



Excerpts From the book "The Way to Virtue"

From the teachings of Father Meena the Recluse (Pope Kyrillos VI) Concerning Virtue

Father Meena said, "My son, rest assured that the principle of the way to virtue resides in forcing oneself in every work done. Thus, one would receive hidden supporting grace that assists along the way; because the kingdom, as the Holy Spirit asserts, *"The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it..."* (Luke 16:16)."

As a starting point on the way to virtue, Father Meena has confirmed the need for striving and extending oneself in learning and keeping the commands of God.

Whoever wants to enter through the narrow gate must relinquish his bags and belongings and squeeze himself because the gate to eternal life is narrow and one must get rid of his desires and disobey his lustful inclinations.

The dual direction of striving along the way to the kingdom:

1. Forcing oneself to overcome one's lustful desires that oppose God's commandments. As Son of Sirach has said *"Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites. If you allow your soul to take pleasure in base desire, it will make you the laughingstock of your enemies."* (Sirach 18:30,31). St. Paul affirms, *"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish"* (Galatians 5:17).
2. Usurping the kingdom of heaven by not listening to the suggestions of the opposing enemies who adorn the road to evil. *"And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force"* (Matthew 11:12).

Father Meena Specifies the Points that Lead to Self-sacrifice

"force yourself into praying the midnight prayers and psalms and continue in that practice. Respect reading and practice it often; for it is the source of good prayers."

In order to be able to do that, fix time for your prayers. Do not leave it to opportunities because life duties and concerns will steal away all the time. In order to grow in grace, you have to increase your prayers. Father Meena stresses the importance of the midnight prayers because Satan fights against it by replacing it with sleep.

The cunning evil spirits do not tell us not to pray but to delay the time of prayer prioritizing the completion of other responsibilities over prayer time. However, St. Paul himself saw and stated the dire need for prayers, *"Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me"* (Romans 15:30).

Many people complain about their thoughts going astray losing concentration during prayers and that they start and finish their prayers without having paid attention to a single word. In his visit to the two brothers St. Maximus and St. Domatius, while pretending he had slept, St. Macarius saw the wars launched by the evil spirits against the two saints in order to distract them and hinder their prayers. For example, he saw swarms of flies buzzing around the face of St. Maximus trying to land on his mouth and nose. But they were expelled by the fiery sword of the angel of God. Another episode is about the priest who when seeing the audience dozing off during his sermon, but keeping wide awake when told stories from the secular world. He then warned them against Satan who made their ears heavy in order not to listen to the word of God.

Father Meena Specifies that Reading Improves the Quality of Pure Prayer

Reading the holy books is a requirement in order to obtain knowledge of God; and the secrets of the heavenly wisdom may be revealed to us and we thus understand what the Holy Spirit requires from us. Reading equips us to comprehend the secrets of the kingdom of God. *“And He said to them, ‘To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables,’”* (Mark 4:11).

The Aim Behind Reading

According to Father Meena, the first step in acquiring virtue is to read with a pure purpose in order to know how to live a virtuous life. Whoever reads with that goal in mind will have the road to virtue clear before their eyes.

Concerning this way, the Lord said that only a few will find it *“Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”* (Matthew 7:14). Therefore, people have to search for it in order to find it. That is why our Lord said to search the books for there is life in them. *“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me”* (John 5:39). In other words, the goal behind reading is to discover virtue and not to gain puffing knowledge.

“But also, for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness” (2 Peter 1:5-6). That is what Father Meena has arrived at that virtue has to be coupled with knowledge (found in reading) and in knowledge self-sacrifice and self-sacrifice requires efforts.

The Coexistence of Virtue with Reading the Old Testament

God told Moses and Aaron *“Speak to the children of Israel, saying, ‘These are the animals which you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth: Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud—that you may eat’”* (Leviticus 11: 2,3). These foods symbolize a spiritual person. An animal that chew the cud symbolizes a person who reads. Cloven hoof symbolizes work. Just as the animal would not be pure without those two factors, so will a person not be pure without the existence of both elements: reading the word of God and applying it. Thus, we offer virtue (work) in our faith, and knowledge (reading) in our virtue. St. Paul testified about the Jews saying, *“But Isaiah is very bold and says: ‘I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.’”* (Romans 10:20). Knowledge without a true purpose is displeasing to God.

Articles on the Christian History The Fifth Century

History of the Eastern and Western Empires after the Council of Chalcedon

Leo I (457-473 AD)

He started his career as an officer, but later on after the death of Marcianus, Leo was appointed emperor by Aspar the Alanic-Gothic who had him under his control. Leo was the first emperor crowned by the patriarch of Constantinople (no representation from the church of Rome was present at the crowning).

His reign was characterized by peace and stability; and this gave him a chance to intervene in the interior affairs of the Roman Empire (because of the strong military and Aspar's support). With his strong influence he could support the candidates for the western empire, (i.e. Rome). Having succeeded to have Aspar killed, (471 AD), Leo became the sole emperor. His belief in the Chalcedonic teachings allowed him to persecute the Coptic Orthodox church by appointing the military governor Dionysius who wanted to enforce the power of Proterius and who also ordered the exile of Pope Timothy II to Gandra Island.

Leo II (Jan 474- Nov 474 AD)

He was the son of Leo's daughter Ariadne and subsequently his grandchild. As emperor of the Empire of Constantinople, he reigned for ten months only after which he died of an illness and was succeeded by his father Zeno.

Zeno (475-491 AD)

He was a man of politics first degree. History has it that after returning to his status as emperor, he turned against the Chalcedonians. His strong grip over the military kept him in power for more than fifteen years. However, after his first year in reign, his popularity dwindled. As a result of a movement against him, he escaped away from Constantinople.

Basiliscus managed to reach Constantinople secretly and stayed there as emperor for twenty months. After that, Zeno could reach Constantinople, had Basiliscus and his family killed and restored the empire. The Coptic Synaxarum for the 21st of Tobe states that St. Hilaria, Zeno's daughter, had escaped to Egypt to be ordained under the disguise of a monk by St. Pemwah who kept her secret until it was revealed when she left for Constantinople.

Basiliscus (475-476 AD)

Brother of Empress Verina, wife of Leo I, he became emperor in 475 A D and remained so for twenty months. Taking advantage of the weak position of Emperor Zeno, he supported the non-Chalcedonian churches especially those of Egypt and Antioch and opposed the Chalcedonians. He allowed the return of Pope Timothy II from exile. However, his approach of appointing his close friends in key positions in order to secure his power was not in his favor; for it aroused the displeasure of many of the important persons within the empire. As a result, Zeno could restore the empire without opposition after having had Basiliscus captured and he and his family killed.

A New Emperor and the Return of Pope Timothy II

God's power in making history is clearly stated in the Holy Book of Daniel, “*And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him*” (Daniel 2:21-22).

Leo I died (457-473 AD), was succeeded by Leo II, (Jan 474- Nov 474 AD) who was followed by Zeno (475-491 AD) and the last followed by Basiliscus (475-476 AD) in whom the Coptic Orthodox Church found refuge because of his opposition against the Chalcedonian churches. It happened that there was a Coptic physician at the empire who had a chance to tell the emperor about the Coptic church.

Consequently, and to the great joy of the Egyptian Christians, the emperor ordered the return of Pope Timothy II. On his way to Alexandria, the pope stopped in Constantinople to thank the emperor and to inform and enlighten him about the danger of the false teachings of the Council of Chalcedon. As a result, with the pope's request and the Emperor's agreement, a Council headed by Pope Timothy II was to be convened in Ephesus and to be attended by all the bishops of the empire. A document was signed by five hundred bishops in which the council abolished all the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon as well as the Tome of Leo. After that, the pope asked and was allowed to take the body of Pope Dioscorus to be buried in Alexandria.

Pope Timothy II spent the rest of his days at his papal see in Alexandria amidst the joy of his people. He devoted his time to restoring the lost sheep who were deluded by the wrong teachings they had been exposed to. He also worked on retrieving and rebuilding the churches usurped and ruined by the Chalcedonians.

In the end, as the Holy Bible says, “*So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house*” (Luke 1:23). After having remained twenty-four years on his papal seat, Pope Timothy II departed to be with the Lord Whom he had served and for whose name's sake he had bore all the hardships. He lived during the rule of four emperors: Leo I, Leo II, Zeno, Basiliscus and reposed during the returning period of Zeno.