



## **Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States Monthly Message for the Monastic**

**June 2021**

### **Jesus Prayer**

Unceasing prayer consists in an unceasing invocation of the name of God. Whether talking, sitting, walking, making something, eating, or occupied in some other way, one should all times and then every place call upon the name of God, according to the command of scripture: pray without ceasing. In this way the enemies' attempts upon our life are stopped. The saintly Abba Isaiah, the Egyptian hermit, says of the Jesus Prayer that it is a mirror for the mind and a lantern for the conscience. Someone has also likened it to a constantly sounding, quiet voice in a house: all thieves that sneak in take hasty flight when they hear that someone is awake there. The house is the heart, the thieves, the evil impulses. Prayer is the voice of the one who keeps watch. But the one who keeps watch is no longer I, but Christ. An elder once said my children I beg you, for the love of God, do not stop saying the prayer (The Jesus Prayer), not even for a moment. Your lips should continuously say the name of Jesus who destroys the devil and all his plots. Cry out incessantly to our Christ, and at once He will hasten whole heartedly to help us. Just as iron cannot be grabbed or even approached when it is red-hot, the same thing happens with the soul of him who says the prayer with the fervor of Christ. The demons do not approach it-and how could they? For of the draw near it, they will be burned by the divine fire which the divine name contains. My children, always remember Jesus so that in all your weaknesses you may find the appropriate medicine. Are you in pain? By calling on Jesus you'll find relief and enlightenment. Are you in affliction? Call and Jesus and behold, consolation will draw in the realm of your heart. Are you overcome by discouragement? Do not neglect to set your hopes on Jesus, and your soul will be filled with courage and strength. Are you bothered by carnal of thoughts? Take the consuming fire of the name of Jesus and set fire to the tares. In all and through all, set the name of Jesus as a foundation, support, adornment, and protection, and do not be afraid of the enemies.

The work of the Jesus prayer is not just for one or two days, but it lasts a long time in many years, observes St. John Chrysostom “for much struggle and time is needed for the devil to be expelled and for Christ to take up His dwelling..... devote yourselves to prayer, therefore, and wait on the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us. Seek nothing but the mercy from the Lord of glory, with a humble and piteous heart. Cry out from morning to evening, possible, all night: Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. St. Anthony the great urges us saying brethren always breathe Christ. As St. John Chrysostom once said “I implore you, brothers, never to break or despise this prayer: a Christian when he eats, drinks, sits, walks travel or does any other thing must continually cry, Lord Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy upon me. So that the name of the Lord Jesus descending into the depth of the heart, should subdue the serpent ruling over the inner pastures and bring life and salvation to the soul. He should always live with the name the Lord Jesus, so that the heart swallows the Lord and the Lord the heart, and the two become one. And again: do not estrange your heart from God, but abide in Him, and always guard your heart by remembering our Lord Jesus Christ, until the name of the Lord becomes rooted in the heart and it ceases to think anything else. What is more beautiful then to entreat Christ at every moment and to say His holy name with these lips of clay? Is there a greater honor?

We read in the Gospel of St. Matthew that Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, “*It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer.*” (Matthew 21:12-13) The Jesus Prayer is the tilling implement that we use to clean our hearts from the tares of the enemy, for it is written, “*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*” (1 Corinthians 3:16) By us calling on God, He comes in our hearts which is His temple and drives out all our enemies. St. Barsanuphius the great once said “in the times of affliction, unceasingly call out to the merciful God in prayer. The unceasing invocation of the name of God in prayer is a treatment for the soul which kills not only the passions, but even their very operation. As a doctor find the necessary medicine, and it works in such a way that the sick person does not understand, in just the same way the name of God, when we call upon Him, kills all the passions, although we do not know how this happens” Just as we sing in the Monday Psalm, “*Everyone who says my Lord Jesus is likened to a sword casting down the enemy.*”

This is why our forefathers always taught us to always call upon God saying, “*My Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me, my Lord Jesus Christ save me, I praise you my Lord Jesus Christ.*” To acquire this prayer, we first

need to be humble like the publican who did not dare to raise his eyes to heaven but prayed silently within himself, “*Lord have mercy on me*”. STRIPPED of all knowledge, lacking in every good thought or deed, without memory from the past or wish for the future, as useless as a worn-out rag, unfeeling as a stone in the path, corroded as a worm- eaten mushroom in the woods, mortal as a fish on the shore and grieved to tears over this wretched plight of yours, thus you will stand in prayer before the Almighty, your Judge and Creator and Father, your Savior and Master, the Spirit of Truth and Giver of Life; and like the Prodigal Son you will stammer out of the depths of your impotency: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son* (Luke 15:21). Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.... And if I have Thee, what more do I ask on earth? Nothing, answers St. John Climacus, but ceaselessly praying, silently to cling to Thee. Some are enslaved by riches, others by honor, still others by acquiring possessions; my only desire is to cling to God. Prayer, with all it contains of self-renunciation, has become your real life, which you keep up as though only for the sake of prayer. Walking with God (Genesis 6:9) is from now on the only thing that has real value for you, and it includes all heavenly and earthly events. For him who bears Christ within himself there is neither death nor illness or any earthly clamor; he has already stepped into eternal life, and that embraces everything. Night and day the heavenly seed sprouts in your heart and grows, you know not how. *The earth produces of itself, your heart's soil, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear* (Mark 4:27-28).

Let us call on Him in our troubles just as St. Peter did when he was about to drown screaming, “Lord save me” and immediately the Lord stretched out His hand and saved him for it is written in the book of psalms, “*Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.*” Let us be humble while calling on Him just as the Canaanite woman screaming “*Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.*” Saying with her even little dogs eat from their masters’ table. Let us remove our old man while calling on Him just as the blind man throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus; screaming saying, “*Son of David have mercy on me*” and his eyes were restored.

Let us have hope while calling on Him just as the right-hand thief on the cross saying, “*We receive the due reward of our deeds*”; screaming and saying “*Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.*” Let us put on Christ and scream with St. Paul and say, “*I’ve been crucified with Christ it’s no longer I live but Christ lives in me.*” Let us persist in saying the Jesus prayer just as Mary Magdalene was persisting and crying in front of the empty

tomb (the heart). When she saw it empty, she kept on crying. She didn't give up because she couldn't find Him, like the apostles, but persistently waiting till Christ revealed Himself to her. Let us do the same by always calling on His name till He reveals Himself to us in our hearts and cleanses us. In the end let us have courage in the name of the Lord and say with the Psalmist "*All nations surrounded me, But in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. They surrounded me, Yes, they surrounded me; But in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. They surrounded me like bees; They were quenched like a fire of thorns; For in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. You pushed me violently, that I might fall, But the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation.*" (Psalms 118:10-14)