



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

August 2024

Prayers to the Mother of God

*"O Virgin Lady, O Mother of the man-befriending God! Direct my heart to contrition and humble it; fill my eyes with saving tears and illuminate them with the light of your prayers, that I might not fall asleep in the sleep of death."*¹

St Ephrem the Syrian

My beloved brethren, the great St. Ephrem the Syrian is known for being a prolific writer, he wrote spiritual hymns and poetry, as well as homilies about a variety of spiritual topics. As we are about to celebrate the assumption of the body of the blessed Saint Mary, the Mother of God, on August 22nd (16th of Mesore), let us read and meditate on the spiritual writings of St. Ephrem to her, which are written in the form of prayers and praises. It was said of him that, "Ephrem's praises of the most Holy Virgin Mary are inexhaustible. Perhaps no other poet has venerated her with such fervent and glowing devotion."²

The following prayers are taken from a book called, *A Spiritual Psalter*, which consists of one hundred and fifty prayers and praises of St. Ephrem.

"O most holy Mother of God, O only Lady who are utterly pure in both soul and body, look upon me, abominable and unclean, who have blackened both soul and body with the stains of my passionate and gluttonous life. Cleanse my passionate mind; set aright my blind and wandering thoughts and make them incorrupt; bring my senses to order and guide them; free me from my evil and repulsive addiction to unclean prejudices and passions that torment me; stop every sin that works in me; grant my clouded and wretched mind the sobriety and discernment to correct my intentions and failings that, freed from the darkness of sin, I might be worthy to boldly glorify and praise you, O only true Mother of the true Light, Christ our God; for all creation, visible and invisible, blesses and glorifies you, both with Him and in Him."³

"O Virgin Lady and Mother of God, most blessed and graced by God, incline your ear and hear my words, pronounced by my defiled and impure lips. Do not despise me, who am miserable;

¹ Ephrem the Syrian, *A Spiritual Psalter or Reflections on God*, trans. Isaac E. Lambertsen and Antonina Janda (Liberty, TN: The St. John of Kronstadt Press, 2004), 228.

² Ida Hahn-Hahn and John Bernard Dalgairns, *The Fathers of the Desert*, trans. Emily F. Bowden, vol. 1 & 2 (London: Burns and Oates, 1907), 266.

³ Ephrem the Syrian, *A Spiritual Psalter or Reflections on God*, trans. Isaac E. Lambertsen and Antonina Janda (Liberty, TN: The St. John of Kronstadt Press, 2004), 63.

do not let me, your unworthy servant, utterly perish; but use your motherly prayers to heal my wretched soul, mercilessly shattered by my evil passions. The wicked enemy has shattered it with the sins of sensuality and trampled it into dust. Therefore, filled with all manner of shame, I dare not; I have not the courage to ask the Lover of mankind, my God, for forgiveness for the multitude of my sins, and healing for my incurable sores. For I have defiled the temple of my body; through my indecent desires I have impregnated it with a multitude of impurities; and I have impaired all my senses with illicit acts. Thus I dare not reach up to heaven with my hands, defiled as they are with vile pursuits. Accordingly do I, who am miserable and a prodigal, submit myself to your ineffable compassion, O immaculate Lady. For I have no other refuge but you, who are my only comfort and swift defender. I put my hope in you: do not abandon me. Your supplications are welcomed by your only-begotten Son; He rejoices at your intercession and is quick to grant your prayers for us. Despise me not who am so miserable; may the indecency of my acts not curtail your boundless mercy, O Mother of God. Accept this my worthless supplication and by your motherly prayers make it acceptable to your Son and God, that He might vouchsafe me the heavenly kingdom as I praise and bless the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”⁴

St Ephrem is also a theologian and one can learn this from many of his writings. The following is an example in which he discusses the Holy Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, as well as the Mother of God, “The Father exclaimed: This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; heed Him. Thus He spoke of the Son, Who is undivided from the glory of the Divinity. For the Father and the Son together with the Holy Spirit are one nature, one force, one essence and one kingdom. And Mary was called the Mother of God by His Son in the flesh, Who was undivided from the glory of His Divinity. For one is God, Who has appeared to the world in the flesh. His glory proclaimed His divine nature which is from the Father, and His body proclaimed His human nature which was from Mary; both of His natures converged and were united in a single hypostasis. He was the Only-Begotten of the Father and also the Only-Begotten of Mary. And he who divides the hypostasis in Him will also be separated from His kingdom, and he who conjoins His natures will be deprived of the life that is of Him. He who denies that Mary gave birth to God will not see the glory of His Divinity, and he who denies that He was clothed in sinless flesh will receive neither salvation nor the life which was granted through His body. His very deeds give witness and His divine strength teaches the contemptuous that He is true God. And His sufferings give proof that He is true man.”⁵

“I entreat the Mother of God: O Birth-giver of the never-setting Light, hear the words that I proclaim before you! I who am miserable wallow in mire; I am all covered with impurities, completely blackened. Even the earth have I defiled with the multitude of my sins, O my Lady. And thus, with sighs does she cry out on my behalf to the incorruptible Judge, calling forth both heaven with its stars and the sun as witnesses. And already the storm of my thoughts plunges me into despair.... I, a prodigal, have laid all my hope upon you, O Mother of God. You alone, who bore the Deliverer of the world in your womb, loosen my unloosenable bonds. Whiten me, who am blackened and have been turned into darkness, with tears of repentance. You, who have given birth to my life, raise me up who am slain by my great carelessness, and lead me who has become alienated from God and the angels back to them, O Mother of God! Awesome indeed is the miracle! How the Lord has tolerated my sins! How is it that He has not conveyed me who am miserable to the depths of hell while still alive! How is it that He has

⁴ Ibid., 79–80.

⁵ Ibid., 35.

not sent from on high His invisible staff or His sword to strike me down.... Without a doubt, you, O Lady, have granted me life by your intercessions. You seek my repentance—O All-good Virgin give it to me, your servant—for you are my wall, my harbor and my rampart.”⁶

“O Mother of God, who surpasses every mind and word! O Virgin who exceeds all earthly virginity, for even before the Divine birth were you a Virgin beyond all virgins—and such did you remain both during and after the birth! You, O Lady do I beg, You do I entreat, O merciful and man-befriending Mother of the merciful and man-befriending God: defend me at this hour if ever you will do so, for now am I most in need of your protection and your help. I am all a mire of filth and sin, a dwelling place of soul-corrupting passions. Yet I intend to approach the all-pure and terrifying Mysteries of your Son and God, and therefore do I suffer fear, and trembling embraces me because of the unbearable multitude of my sins. But if ever I am to remain without communion on the pretext of my unworthiness, then shall I fall into a great abyss of evil and bring upon myself great chastisement. I anguish over both the first alternative and the second. To you do I run; be kind to me, my all-pure Lady. Take advantage of your motherly boldness before your Son and God, and gain for me forgiveness of my former sins. Vouchsafe me to be made pure and enlightened by communion of the Mysteries, and show me how to spend the remainder of my life in repentance, purity and humility. Remain always with me in my thoughts, words and deeds, in all the movements of my soul and body, instructing me, leading me and guiding me, deflecting from me all hostile powers, and preserving me and providing your servant, however worthless, with your grace in every way.”⁷

“May my prayer draw near to You, O Lord! Grant me Your holy seed, that I might bring You a harvest of sheaves abundant in good fruits and say, “Glory to Him Who gave me this, that I might bring it unto Him,” and bow down to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”⁸ “Be kind to me, O Lord, according to Your compassion; and save me according to Your singular goodness, through the prayers of our All-Pure Lady the Mother of God and of all the saints.”⁹ Amen.

⁶ Ibid., 169–170.

⁷ Ibid., 178–179.

⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁹ Ibid., 115.