(e) If the source of the sexual pleasure is sensual, such as touch, sight or hearing, flee away from its cause. Go away from this place, turn your sight from the stumbling scene, and escape from the harmful hearing. If you cannot do that in a particular case, at least occupy your thinking at that time with a serious matter, since occupying the mind, delays the sensual feeling, or at least it would not be centre in the sexual meaning and the war subsides.

(f) We do not wish to mention a particular means, but rather you choose any means you see it will help you in your escape from this thought, and turn you away from the accompanying pleasure.

(g) Beware not to listen to the deceit of the devil, nor to the deceit of the mind dosed by the sensual pleasure, and think that you are negotiating with the bad type of thinking, as if you are negotiating with an enemy which you like to destroy, and like to expose all its corrupt means. The thought does not care if you expose its corruption and peril. This is all clear, and you know that from the beginning. Even at the end - after a while - you succeed in repelling the sexual thought, you have already been defiled during the time between the coming and the repelling of the thought. With your wish to repel it, you have already enjoyed its lingering. This contradicts your love to God and your love to the life of purity. **Get rid of the thought quickly, and do not discuss it, even as an enemy.**

Get rid of the thought quickly because the war - though from inside - is still light, and the will can control the thought and wishes to repel it, while it is there. **Time - in this case - is not on**

the side of the person. As time goes on, the bad thought which gives pleasure to the person, strengthens and prevails, while the will gets weaker. The desire to repel the thought subsides, and the angels around the person start to depart from him. The Divine Grace may also leave the person. All that is caused by his leniency with sin, not repelling it rather desiring it inside.

All that leads the person to the third and serious stage. In that he is condemned by God because - with all his will - he took himself to the point of danger. He resembles the children of Israel who disobeyed God and kept the Canaanites, caused the destruction of the people of God and tempted them to worship foreign gods. But with the courage of the heart, you should say with the Psalmist "Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the Lord" (Psalm 101:8). The city of God here is the inner Jerusalem - your heart.

(3) STAGE OF SEVERE INNER WAR

Which is the most serious stage ..., by which we mean the stage where sexual pleasures prevail on the person, so that he leans towards completing the sin, and his will cannot refuse it. He fails between two serious enemies, one is from the outside and the other from the inside, in spite of his will. He realises his error, wants to leave it but cannot, because the sensual pleasure attracts him to it. This stage of the sexual sin is the most severe stage, and many who go through this stage fall in the sin, and cry to God because of their weaknesses.

What do we say to you dear brother, who goes through this stage. We do not want to rebuke you because you took yourself to this danger. Rather we have compassion on you and God Who knows the human weakness, and the strength of the enemy attacking you, He by His mercy understands your situation, and is able to have mercy on you.

What is important for you - even in this case - that you do not despair, and not let the enemy deceive you that you have fallen, the matter is completed, and you have to actually execute the sin. Do not listen to this rejoice from the enemies, but rather strive to the last breath of your will. We advice you to flee from the material of sin if it is near you, and not to seek it if it is far from you. Try in this case to escape loneliness to where people are, and whom presence prevents you from doing the sin. Try to flee from being alone with the person, the enemy attacks you with. In the worst cases, it is better for you to fall alone than to let another fall with you, and then you have committed two sins instead of one, and be responsible for the enormous results of sin.

DO NOT DESPAIR ...

Trust that if all your body was inflamed with sin, and you tried to flee from doing it, you have with God a crown for your striving, and God does not forget that for His sake you deprived your body from a pleasure it desired. Remember dear brother, that among the strongest means for overcoming the harsh sexual attacks, **is to have a strong courageous heart in fighting them.** The source of this strength is to trust that God is with you, and He does not deliver you to the hands of your enemies, because He desires the salvation of your soul. St. Pachonius, the father of the communal monastic life said "Be strong in heart, and attain courage from the beginning, to be

able to stand the anger of the dragon, as it is difficult to fight it from the beginning if you were not ready. That is to make you weary of the road from the beginning ... Be strong in heart, **and fight like a mighty person in the attacks of the desire.** Throw away the frailty of the heart, in order that laziness and lack of faith may not get hold of you, and your enemies find you a prey. **Let your heart be a lion's heart".**

Put in your own room objects which rebuke you and remind you of God, and brings you back from despair, such as some bible verses, holy pictures, and divine books.

One can also get rid of this state of despair by changing the course of his thinking using one of the means which we mentioned in the previous stage, as the storm of the body subsides gradually. It will subside in any case. Hence resist

E) AFTER THE FALL

There are two kinds of fall: one from carelessness and the other from weakness. The first kind is very serious as the person deprives himself from the Grace of God. But in the second kind, God looks at it with mercy and extends His hand with help to raise up the fallen person and washes him from his sin, if he repents. Beside that, in either cases of fall, one feels disgusted from sin, and regrets committing it.

Make use of this regret and this disgust which follow the fall, by walking into a new and a straight life. Even if your fall is repeated, do not despair as long as it is due to weakness. It was said about a brother who lived in a monastery, that the severity of the attacks used to make him fall frequently in the sin of sexual immorality. He kept hating himself and kept patient in order not to leave his monasticism. He used to practice his worship carefully and in his prayers he used to say "Lord, You know my bad state, and my grief. Pick me up Lord with or without my wish, because I am like the mud who desires and loves sin. But You are the Almighty, make me end with this impurity. It is not strange that You have mercy on the saints, because they deserve this mercy. But who am I, not worthy. Lord show me the wonder of Your mercy, because I submit myself to you".

He used to repeat these supplications every day, whether he did or did not sin. One day, the devil got aggravated from his hope in this prayer, and appeared to him face to face, while singing his psalms and said to him "Are you not ashamed at all to stand between the hands of God, and utter His name with your defiled mouth?". The brother told him "You strive and I strive. You let me fall in sin, and I ask the merciful God to have compassion on me. I beat you to that until I die, without losing hope in my God. I do not stop preparing myself against you, and we shall see who wins, you or the mercy of God". When he heard that, the devil told him "From now on, I shall not return to attack you in order not to make you earn a crown as a result of your hope in your God". The devil left him from that day, and the brother returned back to himself weeping and crying for his previous

sins. If his thought told him "Do not cry", he answers his thoughts by mentioning his previous sins, and if his thoughts told him "There is no hope in you, you made too much sins", he says "God's mercies are vast and he is happy to see the dead alive and to find the lost".

In the course of your fall, apply as much as you can the protective means we previously mentioned. If these means do not produce fast results, do not despair, and do not let the devil picture your desire as stronger than your nature, or that it is impossible for you to overcome it. Realise that the matter needs time until the active protective means produce their fruits. Know also that cleansing yourself from sin and attaining complete chastity, are matters which require patience and do not come all at once. Hold fast in hope, pray much, and be far away from the causes of sin, and you will definitely obtain chastity, even after a while, as long as you are striving for it. The enemy wants you to fall frequently, even in the actual sin, to despair and to submit yourself completely to him, and that there is no use from striving.

Beware of the 'devil of shyness' who comes to visit you after the 'devil of sexual immorality', to prevent you from uncovering your sins to your father of confession. Beware very much from this deceit, and confess your sins in the fullness of its horror. Know that there are sins, one gets comfort by just confessing them. The fathers said "**In particular, 'the devil of sexual immorality' is defeated by exposing him**". Also know dear striving brother that your father in confession is also human, and he understands human weaknesses. But even more, he has many experiences in this matter, from hearing confessions of other people and the stories of their falls. He will also listen to your confession with great compassion, not with disgust, as you imagine. Be truthful in your confession, do not delay it, and let not the devil deceive you to wait until your state improves before you go to your father in confession. Your state will improve by your confession. You also cannot guarantee what happens if you postpone your confession. Maybe, your state will worsen, or you may fall more in sin and your ties with sin strengthen.

F) DREAMS AND BODY DISCHARGES

For a young man - a body discharge - is a semen liquid which discharges from him during sleep. There are two instances: in one, the discharge is not accompanied with a bad dream, and this is natural and is not considered a sin, and you should not be alarmed when an excess fluid to the need of the body discharges.

In the second instance, the discharge is preceded with an impure dream. The human will has very little or nothing at all in that, but mostly in this instance, it is the result to a previous bad desire. The Church considers the body discharge, in the two instances, as breaking the fast, and the person should not take the Holy Communion in the next morning of the discharge. According to the book of Leviticus, the person is unclean until the evening (Leviticus 15:2-5). He also should not enter the altar and touch the holy articles. But it does not prevent him from his ordinary prayers and personal worship, and preferably he should wash and change his inner clothes.

One should confess his body discharge and state whether it occurs frequently. **For those suffering from the body discharge, we present the following points:**

1 - There are body discharges which result from stored or suppressed sexual desires, or from bad images in the inner mind, from memories, or from unclean information retained in the memory. All this require spiritual treatment during the day. One should also care during the day and avoid the causes of sin from which he dreams. If one cares to be clean in his conscience life, it is rare for him to have unclean dreams, and if he has them, he would feel uncomfortable and wake up.

2 - There are discharges which result from the body conditions, such as too much eating, too much fatty food, too much sleep, giving the body more rest than it needs, or sleeping on an extra ordinary comfortable bed. These causes are easily treated, and the more one perfects vigil and fasting, the less he has body discharges.

3 - Body discharges may result from the way one sleeps. When a person sleeps on his back, his spine warms up, and if he sleeps on his stomach his genital members warm up. The correct way is to sleep on the right side of the body.

4 - The cause may be the inner clothes. They are not supposed to press on the sensitive parts of the body.

5 - To avoid body discharges, it is better not to drink too much liquid before going to bed, to avoid filling the bladder during sleep.

6 - It is also better not to go to bed until one actually needs to sleep.

7 - Long prayers before sleep help a great deal, in order to cleanse your bed with prayers, and surround yourself with angels during sleep and to guard your chastity. On the contrary, unclean thoughts may occupy the mind before sleep, and sometimes cause body discharges during sleep.

8 - One should also be careful not to let the bed covers rub against his body during sleep. He should also mind the cold weather which makes him curl in such a way as to press on some of his members. Again, too much warmth may cause body discharges.

9 - Body discharge may result from too much fear from its happening, as it occupies the mind in an exaggerated way.

10 - It may also result from the devil attacks by which he wants to disturb the person, prevents him from taking the Holy Communion, makes him fall in despair, or presents him with unclean thoughts which attack him later on: the wilful sexual immorality. **The fathers advise by forgetting about the bodies by which the person was assaulted in his sleep, in order not to cause him attack when he is awake.** St. John El-Dargy said "When you wake up do not think of the un-cleanliness which you imagined in your sleep, as this is the aim of the devil from the unclean dreams".

G) IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS

A. If the attacks of the desire intensify, search yourself well in order to know the intakes from which they enter, and close them. Stand on the causes of their occurrences and eliminate them. If you do not find a sexual cause, search yourself for the haughty thoughts and vainglory (pride). If you find them creep to your inner dwelling (your heart), humble yourself and submit to God to take them away from you. If you do not know other causes, realise it might be the envy of the devil. God also permits this case to keep the person humble, as St. John El-Dargy says.

B. Among the most important means to help you in your striving against the attacks of the desire, is the bravery of your heart and its courage. That is keeping high morale spirit. The weak fearful heart cannot stand in front of the enemy. And when the devils see that in a person, they escalate their attacks, and rejoice over his fall. But the strong hearted person is like the strong fortress which does not fall easily. In these attacks, get yourself the heart of a lion as our father St. Pachomius said.

C. Never despair. Rather let the trust in God fills your heart, depend on Him and have faith in His power against such impure vicious attacks. Be far away from despair, and trust that help is coming to you even if you reached the fourth quarter of the night of your striving. The Lord says "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation" (Psalm 91:14-16). **St. Aphraam El-Soriany says "The eagles collect on the corpse, and on the despaired soul collect the devils".**

D. It happens sometimes that a striving youth against these attacks, is completely convinced in his mind that it is wrong to meditate, enjoy or submit to the thoughts of sexual desires. Yet he craves inside himself to the sin and its conclusion. The devil uses this craving as a substance to spread despair in the soul of this striving brother. He tells him for example "Now your thoughts are defiled to this extent, and your desires became already impure, what is the use of your striving?!" Even in this situation do not despair. The craving to commit sin is the law in your members, which our teacher St. Paul stated (Romans 7:23). Do not despair dear brother, but "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!" (Psalm 27:14). Do not doubt that "The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:5).

At the beginning of your spiritual life, and the beginning of your striving towards a holy life, do not expect yourself by its nature to repel evil, hate sin, and gets disgusted from the desire. These are spiritual steps which you reach after toil and striving in the road of the spirit. **Put this in your heart; do not despair even when you are in the depth of sin, and the depth of sensual pleasures which your mind oppose and is convinced of their wickedness. We stress on this point as it is among the means of your victory.** Persist in your fight using more the weapons of the spirit which St. Paul mentioned "The breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:10 - 17).

E. It happens sometimes that the devil manoeuvres his plans to trick the striving person. He does not approach from the point of sexual desire, else it is repelled and the plan fails. But he takes his time to make his preparations. Using deceit and tricks, the devil dresses

the desire the robe of virtue, in order to cover his plan.

"And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). He might dress it the robe of love, mercy, or zeal for saving the soul. As an example: a young man volunteers to give lessons to a young woman who may or may not be poor, pressed by feelings of love and kindness. Or a youth who starts a relation with a girl whom he feels living in a suffocating sinful atmosphere, and he aims from that to save her by opening her eyes to her conditions. He may be right in his feelings of love, mercy and holy zeal. **It may start with these holy feelings, but deviation occurs either due to human weakness, or by Satan who finds a substance for sin he can use to trip this person.** In any case, we ought to do good, but beware else it is on the account of our spiritual lives. We have to flee evil and all the places of Satan.

F. Realise dear brother, that you are not the only person who strives against the desire, and walk in the road of virtue. You have many colleagues, who are fighting Satan, and resisting to bloodshed, striving against sin (Hebrews 12:4), and made their banner "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

G. Prepare yourself from now on, sanctify your thoughts and your members in order to deserve to put on the white robe, and play the harp of the spirit, and sing the new song in front of the Throne of Grace, on the heavenly Mount Zion, with the one hundred and forty four thousand celibate. The song which John in his revelation said nobody could learn except those "who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. Those are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes (Revelation 14:1-4).

Prayer

Our Lord God, Great and Holy, who created man in incorruption and made him like You and Your image, to be a holy temple for You. Offer me grace by which I become clean and pure to be a dwelling for You. Take away from me all what does no please Your Goodness. Lord, sanctify, purify and cleanse everything in me, take away from my heart all impurities, purify all my senses, and preserve all members of my body. Fortify me from the world temptations. You created me, You alone know my weaknesses, and You know all the many evil around me in this world, and the stumbling blocks which come across my life. Prepare me with Your Grace to a life full of purity and goodness, leash all my desires, and give calmness to my body.

My Lord God, Who rebuked the wind and there was a great calm, rebuke now the winds of the desires which harm the ship of my life. I have refuged to You after I failed to control my ship in the sea of the world, perplexed by the gusts of temptations, and the heavy winds of the desires. I

haven to You Lord, to rest under Your care, and dwell in the secret place of Your Most High.

Forgive all my sins and transgressions. Do not deal with me according to my many sins and the ignorance of my youth, but forget them and do not deliver me to the hands of my enemies. Guard my life pure, by Your Grace and not by my effort. Hear me Lord by the intercession of the host of all Your pure saints. For thine is the Glory, for ever. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

ANGER

**"Even if an angry person raises the dead, he is not acceptable in the eyes of God."
(St. Isaac)**

- A) Two kinds of anger**
- B) Holy anger**
- C) Evil anger: Its causes**
- D) Evil anger: Its ways and results**
- E) Slow to anger**
- F) Dealing with angry people**
- G) Some Advises for Angry People**

A) TWO KINDS OF ANGER

Not every kind of anger is a sin. There are two kinds of anger: one is essential and holy and the other is evil. We can distinguish between the two by knowing the reasons of anger, its way and development. Hence the Lord Jesus did not say, "Whoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of judgment," but He said, "Whoever is angry with his brother **without a cause** shall be in danger of the Judgment." (Matthew 5: 22)

The motive of this anger without a cause is personal and not holy. Moreover, many mistakes may accompany this kind of anger, like not controlling the nerves, humiliating others, insulting others, hitting others or even killing. St. Paul warned us from this kind of anger by saying, "Be angry, and do not sin." (Ephesians 4: 26) Also, St. James said, "For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." (James 1: 20)

Solomon the Wise said about the evil anger, "A stone is heavy and sand is weighty, but a fool's wrath is heavier than both of them." (Proverbs 27:3). He considered evil wrath as a kind of ignorance or lack of wisdom. Therefore he said, "Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools" (Ecclesiastes 7:9) He also said, "The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger." (Proverbs 19: 11)

B) HOLY ANGER

The motive for this holy anger is holy zeal for the name of God, His holies and commandments, and a true desire to defend the truth without any personal interests. Not getting angry in such cases is considered negligence in a holy duty, for which one is condemned for not witnessing to the truth, or condemned for demeaning such matters for which one cannot be quiet.

A proof for the necessity of this holy anger is the example of Moses. Although he was extremely meek and gentle, "Now the man Moses was very humble more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12: 3), when he saw the golden calf which the Israelites had made and worshiped, "**his anger became hot**, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Then he took the calf which they had made, burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder.; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it." (Exodus 32: 19,20) Moses rebuked his older brother Aaron, till Aaron begged him saying, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people that they are set on evil." (Exodus 32: 22)

Elihu, the son of Barachel, the quiet man who sat silent during the conversation of Job and his three friends justified that by his saying, "I am young in years and you are very old; therefore I was afraid, and dared not declare my opinion to you. I said, 'Age should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom'". (Job 32: 6,7) "These three men ceased answering Job because he was righteous in his own eyes. Then the wrath of Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite of the family of Ram, was aroused against Job; his wrath was aroused because he justified

himself rather than God. And against his three friends his wrath was aroused, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job." (Job 32: 1-3) Elihu's anger was holy. The proof for that was that he was the only one whom God did not blame, and his speech represented the words of God.

Nehemiah, when seeing the Jews lending their brothers with interest and humiliating them, and upon hearing the cry of the people, "**I became very angry** when I heard their outcry and these words." (Nehemiah 5: 6) Then he rebuked the nobles and rulers and ordered them to stop it and have mercy on the people.

St. Paul who commanded us to behave in meekness (Ephesians 4: 2), when he was walking in Athens, "**his spirit was provoked within him** when he saw that the city was given over to idols (Acts 17: 16). He rebuked the people till they mocked him saying, "What does this babbler want to say?"

Jesus Christ Himself became angry at the Jews several times. One of the examples was when they were watching him to see if He will heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath. The Bible says, "When He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts." (Mark 3: 5) Also when He entered the temple and found the merchants, "He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves, and He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple." (Mark 11: 15,16) He rebuked them saying, "Is it not written 'my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a den of thieves."

All these are examples of the holy anger void of any personal interest. There are several examples from the Bible.

C) CAUSES OF EVIL ANGER

The motive for the anger may be in itself a sin. There are many examples from the Bible about this evil anger.

Some may get angry because of envy. When the Jews saw the children singing in the temple, they became angry. "But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" They were indignant and said to Him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" (Matthew 21: 15, 16) Definitely their anger was not due to holy anger when hearing the singing of the children, for at the same time they ignored the merchants selling and buying in the temple. Moreover, they left the money-changers without getting angry or zealous for the honor of the house of God. Their anger was merely due to jealousy.

Another example was what the older son did in the parable of the prodigal son. He became angry and did not want to enter, when he heard the rejoicing for the arrival of his younger brother. This was due to his envy. "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore

his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, "Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time, and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends." (Luke 15: 28, 29)

Competition may be the motive for anger. An example was when Esau became angry at Jacob who was after him twice and took from him the birthright.

Anger may be due to fear of losing any material gain, even if this loss is a spiritual gain. An example for this is Demetrius the silversmith. He became angry at SL Paul because he was afraid that through Paul's preaching, he will lose his profession. "When they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians. " (Acts 19: 28) They were angry not for religious zeal for their pagan worship, but because of material loss.

Some may become angry because one did not fulfill an evil desire for them. An example for that was the anger of Balak at Balaam, because he did not predict evil for the Israelites and did not want to insult them. The Bible says, "Then Balak's anger was aroused against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, 'I called you to curse my enemies, and look you have bountifully blessed them these three times.'" (Numbers 24:10)

Some May become angry because they can not endure the rebuke of others for their sins. For example, the Jews were angry at the Lord Jesus when He reminded them of the Gentiles who exceeded them in their relationship with God. When He told them, "Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout the land, but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:25-26). All those in the synagogue, when they heard these things were filled with wrath.

D) WAYS AND CONSEQUENCES OF EVIL ANGER

One may become angry and lose his politeness, meekness and temper, or even slap someone or cannot control his tongue. One may become angry and may frighten you with his looks. His face changes, his eyes glare with evil, his eyebrows are raised and his voice is high. He may even tremble and his blood pressure goes high. Many physical diseases result from that kind of anger.

All these are signs for a wrong kind of anger whereby one loses control over his nerves. Moreover, he is worse from the inside, for he is full of brutality, madness, hatred, desire to take revenge and evil. All these may appear on his lips, so he condemns others, insults, slanders and justifies himself. It may develop into fighting and killing or the desire to do that. It may end with enmity or even with complexes which settle deep in a person to the extent that he cannot

tolerate the other person. The angry person may think evil of the other person and cannot accept to hear any praise for the other person.

All these are proofs that this anger does not produce the righteousness of God. This anger contradicts the basic virtues. Therefore, St. Paul advised us saying, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you." (Ephesians 4:31, 32) He considered gentleness, meekness, patience, and peace from the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23). He called us to apply these virtues saying: "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." (Colossians 3: 12, 13).

Another example of evil anger is what the Jews did when the Lord Jesus rebuked them for their sins. The Bible says, "Then all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and then they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff." (Luke 4:28,29) Another example is what Simeon and Levi did. Their father Jacob said about them, "Let not my soul enter their council; let not my honor be united to their assembly; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hand-strung an ox." (Genesis 49:6) That is why he cursed their anger by saying, "Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath for it is cruel!" (Genesis 49:7) This harshness in anger was what made Esau decide to kill his brother. (Genesis 27:43)

E) BE SLOW IN ANGER

Anger may be due to swiftness and impulsive behavior. However, if one is slow and thoroughly thinks before he gets mad, he may behave in wisdom or find a reason, or at least calms himself controls his nerves and becomes angry without sinning.

St. James advised us saying, "Let everyone be slow to speak, **slow to wrath.**" (James 1: 19) Solomon the wise said, "The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger." (Proverbs 19: 11) "He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly." (Proverbs 14:29) God is described as being slow to anger. (Exodus 34:6; Joel 2:13)

Therefore, flee from your wrath and thoroughly think before you get angry. Put yourself in the place of the one being angry at, trying to know how he will answer and apologize.

F) DEALING WITH ANGRY PEOPLE

Solomon the Wise said, "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go." (Proverbs 22:24) He explained this in another place by saying, "An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression." (Proverbs 29:22) Therefore, do not expose yourself to an intolerable temptation. **Do not accompany angry people nor associate with them lest you lose your inner peace or lose your peace with them.** If you are put in a situation with an angry person, try to get away from him fast, or to change the subject which caused the anger. If you start a conversation with someone and he starts getting excited, do not continue with him in that subject nor try to come out with a solution. Realize that your listener is not ready for that now, and leave him for another opportunity, when he is more quiet and ready.

Do not oppose an angry person at the moment of his bursting into anger. But remember the wisdom of Rebecca when she saw Esau's anger toward Jacob, she told Jacob, "Flee to my brother Laban in Haran, until your brother's anger turns away from you." (Genesis 27: 45) Remember what the Lord said in Isaiah, "Come my people, enter your chambers, and **shut your doors behind you hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past.**" (Isaiah 26:20)

If you cannot escape, do the following:

+ **Think that this angry person may be going through difficult circumstances, whether physical, social, financial or scientific.** These circumstances may have pressured him or caused him to be annoyed psychologically. It is your duty not to burden him any more, but you have to endure him and comfort him. Maybe that person needs treatment or spiritual service from you. Perhaps God led him to your way and revealed his anger to you, so you may care for him through your patience and abundant love.

+ **Remember that this angry person is your brother.** Do not consider him an enemy, but a prey to a common enemy for both of you.

+ Examine yourself: Perhaps you are at fault and have aggravated him by your words or behavior or from a past experience with him. If you feel that is true, then blame yourself and apologize and make him feel good.

+ **Remember the sayings of the saints, "Fire cannot be put off by fire; likewise wrath cannot be put off by wrath but by love and patience."** Remember what Solomon the Wise said, "A soft answer turns away wrath." (Proverbs 15: 1) Also, "A gentle tongue breaks a bone." (Proverbs 25:15) Do not ever take revenge for yourself. St. Paul said, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord." (Romans 12:19) Speak gently, quietly and kindly with angry people. Be always smiling and never become furious. The Wise Solomon raised us a higher level when he said, "A gift in secret pacifies anger." (Proverbs 21:14)

+ **Do not count the mistakes of an angry person at the moment of his wrath**, whether by his words or his behavior. Do not let any of s behavior affect you, for this is not a normal state. Be sure that will apologize for his behavior when he calms down. Ignore his stakes at the moment of his wrath.

G) SOME ADVICE

The source of anger is not always the wrong behavior of others, it may be a weak point in us. The behavior of others may not lead us to anger, but still we become angry. A drop of ink colors the water in a big container. Hence, a behavior which aggravates an angry person may not aggravate a meek person. When you become angry do not justify yourself and blame others, but rather blame yourself and struggle against the sin of anger.

It was mentioned that a monk was living in a monastery, keeping silent. However, he used to be easily angered when communicating with other brothers. He said to himself, "I will be calm and I will not become angry. He went and lived in a cave. One day he filled a pitcher with water and put it on the ground. Few minutes later, the wind blew it and the water spilled. He went and filled it again, but it spilled again. He filled it again and the same thing happened for the third time. He became angry and smashed it to the ground, so it broke. Later, when he became quiet with himself, he realized his sin and that the devils have tricked him. He said to himself, "I was defeated while in solitude, also. Let me go to the monastery again, for in every place, one needs to struggle and needs patience and help from God."

This is a preventive advice which is to train yourself for the following virtues: gentleness, patience, meekness, calmness, perseverance and love. Repeat several times the prayer which the church taught us to say in the morning prayer "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:1,2) Repeat it in your prayers especially during the times when you are tempted to become angry.

+ **Study the causes which aggravate you to become angry and try to overcome them or to avoid them.** Also, try to clear your conscience or straighten your relationship with those whom you get angry easily, or at least be cautious when you meet them or deal with them, avoiding what may aggravate you or them.

+ **If your anger is due to the irritation of your nerves or your exhaustion, or any physical reason**, then try to treat yourself, or at least do not expose yourself to any excitement while you are exhausted, or else why do you blame others and the reason for anger is inside you?

+ **Do not impose on people high standards which may be higher than their levels and treat them accordingly.** Then, if they do not follow these standards, you become angry. Do not expect that everything will go according to your own principles, opinions and ideas, for people

are different in their personalities, mentalities, spiritualities, and their points of view regarding different matters. Therefore, do not be sad if someone disagrees with you or becomes enthusiastic about a matter which you may see wrong, or if he acts in a manner which you do not like. Do not expect everyone to be a copy of you. Moreover, you cannot make them become like you, and if you think this is possible, you cannot make that by your anger or explosion.

+ If the mistakes of others are the cause of your anger, then, do not become watchful for people's actions. **Train yourself not to interfere with anything that does not concern you.** For if you keep following the mistakes of whom you meet and become angry, then you will lose your nerves and peace before correcting others and you will find what harms you and aggravates you. Be concerned with what is within your jurisdiction and with what you are responsible for in front of God and people. Correct that with the spirit of wisdom as St. James said in his epistle, "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." (James 3:17)

+ **If you become angry, do not let your anger stay for a long time, but try to let it go away and calm yourself quickly.** Remember what St. Paul said, "Be angry and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath." (Ephesians 4:26)

+ **Remember your sins in which you fall during anger and train yourself to forsake them.** Thank God that this anger has revealed to you many of your weak points and try to overcome them benefiting from every time you become angry and is provoked.

+ **Confess to God in all your prayers that you are an angry person who is easily provoked, asking God to heal you from this disease and grant you the spirit of meekness.** Be persistent in your prayers and be sure that you will receive it because God Himself wants it for you.

CHAPTER 9

SPEAKING OUT AND KEEPING SILENT

"For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned"

(Matthew 12:37)

- A) The tongue, a dangerous member**
- B) Good and bad speech**
- C) Some guidelines concerning speech**
- D) Some etiquette of conversation**
- E) Some etiquette of discussion**
- F) Silence**

A) THE TONGUE, A DANGEROUS MEMBER

THE GIFT OF SPEECH:

Ancient philosophers knew that the human is "A speaking animal" as speech is among the most important characteristics which distinguish the human as "The crown of creation". We thus view the speech as a great gift which God specified for man, as St. Gregory the Theologian in his amazing meditating liturgy says "**You granted me the gift of speech**".

Truly, how superb is this gift which God granted us! It is the means of dealing and co-operating between men. It is the means of praying, chanting and praising. It is the means of teaching, preaching and advising, and the means of straightening and moralising. It is the means of comforting the distressed and those in difficulties, and the means of defending the right (1 Peter 3:15), and pleading the cause of the poor and needy (Proverbs 31:8, 9). It is the means of entertainment and comfort among friends, even the means of bringing people together and reinforcing their love. Its purpose goes beyond this worldly life, to the everlasting one, when we join the unseen hosts in their praises and when our voices mix with theirs as we bless Him Who is sitting on the living throne for ever and ever.

A SMALL MEMBER:

The tongue is a small member of the body, created by God to perform a vital task, and co-operate with the rest of the members in their activities in performing the jobs of life. It has two functions: tasting food, and working with the lips and the vocal cords to express speech. When we talk about the sins of the tongue we mean the speech which comes out of the person and is considered sin.

The errors of the tongue are not its own, but they are the errors of the mind and inner nature of the person. The tongue is but an instrument with which a person expresses his thoughts and feelings, like the musician who expresses his thoughts upon his instrument. The tongue is then a signing or an expressing instrument. It is much more important than the hand and the face which are also used for expressing the thoughts of the person.

The errors of the tongue are referred to the tongue, as referring a matter to its doer, though in fact they are the errors of the mind and the heart. If a person is pure, his tongue utters pure words, and when the heart is unclean, the uttering of the tongue is unclean.

A DANGEROUS MEMBER

(1) A Weapon with two edges:

The tongue is a small member but it can be a burning fire!! It is a weapon with two edges. As we find it a holy and useful instrument, it can also be a means for committing sins and terrible evil, for which the wrath of God descends upon the disobedient children. St. John El-Dargy said **"The silence of Jesus astonished Pilate, but a word Peter uttered made him weep bitterly"**.

The danger of this member hiding in the mouth appears, when we realise that it is a weapon with two sides, which people use in both good and evil "With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. **Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing**" (James 3:9, 10). Wise men elaborated in stating this fact warning the people from it. Solomon the Wise said **"Death and life are in the power of the tongue"** (Proverbs 18:21). He also said "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit" (Proverbs 15:4). Jesus Ben Sirach said "Honour or shame can come through speaking and a man's tongue may be his downfall" (Sirach 5:13). He also said **"Blow on a spark to make it glow, or spit on it to put it out; both results come from the one mouth"** (Sirach 28:12).

Were not the few words which **the sinner tax collector** prayed a cause for his acceptance by God and he went to his house justified, to the contrary of the Pharisee with his proud words because of which he was refused and rejected? (Luke 18:10-14). Were not the words of **the wicked servant** which he said to his master "For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow", a cause to condemn him and the answer of his master was "Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant"? (Luke 19:21, 22). Did not the words of the atheist **woman of Canaan** cause the Lord to have compassion on her and heal her daughter, in spite of what He previously said to her? (Matthew 15:22-28). Finally were not the few words of **the thief on Jesus' right**, hanging on the cross, the cause of his eternal salvation, to the contrary of his colleague who was crucified with him and was blaspheming?! (Luke 23:39-43).

We read in the history of the children of Israel that the men of Gilead fought against Ephraim, and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim. The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites arrived. And when any Ephraimite who escaped said, "Let me cross over", the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said "No", then they would say to him, "Then say, "Shibboleth"! And he would say, "Sibboleth", for he could not pronounce it right. Then they would take him and kill him at the fords of the Jordan. There fell at that time forty-two thousand Ephraimites (Judges 12:4-6). If one letter caused the death of this huge number, should we not care to control our tongues and guard our speech? **One word a person says may cause his misfortune, trouble and death. How many times the Jews collected around Jesus "to catch Him in His words"!** (Matthew 22:15, Mark 12:13). The devils also often gather around us to catch us from our tongues and in our words. Hence, we should control and guard our lips.

(2) Since all time, it was dangerous:

When we view the life of man since Creation, we find that he fell because of his tongue, and its wrong usage. The serpent spoke to Eve and deceived her, and she in turn deceived her husband (Genesis 3:1-6). And when God spoke to Adam in paradise about his disobedience, Adam

answered in a twisted way to excuse himself. Cain also lied to God after killing his brother Abel, to hide his crime (Genesis 4:9).

Until the end of the Flood, the whole earth had one language and one speech. But as they persisted in doing evil, they agreed to build a tall tower "whose top is in the heavens", so that another flood would not destroy them. Then the Lord came down and confused their language, and they started talking with different languages (Genesis 11:1-9). As we see, **many dangers come to us via the errors of the tongue. This was clearly indicated by the Lord Himself "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned"** (Matthew 12:37).

(3) Description of apostle James and others of its danger:

One may underestimate what comes from the tongue. Let us listen carefully to the words of Apostle James describing the tongue "Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! **And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.** For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. **But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison"** (James 3:5-8). Even more, the Apostle shows that our worship is useless without bridling the tongue. He says "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" (James 1:26). **This Apostle crowns what he has said by explaining that controlling the tongue is a measure of perfectness in the life of a person. He says "If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body"** (James 3:2).

Jesus Ben Sirach said "The lash of a whip raises weals, but the lash of a tongue breaks bones. **Many have been killed by the sword, but not so many as by the tongue"** (Sirach 28:17, 18). He Also said "Better a slip on the stone floor than a slip of the tongue; and the fall of the wicked comes just as suddenly" (Sirach 20:18). St. John El-Dargy said in the same meaning "It is better for a man to fall on the ground from a high place than he falls by his tongue". One of the poets said:

Guard your tongue man
Let it not bite you, it is a snake
How many people are killed by their tongues
Courageous men used to fear it

(4) It presents the secrets of the heart

The importance and the danger of this small member is that the words and expressions it says, are a measure of the inside state of the person, his piety or the lack of it, his wisdom, or his foolishness, his knowledge or his ignorance, No wonder, it is a faithful translator to a large extent, of what is inside the person and his personal matters, as our Lord taught

us **"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.** A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (Matthew 12:34, 35). Metals - their kinds, quality and purity - are known from the sound of its resonance when we hammer them. Likewise words show the reality of ourselves. Words are "the fruit of our lips" as the Apostle calls them (Hebrews 13:15), and the tree is known from its fruits (Matthew 7:16). That is how words express our personalities and our characters.

When Peter the Disciple denied his knowledge of Jesus his Master, in the house of Caiaphas on the night of the suffering of the Saviour, they said to him as he is insisting he does not know the Man "Surely you also are one of them, **for your speech betrays you**" (Matthew 26:73). St. John El-Dargy said "Close the door of the bedroom for the body, the door of the mouth for the tongue, and the door of the heart from the desires and from much thoughts".

B) GOOD AND BAD SPEECH

GOOD USAGE OF THE TONGUE:

God Who created man in His own image, did not create his tongue for evil usage, and He "Saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). God must have put in man the member of speech to be used in all what is good. Without doubt, it would be a great source of goodness and blessing to us, if we use it in the proper way. The Wise says **"The mouth of the righteous is a well of life"** (Proverbs 10:11). How beautiful is this expression **"is a well of life"**. God created the tongue in us to be **"a well of life"**. But, what is this life about which the Wise spoke that originates from the tongue? Is it not the good words which come from it, and its holy usage? Did not the Lord Jesus say "The words that I speak to you **are spirit, and they are life**" (John 6:63). When you speak the words of God which is "Spirit and Life", do they not come from the mouth which is "Spirit and Life"? On the contrary; "The mouth of fools pours forth foolishness" (Proverbs 15:2). In any case the tongue is "A source", either of life or of foolishness.

We mentioned that the tongue is a sword with two edges, and we should be very careful when we use it, as it should not be a means to fail us and destroy us. For this reason the saints guarded and controlled their tongues by strict exercises, in amazing and astonishing ways. They followed the saying of prophet David "I said, I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue" (Psalm 39:1). They looked to the tongue with reverence and regard, that prophet David said "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and **speaks the truth in his heart; He who does not backbite with his tongue**" (Psalm 15:1-3).

It is astounding to see a person pray, bless and praise God with his mouth, and with this very mouth he curses people, swears at them and utters that which is ugly and unclean! The Apostle James is amazed and asks "Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring

can yield both salt water and fresh" (James 3:12, 13). The Lord of Glory Himself says "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:33, 34). Moreover, God confirms that with what the Psalmist says "But to the wicked God says: ""What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth"" (Psalm 50:16).

The Christian, as the light of the world and an example to others, has to be a model in good usage of the tongue. St. Paul said to his disciple Timothy **"Be an example to the believers in word"** (1 Timothy 4:12). He also said "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6). He also said "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

The Jewish scribes who were writing the holy books, used to keep aside a special pen by which they only write the word "God". Is it not suitable for a believer who prays with his tongue, reads the Holy Bible with it, and also with it eats the Body and Blood of the Lord, to keep it aside for God?! **How much should we all imitate our Good Teacher Who when He spoke and the people heard Him "Marvelled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth"?** (Luke 4:22).

GOOD SPEECH

Good speech is what comes from God. The saints realised this point, as we see prophet David say "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise" (Psalm 51:15). They did not speak from themselves, but they spoke when they felt that the hand of God opened their lips to say a useful thing, and that It put words in their mouths. Read for example the words of Jeremiah "He who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully (Jeremiah 23:28), and of the Psalmist "The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those who proclaimed it" (Psalm 68:11), and the words of Jesus Himself "For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me" (John 17:8).

BUT WHAT IS GOOD SPEECH?

By good speech, we do not mean talking about theology and spiritual subjects in general - though without doubt - this kind of talk is at the top of good speech. But **it includes also all kinds of useful and valuable talks, which build the spirit or the mind or which minister to our worldly life.**

Good speech in general has a constructive function in life. It benefits its hearers, increases their knowledge, strengthens their mental abilities, and adds to their thoughts a new collection each day.

From the spiritual point of view, it has its noble message in both our private and general lives. The Wise says "A man will be satisfied with good by **the fruit of his mouth**" (Proverbs 12:14). The Apostle says "Therefore by Him let us continually offer **the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips**, giving thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15). The mouth has good fruits which we gather in due time, and they are but the fruits of the good words.

1 - In our relation with God, by words we express our hearty love to Him: we praise Him, thank Him, ask for His help, cry for Him in our distress and difficulties, and He listens and answers our requests. He who knows how to speak well to God, gets all he asks for.

2 - In our social relations with each other, it helps to strengthen the ties between people, and the bindings of their hearts. We do that by speech, by showing our loving feelings, or getting rid of bad ones which may occur, eliminating their traces by confessing our mistakes and apologising to whom we trespassed against. We benefit our brethren with good speech and build their lives by preaching, teaching, advising and directing them. "**The lips of the righteous feed many**" (Proverbs 10:21). By it we also express justice and defend it. The Psalmist said "The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice" (Proverbs 37:30). By it we plead the cause of the innocent "Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:8, 9).

3 - It solves disputes, calms down quarrels, and quenches the fires of anger. Among the best examples to that is of Abigail, whose husband Nabal returned evil to David the prophet who did good to him. As David was preparing to avenge himself and destroy Nabal and all his household, Abigail hurried to him, and her speech calmed down his wrath, that David told her "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand. Go up in peace to your house. See, I have heeded your voice and respected your person" (1 Samuel 25:32-35).

Among these examples also is **the quiet speech of Jacob which he said to his brother Esau**, which resulted in turning away Esau's wrath after he was coming down to take revenge on Jacob (Genesis Chapter 33). The Wise said "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

4 - Divine words are bound to inflame our hearts, as happened with the Disciples at Emmaus to whom the Lord appeared and was talking. When He disappeared "They said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"" (Luke 24:32). Also the divine words sanctify our thoughts and cleanse our souls as the Lord Himself said "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:3).

By divine speech also God blesses our gatherings, and raises them up as He said "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). This is what happened to the Disciples at Emmaus to whom the Lord Himself appeared while they were talking about matters of spiritual life (Luke 24:13-31). Also the Disciples - who

when they were talking about the Lord Jesus - Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and He gave them His peace" (Luke 24:36).

5 - It helps us in our lives in general, and because of it we see much good. David the prophet said "Who is the man who desires life, And loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit" (Psalms 34:12, 13). St. Peter said "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit" (1 Peter 3:10).

BAD SPEECH

We have seen great fruits coming from the good speech. We find the contrary for bad speech. **Bad speech tends to cool the temperature of the heart.** Our spiritual life is like wax, it melts with heat and solidifies with cold. The Lord said "**And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold**" (Matthew 24:12). The speech concerning divine and spiritual matters tend to generate heat and sacred desires in the heart. When our hearts soften we become ready to accept the image of God inside us, as the image of the king stamped on soft wax, and we become "Conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29).

Bad speech defiles our bodies, and offends God himself Who is dwelling in them, and took them as His temple "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:14). The Apostle also says "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? " (1 Corinthians 6:15). Thus it is not proper for us to take the members of Christ and make them instruments of sin as the Apostle says "And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:13).

Added to that, bad speech "defiles the good hearings" as the saintly fathers say. How many desire move inside a person because of bad speech he hears, not only related to sexual matters but also related to anger, for example? How many stumbling blocks a person meets because of bad speech he hears. We shall talk about that at length when we present some of the sins of the tongue.

For this reason the saints guarded their mouths carefully. **St. Anthony said "Our Lord Jesus asked us to enter from the narrow gate. What is this narrow gate except guarding the tongue from sinning. Let us then strive and keep a strong guard on our mouths in order not to utter evil wickedness".** We need to imitate the pious Job who said "My lips will not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit" (Job 27:4).

C) SOME GUIDELINES CONCERNING SPEECH

TIME TO SPEAK OUT

Solomon the Wise said "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: **A time to keep silence, and a time to speak**" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7). **Often we do not choose the proper time for speaking.** Perhaps the same words we say on one occasion at a certain time, would get better results if we said them at another time, when circumstances are more suitable and people are ready to listen. The Wise said "A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is! (Proverbs 15:23). He also said "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).

David the prophet said "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3). We notice here that the prophet did not ask God to entirely close his mouth, but to keep a door to open and to close it in the proper time!

PURPOSE OF SPEECH

Think well before you speak and ask yourself "Is there a need for me to speak?" If you do that, you will find that you can spare many speeches.

* **Ask yourself also before you answer a question** posed to you, how would the Lord Jesus answer if He were in my place? If you did that you would answer correctly.

* **Do not speak just for the sake of speaking**, as this is a bad habit which people hate and it lessens their liking and regard for you. The Wise Ben Sirach said "Answer a man if you know what to say, but if not, hold your tongue" (Sirach 5:12). **Think well** before you speak. God created two ears and one mouth for man, so that he hears more than he speaks "Let every man be swift to hear, **slow to speak**" (James 1:19). **The tongue is put between two doors - the teeth and the lips - in order to think before we open** these doors to speak! Ben Sirach said "Fools speak before they think; wise men think first and speak afterwards" (Sirach 21:26). This means that fools control their hearts by their mouths. On the contrary, the wise control their tongues by their hearts. **If a man should chew his food well before it goes to his stomach, likewise he ought to think well before speech comes out of his mouth.**

MANNER OF TALKING

* **Talk mindfully and with care.** It is better for you to speak one word carefully and in its place than lots of chatter with no meaning. The Wise said "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19). Do not hasten to answer a question posed to you before you comprehend it well "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (Proverbs 18:13).

It is not possible to swallow back the words we spoke. Solomon the Wise said "He who

has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive" (Proverbs 17:27, 28).

* **Speak with a low voice, just enough for your hearer to hear you.** Speaking with an undue loud voice does not agree with decency. The quiet low voice in the story of prophet Elijah, was the voice of God "And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12). It was also said about the Lord that "He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets" (Matthew 12:19).

* **Do not be unnatural when you speak,** and do not imitate another person in the way he speaks nor the way he argues.

* **Do not speak in a lengthy way needlessly:** do not answer with two words what could be in one word only.

* **Avoid going around the answer,** which implies slyness and guile. Rather be clear and frank in what you say.

D) ETIQUETTE OF CONVERSATION

* **Do not interrupt others when they speak.** Beside appearing discourteous, it is against Christian humility, and is a sign of disrespect to what the speaker says. "Do not answer without first listening" (Sirach 11:8).

* **Do not answer a question posed to another in order not to appear condescending or lofty.**

* If you were in a gathering and a question is posed to all, **do not be the first to give an answer.** St. Pachomius said "If you know all the wisdom, still be the last person to speak". Do not be the first to answer, but let others feel the need of your speech and of knowing your opinion, by requesting you to speak. Then you find listening ears, and know that your speech has a message, and is of use to others.

* **When you speak do not do any unsuitable gesture** with your members; your eyes, your hands, or your lips.

* If you are a person among others discussing a certain matter, **form your own opinion and do not fluctuate with the opinions of others.** Ben Sirach said "Do not winnow in every wind or walk along every path" (Sirach 5:9).

* **You should beware of the people you talk to,** their social stature and their ages. The speech of a young man with a young man friend ought to be different from the speech to elders, teachers or priests. Listen to the advice of the Wise "Never be garrulous among your elders" (Sirach 7:14).

* **Don not be talkative.** Thus you gain wisdom and the love of others. Ben Sirach said "A garrulous man makes himself detested" (Sirach 20:8). St. Aphraam said "Remember brother that silence is the end of hosts of speeches. Who speaks excessively increases enmity and hatred for himself, and who guards his mouth is loved". St. John El-Dargy said "He who experienced bitterness from the falls of the tongue is careful not to speak, and he who speaks too much did not yet know himself what it should be". St. Isaac said "Anybody who speaks too much is empty from inside, even if he were knowledgable of many matters". **Garrulity beside being unappreciated by others, it is a waste of time which is counted in your life - even if the speech does not include bad talks.** You will give account of every minute of your life, **and you should have a useful message from it.**

E) SOME ETIQUETTE FOR DISCUSSION

SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION

* **Do not interfere in every discussion, as you are not knowledgable in everything.** If a matter is discussed in your presence, do not rush in giving your opinion, or judge it. Rather listen carefully before you speak in order to comprehend - as much as you can - the subject of discussion. It is not improper - in fact it is better - if you are asked about something you do not know or understand to answer "Sorry, I do not know this subject", or "I have no experience with this matter", or "I need first to study or search the matter and understand it well", ... etc.

* **Do not discuss trivialities** which produce neither good nor bad. Avoid thorny and stumbling issues, and foolish and "ignorant disputes" (2 Timothy 2:23) which are useless.

* **Discuss with others what interests them** and they will be eager to listen to you. If you discuss what they feel is of no importance to them, start by making them anxious and point out the values of the subject, else they listen coolly or half heartily.

PURPOSE OF DISCUSSION AND ITS MANNER

* **Realise that the purpose of discussion is not to defeat the other person, but to direct him to the truthful side. Your aim is for truth to prevail and not your own opinion,** unless you were right in what you say. Discuss with fairness, without partiality or upholding your pride. Be honest in your opinion and observe the feelings of the other person not to embarrass him.

* **Be honest in your discussion.** Do not bluff or mislead your hearer with information he does not comprehend. Do not mention the virtues of a matter and intentionally ignore its vices which your hearer is not aware of.

* **If you discover some weakness in your opinion, do not be arrogant and sacrifice the truth to save your pride.** Agree with the correct points of the other side. Do not let him feel that you are inflexible, and you cannot change your mind, and all you want is his yielding to your side, rightly or wrongly.

* Do not pretend that you know everything. If somebody asks you about something you do not know, do not be shy to tell him so. Ask the other person to explain to you what he knows about it, and accept from his explanation - in humility and with thanks - what agrees with truth and justice.

* **Do not start your discussion by ruling on the matter,** but rather start in a questioning mood. The questions sometimes serve as an introductory way to enlighten your road. Passing judgement is like the job of a judge who finished with the matter and gave final verdict, and the questions are like the work of an investigator who is still clarifying the points of the subject to uncover its mysteries. Obviously, the investigation precedes the verdict.

* **Beware of that which is obvious to you and do not try to impose it on others.** The obvious points are sometimes relative matters. What is obvious to you may not be obvious to others and vice versa.

* **Beware not to generalise.** There exist special cases which are not subject to the general rules, or regulations. Such cases are the exceptions and need excessive care and study.

* **Do not conduct your discussion in a harsh or with a loud voice.** Watch well your movements, gestures and attributes in your discussions, specially when you are talking to an older person. Be humble and calm in your discussion.

SUITABLE TIME

* **Choose the time which suits your hearer.** Select the suitable time for discussions, and avoid lengthy discussions which the other person has no time for.

* If your hearer has not enough time, be brief as much as possible.

If you find that time is over for your hearer, finish your discussion, and apologise if you have wasted his time. Do not wait for your hearer to look at his watch several times, and be uneasy in his chair, but rather - yourself - be sensitive, smart and quick to observe this point. If you are discussing a matter with a person who asks you to postpone it to another time, do not get angry, misinterpret him or feel that he insulted you. Rather accept it with simplicity, love and trust, and let him depart in peace. Be careful not to press him, not caring for his time or his commitments. Because of your enthusiasm for discussion do not ask him to extend the discussion disregarding his other responsibilities.

* Even if your speaker does not excuse himself for lack of time, you should take that into account, assessing by yourself his circumstances, giving him a chance during the discussion to end his talk at any instant and go. But never - for shortage of time - end the discussion suddenly in an obvious way and ask him to leave because of his obligations. You may embarrass him by this rough way and it looks like you were kicking him out.

* If you yourself have not enough time and want to leave, do that quietly, politely and in a nice way without embarrassing others. Choose for that the right moment in order not to be misunderstood.

* In any cases if there is some time left for both you and your speaker to extend the talk, be discerning and give each point the time it deserves. Do not spend much time in trivialities, as you are going to give an account in front of God and your conscience on how you spend your time. You are supposed to be plentifully fruitful with it.

* On the other hand, realise well that your basic principles in life and in general your fixed ideas, were not created yesterday. They may be the result of many years of experience and education, and of many circumstances and they are psychologically of certain kind. Hence do not expect from the other person to arrive - in one sitting with you - to what you have accomplished in a long period of your life. Do not assume that he will leave you trusting in all your views, no matter how convincing you are. It is his right that you give him a chance to embrace what he collected from new ideas, or what he disagrees with, a chance to think, wait on, meditate, search, saturate his thinking, and experiment with in his practical life. Therefore do not be disappointed or regret that you have spent a great effort in convincing him, and did not get a complete result. Rather consider yourself as a wise farmer who sows live seeds and waits until they grow and give fruits.

INTERRUPTIONS

Listen more than you speak. Do not interrupt your speaker, but give him a chance to say what he wants to say. Interruption is against the etiquette of speaking. The person you interrupt may be offended by your behaviour. Practically, he may not be listening to you as he may be occupied by the rest of his speech. Again, frequent interruptions show your haste, or your need of some long-suffering, patience and tolerance. Did you not once hear whom you interrupt beg you by saying "Please be a little patient until I complete my speech. Allow me to finish my talk and you will understand me", "Yes I have an answer to your objection, you will hear it if you give me a

chance to say all I have"! Your interruption may also bother your speaker, scatter his speech and the sequence of his thought, and makes him start again from the beginning - after answering your interruption - in order to return back to the chain of his thoughts. Again, frequent interruptions may lengthen and intensify the discussion.

* You may say "My interruptions are not to object or protest, but they are explanatory questions, trying to fill the gaps in the information given by the speaker". In fact this is the easiest kind of interruption and may sometimes be accepted if it comes out with a gentle quiet manner, being understood as clarification, and was not a cause to scatter the thoughts of the speaker. For this kind of interruption, it is better to choose the proper opportunity, such as for example when the speech of the speaker forms somewhat independent parts. Then the listener poses questions at the end of these parts, and before the beginning of the following part. He may politely say to the speaker "Allow me - before the start on this part - to enquire about certain points the preceding part".

* If you yourself are the speaker and somebody interrupts you, first listen to him until he finishes, and understand his mind well. Then you have two choices: either to answer him right away in order to give peace to his mind, or to promise to answer him during your speech, making sure not to forget about him, and ask him politely to wait for a while.

FEELINGS OF OTHERS IN THE DISCUSSION

* **Know that your speaker has feelings which you should not offend**, even if he offends your feelings. He also has his own views and thoughts which you should not despise, but try to understand. Do not misrepresent or question his mentality or his honesty, but try to understand his point of view.

* Do not focus on the wrong points in the discussion of your speaker, but also see the positive side, and praise him for it. It is nice to use expressions such as "This is good, this is reasonable, as you wish, ... ". In your discussion with someone, let him feel that he is in front of a friend whom he respects, not an enemy who wants to find mistakes in him.

* **Do not be sarcastic about the speaker**, and do not try to present him as incapable or defeated.

* **Do not ask awkward questions**, and if he wants to withdraw what he said do not embarrass him for this withdrawal.

* **If you win a point during the discussion do not puff up in pride**, but rather move to the next point quietly without making your speaker or your listeners feel that you won a point.

* **Do not use the means of the world**, such as to present your view and laugh victoriously, as if nobody has a better view; nor make the people around you laugh at the speaker, ending the discussion without hearing his point of view, leaving him like a defeated person.

* **Avoid harsh words which hurt your speaker directly or indirectly.** For example, you should not say "Those who believe this view are stupid, or are weak in personality", when it is clear that your speaker is among those who believe in this view. Say in simplicity, for example "The Bible, the Church rules, or the sayings of the fathers, say the opposite to that". Or show the flaws in the view without swearing at those who support it.

* If you find in the speaker something you do not like, such as his voice, the way he speaks, his stuttering, or his appearance, do not let him feel that you notice that. Ignore these things as mostly they are out of his hands.

* **Do not take the position of a teacher but of a person who wants to understand your speaker.** If you want to teach him something new, do not let him feel that. Rather let him feel that the new point you present is his view not yours.

* If the other person agrees with you about a certain point, do not try to confirm it, in order not to annoy him.

* **During discussions, do not speak much about yourself.** Win the discussion by your views not by your personality.

* If the other person is specialised in certain aspects in science which is the subject of discussion, do not ignore such speciality, **and do not ignore the other gifts of your speaker.**

* Try to end the discussion - no matter how the two views are apart - by the spirit of love, friendship, and closeness between hearts.

F) SILENCE

A. WHY IS SILENCE PRAISED?

The saints viewed silence as an important virtue. They trained themselves to attain it, lived in it, experienced it and wrote for us their experiences about it. Somebody may ask: If speaking is useful and valuable, as we mentioned in the previous section, **why then silence is considered among the important virtues, and why the saints loved it and lived in it?**

The answer to that is easy and simple. The numerous sins of the tongue occur easily and frequently. Thus one ought to have a strong bridle on the tongue, and silence is among the strongest and most effective bridles. Beside that, the saints found that man can perfect his speech with silence, contrary to science and other knowledge, which he perfects as he utilises them more. In that St. Basil the Great said "Better speech is not gained except with silence and its perpetual practice". St. Eronimos also said "Let us learn silence before every thing, in order to be able to speak well later on".

Let nobody think that controlling the tongue leads to the suppression of the feelings and complicating the self, which is generated from suppression as described in psychology. There is a big difference between controlling the tongue and suppressing the feelings. In suppression, the desire in the self is not expressed when the person wants to realise it, because of fear.

But controlling is when one controls himself or his tongue, which is the tool for expressing his feelings. **Suppression is pressure, deprivation and sadness, while control is striving, cleansing, joy, with striving and victory.**

Here is what some of the fathers said about silence:

St. Gregory the Theologian said "One wishes that speech is as useful as silence!". He also said "When I was pressed to speak, I did not speak except about silence, in order to guide people to silence, by silence and by speech. This is my view about silence and this is my philosophy about speech".

St. John Chrysostom said "Silence is immense growing up for man because it gives the heart perpetual isolation, brings modesty and drives away anger. It is like asceticism, creates knowledge and keeps love. Silence is the completion of philosophy. Who practises silence can keep all other good habits". **St. Anthony in an advice to his disciples the monks said** "Keep silent, for in front of God a silent person is counted among the hosts of angels".

*** However, not every silence or every speech is praised.** There are times when one should speak, and it is a considered shortcoming if he does not speak, a matter to be blamed for. **St. Bimen was once asked** "Which is better, speech or silence?". He answered "Silence for God is good, and speech for God is also good".

* Real silence is the silence of thoughts and heart. Someone may practise silence from the outside, but his mind waves with many wrong and evil thoughts. At the same time there is another who speaks all his day, but he is keeping silent. **In this sense, St. Bimen said** "You may find a person whom you think is silent but his thought is condemning others. He who has this character is always speaking. Again you may find another who speaks from the beginning of the day to its end, and in spite of that he is practising silence, meaning he does not say any useless word".

B. SOME BLESSINGS OF SILENCE

1 - By silence **we see the reality of ourselves as in a mirror.** We see our failures and mistakes. St. Isaac said "If one stops much talking with people, he goes back to himself and straightens his behaviour in front of God".

2 - **It is a chance to free the soul in its worship and its relation with God.** Silence gathers

the mind, while it scatters from too much talk. St. Arsenius considers silence as the main factor in cleansing the mind of man. St. Isaiah from Eskiet said "Love silence more than speech, because silence gathers and speech disperses".

3 - When the mouth shuts up, the soul calms down. Then the inner ear can hear the voice of the Beloved Who knocks on the door of the heart. It opens to Him (Revelation 3:20). On the contrary to that, too much talk excites the soul which then cannot hear the voice of God. For this St. John El-Dargy said "The ear of the silent person hears wonders from God".

4 - In general, **the spiritual life as a whole flourishes and grows in silence.** A pot put on fire boils faster if it has a tight cover. The Spiritual Elder said "If your tongue is accustomed to talk much, your heart is shut off from the illuminating movements of the spirit. But if your mouth is quiet and silent, your heart is always inflamed from the heat of the spirit". From his famous expressions is "**Silence your tongue for your heart to speak, and silence your heart for God to speak**". The worshipping fathers taught that silence kills the thoughts in the heart. St. Bimen said "**Who controls his mouth, his thoughts die. It is like a pitcher containing serpents and scorpions, when its opening is covered they die**".

5 - Silence gives the person a chance to think quietly, resulting in mature thoughts. For this the book of Ecclesiastes says "For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words" (Ecclesiastes 5:3).

6 - If silence helps us to speak well with people, it also **teaches us how to speak with God** - In other words it is a teacher who teaches us prayer. St. John El-Dargy said "The heavenly hosts stand with the silent man to join him in worship and praises, even they are eager to accompany him for ever".

7 - Silence leads us to humility. St. Isaac Said "The difference between the wisdom of the spirit and the wisdom of the mind is that the former leads you to silence and the latter pushes you to impudence and arguments. Wise silence leads you to humility. but arguments and stubbornness lead you to arrogance and pride".

8 - As a whole, **silence is a strong bridle to the whole body.** For this St. James the Apostle said "Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! (James 3:3-5). Have you seen brother, how the Apostle makes comparison between the bridle and the rudder of the ship from one side and the tongue from the other side? The similarity is that in each, man can control the horses, the ship or the body. The Apostle settles this idea by saying "For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, **able also to bridle the whole body**" (James 3:2).

From the other side **silence shows the ability of man to control the movements of his body and his desires.** St. Isaac said "If you want to recognise the man of God, find him from his continuous silence". The Wise said "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls. (Proverbs 25:28). St. Eronimos commented on this verse by saying "The city

without walls is subject to be taken and be swindled by the enemy. Likewise who is not guarded by the wall of silence, the attacks of the devil are aimed at him, and he is in danger of defeat".

C. EXAMPLES OF MEN OF SILENCE

Without exception, all the worshipping fathers practised silence until they perfected it. History keeps for us the names of those who excelled in it. Among them are:

* **St. Arsenius** the tutor of the kings' sons, who loved serenity and silence and made for it a symbol; his famous saying "**I often spoke then I regretted, but I never regretted my silence**". A poet re-phrased this saying in the following words:

I have never regretted my silence once,
But I regretted my speaking many times

* **St. Agathon**, when he wanted to train himself in silence, he put a pebble in his mouth for three years, until he perfected it!

* **The great saint Youhanna El-Assuity (Al-Tabaisy)** guarded his silence for thirty years, in which he did not utter one word. It was said that he lived in a cave for thirty years in which he did not meet anybody. Others gave him what he needed from an opening. Those who went to seek him, he dealt with in writings. Many people used to go to see him because of the gift of healing God gave him. Once four thieves thought that he kept lots of money in his cave. They went at night to the cave to steal, but they were blinded and kept standing outside the cave till morning. When people came, they caught them and wanted to hand them to the ruler. The saint spoke to them saying "If you do not let these go, the gift of healing will leave me", so they were let go. It was said that this is the only phrase he uttered during this thirty years.

***St. Bemwa**, when he left the world to go to the desert, went to seek one of the saintly elders asking advice to help him in his new life. The elder opened his mouth with what prophet David said "I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue" (Psalm 39:1). When St. Bemwa heard this verse he said "Enough teacher, do not teach me anything else until I learn that". He went to his room and never came back to the elder. When the elder met him after sometime, he asked for the reason why he did not come back for another lesson. St. Bemwa replied "Believe me father that I did not learn the first lesson well". After many years, a friend asked him if he finished learning the first of David's lessons (meaning the verse of David's psalm). The saint replied "It has taken me forty five years to meditate in this verse, and I hardly practise it well". The saint said that in humility, as "Baladius" the historian mentioned that the saint perfected silence well and when he was asked about anything, he first lifted his heart to God for guidance before he talked and God helped him in guarding this virtue. It was said that at the moment of his death, his conscience did not rebuke him for a word he said for which he was sorry.

CHAPTER 11

CONDEMNATION OR JUDGING OTHERS

"The devils push us to sin. However, if we do not obey them, they will push us to judge whoever sins."

(St. John-El-Daragy)

- A) Dangers of the sin of judging others**
- B) Causes of judging others**
- C) Why should we not condemn others**
- D) The consequences of judging others**
- E) How do we get rid of judging others?**

What are your feelings toward some people? Do you criticize their behavior and condemn their actions, as you see them apparent? Do you keep these feelings and thoughts inside you and do you reveal them under the name of defending the truth and virtue? If you do this or that, know that this is the sin of judging others, which the Lord Jesus has warned us saying, "**Judge not, that you be not judged.**" (Matthew 7: 1)

A) DANGERS OF THE SIN OF JUDGING OTHERS

The sin of judging others is dangerous for the following reasons:

- 1. Many do not feel that they are committing that sin,** hence they do not exert any effort to overcome it. The youth may feel very sorry for falling in the lust of the flesh, may try to avoid its causes, and consider overcoming it an accomplishment of virtue. But they never think of purifying themselves from judging others.
- 2. This sin is related with apparent matters, which one may see or hear:** This sin is sensed by the physical senses. The difficulty lies here in how to rid one's self from factual things one has seen with his senses and convince him with opposite of what he has seen and heard.
- 3. Robbing one of God's rights, which** He did not grant to any human being or even any of the angels. One may wonder how can one be so easy regarding this sin! If one is careful in not committing this sin, one is guaranteed eternal inheritance. **Since the ultimate goal of our spiritual struggle is not to be condemned in the Day of Judgment, therefore keeping ourselves from not committing this sin will help us in attaining our goal.** The Lord Jesus said, "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." (Luke 6:37)

Story: This story was written in the book of "The Paradise of the Monks", told by St. Anastasios El-Sinaey. One of the monks who lived in the monastery was lazy. At his departure, he seemed to be not afraid of death at all, on the contrary he felt very joyful. The monks surrounding him during his last moments of life asked him, "Our brother, we know that you have spent your life in laziness, why are you so joyful at your last hour? We do not know the secret. By God's power, sit and tell us about this strange matter so we may know the wonders of God." The brother sat down and said, "Yes, my honorable fathers, I have spent all my life in laziness and sleep. But now at this hour, the angels have brought me the book of my deeds and since I became a monk, I have not judged anyone, nor hated anyone, nor became angry with anyone. **I hope that the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Judge not, that you be not judged," be fulfilled in me.**" When I said these words, the handwriting of my sins was torn because I obeyed this small commandment." After he finished these words, he departed, and all the other monks benefited and praised God.

I want to mention that the word "Laziness", which was mentioned several times in his story, does not mean the life of sin or drifting away from God, or else the story would not have ended like that. But what we mean is that this monk did not have any significant virtues, as the ascetic fathers used to have.

Do you know, my brother that keeping this commandment, "**Judge not**" is capable of saving you from eternal judgment through the mercy of our God? Open your heart now to know its causes and how to overcome it.

B) CAUSES OF JUDGING OTHERS

1. Pride: The sin of judging others is one of the faithful daughters of the sin of pride, which nourishes it and makes it grow. This sin also strengthens the sin of pride. Love of self and the proud opinion create in us the spirit of judging others. Every time we judge others, our pride goes one step further, accompanied by the feeling of self-importance and satisfaction for one's self. Had I not felt that I am better than that person and I would have never done that action, I would have never judged him.

This is pride itself. However, the humble person never opens his eyes for other's mistakes, but looks at his own and finds many. St. Pachomios said, **"Do not despise nor judge anyone, even if you see him committing sin, for judging others comes from pride. But the humble person considers everyone better than him."**

2. The evil heart: The fathers say that if someone judges his brother for an evil act, he has the same sin, even a very small part or a root of it which involuntarily drives him to judge others. Our Lord says, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things." (Matthew 12:35) The pure heart, with no lust, looks at others' deeds with no evil. "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil." (Habakkuk 1: 13)

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness." (Matthew 6:22,23)

Hence, the source of thoughts of condemnation is not others' sinful deeds, but one's evil heart. The rays of the sun penetrates the glass and is formed by its color. If the rays fall on a blue glass, it penetrates from the other side with a blue color and so on. The defect here is not the sun and its light, but it appeared through the other side with the color of the glass through which it penetrates. In the same manner, man regards the sin of condemnation. If his heart were pure, he would not see other people's actions in a mistaken way. The same manner, the straight track seems broken in water. This is what is known in physics as the theory of refraction. Certainly the track is straight, but it seems broken. Likewise, when the sick person is offered delicious food, he tastes it and finds it bitter. The defect here is not in the kind of food but in the sick person.

3. Lack of Love: St. Paul said that love "does not behave rudely, thinks no evil, endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13: 5, 7) The wise Solomon also said, "Love covers all sins." (Proverbs 10: 12) With this forgiving love, which covers all our sins, God has loved us and visited us from above and ignored the time of our ignorance. Still the eyes of His love watch us, care for us, and cover our sins. Hence, we say in the "Thanksgiving Prayer", "Let us give thanks ... for He has covered us." Love is the spectacle, which shows the reality of all matters, even if they are far or not clear. But if our love toward one another is decreased, then we will start judging others like the rocks, which obstruct the flow of the river, and threatens our life. **Hatred obliges me and**

convinces me that I wish to see my brother in the worst condition, hence, I see him full of mistakes. But love endures all things and gives excuses for mistakes.

4. Lack of Knowledge: How little are what one knows, and how many are the things he ignores! What little are what one knows from the apparent things, and how many are the hidden things that one ignores! In spite of that, one pretends knowledge in all things. **One of the things that one pretends to know is what is hidden in the hearts, thoughts, and souls!** If St. Paul himself says, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?" (1 Corinthians 2:11) How dare, then, if one condemns his brother not for an action that was committed but for an inner thought that one thinks he might have discovered?

Often one hastens and passes judgment on a specific matter, in one's mind, according to its outward appearance, without even investigating the details. Hence, his judgments become contradicting and away from the truth. Our Lord Jesus has warned us by saying, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." (John 7:24) Hence, when we pass judgment, the words of St. James "become judges with evil thoughts," (St. James 2:4) are fulfilled in us.

Since man sometimes stands perplexed, between himself, as to what the intentions are that pushed him for a specific behavior, so how can one easily judges the behavior of another just from seeing or hearing, without even asking him? Since the Apostle says about the day of judgment, "In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel" (Romans 2:16), and since no one knows these secrets except God, (Deuteronomy 29:29), how can I dare to pass wrong judgments on others?

5. Forgetting our sins: One of the reasons, which make us easily condemn others, is forgetting our sins, whether the present or past, and not realizing our weaknesses. Looking at our sins create in us humility, holy shyness, and the fear of God. A person, who feels his weaknesses and remembers his sins, who prays with a broken heart, "My sin is ever before me," cannot be occupied with others' sins. One of the Fathers said, "Who will forsake his dead and weeps for the dead of his neighbor?" Man's sin is his dead soul. Many of the Fathers have elaborated that this is an exercise to cure the sin of judging others.

St. Isaiah said, "If you are not occupied with your sins, then you will fall in judging others' sins." One monk asked an elderly monk, "Why do I always condemn others?" The elderly monk answered, "Because you do not know yourself yet. Whoever knows himself, does not look at others' shortcomings, lest you hear what was said to the hypocrite, "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:3) When we judge others, we judge ourselves, because we do the same mistakes. St. Paul said, "In whatever you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?" (Romans 2:13)

It was mentioned that St. Moses the Black, who was a murderer and a robber before his conversion, one day was invited to attend a meeting to judge one monk who had sinned. He declined from attending and refused completely to go. The priest came to him saying, "The Fathers are all waiting for you." He rose and took a bag full of holes, filled it with sand, carried it on his back, and went to the meeting. When the Fathers saw him doing that, they asked him, "What are you doing Father?" He answered saying, "These are my sins running behind my back, and I am coming today to condemn my brother's sins?" When they heard this, they forgave the monk who had sinned.

6. Lack of wisdom: A wise person's work is inside him, He is occupied with the Kingdom of God which is - inside, him (Luke 17: 21), and the hidden treasure in his heart (Matthew 13: 44) and the pilgrimage he is walking through lest he goes astray, and the commandment to the holy city which has foundations and whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11: 10). He is occupied with the love of God and the love of others for God. He is occupied with keeping his heart quiet so he may hear the voice of the One Who is knocking at his heart, so he may open to Him and prepare supper. "I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me." Revelation 3:20) He does not have the time nor the effort to spend in judging others and thinking of their mistakes, for his mind and heart are occupied with much more important and beneficial matters.

The wisdom of a student before his examination is to be wholly concentrating on his studies. Whatever he encounters before his examination, cannot make him forget his studies. In the same manner reacts a wise person in his spiritual life toward the road of virtue. However, an ignorant man reacts contrary to that, for his ignorance darkens his heart and thought. St. John El-Daragy said, "**A wise person contemplates the virtues of others to obtain them for himself, while the ignorant contemplates the vices of others to condemn him for them.**"

7. The Deceit of the Devil: When we speak about the causes for judging others, we have to mention the role of Satan to tempt us to commit this sin. How abundant his tricks are! He puts all his traps so we may fall in that sin. All God's creation is good, but the devil mars the image of your brother in front of you, this image that is according to God's image and likeness. Satan gives you wrong thoughts about your brother. If the devil stumbles you about your brother, do not be sad at your brother, but rather, pour all your wrath on his enemy and yours, who hates love. For where love is, God is there. Ruin the devil's plans and reveal his conspiracies, then he will flee from you, for he cannot find a place in you.

C) WHY SHOULD WE NOT

CONDEMN OTHERS?

1. We are not perfect: A judge has to be perfect. Definitely, this is not one of our qualities, for while my brother is committing one sin, I commit a different kind of sin. In spite of the

difference between my sin and his sin, yet both of them lead to destruction. as two students failing in the same class, but in different subjects. Can one student brag over the other, even if the subject of his failure was easier and less important than the other? One of the Fathers said, **"Do not condemn the sinner, O you weak, lest you become like him a transgressor of the law, for He who said, "Do not commit adultery", said also, "Do not judge others."** St. James said, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law." (St. James 2: 10, 11)

Even if we do not commit such sins, yet we are all human beings under sin, susceptible to fall in sin like those whom we judge. Even the saints are subject to that, for St. James said about Elijah, who ascended alive to heaven, that he was a man with a nature like ours. (St. James 5:17) It was mentioned that one of the Fathers, when seeing one of his brothers committing sin, used to weep and say, "Since my brother sinned today, that means that the devil is very active, and I am afraid lest I fall tomorrow."

It is worthy to mention that a judge who is perfect in virtue, has to be perfect in knowing the secrets of matters, so that his judgment is correct. Naturally, this is not one of our qualities as human beings, therefore, the Apostle forbids us to judge others. Often, the things we judge are under doubt and hidden from us, and no one knows the truth except God. Whoever dares to judge others, robs God's authority

2. We do not know the end of their lives: We do not know the end of those people who sinned before us and whom we have judged. Maybe, that person whom you judged, have sinned unknowingly, and due to good intentions, God will forgive his sins. Maybe that person whom you judged have repented and God accepted him, yet I die in my sins.

Suppose, you were present during the time of stoning St. Stephen, and have seen St. Paul guarding the clothes of St. Stephen and consenting to his death, what would have been your judgment of St. Paul? Wouldn't you have hastened and said that he was a murderer? But what has happened? A miracle has happened and he became the Great St. Paul. He even said about himself, "Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and insolent man, but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." (1 Timothy 1:13) Has anyone who has seen the first scene, would have thought that he would be changed and became so enthusiastic to spreading Christianity to the extent that he rejoiced in tribulations, chains, and even death for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Suppose you were present when St. Peter took his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the chief priest (Matthew 27:51), what would have been your judgement? Wouldn't you have said that he was a criminal? **How would you have judged him when he denied his Master, cursing and swearing in front of the servants?** Do not hasten in judging him, for after a few moments, after the rooster crowed, he wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:69, 75) The Lord has accepted his repentance and delivered to him the shepherding of his flock, making him equal to the other disciples who have not sinned like him. (John 21:15-17) **Suppose you were present during the time that our Lord Jesus was on earth and have heard about the**

right thief and, his crimes, would you have expected this great fate for him? He was one of the first ones to enter the Paradise after it had been closed for several generations.

St. Efram El-Syriany said, "If you see someone sinning and see him the next day, do not look at him as a sinner, for you do not know whether he has repented and supplicated God with tears." **It was mentioned that St. John the Short**, whenever seeing someone sinning, he would weep bitterly and say, "This man has sinned today, but probably he will repent. However, I may sin tomorrow, and may do not have a chance to repent."

Judging others is God's jurisdiction only. **"Therefore, judge nothing before the time**, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveals the counsels of the hearts, and then each one's praise will come from God." (1 Corinthians 4:5)

3. God commanded us to love one another: The first and greatest commandment is love. What does love do? **Besides the qualities of love that were mentioned, love enlarges the heart, so it may become more enduring. On the contrary, hatred narrows the heart.** St. Paul said, "We, then, who are strong, ought to bear with the scruples of the weak." (Romans 15: 1) "Love endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:7) This is the power that multiplies our endurance and patience, the fire that burns what the devil plants, and the water that waters the holy branches and makes them grow. **Love, in our spiritual life, is like the digestive system. If it is strong, it can digest very easily everything, which is offered to it even if it was hard to digest. However, if it is weak, it cannot tolerate even the easiest kinds to digest. Love is the tasting sense, whereby we can taste the food and pass a judgment. If this sense is sick, it tastes even the delicious food as bitter.**

Love gives and sacrifices, endures and is patient. It does not think evil nor judges others, but is compassionate toward others and gives excuses. It bandages the wounded. Love is God Himself Who said to the adulterous woman, "Neither do I condemn you." (John 8: 11).

James and John wanted that fire come down from heaven to consume the village of Samaria because it rejected to accept the Lord Jesus. Jesus rebuked them saying, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." (Luke 9:55, 56).

St. Peter denied his Master three times, but Jesus did not rebuke him for his denial when He appeared to him by the sea of Tiberias, but rather delivered to him the shepherding of His flock. Is the reward of the denial shepherding of the flock? But this is love, which covers multitudes of sins.

4. God commanded us to be merciful: God commanded us to be merciful when He said, "Blessed are the merciful for they obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7) "Therefore, be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not and you shall not be condemned." (Luke 6:36, 37) Have you noticed the chronological analysis in the previous verse: "Be merciful and do not condemn," for the two are related to each other. Definitely, not judging others is related to being merciful.

We do not speak here about mercy, with its specific meaning, which is alms giving, but with its general meaning, which requires a merciful heart toward all God's creation, even to the animals. In the incident of the disciples plucking the ears of the corn on the Sabbath, Jesus said to those who opposed Him, **"If you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless."** (Matthew 12:7) St. James said, "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment." (James 2:13)

A merciful heart does not judge others nor condemn, but heals the wounded and covers the weaknesses of others.

5. Judgment is for God only: A person who judges his brother robs God of one of His rights, which He had not given to anyone. Hence, here comes the seriousness of the sin of judging and how God is extremely annoyed from those who commit it. St. James wrote, "He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?" (James 4:11, 12) St. Paul also said, "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him (Romans 14:4)

It was mentioned that **St. Isaac El-Tebaysi** judged his brother for a sin that he had committed. When he went outside in the wilderness, an angel appeared to him telling him, "The Lord is telling you where do you want me to throw the soul of your brother you have judged?" Immediately St. Isaac realized his mistake and said, "I have sinned, please forgive me." The angel told him, the Lord has forgiven you, but you have to keep yourself from judging others, for God judges them."

6. To Follow the Example of Jesus Christ Himself: Jesus Christ, who is the Perfect Judge, who has all the judgment and His judgment is just (John 5:22, 30), gave us His life as an example to follow. He did not judge anyone. Even the adulterous woman who was caught in adultery, and the scribes brought her to Jesus to be stoned as Moses commanded them in the Law, Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." (John 8:11) His words were a good practical lesson, which he gave to those who accused her. He said, "He, who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." (John 8:7) He stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger. It was said that He was writing the sins of each one of them. Those who read their sins on the ground, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one. Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. (John 8:3-11) The Lord Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, commenting on this incident, "You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. And yet, if I do judge, My judgment is true." (John 8:15,16)

7. To Follow the Example of the Saints: We read in the history books that our Fathers were very cautious from falling into that sin. They lived following the footsteps of the Lord Jesus and commanded their disciples to do the same. Moreover, the Lord Himself, through visions, used to purify them from this sin.

This story about St. John El-Senai was mentioned in the book of "The paradise of the Monks:"

While I was sitting in the wilderness, one of the monks came to me from the monastery. I asked him, "How are the brothers?" He answered, "Through your prayers, everyone is fine." I asked him, "How is that particular brother, who had a bad reputation?" He answered, "Believe me, my Father, he has not repented yet." Hearing this, I said, with criticism, "Too bad." Then I fell asleep and I saw a vision, as if I am standing in front of the Golgotha and Jesus crucified between two robbers.

I approached to worship the Lord Jesus, but Jesus ordered the angels standing by to put me away saying, "This man has robbed the judgment from Me, and has judged his brother before Me judging him." I tried to escape, but my robe was hooked to the door and the door was closed. I left my robe there. When I woke up, I told my brother, "How bad this day on me!" He asked me, "Why, my Father?" I told him what I have seen saying, "I have lost the robe, which is God's cover to me." Since that day, the Father stayed seven years in the wilderness repenting, fasting and praying. Finally, he saw in a dream the Lord giving him another robe. He rejoiced greatly. Three days after this incident, he departed.

D) CONSEQUENCES OF JUDGING OTHERS

1. Eternal Judgment: The Lord Jesus said, "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you." (Matthew 7:2) St. Paul said, "Do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that will escape the judgment of God?" (Romans 2:3)

2. Falling in the Same Sin: Sometimes, God allows the person, who judges others, to fall in the same sin of the person whom he has judged. St. John El-Daragy said, "**You will fall in whatever you judge your brother.**" He also said, "Whoever looks at his brother's sins and judges him, will fall in the same sins." St. Dorotheos said, "Nothing is worse than judging your brother, for evil will dwell in the person who judges. God's grace will forsake the person who condemns his brother, and he will fall in the same sins."

Story: St. John Casian related this story, which proves this point. He said: It happened that one of the brothers who were tempted, went to one of the elders and revealed his thoughts to him. The elder, who was inexperienced, rebuked him saying, "On what do you trust, since your senses are dirty with all these thoughts? Upon hearing this, the brother became so depressed, lost hope in his salvation, left his cell, and went to the world. It happened that he met another elder called St. Apollo. St. Apollo, seeing the brother very troubled, encouraged him saying, "Do not be in despair, for in spite of my old age, I am still tempted with these thoughts. God's

grace will help you. Go back to your cell." The brother obeyed the elder's advice and went back to his cell.

The wise St. Apollo went to the former elder who discouraged the brother and drove him to despair. St. Apollo stood outside the elder's cell and prayed very fervently to God saying, "Please God, do not lead the young brother into temptation anymore, but let this elder fall into the same temptation to learn a lesson, to feel what the strugglers are going through." Finishing his prayer, he saw the devils tempting the elder. The elder could not stand the temptation and left his cell to go to the world.

St. Apollo met him on the way and asked him about his intention. He was so ashamed to answer. St. Apollo told him, "Go back to your cell. From now on, realize your weakness and know that you have not been tempted yet, for you were not able to struggle for one day. What happened to you today is the result of your behavior with the young brother who was tempted." He then prayed that God might deliver him from that temptation.

3. God's Grace Forsakes us: Since judging others is a result of pride, God often allows to chastise us by forsaking us so we may repent.

It was mentioned that two monks were living in fellowship, and each one was able to see God's grace on the other. On a Friday, one of them saw one of the brothers eating in the morning. He criticized him saying, "Do you eat that early on Friday morning?" The following day, his brother did not see God's grace on his face. He was sad and asked him about what had happened. He answered, "I have not done anything wrong nor thought any bad thoughts." He asked him the second time. Finally he mentioned the story of him criticizing the brother who eats on Friday morning. Immediately, he realized his mistake and repented, then God's grace appeared on his face once more.

4. Falling In Other Kinds of Sins: Along with judging others comes pride, evil thinking, getting mad at others, despising them, unholy jealousy and many other sins which defile the heart.

E) GETTING RID OF THE

SIN OF JUDGING

1. Give Excuses to others: Always give excuse to others' actions, which may appear mistaken instead of judging them. When Joseph's brothers tried to apologize to him, he told

them, "Do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life." (Genesis 45:5)

When you see a person sitting during the Divine Liturgy in the church, do not hurry to judge him that he does not respect the house of God, for maybe he is sick with a hidden disease, although outwardly he may appear healthy and strong.

If one time, a friend answers you rudely, say to yourself, 'Maybe my friend is tired or annoyed. How many are the troubles of life!'

If for the first time you met someone and he talked with you in a loud voice, do not hasten to judge that he is a proud person, but maybe this is his nature.

2. Think of other's virtues: Try to find something good in that person whom you judge. There is no such person who is perfect in all his behavior and the details of his life, and no such person who is evil in all his behavior and deeds. For each person have his good qualities. **If the devil tempts you to judge a person for a specific matter, remember his good qualities, then this temptation will be lessened.**

3. Do not think evil: There are three stages:

(a) If this thought to judge others is due to something you have seen or heard: do not think evil, rather think good. An example about this:

A monk, entering another monk's cell and finding it clean and organized, says to himself, "My brother's heart must be clean and organized." If he enters another monk's cell and finds it not organized, he may say to himself, "My brother must be busy in worship that he does not have time to organize his room."

One of the fathers, seeing his brother wearing poor clothes, praises him. When he sees another one wearing good clothes, he may say, "This person is better than me because he wants to hide his virtues, for he is wearing Christ inwardly."

(b) If this thought to judge others is due to an apparent sin committed by one and you cannot justify it, try to know the causes, not to judge him but have a different feeling. Maybe that person has many virtues and God does not want him to fall in vain glory, therefore, God allowed that he falls in that sin so he may feel his weakness and become more acceptable in the sight of God. Do not forget to pray for that person, realizing that you are a person under sin, "considering yourself lest you also be tempted." (Galatians 6: 1)

(c) If this thought to judge others is due to an apparent sin resulting from a non-penitent heart, raise your heart to God by praying and remember that some who attained high degree of holiness and spirituality, have started very differently. On the other hand, some who started good and attained high degrees in their spiritual lives, have fallen in the middle of the road, but then repented and attained high degrees of repentance. Mix that feeling with being cautious, lest you fall.

4. Avoid listening to talks about judging others: Do not give an opportunity to listen to words of judgment from one person against another if the person judging others is your age and level, rebuke him gently telling him that you have more mistakes and that you do not want to hear. If the speaker is older than you and you cannot rebuke him, then be quiet and do not participate in his judgmental talks. Probably he will feel that you are not agreeable with his talk, then he might quit. Anyway, after these kinds of gatherings, clean your ears from judgmental talks.

5. Remember God is covering your sins: ' When we pray the prayer of thanksgiving and say 'For He has covered us," look at yourself and remember how much God has done for you and has compassion on you and has covered your sins. He did not show all your defects and mistakes to others. St. Mar Isaac said, **“Cover the mistakes of the sinner, without rejecting him, so God's mercy may carry you. Help the weak, encourage the young so that His hand which carries all, may carry you.”**

6. Beware of the sin of generalizing: Sometimes we have a tendency to generalize. If we find a good quality in a person, we may hurry and judge that this person is good. Moreover, we may say that he is very good and that no one is better than him. This is the danger when we consider all the behavior of that person, even the ones that are not related to this quality, must be very good also. The reason is that we cannot imagine that any person whom we admire has a deficiency or even one mistake. The contrary is true. If we see a bad quality in a person, we may hurry and judge that this person is evil. Moreover, we may say that he must be very evil and we cannot imagine that this person has other good qualities.

These are judgments by people who have lost good judgment and they judge others on some behavior, which may be good. They may encounter emotional instability and social ills, which lead them to be introvert, or losing their friends. They may deprive themselves from benefiting from the mistakes of the virtuous people or the virtues of the weak. They may even lose confidence in themselves and their personalities and do not know if they are good or bad, for they feel that there are mistakes inside them beside the virtues. They do not realize that this is the nature of a normal person. The discrimination between a good and a bad person lies in the exceeding of the good over the bad, and the tendency of a person to prefer one over the other, and his continuous struggle to progress and reach toward perfection. The goal is not attaining perfection itself. For this reason, the Holy Bible has mentioned the mistakes of the prophets and the saints.

CHAPTER 10

SOME SINS OF THE TONGUE

"In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise"

(Proverbs 10:19)

- A) Lying**
- B) Swearing (Oaths)**
- C) Gossip, slander and speaking evil**
- D) False witness**
- E) Revilement**
- F) Coarse jesting**
- G) Flattering**
- H) Murmuring**

The sins of the tongue are so numerous that we cannot - as a matter of practicality - cover them as they deserve, since each of them needs a separate research. We try to understand them in a quick manner.

A) LYING

This is when a person speaks contrary to the truth, knowingly.

WHY DO PEOPLE LIE?

(a) **Lying is usually made to hide trespasses and other sins.** After a person commits an evil he resorts to lying to hide his sin and his wrong doing.

(b) **He might resort to lying for a personal gain,** such as avoiding a loss, attracting some gains, or for a certain purpose, ... etc.

(c) **One is pushed to lying by his desire for fun,** as for example what they call "**April Fools Joke**", or the desire to make fun of others, especially if they are weaker than him, less educated or in a lower position, for the purpose of amusing himself.

(d) **One might lie because of a psychological problem** from which he suffers since his early upbringing, which makes him scared, hesitant, and feeling that fear is chasing him in everything he does. Scientists say that lying is among the problems well related to fear. Some researchers see constant lying by children is only created by fear, as its main aim is to protect the self. For such person, a psychological complex may accompany him as he grows older.

(e) **The causes of lying might be other psychological factors,** such as the feeling of inferiority or shyness; or the youth who sits with some frivolous friends who boast of their evil adventures, which makes him imagine and tell about comparable adventures. Or like the youth who grew up in a poor family and mixes in circles of higher social status. So he lies when he speaks about his origin and his family.

(f) Beside those mentioned, the causes of lying might be other subconscious factors, out of a person's hand, which we have no place to examine here.

In any case, whatever the reason for lying, it is evil and sinful, because it does not agree with the law of perfection and love which does not seek its own and does not rejoice in iniquity. It is sufficient that the Lord Jesus was pleased to call Himself "The Truth" (John 14:6). **Because of lying, dealings are mixed with fraud and families are destroyed. It also leads to vain oaths, disputes, quarrels and other kinds of evil.**

DANGER OF LYING

1 - Lying is dangerous because it hides other sins. The 'devil of lying' coordinates lying with other sins, encourages and assists them. When a person does an ugly unacceptable thing, and succeeds in hiding it by lying, he is encouraged to do more evil. It is the custom of the devils after they succeed in trapping a person in a certain sin, that they leave him to the 'devil of lying' to

prepare with him the next plan.

2 - There is strong connection between lying and some of the other sins, such as stealing and fraud. The researchers found out that in the crimes of youngsters in particular, a youngster who lies, usually steals and cheats also, and vice versa. No wonder; these three characteristics have one thing in common; dishonesty. Lying is dishonesty in describing the truth, stealing is dishonesty in regarding the property of others, and cheating is dishonesty in speeches or in deeds in general.

3 - He who lies commits a sin against God Who is "The truth" (John 14:6), **against whom he lies, and against himself** which are born in the image and likeness of God. From the beginning God forbids His people to lie by saying "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another" (Leviticus 19:11).

4 - Lying is not consistent with the new life we have in Jesus Christ. The Apostle says "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds" (Colossians 3:9). When this apostle advised the believers from the Church of Ephesus not to join the Gentiles in their behaviour and to put off, concerning their former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and to put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness, he continued by saying "**Therefore, putting away lying, Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour, for we are members of one another**" (Ephesians 4:22-25). We notice here that the advice of the apostle concerning lying came on the top of his advice about other vices which followed; anger, wrath, stealing, bitterness, blasphemy, and malice (see Ephesians 4:26-31). This indicates that lying is the source of many other vices. It is worthwhile for the believer to get rid of the sin of lying before any other vice.

5 - To show the seriousness and danger of lying, it is enough to know that lying is related to the devil, even is considered a son of his. The Lord announced that to us about the devil by saying "For he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). The Wise also showed how does God loathes lying by saying "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight" (Proverbs 12:22). On the contrary to that is "truth" which is one of the characters of God. The Lord said by prophet Isaiah "I, the Lord, speak righteousness, I declare things that are right" (Isaiah 45:19). In the Book of Revelation, John said about Him "The Faithful and True Witness" (Revelation 3:14).

IS THERE ANY JUSTIFICATION FOR LYING?

There is no justification for lying. Lying is an absolute evil and it does not agree with the good nature of God. There is no acceptable lying and unacceptable lying. **Christianity does not qualify different kinds of lying! There is no white lying as some imagine.** We, as children of God Who "Wished and born us by the Word of Truth" ought to behave in the truth.

There is no justification **for lying no matter how the reason seems straight or holy. Under no circumstances, as some imagine, that the aim justifies the means.** A commandment is not kept by breaking another commandment.

Some one may ask "If my lying will save the life or the future of a person, for example, is it not acceptable in this case?" The answer to this question is "No". Lying is wrong, and the person who cannot find a means for saving the life of another person except by lying, does two deeds at the same time, one is good and the other is evil. We might excuse him by saying that he was not in full control of his senses, and he had good intentions. In spite of all that, lying is wrong, while the reasons for lying lessen the liar's responsibility and intervene for him.

Experience showed that any problem solved by means of lying, has a momentary solution, which will soon result in other errors. Besides, this will be on the expense of the welfare of others. To explain this point, we present the following actual case:

"A mother went to the principal of the high school of her son complaining of the lack of discipline in the class room which is harming her son who could not absorb his subjects. The principal called her son and confronted him with the complaint of his mother and asked him to name the students who disrupt the class. The son out of hand, named three of his colleagues. The principal called them to his office and asked one of them if he smokes. The student denied, though he was actually a smoker. The principal asked one of the teachers - who was present - to examine and smell the student's fingers. But out of pity to the student - who was previously kicked out from another school because of bad conduct - the teacher answered with the negative. The matter ended, may be, by an advice or with a light punishment. The end result is that the disrupting student continued disrupting the class.

We see here that the teacher did harm to the disrupting student himself, because the lying of the teacher encouraged him to continue his bad conduct, because of which he was kicked out of a previous school. The teacher also did harm to himself by not being truthful and committed a sin. He did harm to the truth itself by hiding it. Besides, he did harm indirectly to others, such as to the family of the complaining mother who did not want her son to be a failure, to the families of the rest of the students, for wasted time and the lack of expected gain in the class room, and to the whole society as a result of an irresponsible member in it. The teacher should have said the truth, and the disrupting student should have carried the punishment, as this is better for him and for others. We do not think that by his behaviour, the teacher has solved the problem of this student and of forty others in his class.

All truthful people found out that the string of lying is short and it does not lead except to a temporary solution, if any. But truth rescues from eternal punishment first, and in most cases, from the evil in the world, or at least reduces the punishment.

We do not deny that there are very critical circumstances which require the literal untruth, and lots of wisdom, eloquence, and consideration. As an example to that, a doctor who is treating a patient in a late state. What will be the answer of the doctor, if he is asked by the patient about his health? Definitely, the doctor could not give a frank answer, as it may harm the patient even more. The duty of the doctor is to calm the patient in order to help him to recover, and calming the patient is part of the treatment. In this case, the doctor should be courteous in his answer, in such a way as not to lie and not to harm the patient by saying the truth. What we mentioned here may be an example for similar situations.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED LYING?

Intentional exaggeration in speech is considered lying as well as not being exact. This - while considered lying - is also a complex sin because it has another aspect, depending upon the aim for which it is said. As an example, the case of a person who exaggerates for the purpose of bragging, boasting and pride, or who exaggerates to cause harm and hurt to others.

Intended unclear, or twisted talk for the purpose of giving untrue information, is also considered lying.

Some dress lying in another robe, in order not to appear obvious, and think they are wise or clever, This and similar behaviours are nothing but lying.

PUNISHMENT FOR LYING:

1 - Timely Punishment:

(a) **No matter how clever the liar is, he will be discovered,** even when he succeeds time and time again. God Himself said "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known" (Matthew 10:26), and He "Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:5), uncovers him and shows his lying. If lying is the devil's work, and if the Lord had said "Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops" (Luke 12:3), the liar and his lying will not abide. The Wise said "The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment" (Proverbs 12:19).

(b) The natural result on discovering the liar, is that he loses **the regard of people, their respect and their trust of him and his talk.** As a result of his previous reputation, all what he says is doubted and is put on the scale in front of God before believing and accepting it, even when he speaks the truth and the fact.

(c) Discovering liars and what follows as a result of losing the trust and respect of others to them, is considered a social punishment they brought on themselves. **Yet they also acquire a material loss.** Consider Gehazi who lied to his master Elisha, extracted the leprosy of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5:20-27). And Ananias and his wife Sapphira who lied to the Apostles, fell down at once and died after Ananias heard the rebuke of St. Peter "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit ... You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3-10).

2 - Eternal Punishment

The liars are not only punished in this present life, but also in the life to come. David the prophet said "You shall destroy those who speak falsehood" (Psalm 5:6). The Wise Solomon said "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape" (Proverbs 19:5). John who scribed to us about the life to come told us in the Book of Revelation what will happen to

the liars, said "**All liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone**" (Revelation 21:8). The rest of this verse is that the liars will be in one lake with the unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, and the idolaters!!

TREATMENT FOR LYING

* When we reviewed the causes of lying, we mentioned many different causes, and to deal with lying, we need a special treatment for each of these causes.

* The matter needs **mental convincing of the ugliness of lying**, by which one hurts himself, and brings contempt to her when his lying is discovered. Even more than that, others are not willing to believe him because of his frequent lying, because he is a "liar".

* The matter also needs **mental convincing of the worthlessness of lying**, when used to save one's self. All truthful people experienced that lying is short-lived and it only leads to a temporary rescue, if any. But truth gives a permanent rescue - and at least reduces the timely punishment, and entirely rescues from eternal punishment.

* Lying which is caused by fear, needs courage of the heart resulting from the belief of the person in his Creator "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him" (Psalm 91:14-15). We should accept with clear conscience any loss we encounter because of saying the truth. We know that the wicked enemy threatens us with encountering losses if we say the truth. But if we get hold of our God and of our truth, the enemy vanishes from in front of us, and his threats exist no more.

We ought to imitate the three young men Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego who answered the king, with great courage, when he threatened to throw them in the burning furnace if they do not deny their God. They said "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18).

* **In general, lying needs in its treatment to true repentance and a holy life with the Lord.** We said that lying comes as a second step to covering and hiding a sin one committed. Thus when we live an acceptable life with God, we strive to get rid of our trespasses, and we need not refuge to lying in order to hide them!

When one lives the life of the Spirit, he becomes - if he weakens or falls in sin - ready to admit it, confesses it, and apologizes to whom he trespassed and erred against. He would even be ready - with good conscience - to accept the punishment he deserves. With this holy life, one rises above enmity and hatred, and his love and affection expands to all people, and he is no more delighted to hurt them.

* Lastly, lying which is caused by psychological reasons - as we previously mentioned - is treated by confession and by living in a holy spiritual atmospheres, either by the help of a spiritual father - if this is at all possible - or by psychological specialists.

DUTIES OF THE TEACHERS:

There is an important duty for teachers concerning the subject of lying and the sins of the tongue in general. By teachers we mean parents, religious or secular teachers, brothers or counsellors. Scientists say that if a child grows up in an atmosphere which respects the truth by words and deeds, naturally, he will grow up truthful in his sayings and in his deeds. That is beside other factors which are needed for his physical emotions for security, freedom, respect, love, feeling of success, and getting good counselling and guidance. **If all these factors exist, he does not need to substitute for a deficiency, or aim for any cruelty, or revenge, or any such means which finds in lying suitable forms to express them.**

B) SWEARING (OATHS)

Swearing or the Oath, as is known by the theologians, is calling the name of God as a witness, on either the truth of a saying, or registration of a promise. **Using names other than the name of God is also considered swearing**, as St. James says "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth **or with any other oath**. But **let your "Yes", be "Yes", and your "No", "No"**, lest you fall into judgment" (James 5:12).

REASONS FOR SWEARING:

- (a) To confirm the truth of what one is saying.

(b) To show one's innocence of an error or an accusation related to him.

(c) As a habit for any trivial reason, and sometimes for no reason.

WHY SHOULD WE REFRAIN FROM SWEARING?

(a) If swearing is calling the name of God as a witness, **it is a disregard of the Great Name to be called for witness of truth or of lying.** God forbids swearing completely by saying "But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your "Yes" be "Yes", and your "No", "No". For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matthew 5:34-37).

Before saying these verses about swearing, the Lord Jesus said "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord". But I say to you, do not swear at all ... "(Matthew 5:33, 34). That is, after the Lord Jesus pointed to what was the custom, He gave the commandment to forbid swearing in any form and for any reason. St. John Chrysostom said in this meaning "If you ask: what harm will occur from swearing out of necessity?, I answer you: There is no iniquity on the unbeliever. But when the law is broken, there is no regard for the necessity. The necessity is one thing which is, one should not be an enemy to God".

(b) Notice the saying of the Lord "For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matthew 5:37), which is from the devil. St. James confirms this meaning by saying "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ""Yes", be "Yes", and your "No", "No", lest you fall into judgement" (James 5:12). The Wise Ben Sirach also said "Do not inure your mouth to oaths or make a habit of naming the Holy One" (Sirach 23:9).

(c) We should not swear, because we do not own the object we swear by. I do not own myself that I swear by, I do not own one hair in my head, and I cannot change its colour, so I should not swear by my head. But if the Lord had sworn by Himself at some times in the Old Testament (Genesis 22:16, Isaiah 45:23), it is because He owns Himself. While God owns Himself and may swear by Himself, He did not want, in any of the four testaments, that the Lord Jesus - Who is God appearing in the flesh - to swear at all. But when He wanted to confirm an important matter, He used to say "Most assuredly, I say to you ... " (John 3:3), which is believe Me, or I am telling you the truth.

When the Lord Jesus gave us the commandment not to swear, He gave it as an absolute commandment in strict words which have only one meaning. For this reason, one should not swear by God, by the saints and martyrs, nor by any other matter or place.

(d) It is feared that if we allow ourselves to swear, that one swears in a state of anger or for a state of exaltation, ..., and when that cause no more exists, one finds himself bound by the swearing,

and the devil keeps after him, and inflames him until he finishes it. This is what happened with king Herod, when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. "Therefore he **promised with an oath** to give her whatever she might ask". So when she asked for John the Baptist's head on a platter, the king was sorry; nevertheless, **because of the oaths** and because of those who sat with him, he commanded it to be given to her. "So he sent and had John beheaded in prison" (Matthew 14:6-10).

SWEARING AS A MATTER OF HABIT

For some people, swearing has become a habit of speech. They do that without thinking, as they confirm their sayings by the name of God, while they do not mean that. Without doubt, this is a saddening sin which renders all the meanings of sin. Mentioning the name of God as a habit for the purpose of swearing, shows a slack conscience, wide enough to do all kinds of offences, since a clear conscience does not allow committing offenses.

REPERCUSSIONS OF SWEARING:

1 - Those who are accustomed to swear harm themselves without knowing it, since nobody believes them as compared to a person who is known to be truthful without swearing. The respect of a person to God's commandment not to swear, gives others an idea of this person's piety, and make them believe him. **St. John El-Assuity said "Continuous swearing is truly lying and the speech without swearing is full of truth".**

2 - The Lord God has a great revenge on those who have disrespect to His Holy name and His honor. Prophet Zechariah said "Then I turned and raised my eyes, and saw there a flying scroll. And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I answered, "I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits and its width ten cubits". Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth: Every thief shall be expelled, according to this side of the scroll; and, **Every perjurer shall be expelled, according to that side of it.** I will send out the curse, says the Lord of hosts"; It shall enter the house of the thief **and the house of the one who swears** falsely by My name. It shall remain in the midst of his house and consume it, with its timber and stones"" (Zechariah 5:1-4).

Ben Sirach also said "**A man given to swearing is lawless to the core**" (Sirach 23:11). King Belshazzar drank from the vessels of the Lord, and God punished him greatly (Daniel 5:22-27). This will happen to any one who chews the name of God in his mouth, like Belshazzar. For this, the Apostle said "The name of God is blasphemed because of you" (Romans 2:24).

TREATMENT OF SWEARING:

1 - Those who swear to confirm lies, commit a double sin. Naturally, they cannot stop swearing before they stop lying, which pushes them to swearing.

2 - If swearing is for others to believe us, we are not bound to do that; let God convince them of the truth of our speech and of our innocence, no doubt He will do. In dealing with each problem in our life which requires breaking of a commandment of God, one should look to God on one side and to sin on the other side, and balance between them, remembering the divine saying "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

3 - If swearing is to make others believe us, because of the bad opinion they have about us from our bad past, then if we have left our past life - with it's lying - in this case we also let God work on our behalf, and time will show our new life. The person you talk to, might not believe you, once, twice and three times, but he will believe you at the end.

4 - But those who are accustomed to swear for a trivial reason, or for no reason at all, they should be convinced of the magnitude of this sin, and should have daily exercises to get rid of it, and no doubt they will. St. John Chrysostom points to a strict exercise for those who are accustomed to swear and says "When you watch yourself, one of your servants, or your children, have the habit of swearing with definite oaths, do not give him any food. Do that with yourself as well, if you are accustomed to swear. When the bold tongue is disciplined, it does not dare to swear later on, because the pains of hunger makes it refrain from doing it". He also says "Deal with your friends and your house hold, because when the tongue is disciplined, it runs away from swearing as it runs away from bitterness".

They should also ask for the grace of God in every prayer, to get rid of this habit. They should also try to use words such as "believe me", to replace their swearing.

C) GOSSIP, SLANDER AND SPEAKING EVIL

These three sins have many similarities and aim nearly at the same thing. Gossip is a speech for the purpose of tale bearing and is said as rumour to harm, slander is mentioning the bad characters of a person in his absence, and speaking evil is the opposite of speaking good. Their aim is distorting the reputations of people in front of others trying to destroy their lives socially. Those who commit such sins fit the description of the Wise "An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire (Proverbs 16:27).

CAUSES OF THESE SINS:

As we explained, these sins result from the thoughts of condemnation, hate or envy, and in turn these are derived from pride and lack of love.

THEIR SERIOUSNESS:

1 - God hates these sins and detests those who commit them, because behind them hide

other sins such as pride, hostility, bitterness and envy. God forbids them by saying "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbour" (Leviticus 19:16). And when God started to count the sins of Jerusalem by prophet Ezekiel, He said "In you are men **who slander** to cause bloodshed" (Ezekiel 22:9). About gossip, prophet David said "**He who does not backbite with his tongue**, nor does evil to his neighbour, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; He who does these things shall never be moved" (Psalm 15:1-5). About slander he said "I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me. I will not know wickedness. **Whoever secretly slanders his neighbour, him I will destroy**; the one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure" (Psalm 101:3-5), and about speaking evil, St. James says "**Do not speak evil** of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law" (James 4:11).

The four gospels told us very little about the teaching of John the Baptist "born before the Lord and the greatest among those born by women". Yet this very little includes teaching against these sins, indicating their seriousness. Responding to the question of the two soldiers he said "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely" (Luke 3:14). Ben Sirach said also "Do not get a name for being a gossip or lay traps with your tongue" (Sirach 5:14).

The Lord hates these sins to the extent that He uncovers them and quickly proves the innocence of those who they are committed against. It happened when the Lord was casting out a demon from a dumb man that some Jews said about Him "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" (Luke 11:15), but immediately a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" (Luke 11:27).

2 - People also hate these sins which destroy others and their homes, and plant hatred and strife between friends and cause trouble among them. For this the Wise said "A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends" (Proverbs 16:28) and said "Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases" (Proverbs 26:20). People consider these sins worse than stealing. A thief steals material things which can be replaced, but a person who gossips deprives others their reputations and their honor, which cannot be brought back with money, as the Wise says "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches" (Proverbs 22:1).

3 - What increases their seriousness, is their mismatch to the new life which a man lives after the Divine Grace touches his heart. Listen to Zacchaeus the tax collector saying to the Lord Jesus "Look, Lord, ... and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold". The Lord's answer to him was "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:8, 9).

4 - The person committing these sins harm himself more than he harms others. His evil to the innocent will be uncovered by God. This evil will hunt him, and he will be the only one with a bad reputation. Prophet David said "Let not a slanderer be established in the earth" (Psalm 140:11). He is like a person who cleans the wick of a candle or of a gas lamp. He dirties his fingers, yet their lights increase in strength and brightness. Soon people will be disgusted with him and guard themselves against him to avoid the harm his tongue did to others.

SAINTS AND THESE SINS:

Because of the ugliness and seriousness of these sins, the Lord commanded us not to associate or mix with those who commit them as the Wise says "He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips" (Proverbs 20:19). The saintly fathers confirmed that in their advice. A father counselling his disciples said "The tongue of a snake is lighter than the tongue of the devil, as the latter causes chaos and fights between the brethren, develops uproar and evil among peaceful people, and divides the assembly of many. The tongue of the person who gossips does not differ from the tongue of a serpent. It is better to live with a serpent and a scorpion than to live with a person with a gossiping tongue.

Now, I advise you to flee away fast from the gossip, even if he is an ascetic, a hermit, or a striving person. If your father or brother gossips leave him, as it is better to live with a lion and a lioness than to live with a gossip. Do not be reluctant to flee from him, else he kills you with his poison which is sin.

The saintly fathers advised us also that if we gather in one place with a person who starts to speak evil about others, that we do not go along with him, and be not timid, but divert the talk to a useful matter, or show our reluctance to hear such talk. **St. Macarius the Great said "Guard your hearing from the words of gossip, in order for your hearts to be pure"**.

D) FALSE WITNESS

This is a multiple sin as it constitutes lying and vain swearing. It might also be against love when it aims to harm one of the two conflicting sides. That is by hiding facts and hushing them from the judges or the jury to give a wrong and unjust verdict. The rights of one of the sides will be lost and may be his honor and reputation as well.

GOD AND FALSE WITNESS

God made a special command concerning false witness, which is the ninth of the ten commandments. He said "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour" (Exodus 20:16). God is "Truth" and "Love" and those who bear false witness resist and distort the truth, work against the law of love, and assist in the spread of injustice and increase the prospect of deceit. No wonder that we see the divine response warns us greatly from falling into this sin by saying "**Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness**" (Exodus 23:1). God also in the past commanded to punish the bearer of false witness to do to him as he thought to have done to his brother (Deuteronomy 19:16-19). The Wise said "**A false witness will not go unpunished, and he**

who speaks lies will not escape" (Proverbs 19:5).

OUR DUTY TOWARDS FALSE WITNESS:

A person who is asked to bear witness, usually has many emotional feelings, specially if justifying a condemned man depends on his witness, and meanwhile no harm will be caused to another person - or at least that is what he believes. However, a bearer of false witness should realise that by his sin he commits many other sins:

(1) **Against himself**, as he commits a deed which is an abomination to God, as the Wise says "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 17:15).

(2) **Against the person to whom he falsely bears witness, for his benefit**, as the punishment which he would receive in this life is going to save him from the eternal punishment.

(3) **Against God Who gave this command**. We are supposed to give proof of our love to God as children who submit to Him by keeping His commandments, regardless of any other factor "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

*** When somebody is requested to witness in a certain case, he should give a true witness and free himself from all other considerations, regardless of all circumstances.** Mercy and love are two divine commandments, and also bearing witness to the truth is a divine commandment. How do we then fulfil the first commandment by breaking the second one?!

* Perhaps the required witness is to decide upon a dispute between two people, or between an actual personality and an abstract one (such as a government department, an organisation or a company for example). The person may be encouraged to give false witness in the latter case, the fact that no harm will come to another person. **But we restate that a commandment is a commandment, and keeping it is the sign of love to God.**

* A person may be requested to witness in a court case, the outcome of which will affect the future of a person he knows, such as the firing of this man from his job, putting him in prison, or some severe harm. We should not think about the outcome of the court case, as the goal does not justify the means. But the goal should be good and holy and the means also, and we should be honest in giving our witness. As for the feelings of love, affection and mercy, God is more loving to this person and more affectionate. If we are sure of the innocence of this person, we should give a witness worthy of truth and honesty.

* If you were ever moved to bear a false witness - even for a good purpose - remember the two persons who gave false witness against the Lord Jesus in front of Caiaphas the high priest, and He was sentenced to death because of their witness (Matthew 26:60, 61).

E) REVILEMENT

Castigation is an insult said to a person's face, and results from anger moved by wrath, jealousy or hatred, or even from a distorted religious zeal.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT BEING REVILED?

Some ask about what to do when we are reviled, and say "what about reviling for the purpose of scaring or chastising? Should parents apply castigation with their children, teachers with their students, bosses with their employees, masters with their servants?".

1 - When We Are Reviled:

For building our spiritual lives, there is no better way than to look unto the Lord Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), upon Whom St. Peter said "**Who (Jesus) when He was reviled, did not revile in return;** when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). We should not answer back those who revile us in similar words. The Lord taught us to bless those who curse us, and pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us (Matthew 5:44). St. Paul said "Bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:14), and St. Peter said "**Not returning** evil for evil **or reviling for reviling**, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9).

It happened in the past that Shimei the son of Gera started cursing continuously the prophet David who was also the king of Israel, and he threw stones at David and at all the servants of king David. One of the king's people wanted to kill this reviling man. But David - and he was a king - said in complete meekness "So let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, "Curse David". Who then shall say, "Why have you done so?" It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day" (2 Samuel 16:5-12). The book 'The Paradise of the Monks' tells us about a striving noble brother who was reviled by a man whose reputation was not good. This noble brother answered this man by saying "**I am able to answer you according to your speech, but the law of my Lord shuts my mouth**".

Bearing unjust criticism and not answering back in the same way creates humility in the soul, by which man is worthy of many graces. For this St. Paul said "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, ... for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

2 - Reviling:

If we are required that no corrupt word proceeds out of our mouth (Ephesians 4:29),

how can a man revile his brother who is in the image of God!" The person you revile, whether he is working for you or a servant, is a human being like you created in the image of God. The tongue with which we pray and bless God the Father is not suited to be used to curse the people and revile them. In this St. James said "My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?" (James 3:10, 11).

This is our position as Christians who are called to a holy life and "to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4). We never read about the Lord Jesus - when He was in the flesh and was subject to and withstood many insults - that He reviled and that any unsuitable word came out of His Holy Mouth "**He was oppressed, yet He opened not His mouth**" (Isaiah 53:7).

Therefore there is no justification for disparaging anyone, even for the purpose of scaring or chastising youngsters. A reviling word cannot come out from a good man - neither forged nor deliberate - for "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). Moreover, reviling is not a means of scaring or chastising, and reviling people are responsible in front of God for giving themselves as examples to their children, to their subordinates and to their servants. This does not mean that we refrain from using expressions to exhort and rebuke. The apostle Paul said to his disciple Timothy "Rebuke, exhort" (2 Timothy 4:2). This is totally different from the words of reviling.

Some may think that in certain jobs they occupy, their workers do not give good production without reviling them and scaring them. Hence they are obliged to do so. This is contrary to reality, because criticizing is not good for building healthy personalities. Besides, there are better ways and means for exhorting careless employees. Perhaps, correct counsel and showing kindness are enough to embarrass the inattentive and careless, and encourage them.

TREATMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Psychological persuasion is needed to show its wickedness, ugliness and bad effect and one needs to pursue a good spiritual life to overcome it.

This type of berating mostly results from angry emotion, which when met with corresponding emotion, increases the differences and gap between the reviling parties. It is like fire which intensifies more as it is supplied with new fuel. When you are faced with violent criticism, meet it with modesty and calm, which are like water which extinguishes a blazing fire. Imitate your Master and "Quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one" (Ephesians 6:16). We know from the words of the Wise that "**A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger**" (Proverbs 15:1). Apostle Paul also teaches us, not to be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21). If you can control yourself in an insulting situation, or when a curse is directed at you, do not disdain yourself or consider that as weakness and humiliation, but rather as strength and victory. The Wise says "**He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city**" (Proverbs 16:32).

As we mentioned, **the treatment of this problem needs an overall spiritual life.** Reviling

is not an isolated sin, or it would be easy to combat. But it expresses other sins such as anger which in turn shows an inner evil inside the person, such as hatred, envy and hostility, ... , and these result from the lack of love. Hence we should treat the illness from its root.

If reviling is used as a habit of the tongue, and comes out during common conversation, then the matter requires the person to be diligent and give account of himself in the evening of every day, as a kind of exercise to control his tongue against this sin. That is if he is striving for a holy spiritual life.

REVILING AS A HABIT:

We notice that for some people, this type of abuse runs like water from their tongue. It is more serious, when the person does not mean what the word intends. One may intend to praise others by his joking revilement, and another during ordinary conversation as a sign of his accord with them!! What we have said about swearing which some do as a matter of habit, we here repeat and say that he who lets revilement come from his tongue without thinking, has a rotten conscience, and has to be waken up and be diligent and sensitive.

Prayers and supplications concerning this matter are means to help get rid of this sin, in order that God may give His needed help. The person who is defeated in this sin should study the situations in which he commits this sin, in order to be careful in such circumstances. For example, he notices that he swears when he jokes with his brethren, or when they joke with him by cursing, and he does the same. Hence he should be specially careful in such situations. No doubt, by giving account of himself and training, at the end - by the grace of God - he will get rid of swearing and replace it with good words.

THE END OF THE REVILERS:

Dear brother, do not belittle reviling and consider it a trivial matter, as it does not seem in our eyes as serious. But St. Paul speaking to the believers of the Church of Corinth, warned us not to keep company with a reviler "**Do not to keep company** with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner-- **not even to eat with such a person**" (1 Corinthians 5:11).

The Holy Bible draws to us a horrifying picture to the end of the revilers in the life to come. Our teacher St. Paul says "Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, **nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God**" (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). Let us then look carefully at the bitter end of reviling, and not belittle it. Who commit it are counted among the adulterers, idolaters, and the committers of the ugly shameful sins ... !!, and they all have no inheritance in the everlasting kingdom of Christ.

F) COARSE JESTING

* As a means of vain entertainment and by jesting, one debase himself with ugly expressions, dirty jokes, telling tales and stumbling stories, and singing cheap songs.

* Jokers think that joking and what it contains of unsuitable coarse jesting, is nothing but a means of passing time and entertainment. But this is not the way for the children of God who live by the Spirit and for the Spirit, and also rejoice in the Spirit. Our route is the route of grace and salvation, and our entertainment is in the fellowship with the Beloved and His loved ones, as the Apostle said "If there is any comfort of love" (Philippians 2:1).

* Course jesting is encompassed under bad speech which does not suit our lives as the children of God. The Lord taught us that every idle word we say, we will give account of in the day of judgment (Matthew 12:36). And the Apostle commanded us by saying "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, **filthy language out of your mouth**" (Colossians 3:8).

* We should not be satisfied by just not speaking course filthy jesting, but also we should not sit in the council of the scornful. In the opening of his psalms, the Psalmist blessed those who do not sit in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1). Prophet Jeremiah affirmed the same meaning by saying "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts. **I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, nor did I rejoice**" (Jeremiah 15:16, 17).

* Jokers think that they alone are the happy people with their jokes and jests, and they describe others who do not share their jests and trash, as rigid and backward. Sometimes, some young men weaken when they are described by such names, and go along with their colleagues in this behaviour. But let these young men and those jokers hear the words of the Lord Himself "**Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep**" (Luke 6:26). Let them also hear the words of St. Paul "Let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; **neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting**" (Ephesians 5:3, 4), but the joy of the children of God is a deep hearty joy, which the Apostle describes as "Inexpressible and full of

glory" (1 Peter 1:8).

* The person who has the habit of joking and coarse jesting, think that as people respond to him, they describe him as 'light hearted' and like him. But let this miserable person know that people between themselves describe him as 'light minded'!

* **Excessive joking and coarse jesting are bound to extinguish the heat of the spirit,** even when the joking is innocent and use totally innocent words. It does to the heat of the spirit and the warmth of the heart what water does to the flaming fire. **St. John El-Dargy says "Joking eliminates the reverence, disperses the mind, spoils formality, abolishes the heat and distorts prayers".**

* **We wish to attract the attention of some ministers who use the means of exciting laughing during their teachings or preaching in order to gain the love of those they minister to,** thinking that this makes a good introduction to their speech. They think in the spirit of the world that those ministered to, would not be repelled by their teaching or preaching. Let those ministers know that our preaching and service aim for the repentance of those who hear us. Repentance, never result from laughing but from our feeling of regret for our sins and the lukewarmness of our love to God. That is besides what results from the lack of regard to the houses of God and the reverence to His words, and also familiarizing the believers with them.

* What we said does not mean that a person should appear miserable and sad within himself, and heavy handed in his dealings with others. St. Paul commanded us to "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4), and to "Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering" (Colossians 3:12).

* **Along with coarse jesting goes mocking expressions which some love to say to others for entertainment sake - not to entertain those they mock but to entertain themselves!** They mock for example, a person who is weak, poor, disabled, blind, deaf, mad, or ugly looking. In the past God warned His people from such sin and said "You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:14). Perhaps some people are created in this image which you mock. Is not your mocking in these cases considered a reproach to God? The Wise said "He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker" (Proverbs 17:5). And Isaiah said "Now therefore, do not be mockers, lest your bonds be made strong" (Isaiah 28:22).

* Mocking offends the feelings of our brothers who are weak, poor or disabled, and this is against the law of love which teaches us "For we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25), and which asks that the strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves (Romans 15:1). It is also against the spirit of Christian humility which prevents me from insulting others, despising them, or even being haughty over them.

* Finally we wish to mention an important point; we are in need to be diligent in our words and in our dealings. Some people are accustomed to use expressions - which do not agree with perfect Christianity - for joking, and they do not feel that they are wrong. Such people need to

reconsider what they are accustomed to say in words and of expressions.

G) FLATTERING

* This is one more sin of the tongue which some use to get what they want. In doing that, they flatter the rich, the great and those with authority, and they cling in their praises even when it is opposite to what they believe in their hearts and conscience.

* Flattering is a sin, because it is against frankness and against the truth. The Lord Jesus never flattered anybody. Also His predecessor John the Baptist did not delay in rebuking Herod for taking the wife of his brother to be his wife, and preferred to die as a martyr than to cover-up the truth (Matthew 14:1-12). The apostle Paul warned us of this sin by saying "Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words" (Colossians 2:4).

* **Flattering leads to hypocrisy, for which** Jesus kept wooing the scribes and the Pharisees (see Matthew chapter 23). The hypocrite imitates Judas Iscariot who came to deliver his Master to the enemies. He showed dishonest love that he went to kiss Jesus saying to Him "Greetings, Rabbi!" (Matthew 26:49).

* The Lord - Who is the Truth itself - hates this sin, because it is against the fact and the truth. It also implies lying, as it does not express reality. Prophet David said "They speak idly everyone with his neighbour; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things" (Psalms 12:2, 3).

* Agreeing with others on their wrong opinions and their bad speech (such as scorning people), in order to keep their friendship and the fear of offending them, knowing that what they say is wrong and against what we believe, is also considered flattering. Truth is truth, and Truth is Jesus Himself. Put this fact in front of your eyes, so that you should not laud a person, and keep his friendship, while you offend the Lord.

* Avoiding flattering, does not mean to be dry and coarse in our dealings and our talks with our superiors and influential people, and that our speech should come out empty of the spirit of gentleness and courtesy. We should be gentle with all, rendering honor to whom honor due (Romans 13:7), denying ourselves. But at the same time, we withhold the truth which pleases God

and which satisfies our conscience.

H) MURMURING

MURMURING COMES OUT FROM UNHEALTHY SOULS

Words of wrath express what is inside the heart due to gloom and unhappiness. We here ask: does a person speak the words of wrath as a result of his disgust with rotten matter around him, and he uses that to reflect his own bitter sick soul?!

If the soul is healthy and it encounters a rotten matter, it chooses one of two things routes:

In the first route, it tries to find out the good points in this matter. Such as to find out some good characteristics in a troublesome person, and based on these good sides starts to collaborate with him. The Bible says "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness" (Matthew 6:22, 23), and also "To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled" (Titus 1:15).

The second route is to be kind to the weak person and find out an excuse for him, then his weakness would not disgust you, but rather make you compassionate and extend your hand to help him. Perhaps this is what the poet means when he says:

The accepting eye does not see shameful matters,
but the eye of wrath shows the errors.

If a man sees some disorder in his own house, with simple eyes, he goes to help the workers, and puts things in order. But if he looks for the defects with critical eyes and with anger, the defects would seem big in his eyes, and other things also would look defective, and he might start to rebuke and blame others for that. The eyes of the children of God are the eyes of love and kindness. They look to the good sides of people, are compassionate and help them in their weaknesses. They do that quietly and lovingly, as the Book says "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, ... Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1, 2).

The healthy loving soul expresses its criticism with words full of kindness and encouragement to correct the errors. It does not speak the words of wrath or murmuring, imitating the Lord of Glory. **In most cases wrath expresses what is inside the soul out of bitterness, resulting from its own troubles. It expresses murmuring with strong expressions, heavy criticism and rotten words.**

It happened that the Corinthians criticised apostle Paul, accused him falsely and complained against him. Paul however, worked hard to correct what was evil in them, until he succeeded. In

describing their case, he said "O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, **but you are restricted by your own affections. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open**" (2 Corinthians 6:11-13). This shows that their murmuring was not because of an outside defect but from themselves.

MURMURING LEADS TO OTHER SINS:

Murmuring leads the murmurer to hate the others, and use bad and unjustified words, which in turn spoils the atmosphere of understanding and creates an atmosphere of turmoil. Moreover, the murmurer lets the feelings of pride, jealousy and partiality get hold of him. In this, the Apostle says to the Corinthians also "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbiting, whisperings, conceits, tumults" (2 Corinthians 12:20).

The murmurer pulls himself to blaspheme against God. As he sees the blessings of God through dark glasses, he does not thank but blasphemes. As he does not understand the wisdom of God in any issue, he does not do as St. Paul did when he shouted saying "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor?" (Romans 11:33, 34). He rather blasphemes on God as the children of Israel did after they went out of Egypt and reached the borders of Canaan. They sent spies to study the land of Canaan who came back carrying samples of the goods of the land. They did not thank God Who helped them and fulfilled His promises to them and to their fathers, but forgot every thing. They forgot the support of God against strong nations which resisted them. They started to speak against God, and decided to go back to Egypt; the land of slavery and idol worshipping. That, for them was better than moving to the land of freedom and worshipping the Holy God. God was very angry with them and decided that none of them would enter the promised land, but that all will die in the wilderness. Only the new generation, born in the wilderness, whose mind was not contaminated by idol worshipping, will enter Canaan (see Book of Numbers, chapters 13 and 14),

To guard against this spirit, apostle Paul says "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31). It is clear that this verse carefully distinguishes between the different issues which the tongue expresses as a result of the bitterness in the heart, such as anger, shouting and blasphemy. The same Apostle says in his epistle to the Colossians "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth" (Colossians 3:8).