



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

**March 2022**

### **On Prayer**

Prayer is the refuge of help, a source of salvation, a treasury of assurance, a haven that rescues from the tempest, a light to those in darkness, a staff of the infirm, a shelter in time of temptations, a medicine at the height of sickness, a shield of deliverance in war, an arrow sharpened against the face of his enemies, and, to speak simply: the entire multitude of these good things is found to have its entrance through prayer.<sup>1</sup>

As the fathers teach us that what makes grace accessible is prayer. Prayer is like any relationship, involves sacrifice. Prayer is the way we place our day, our work, our life, and our being on the altar, making them available to God to bless, and to sanctify. Prayer is by its essence communication and union of God and man. Through its activity the world is held together and there is reconciliation between God and man. It is the mother, and the daughter of weeping, the atonement for sin, a bridge over temptations, a wall to sufferings, a quashing of disputes, a labor of angels, nourishment for all spiritual creatures, future happiness, limitless action, a fountain of virtues, a spring of graces, unseen advancement, nourishment for the soul, an enlightenment of the mind, an knife for grief, a showing forth of hope, the rejection of lamentation, the riches of monks, the wealth of solitaries, the lessening of anger, a mirror of advancement, the awareness of achievement, evidence of one's state, a portent of the future, a mark of glory.

Pure and sincere prayer can be gained, First; all anxiety about carnal things must be entirely got rid of; next we must leave no room for not merely the care but even the recollection of any business affairs, and in like manner also must lay aside all backbiting, vain and incessant chattering, and frivolity; anger above all and disturbing sadness must be entirely destroyed, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Isaac The Syrian, The Ascetical Homilies (Holy Transfiguration Monastery), Homily 8, P. 186

deadly taint of carnal lust and covetousness be torn up by the roots. And so when these and such like faults which are also visible to the eyes of men, are entirely removed and cut off, and when such a purification and cleansing, as we spoke of, has first taken place, which is brought about by pure simplicity and innocence, then first there must be laid the secure foundations of a deep humility, which may be able to support a tower that shall reach the sky; and next the spiritual structure of the virtues must be built up upon them, and the soul kept free from all conversation and from roving thoughts that thus it may by little and little begin to rise to the contemplation of God and to spiritual insight.

Prayer is the atmosphere in which the soul lives. It is the complete turn and offering of man to God. An offering, which, when it is accompanied by the struggle for the keeping of the commandments of Christ, draws divine grace. And divine grace in its turn cleanses the heart, enlightens the mind. Just as the body” says the sacred Chrysostom, “without the soul, is dead, thus also the soul, without prayer, is dead “Prayer is the uplifting of the mind to God. It is a spiritual work, which suits the human mind more than whatsoever other occupation. Prayer is born from meekness and wrathlessness. It brings the soul joy and pleasure It safeguards man from sadness and despondency. Just as bread is food for the body and virtue food for the soul, thus the mind’s food is spiritual prayer. Just as sight is higher than all the senses, thus also prayer is more divine and sacred than all the virtues. He who loves God, always converses with Him, just as the son with his father, and he rejects every passionate thought. Since prayer is the mind keeping company with God, I wonder in what condition must he be, to be able, without turning elsewhere, to approach his Lord and to converse with Him without the intervention of another? If Moses, trying to approach the burning bush, was prevented, until he took off the sandals from his feet, you, who wish to see God and to converse with Him, must you not take off and throw off from you every sinful thought? All the war between us and the impure demons are not done for anything else rather than for spiritual prayer. Because for them prayer is very bothersome, whereas for us it is the cause of salvation, delightful and pleasant.

The tied person can’t run. Neither the mind, which works like a slave to some passion, will be able to do true prayer. Because it is dragged and turns here and there from the passionate thought and can’t stand undisturbed. You will not manage to pray purely, if you are mixed up with material things and you are disturbed with ceaseless cares. Because prayer means a deliverance from every concern. If you want to pray, you have need of God, who grants true prayer to whoever persists tirelessly in the struggle of prayer. So call upon Him

First of all, pray to obtain tears, to soften with mourning the wildness of your soul. Then you will easily confess sincerely, before the Lord, the sins you committed, and will receive from Him remission. Use tears to obtain your every request. Because the Lord rejoices very much when you pray with tears. If you want to pray praiseworthily, deny your own self at every moment. And if you suffer many hardships, consider the comfort you will find, when you take refuge in prayer. If you long to pray as you ought, don't sadden any person. Otherwise in vain do you pray. Whatever you do against some brother who has mistreated you, will all become an obstacle in the time of prayer. "Leave your gift", says Christ "before the altar and go first to reconcile yourself with your brother, and then come and pray without disturbance" (see Matt. 5:24). Because revenge dims the logic of man who prays, and darkens his prayers. They who pray, but gather up in them sadness and revenges, resemble people who draw water from the well and empty it into a jug with holes.

Blessed is the mind, which prays undistractedly and constantly obtains more longing for God. Blessed is the mind, which at the time of prayer becomes immaterial and free of everything. Blessed is the mind, which at the time of prayer remains uninfluenced from each thing. If at the time of prayer, you feel joy greater than every other joy, then truly you found true prayer. Do you long to pray? Become dead to the earth. Have heaven as an everlasting homeland-not in words, but with an angelic life and with divine knowledge. Reject everything, to inherit everything.