

Coptic Orthodox  
Diocese of the Southern United States

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**PAT 101**  
**ANTE NICENE FATHERS**

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## **Basic Introduction to Patrology**

Before conducting this research and before speaking about the patriarchs, we have to point to the corporeal bond between the church patriarchs, the apostles and our God Jesus Christ Himself. This bond is revealed in the meaning of the church as “the mysterious Body of Christ” where Christ is the head of the body and the corner stone of the building.

We will quickly expose:

**First:** The work of the apostles to discover the mission of the church and if the patriarchs achieved this mission and where are we from it today?

**Second:** The curriculum followed by the apostles and then the patriarchs and if we are following the same curriculum?

This is to confirm and clarify a basic truth which is the faith received by the saintly apostles from God was passed on to the patriarchs who were efficient and built it into a monumental high-rising construct, absorbed by the church and preserved as a priceless tradition over the generations. It is very beneficial for us that we may review ourselves, our service and our mission as a church and as different groups.

### **The Great Mission**

“Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:45) Here Jesus Christ after His resurrection confirmed to His apostles with many evidences that it is He who is risen overcoming death and that His body that they see is not a spirit nor a product of their imagination. “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bone as ye see me have.” He ate in front of them a piece of broiled fish and of a honeycomb. He then started to talk to them about what was written about Him by the prophets. He gave them power and opened their eyes to understand the scriptures and evangelize all His creation and preach repentance and remission of sins in His name, to disciple, baptize and teach all the commandments of God (Refer to Luke 24:36-48).

According to Christ’s command, and after the Father has fulfilled His promise to them, on the day of Pentecost, the apostles went out as witnesses of the resurrection to all the people. They evangelized Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and the furthest corners of the earth. A big group of about 3000 people joined the apostles in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost which soon grew to 5000. In unity of spirit and heart they continued to pray in the temple, to break the bread in the houses, and to teach the disciples and to commune. They sold their possessions and placed it at the feet of the apostles as everything was common among them..

This was the nucleus of the Christian groups among the Jews who believed and which were formed all over Judea and Samaria. Soon the nations were attracted to them from all over the world. The generation of the apostles was not over when the message of salvation had reached most of the world..

### **The Evangelizing and Teaching Curriculum**

If we examine the evangelizing and teaching curriculum of the apostles, we will discover that it completely coincides with that of our teacher, our God Jesus Christ, in evangelizing and teaching.

Evangelizing for the apostles was based on announcing the love of God to the sinners to all the people and calling them to repent and believe in Jesus Christ as God and savior and to practice the works of repentance.

This is what the Lord Jesus Christ called for personally, "Repent, and believe in the gospel," "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," "You will know them by their fruits," "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance," "for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

This simple evangelical curriculum is appropriate for the human soul's need of salvation and life and was practiced by the Church patriarchs as evidenced in their many sermons to those preparing to be baptized. These sermons were simple and biblically correct. In the early centuries, the church evangelized and attracted pagans and heretics in great numbers in addition to many philosophers, wise and great men.

This is the mission of the church in every age because it is the visible image and the heard voice of Christ to the humanity whom He loved and for whom he sought salvation. Can the church in this age testify that it practices its mission towards the world? Does she call for repentance and a return to the arms of Christ? We hope that the church realizes its responsibility and be not absorbed in its many preoccupations and be not limited to its private problems and interests but seek a revival of its spirit, thoughts and life and realize the injuries, the falls, the pain and the need of the world and lend it a hand of salvation, truth and peace.

## The Teaching Curriculum Of The Apostles Is Based On Two Principles:

**First:** The sacraments like the baptism and the Lord's Supper practiced by the apostles in their meetings every Sunday. Laying of the hands on the baptized to accept the Holy Spirit and on those called upon for priesthood to accept the gifts of the spirit for the service, etc. The Holy Spirit is ever present and working in the church through the sacraments since the days of the apostles, during the age of the patriarchs, up till today and for ever.

**Second:** The biblical curriculum which is based on fulfilling the sayings of the patriarchs and the prophets of the Old Testament. God started this curriculum with His disciples especially after the resurrection and they followed suit in their teachings of the faithful. The Holy Spirit imbued its gifts on the faithful to serve the word, establishing many prophets, teachers, evangelists, wise men and keepers in the church.

The first church was rich with these talents which lasted through the age of the patriarchs. The holy Bible with its Old and New Testaments inspired the Church patriarchs and filled them with the Holy Spirit. Thus they were able to extract from it the Christian doctrines, the creed, theology, monastic life, the church order and the explanation of the Holy Books. All that the church patriarchs laid especially in the first four centuries is an extension and a growth of the living tradition which they received from the apostles themselves. They lived and served by it. The faith is this tradition was preserved in the hearts of the faithful as a valuable deposit as it carried God's commands, His will and His Holy Spirit.

The patriarchs traded in this share- the apostolic tradition- each according to his ability. They fought with it fierce fights and came out each time with additional thoughts that are correct and linguistically precise saving it from heresy and enriching it with their experiences of faith and fortitude as a witness to their love and sacrifice for Christ either as martyrs or as sacrifices of consecration, monasticism and holiness. The living tradition as it is today narrates through every word and every principle the history of the periods and ages of long perseverance and struggle with external and internal forces. Shouldn't then we cherish our apostolic patriarchal tradition, preserve it, live it and pass it on to the next generation pure and fertile as it is?

For about a century or more, scholars have been searching for this Christian tradition in many parts of the world, in written manuscripts and icons, and in monuments and ancient history trying to locate these treasures and examine it to know its features and its impact on other civilizations in literature, ideology and the arts.

We should always rely on the spirit and the thoughts of the patriarchs which transfers to us the spirit of the apostles which is the spirit of Christ

## The Term Patriarch

The term patriarch was used in the Old Testament to describe Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. St. Paul mentioned it in the New Testament to describe the evangelical teachers who begat souls in Christ, "For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have you not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1CO 4:15)

The early Christians used the term "father" to describe the Teacher. St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Leon (130-200AD) says in his book *Against Heresy*, "who taught me a letter I became a son to him and he became my father"- Adv. Haeresis 4:41. In Stromata 1:1, 2 the scholar Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD) clarified that," words are the children of the soul and that's why we call those who taught us fathers." Each human who receives teaching is a son to his teacher by depending on him. The bishops who practiced the Christian teachings named the patriarchs. In some of the apostolic rankings the bishop is still called father as in our Coptic Church. In the fourth century and with the advent of theological conflicts in the church, the word "church patriarchs" extended to include all the teaching bishops and all church writers accepted by the church and whose writing agreed with the church tradition. St Augustine refers to S. Jerome as one of the Church fathers who wrote about original sin. Jerome was not a bishop. And St. Jerome himself (420 AD) and he is a church father added the term "church writers" to the list of church fathers.

That doesn't imply that all church writers are considered by the church as patriarchs. For example Tertullian, who died in 220 AD is considered the father of the study of theology in the Roman Church and has a great influence on the Latin theology. He is very precise in his choice of linguistic terms to express theology yet he fell in the heresy of montanism. That is why he is considered a first class church writer but not a church patriarch.

Origen, who died in 253 A.D., is one of the greatest and most famous scholars in Church history. He carried a great love for Christ, a strong spiritual jealousy in his heart and asceticism in his body. He also acknowledged his faith during persecution. Yet, he did not follow the patriarchs and was unbalanced in his ideology of the divinity and he therefore fell in a number of heretic ideologies which denied him the status of a Church Patriarch.

## Patrology

It is the study of the biographies of the church patriarchs, its ancient scholars, their writings and their teachings in the old ages that immediately followed the apostolic age and up till the sixth century.

Patrology is an ancient discipline. The first book in this discipline is traced back to the age of St. Jerome in 393 A.D. The title of his book is *De Viris Illustribus* or *The Life of Great Men*. In this book St. Jerome relied on Eusebius Cesarean's *Church History*. St. Jerome's book is considered the foundation on which the scholars of patrology base their studies.

### The Scope of Patrology

Patrology scholars research the biographies, the writings and the teachings of the church fathers. Studying the biographies of the patriarchs is beneficial because it leads us to a true understanding of Christianity and reveals to us the circumstances in which they witnessed to the truth.

Their writing is an indivisible part of their lives. It is a living expression of the church life and tradition which they lived and experienced.

### **Necessity here calls for the following:**

**First:** A verification of the authenticity of these writings and its authors which is the scope of the work of the critics

**Second:** Analyzing and classifying these writings and deducing its curriculum and the tendencies of each father which is the scope of the theology scholars.

In the study of patrology, it is necessary to note that each father has his own identifying marks in the way he teaches divine truths in terms of emphasis and reinforcement to defeat the problems and the heresies of his age. These traits will be clarified as we study each of those fathers independently.

This scholarly pursuit shows the affinity between patrology and the history of the doctrines and its development. Doctrine means the truth revealed in the phraseology used by the church. This phraseology was the subject of much debate in church history. During such periods of crisis, the fathers played a crucial role and managed to delivered the church each time with a clearer vision of divine truth announced to the whole earth.

Not only does Patrology include the study of theology, but also Christian behavior, asceticism, and contemplation. We include here among the church fathers: The fathers of monasticism and the teaching saints of the deserts.

### **Features of the Church Patriarchs**

**The church patriarchs are those who have the following four personal features:**

1. Orthodoxy of doctrine concerning the faith in the holy trinity and the nature of Jesus Christ the son of God who was resurrected from the dead and the Holy Spirit, its presence, and its work in the church, the sacraments, the liturgies, the holy books and all subjects of the faith mentioned in the bible and in the writings and the preaching of the church fathers as they received it in the church tradition
2. Holiness revealed in asceticism, austerity and endurance of pain and persecution in acknowledging Christ. The works of the fathers based upon their teachings is the evidence of the truthfulness of their teachings according to our greatest teacher The Lord Jesus Christ, "but whosoever shall do and teach them the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Mathew 5:19)
3. Church acceptance and awarding them the status and the position of father. Those patriarchs are initially the sons of the church and its men of tradition before they became patriarchs. The church brought them up in the true faith and tradition and they offered it to the church in the form of active service, fiery intelligence, true Christian knowledge, pure, righteous, and fertile thoughts that helped to revive the faith and to confirm it against heresies which attacked the church for many centuries.
4. Antiquity. The Chalcedonian Churches date of the end of the age of the patriarchs at about the 7<sup>th</sup> or the 8<sup>th</sup> century. In the West, the age of the patriarchs, ends with St. Gregory the Great who died in 604 A.D. and St. Theodore of Seville who died in 636 A.D. In the East, it ends in the Byzantine churches with St. John of Damascus who died in 749 AD. The non-Chalcedonian Orthodox churches end this period with the Council of Chalcedonia in 451 A.D. or a little after. The fourth and the fifth centuries are considered the height of the golden age of the patriarchs because the church and its group of genius saintly fathers and Christian philosophers were able to defeat the storms of heresy, to define the apostolic faith, explain it and clarify it to reason and build the reason of the faithful in addition to the simplicity of their hearts. However being ancient or old alone is insufficient as a precise measure.



Is the golden age of the patriarchs over? Or is the spirit still working in the church up till today? There are challenges in every age of the ages of the church as a continuous fight is waged by its adversary. The church therefore needs those church patriarchs, the Apologists of the faith, and the tradition to be in the heart of the believers.

## **Classification of the Patriarchs**

### **General Classification**

1. The Church patriarchs in general are the teachers of faith and knowledge and in specific the members of the ecumenical councils which defined the doctrines concerning heresies. The patriarchs in general are:
2. The apostolic or the writers who were in touch with the apostles like Clements the Roman, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp and Papias.
3. The Apologists who defended Christianity against paganism, the criticism of the learned, the prosecution of the Jews and the authorities like St. Justin the Martyr, Athenagoras, and Irenaeus.
4. The ecumenical teachers like Saint Athenasius of Alexandria, Cyril the Great, St. Basil, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John of the Golden Mouth of the East, Keprianos, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine of the West
5. The confessors who taught, were persecuted and persevered in the faith like Saint Dioscorus and St. Severus of Antioch
6. The early fathers of monasticism who kept the purity of the faith and of the orthodox teachings in addition to monasticism like St. Anthony, St. Pachom, St. Macarii the Great, St. Isidore Pelusium, St. Shenoute and the fathers of later ages following the golden age of the patriarchs.

### **Classification according to the language in which they wrote:**

The Latin Patriarchs, the Greek Patriarchs, the Coptic patriarchs, the Syrian Patriarchs, and the Armenian Patriarchs. This classification is not based on their nationality but on the language in which they wrote meaning, "the patriarchs who wrote in Latin, " or "the patriarchs who wrote in Greek," etc.

Most of the writing of the Patriarchs is recorded in Latin or Greek.

The Church Patriarchs who are considered the fathers of the Catholic church and the references of faith and teaching according to the respect awarded to them by the Coptic Church are:

From the Patriarchs of the Eastern Church who wrote in Greek:

- a. St. Athenasius the Apostle the 20<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria
- b. St. Basil the Great Archbishop of Cappadocia
- c. St. Gregory the Theologian, Bishop of

- d. St. John Patriarch of Constantinople
- e. St. Cyril of Alexandria the 24<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria
- f. St. Dioscorus the 25<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria
- g. St. Severus of Antioch Patriarch of Antioch

From the Patriarchs of the Western Church who wrote in Latin:

- a. St. Keprianos Bishop of Carthage, North Africa
- b. St. Ambrose Bishop of Milan, Italy
- c. St. Jerome A Palestinian Ascetic

The writers, the scribes of tradition, and the theologians followed the age of the great church teachers in the Middle Ages beginning the Eighth Century.

Writings in the other Eastern Languages have also significantly contributed to the Christian tradition.

#### **Classification based on the periods of the church history:**

- a. The origins of patriarchal writing in the first, second and third centuries
- b. The height of the patriarchal age or the Golden Age of the Patriarchs: the fourth century to the mid fifth century
- c. The later ages: From the sixth century onwards

### **1. Origins of Patriarchal Writings (First Three Centuries)**

This age should receive great emphasis because its writers lived close to the founders of the church i.e. the apostles who are the first witnesses on the teachings delivered by Christ regarding the trinity, the incarnation, the building of the church, its constitution, its rules and its early rituals.

The apostolic fathers (First group) are those who witnessed the apostles and were disciplined by them.

The late writers (of the second century) are also extremely important because they were related to the disciples of the apostles.

The writers of the third century, despite distance from the apostolic age, diligently continued to pour church traditions into curriculum in preparation for the great teachers of the fourth century.

### **2. Second Stage (From 300 to 430 AD)**

This period extends from St. Athenasius the Apostle up till the death of St. Cyril the Great in the East, and of Saint Augustine in the West. During this period many

characters of the history of the church responded to the theological dispute around the doctrine of the Trinity in the East and the doctrine of grace in the West.

**First Stage:** From 300-360A.D. Disputes around the trinity and the right doctrines surfaced

**Second Stage:** 360-430 A.D. The beginning of the expansion, the crystallization and the explanation of the teaching of the fathers of the first stage. The father's crystallizations were expressed in their own words. St Cyril the great is the best example because his writings are a living image of the writings of those who preceded him. He was therefore worthy to be described as "The Last of the Patriarchs."

### **3. Third Stage (From 430 and up till the dissolution of the Empire in the 7<sup>th</sup> century)**

**First period:** The dispute over the nature of Christ -Christology after establishing the doctrine of the trinity and it lasted from the Council at Ephesus (431AD) up till the Chalcedonian Council and till the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D. This period is known for the Church fathers who defended orthodoxy until martyrdom or through torture like St. Dioscorus and St. Severus of Antioch

#### **The Authority of the Patriarchs in the Church**

Each Christian committed to the teachings of the fathers as defined by the ecumenical councils, the Orthodox creed and all the ecumenical councils rules and partakes of the Eucharist participates in prayer with these saints who finalized the liturgy and is closely knitted to them as the monk is knitted to the rules of monasticism and its founders.

The patriarchs then have a teaching authority over all the Christians in the world and through the ages. No generation regardless of the reasons can be free from the rules of the fathers or the councils because should they do so, they let go of a priceless church tradition that is highly prized by the church.

The fathers did not leave a problem or a topic concerning faith or church discipline without addressing it or referring to it. They always agreed as if they formed a unified chorus from the East to the West and through all ages revealing the divine truth. If there were different opinions in the church on a certain topic, the church always referred to the fathers to rule concerning the word of the laws and in all sources of church tradition.

## The Texts of the Patriarchs

Publication of the writings of the church fathers started in the sixteenth century after the renaissance and the enlightenment in Europe. It was developed and completed in the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries

Mau des Fosses of the Benedictines was one of the early fathers responsible for this great scholarly feat. Marguerie de la Bigne who died in 1589 followed suit and published the writings of more than 200 early and medieval church fathers in his collection titled *Sanctorum Veterum Patrum Bibliotheca*. Gradually more works were added to this collection in Cologne in 1616 and it was titled *Magna Bibliotheca Veterum Partum* in 14 volumes. This collection was republished in 1677 in Leon, France in 27 volumes and was titled *Maxima Bibliotheca V.P. et Antiq. Script. Eccles*. Galland who died in 1779 published his 14 volume collection from 1765-1781 and again in 1788 under the title *Biblioth.V.P.*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century M.J. Routh published his collection in 1814 titled *Reliquiae Sarae*. Yet the most important and complete collection to be published up till date is Abbe Migne's (died in 1875) Collection. This scholar collected the most important and the greatest writing in general and published them in two groups.

1. *Patrologia Latina* in 217 volumes and was referred to as PL and covers all the writings of the fathers of the Latin Church up till the Roman Pope Innocent the Third who died in 1216 A.D.
2. *Patrologia Graeca* in 161 volumes. The 162<sup>nd</sup> volume was never published because the publishing house was burnt. This collection is usually referred to as PG and it covers the period up till the council of Florence in 1439

Migne was most concerned with the collection of the biggest number of texts without

scholarly verification. Critics therefore started to verify his texts and publish their research result and their opinion about the authenticity of the editions in the anthology.

Haman was one of those scholarly fathers who reviewed the first 96 volumes of Migne's Collection to verify their authenticity employing all former studies done in this field with the purpose of presenting a useful text to the fathers. These volumes cover the writing from Tertullian to Bede and are published in 4 volumes by a French publisher. As for the collection of the Greek fathers, it was published a second time using mechanical photocopying by an Austrian publisher

3. The collections that complement Migne's Collection
  - a. *Patrologia Syriaca*
  - b. *Patrologia Orientalis* (and it includes the fathers who wrote in Coptic, Armenian and Slavic)

c.. *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*

4. Collections that edit and complete Migne's

The most important of which is

-*Loeb Classical Library*, London New York, 1912

*Sources Chretiennes*, Paris, 1941 ff.

300 copies of which have been published so far

All these collections publish the writings in its original language whether Greek, Latin or Coptic, etc Sometimes the writings are accompanied by translations to one of the living languages.

**Translations to living languages**

Since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, English and French translations of church fathers have appeared. The most famous of which is

*Library of the Fathers*, Pusey - Keble- Newman

Which was published in 45 volumes between 1838 and 1888 AD

And the famous collection

*Ante-Nicene Christian Library* which was published in Edinburgh between 1866-1897 in 25 volumes

And the collection

*Select Library of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* which was published between 1886 and 1900 in the USA in 28 volumes and was republished 40 years ago.

It is however known that nothing surpasses the reading and studying of the writings of the church fathers in their original languages.

**GENERAL TABLE OF PATRIARCHAL WRITINGS IN THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES**

The Apostolic Fathers, the Apologists, the Works of the Martyrs, the Refutation of Heresies

First: The Apostolic Fathers

1. St. Clement the Roman, (?-102AD) Epistle to Corinthians (90 AD) Authorship of other epistles: second epistle to the Corinthians- two epistles to the virgins)
2. St. Ignatius of Antioch (?-107) Seven Epistles
3. St Polycarp the Martyr (70-156 AD) An Epistle to Philippi
4. Papias, Bishop of Herapolis (130 AD) Explanations of the words of our God

5. Epistle of Barnabas (End of first century)
6. Didach (End of First Century)
7. The shepherd : Hermas (Second Century)

Second : The Apologists (Second Century)

- Quadratus (124 AD) Asia Minor
- Aristides (125 AD) Athena
- Aristo (140 AD) Pella
- Tatian (172 AD) Syria
- St. Justin Martyr (165AD)
- Apollinarus of Herapolis (172 AD)
- Melito (190 AD) of Sardis
- Athenagoras of Athens (177 AD)
- (After 181 AD) Theophilus of Antioch
- Epistle to Diognetus (Second Century)
- Hermas (200)
- Minucius Felix (Second Century)

Third: Works of the Martyrs

Martyrdom of Polycarp- Martyrdom of Justin and his companions – Epistles of the Churches of Gal-Works of the Martyrs of Scillitan

Fourth: Refutation of Heresies

Against Heresies (lost works)

St. Bishop of Leon (140-202 AD) against--, writings on the authority of the church and the councils.

Fifth: Origins of Christian Theology Writings

Writers of the East

1. Clement of Alexandria (125 AD), Origen (185-254/255), St. Pope Dionysus of Alexandria (264 AD), Fathers of the Theological School of Alexandria, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions (Third Century)
2. Antioch and Palestine: Julius Africanus (after 240AD) Doxology
3. Asia Minor: St. Gregory the Wonder Worker (213-270 AD), St. Methodius of Olympia

Writers of the West

1. North Africa: Tertullian (160-220AD) St. Cyprian (200-258AD) Arnobius (280-310AD) Lactantius (After 317 AD)
2. Rome: Hippolytus (16-135AD) Priestly Ranks

**The Church Fathers and Modern Life**

Our Lord Jesus says in Mathew 23 :8-10 “But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.”

Do these words mean that we as Orthodox use the word father to refer to a church teacher erroneously? Of course not.

Christ himself used the word father with people as well as God as He said in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man on the tongue of the rich man "My father Abraham" (Luke 16:24) which refers to an earthly father. We read in the rest of this chapter that God condemned the haughty leadership of the Jews in his time. He warned his audience against fascination with big titles and honor on account of the people and urged them to be satisfied with the kind of treatment that He received-Glory to Him

Saint Paul gives us an example about the worthiness of the word father in the Christian Church in his epistle to the (Corinthians 4:15) when he said, "For you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" where he uses the term father in the literal sense referring to the spiritual birth and indicating that he has given them life in Christ through suffering and evangelism and in this sense he permits them to call him father, a natural term for a man who gave them a new birth through baptism.

The same applies to the church fathers who offered their parishioners a new birth through baptism and renewed this birth through repentance and confession. They brought their flock and parishioners to Christ through biblical instruction and guidance and through Christ's commandments. More importantly they offered themselves as a good living example to their congregation. In this fashion, they shared with St. Paul fatherhood to their parishioners then to the church in the generations that followed

### **The Church Fathers and Their Role In The Orthodox Teachings**

Correct teaching in Christianity is not an easy task especially when it comes to doctrines and Christian behavior. It is a serious mission and that's why the fathers have a gross share in the orthodox teaching of the modern man. They have truly become the oasis of growth in Christ amidst the barren desert of this world. Father George Florovsky, one of the great scholars of patrology in the modern age, stated that patrology is not simply the study of the history of church writing but it is patrological theology.

Examining the modern period, reveals systematic under currents negating or concealing truth by rejecting the righteous conscience "having faith and a good conscience which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck." (1Timothy 1:19) There is also another current of ignorance from the Orthodox themselves who are ignorant of the teachings of the fathers. This doesn't apply to the laymen only but also to the clergy who are more in need of truth and church life since our everyday fight with ordeals is an unending war. Church fathers

offer us two gifts: **Righteousness** because their source is the light of the bible and **Life** because of the unending church life tradition.

The fathers of the church contributed to the Orthodox teaching by covering topics related to life, death, church, evangelism and doctrine.

The fathers are not the light but they speak of the light. They help us understand beyond doubt the concept of God. St. Paul predicts this sentiment about the contribution of the fathers, "giving thanks to the father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light." (Colossians 1:12)

### **The Fathers Contribution To The Accurate Interpretation Of The Word Of God**

In St. Peter's second epistle (16:30) St Peter affirms that there are some things that defy understanding which are misinterpreted by some unconfirmed scholars leading to their damnation. Over the years some scholars and nonscholars misinterpreted the keys of some biblical verses. But through the fathers we have the correct faith and the right interpretation of all books. To assure us that not all fathers were interpreters of the bible but wrote about different things concerning the biblical verses, they explained to us the meaning of "true" and emphasized it and applied it in the lives of the faithful. We therefore have explanations of words and meanings by the spirit and by the letter for the books. St Basil discusses this subject and says that in the writings of the Church fathers we find an easy interpretation of the Holy Bible whether mystical, physical or spiritual. In general, we find comments and thoughts that enhance our understanding of God and of our spiritual growth. We do find some fathers who specialize in explaining the Bible like St. Athanasius in the explanation of the Psalms, and St. John Chrisostom, the Golden mouth who explained the New Testament and St. Augustine and others. In return we find other fathers who did not explain the bible as such but explain the divine message for they were able to practice what they preached at all times.

### **The Church Fathers' Contribution To The Daily Behavior Of Individuals**

The Church fathers did not write their sermons, discussions, letters, books, articles, defenses and explanations because they had nothing to do or because writing was their profession but because there was a real communal and individual need. The fathers lived during every age and truly expressed their contemporaries. They faced the real problems of people and their real interests. Their writings were not addressed to philosophers but to the simple people in their parishes who lived their daily lives facing their individual problem in an ever changing society. The fathers in general spoke to every believer during their time and in the present -excluding the modern problems that face us today- yet, they spoke about the basics of our spiritual life and its advancement. To be more specific, many church fathers spoke about riches and materialism. St. Clements wrote a long article about this topic, " Can the rich man be saved and how?" St. Tertullian of North Africa discussed patience and prayers, the two



virtues which bring us close to God. He also discussed the attitude of the believers towards entertainment and the dress code of the Christian woman. St. Keprianos taught about death, the body and abstinence. St. Gregory, the wonderworker bishop of NewCesarea--- discusses specialized topics like denying Christ as a result of fear and pressure. St. Athenasius speaks about the incarnation. St. Basil advises the youth to benefit from the study of Greek Literature and gives advice to the merchants. He discusses anger, the Holy Spirit and those who do not repay their debts. He addresses envy, alcoholism and humility. St. Gregory of Nicea finished St. Basil the Great's article about man's creation and wrote about luck, comprehension and the death of children.

St. John Chrisostom, the Golden Mouth writes in details about priesthood and repentance. He teaches about focusing on virtue. He instructs and consoles the young widows and teaches the parents how to raise their kids. He talks about how materialism and the aristocratic life do not last. He is preoccupied with the problems of his congregation and he writes about peace between husband and wife

St. Isidore of Pelusium (now Baloza near Port Said) wrote more than two thousand letters around many topics like attire, hospitality, humility, lust, luck, chatting and moodiness. He wrote to soldiers, teachers, statesmen, physicians, kings, monks and priests. He was a spiritual father to thousands including St. Cyril the great

St. Ambrose wrote about the duties of those who hold positions in the holy service. St. Augustine discusses in his writings and sermons the immortality of the soul, the teacher and the monk's errors.

The above is not a comprehensive list of what the fathers wrote about but it reveals the rich collection of topics discussed which surpasses our time and space. They were not limited by time so let's allow the Church fathers guide us to the right path towards meeting the Lord.

### **The Fathers and the Orthodox Spirituality**

Living a spiritual life according to God's law and close to Him is not an easy venture. That's why man needs a teacher, a guide, an advisor, a trainer and a counselor.

The fathers were not theoretical and did not play with logic like Plato and other non Christian philosophers. They presented mystical life that involves man's experience of God on the basis of love using all human energy and power. They discussed mysticism away from reason, theories, logic, emotions, and feelings. In addition, they gave us spiritual peace through their mystical experiences which begins with light and ends in divine love. This mystical life is a continuous renewal process for the self. It makes the self holy in truth (John 17:17)

This mystical, spiritual and holiness in truth leads man to theosis or being united with God. Our fathers contribution to our spiritual life is summarized in the following:

1. The objective of our Christian life is to be one with God which is theosis or unity with God or partaking of the divine nature. According to St. Peter in his second

epistle (2PT 1:4) this objective is achieved when we become partners in the divine nature. This objective is echoed in all the writings of the Church fathers. St. Athanasius summarizes this as, "The Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of men become the sons of God by grace."

2. Man's partaking of the divine nature can not be accomplished by our will alone or through trials or even through the tribulations of life. Grace is the main factor in renewing our lives. All fathers have reached a consensus and acknowledge with the apostles that "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved" (Acts 15:11)

The apostolic fathers like John Chrisostom, the scholar St. Clements of Alexandria and Ephraim the Syrian and others taught in almost the same words that we as humans must first choose virtue and then God will finish our work in a way that is suitable for each of us as St. John the Golden Mouth teaches, "God doesn't work above our will so as not to destroy our freedom" (Sermon 12 in the *Explanation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*)

3. There is no spiritual life without prayer. Our prayers despite deep are done as a duty but the prayers of the fathers were a continuous talk with God practiced in joy. These prayers can lead to complete internal peace and deep spiritual joy or according to St. John "The sequence of words in this prayer has the effect of a fire lit before the Lord." (About Prayer)
4. The believer's participation in church sacraments is extremely important according to the Church fathers not out of necessity or ritual but because it is a living work through which we encounter not vague symbols but a spiritual process towards theosis.
5. The spiritual life of the individual is incomplete without partnership with the saints. Not because the saints authored theories of faith but because they lived this faith on daily basis. We can therefore take them as our personal guides and counselors since they have lived in this world without being from this world. On this topic a saint say, "faith without works and works without faith are rejected in the Orthodox church" if a believer asks why and how he can fight St Paul will answer him saying, "that we may be partakers of His Holiness." (Hebrews 10:12)

### **Examples of Practical Christianity**

Church fathers offer the modern man true guidance and thoughts in addition to their lives as a perfect living example in the face of those who claim that Christianity can't be applied in our current days reminding them that life in truth in Christ is powerful and rich.

The church fathers lived their lives as examples holding the light when their lives corresponded to their faith. They were not satisfied with preaching from the pulpit. They were makers of the "message" and then teachers. They understand true teaching which makes theory correspond to works. Their words reflected their lives which were built on rock. They were governed with holy desires that form good teachers. St. John, the Golden Mouth says, "Words from these good teachers reaches the hearts of the listeners quickly as if it is hammered iron.

In our world today, we deal with a lot of corruption and deadly temptations which summons us away from Christ and causes us to forget our objective because our present emotional needs appear more important than Christ.

Church fathers as role models who can help us return to the right path life examples and words like St. Ignatius, also known as the carrier of God, the theoforus who says: "I will chose Christ. I will give up all my money to have him. I want to be wheat that is milled for his grace. I want to give everything to have him."

The question that arises now is what can I do to become a Christian on my own? No one wants to be my partner. The whole world is corrupt. People no longer listen to the bible.

Many people repeat these words as the psalmist said, "They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one." (Psalm 14:3)

St. Gregory the Wonderworker answers, "No. One man can be effective as long as his acts, his works and his words are righteous."

When St. Gregory became a bishop, there were only 17 believers in his parish. After a life full of service, evangelism, faith and righteousness, he died leaving only 17 behind as unbelievers. How many believers are in your parish? One man was able to change a whole parish. One man who is on fire with divine jealousy was able to change a whole parish to Christ. That's what the fathers said on the tongue of St. John the Golden Mouth.

Another example worthy of contemplation is St. Athenasius the great who struggled all the days of his life for the truth which made him one of the great bearers of Orthodoxy. Another Church leader who sought to elevate the church and bring peace and grace to it and to be worthy of his priesthood is St. John the Golden Mouth who is a church jewel hidden under a fiery face. He was observant of his own self control and taught and trained his priests well. He oversaw evangelism with faith. Even during his banishment, he brought all those who listened to him to Christ. He thought about everyone and took care of everyone within his circle of communication.

Those are just some examples of the wealth of our tradition and whoever the fathers or the saints we speak about they all professed the same principles.

We mustn't forget that all these fathers lived in a material world but they conquered sin

with the grace of God. They lived the pain and the crisis of their societies and cared for their congregations expecting no reward. They practiced their Christianity and their words did not contradict their works. They taught through the example of their lives and proved that everything is possible in Christ. St. Isidore Pelusium says that they have practiced their words and preached their works. (First Letter, Paragraph 46.) They were not interested in miracles other than the miracle of their lives in Christ.

That's why the effective living contribution they made to the modern man is being living models of Christianity. They are the living picture of Mathew 5:19 "but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

The fathers practiced Christianity and then taught it and therefore become great in spirit

Their message to us today is to show us the way to theosis and show us how to practice our spiritual life in our daily life.

### **The Fathers Of The Church And The So Called Religious Education**

The Orthodox Church doesn't differentiate between religious education and secular education. This differentiation has only been known to us through the Western religious reformation. The objective of the Orthodox Church has always been to change rather than train the individual to think, act, behave, shape and grow according to God.

The Church doesn't see the individual in fragments but as a whole image of God. The Church imbibes the divine into the human to beautify him with divine qualities and to make him "a perfect man." (Ephesians 4:13). The church doesn't train man on a particular style or teaching or behavior. This is the job of the society and the secular institutions. The church reshapes its people to make them the church- the body of Christ.

It doesn't train them to carry their cross or to memorize the creed, etc. It is not a religious club or a church project. It is the body of the crucified and the resurrected Christ visible and mystical, material and divine at the same time without separation.

We need to serve the living word of God not a dry recital of the epistles, the Acts, or the bible during the liturgy. The word of God in the bible is not a book to be read but it is the living word incarnate expressing Himself through the living. The individual should begin to learn the books when he or she starts to speak the word and not in the pages of the book, and when the word becomes living, practical, spiritual, mystical. This is what the church does all the time. The church fathers did exactly that when they made the bible into the liturgy. The bible became a mystical act served to make the individual holy. These are the liturgical services that we assume are ritual ignoring their spiritual meaning and depth.

We need to rekindle the ascetic life in monasteries. The monastery is the oasis amidst the pressures of the societies. We need the patristic theology in our churches not in a primitive naive way nor in a dry scholarly manner but as prophetic theology that speaks in the name of God about God to man. The church without patristic theology is silenced and not the church of God the Word. We would like our people to see and live the orthodox doctrines in poise and to experience the richness and the realism of the Orthodox life and how it makes the circumstances of the individual's life holy and devotes them to God without obstructing or disturbing the balance of the vitality of any life aspect.

As an example, the church through its fathers preferred to build the churches using a distinctive architectural church design which retained its style up till today. In addition, iconography expressed theological truth through the use of the brush and the colors. The church, thus "offered an open book for our faith even for the illiterate" as a church father put it.

The fathers also wrote symphonies and classified the written and the oral work of the fathers in the form of church music and new rhythmical hymns that entice the soul to worship and bow in front of God.

The church through the fathers also took the flower from the garden and made the incense and gave it to man to teach him prayers and spiritual joy and the fragrant smell of Christ.

It took the beeswax and made candles to teach man the light of Christ that rises on all. It took threads and made white priesthood gowns to show how dust can be blessed with holiness and purity.

The church thus made the whole universe a holy altar to God.

**THE LETTER OF ATHANASIUS,  
OUR HOLY FATHER,  
ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA,  
TO MARCELLINUS  
ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PSALMS**

My dear Marcellinus,

YOUR steadfastness in Christ fills me with admiration. Not only are you bearing well your present trial, with its attendant suffering; you are even living under rule and, so the bearer of your letter tells me, using the leisure necessitated by your recent illness to study the whole body of the Holy Scriptures and especially the Psalms. Of every one of those, he says, you are trying to grasp the inner force and sense. Splendid! I myself am devoted to the Psalms, as indeed to the whole Bible; and I once talked with a certain studious old man, who had bestowed much labour on the Psalter, and discoursed to me about it with great persuasiveness and charm, expressing himself clearly too, and holding a copy of it in his hand the while he spoke. So I am going to write down for you the things he said.

SON, all the books of Scripture, both Old Testament and New, are *inspired by God and useful for instruction*[2 Tim 3:16], as it is written; but to those who really study it the Psalter yields especial treasure. Each book of the Bible has, of course, its own particular message: the Pentateuch, for example, tells of the beginning of the world, the doings of the patriarchs, the exodus of Israel from Egypt, the giving of the Law, and the ordering of the tabernacle and the priesthood; The Triteuch [Joshua, Judges, and Ruth] describes the division of the inheritance, the acts of the judges, and the ancestry of David; Kings and Chronicles record the doings of the kings, Esdras [Ezra] the deliverance from exile, the return of the people, and the building of the temple and the city; the Prophets foretell the coming of the Saviour, put us in mind of the commandments, reprove transgressors, and for the Gentiles also have a special word. Each of these books, you see, is like a garden which grows one special kind of fruit; by contrast, the Psalter is a garden which, besides its special fruit, grows also some those of all the rest.

The creation, for instance, of which we read in Genesis, is spoken of in Psalm [19](#), *The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament showest His handiwork*, and again in [24](#), "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof: the inhabited earth and all that dwell therein. He Himself laid the foundations of it on the seas." The exodus from Egypt, which Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy record, is fitly sung in Psalms [78](#), [106](#), and [114](#). *When Israel came out of Egypt, says this last, the House of Jacob from among a foreign people, Judah became his holy place and Israel came under his authority. He sent Moses His servant, Psalm [105](#) declares, Aaron whom He had chosen. He showed the words of His signs among them, and of His wonders in the land of ham. Darkness He sent, and it was dark, and*

*they were not obedient to his word. He turned their waters into blood and slew their fish: their land brought forth frogs, even in the king's apartments. He spake, and dog-flies came, and flies in all their quarters; and so on, all through this Psalm and the next, we find the same things treated. As for the tabernacle and the priesthood, we have reference to them in Psalm 29, sung when the tabernacle was carried forth, [This Psalm is heading in the Septuagint A Psalm of David, when the Tabernacle went forth] Bring unto the Lord, ye sons of God, bring unto the Lord young rams, bring to the Lord glory and honour.*

The doings of Joshua, the son of Nun, and of the Judges also are mentioned, this time in Psalm 105, *They built them cities to dwell in and sowed fields and planted vineyards, for it was under Joshua that the promised land was given into their hands. And when we read repeatedly in this same Psalm, They cried unto the Lord in their trouble and He saved them out of their distress, the period of the judges is referred to, for then it was that, when they cried to Him, He raised up judges to deliver them from their oppressors, each time the need arose. In the same way, Psalm 20 has the kings in mind when singing, Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will gain glory by the Name of the Lord our God. They are brought down and fallen, but we are risen and stand upright. And Psalm 126 of the Gradual Psalms [Psalms 119 - 133] speaks of that which Esdras tells, When the Lord turned the captivity of Sion, we became as those comforted; and similarly Psalm 122, I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the House of the Lord. Our feet were set in thy gates, O Jerusalem! Jerusalem is built as a city that has fellowship within itself: thither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to testify to Israel.*

You see, then, that all the subjects mentioned in the historical books are mentioned also in one Psalm or another; but when we come to the matters of which the Prophets speak we find that these occur in almost all. Of the coming of the Saviour and how, although He is God, He yet should dwell among us, Psalm 50 says, *God shall come openly, even our God, and He shall not keep silence; and in Psalm 118 we read, Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the House of the Lord. God is the Lord, and He has given us light. That He Who comes is Himself the Father's Word, Psalm 107 thus sings, He sent His Word and healed them, and rescued them out of all their distresses. For the God Who comes is this self-same Word Whom the Father sends, and of this Word Who is the Father's Voice, Whom well he knows to be the Son of God, the Psalmist sings again in 45, My heart is inditing of a good Word; and also in 110, Out of the womb, before the dawn, have I begotten Thee. Whom else, indeed, should any call God's very Offspring, save His own Word and Wisdom? And he, who knows full well that it was through the Word that God said, Let there be light, Let there be a firmament. Let there be all things, [Gen 1:3 ff] says again in Psalm 33, By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the Breath of His mouth.*

And, so far from being ignorant of the coming of Messiah, he makes mention of it first and foremost in Psalm 45, *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, a scepter of justice is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. Thou has loved righteousness and hated lawlessness: wherefore God,*

*even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.* Further, lest any one should think this coming was in appearance only, Psalm 87 shows that He Who was to come should both come as man and at the same time be He by Whom all things were made. *Mother Sion shall say, A man, a man indeed is born in her: and He himself, the Most Highest, founded her,* it says; and that is equivalent to saying *The Word was God, all things were made by Him, and the Word became flesh.* [Jn 1:1, 2, 14] Neither is the Psalmist silent about the fact that He should be born of a virgin - no, he underlines it straight away in 45, which we were quoting, but a moment since. *Harken, O daughter,* he says, *and see and incline thine ear, and forget thine own people and thy fathers's house. For the King has desired thy beauty, and He is thy Lord.* Is not this like what Gabriel said, *Hail, thou that art full of grace, the Lord is with thee?* [Lk 1:28] For the Psalmist, having called Him the Anointed One, that is Messiah or Christ, forthwith declares His human birth by saying, *Harken, O daughter, and see;* the only difference being that Gabriel addresses Mary by an epithet, because he is of another race from her, while David fitly calls her his own daughter, because it was from him that she should spring.

Having thus shown that Christ should come in human form, the Psalter goes on to show that He can suffer in the flesh He has assumed. It is as foreseeing how the Jews would plot against Him that Psalm 2 sings, *Why do the heathen rage and peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth stood up and their rulers took counsel together against the Lord and against His Christ.* And Psalm 22, speaking in the Saviour's own person, describes the manner of His death. *Thou has brought me into the dust of death, for many dogs have compassed me, the assembly of the wicked have laid siege to me. They peirced my hands and my feet, they numbered all my bones, they gazed and stared at me, they parted my garments among them and cast lots for my vesture. They peirced my hands and my feet- what else can that mean except the cross? and Psalms 88 and 69,* again speaking in the Lord's own person, tell us further that He suffered these things, not for His own sake but for ours. *Thou has made Thy wrath to rest upon me,* says the one; and the other adds, *I paid them things I never took.* For He did not die as being Himself liable to death: He suffered for us, and bore in Himself the wrath that was the penalty of our transgression, even as Isaiah says, *Himself bore our weaknesses.* [Mt 8:17] So in Psalm 138 we say, *The Lord will make requital for me;* and in the 72nd the Spirit says, *He shall save the children of the poor and bring the slanderer low, for from the hand of the mighty He has set the poor man free, the needy man whom there was none to help*[ Athanasius takes these last two quotations as referring to the Resurrection, although it is not named.]

Nor is this all. The Psalter further indicates beforehand the bodily Ascension of the Saviour into heaven, saying in Psalm 24, *Lift up your gates, ye princes, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the king of glory shall come in!* And again in 47, *God is gone up with a merry noise, the Lord with the voice of the trumpet.* The Session also it proclaims, saying in Psalm 110, *The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on My right hand, until I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet.* And Psalm 9 mentions also the coming destruction of the devil, crying, *Thou satest on Thy throne, Thou that judgest righteousness, Thou hast rebuked the*



*heathen and the wicked one is destroyed. And that He should receive all judgement from the Father, this also the Psalter does not hide from us, but foreshows Him as coming to be the judge of all in 72, Give the King Thy judgements, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the King's Son, that He may judge Thy people in righteousness and Thy poor with justice. In Psalm 50 too we read, He shall call the heaven from above, and the earth, that He may judge His people. And the heavens shall declare His righteousness, that God is judge indeed. The 82nd like-wise says, God standeth in the assembly of gods, in the midst He judges gods. The calling of the Gentiles also is to be learnt from many passages in this same book, especially in these words of Psalm 47, O clap your hands together, all ye Gentiles, shout unto God with the voice of triumph; and again in the 72nd, The Ethiopians shall fall down before Him, His enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarsis and of the islands shall bring presents, the kings of Arabia and Saba shall offer gifts. All these things are sung of in the Psalter; and they are shown forth separately in the other books as well.*

My old friend made rather a point of this, that the things we find in the Psalms about the Saviour are stated in the other books of Scripture too; he stressed the fact that one interpretation is common to them all, and that they have but one voice in the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, he went on, the opposite is true, to some extent; for, just as the Psalter includes the special subjects of all the other books, so also do they often contain something of the special feature of the Psalter. Moses, for example, writes a song; Isaiah does the same, and Habakkuk offers prayer in form of song. And in the same way in every book we see something alike of prophecy, of law-giving, and of history; for the same Spirit is in all and He, being by nature One and Indivisible, is given whole to each: yet is He diverse in His manifestations to mankind, and each one who is taught by and receives Him ministers the word according to the moment's need. Thus (as I said before) Moses is at times a prophet and a psalmist, and the Prophets on occasion both lay down laws (like *Wash you, make you clean. Wash clean your heart from wickedness, Jerusalem* [Is 1:16; Jer 4:14]), and also record history, as when Daniel relates the story of Susanna [Dan 12] or Isaiah tells us about the Rab-shakeh and Sennacherib [Is 36-37]. Similarly the Psalter, whose special function is to utter songs, generalizes in song matters that are treated in detail in the other books, as I have shown you. It also even lays down laws at times, such as *Leave off from wrath and let go displeasure, incline thine heart from evil and do good. Seek peace and ensue it*, as well as telling us the history of Israel's journey and prophesying the coming of the Saviour, as I said just now.

You see, then, that the grace of the one Spirit is common to every writer and all the books of Scripture, and differs in its expression only as need requires and the Spirit wills. Obviously, therefore, the only thing that matters is for each writer to hold fast unyieldingly the grace he personally has received and so fulfil perfectly his individual mission. And, among all the books, the Psalter has certainly a very special grace, a choiceness of quality well worthy to be pondered; for, besides the characteristics which

it shares with others, it has this peculiar marvel of its own, that within it are represented and portrayed in all their great variety the movements of the human soul. It is like a picture, in which you see yourself portrayed, and seeing, may understand and consequently form yourself upon the pattern given. Elsewhere in the Bible you read only that the Law commands this or that to be done, you listen to the Prophets to learn about the Saviour's coming, or you turn to the historical books to learn the doings of the kings and holy men; but in the Psalter, besides all these things, you learn about yourself. You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries. Moreover, whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you do not merely hear and then pass on, but learn the way to remedy your ill. Prohibitions of evil-doing are plentiful in Scripture, but only the Psalter tells you how to obey these orders and abstain from sin. Repentance, for example, is enjoined repeatedly; but to repent means to leave off sinning, and it is the Psalms that show you how to set about repenting and with what words your penitence may be expressed. Again, Saint Paul says, *Tribulation worketh endurance, and endurance experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed* [Rom 5:3, 5]; but it is in the Psalms that we find written and described how afflictions should be borne, and what the afflicted ought to say, both at the time and when his troubles cease: the whole process of his testing is set forth in them and we are shown exactly with what words to voice our hope in God. Or take the commandment, *In everything give thanks*. [1 Thess 5:18] The Psalms not only exhort us to be thankful, they also provide us with fitting words to say. We are told, too, by other writers that all who would live godly in Christ must suffer persecution; [2 Tim 3:12] and here again the Psalms supply words with which both those who flee persecution and those who suffer under it may suitably address themselves to God, and it does the same for those who have been rescued from it. We are bidden elsewhere in the Bible also to bless the Lord and to acknowledge Him: here in the Psalms we are shown the way to do it, and with what sort of words His majesty may meetly be confessed. In fact, under all the circumstances of life, we shall find that these divine songs suit ourselves and meet our own souls' need at every turn.

And herein is yet another strange thing about the Psalms. In the other books of Scripture we read or hear the words of holy men as belonging only to those who spoke them, not at all as though they were our own; and in the same way the doings there narrated are to us material for wonder and examples to be followed, but not in any sense things we have done ourselves. With this book, however, though one does read the prophecies about the Saviour in that way, with reverence and with awe, in the case of all the other Psalms it is as though it were one's own words that one read; and anyone who hears them is moved at heart, as though they voiced for him his deepest thoughts. To make this clear and, like Saint Paul not fearing somewhat to repeat ourselves, let us take some examples. The patriarchs spoke many things, all fitting to themselves; Moses also spoke, and God answered; Elijah and Elisha, seated on Mount Carmel, called upon the Lord and said, *The Lord liveth, before Whom I stand*. [ See for

Elijah I Kings 18: 15, 19, and for Elisha II Kings 2: 25 and 3: 14.] And the other prophets, while speaking specially about the Saviour, addressed themselves also at times to Israel or to the heathen. Yet no one would ever speak the patriarchs' words as though they were his own, or dare to imitate the utterance of Moses or use the words of Abraham concerning the great Isaac, or about Ishmael and the home-born slave, as though they were his own, even though like necessity oppressed him. Neither, if any man suffer with those that suffer or be gripped with desire of some better thing, would he ever say as Moses said, *Show me Thyself*, [Ex 33:13] or *If Thou remittest their sin; then remit it; but if not, then blot me out of Thy book that Thou hast written*. [Ex 32:32] No more would any one use the prophets' words of praise or blame as though they were his own, or say, *The Lord lives, in Whose sight I stand today*. For he who reads those books is clearly reading not his own words but those of holy men and other people about whom they write; but the marvel with the Psalter is that, barring those prophecies about the Saviour and some about the Gentiles, the reader takes all its words upon his lips as though they were his own, and each one sings the Psalms as though they had been written for his special benefit, and takes them and recites them, not as though someone else were speaking or another person's feelings being described, but as himself speaking of himself, offering the words to God as his own heart's utterance, just as though he himself had made them up. Not as the words of the patriarchs or of Moses and the other prophets will he reverence these: no, he is bold to take them as his own and written for his very self. Whether he has kept the Law or whether he has broken it, it is his own doings that the Psalms describe; every one is bound to find his very self in them and, be he faithful soul or be he sinner, each reads in them descriptions of himself.

It seems to me, moreover, that because the Psalms thus serve him who sings them as a mirror, wherein he sees himself and his own soul, he cannot help but render them in such a manner that their words go home with equal force to those who hear him sing, and stir them also to a like reaction. Sometimes it is repentance that is generated in this way, as by the conscience-stirring words of Psalm [51](#); another time, hearing how God helps those who hope and trust in Him, the listener too rejoices and begins to render thanks, as though that gracious help already were his own. Psalm [3](#), to take another instance, a man will sing, bearing his own afflictions in his mind; Psalms [11](#) and [12](#) he will use as the expression of his own faith and prayer; and singing the [54](#)th, the [56](#)th, the [57](#)th, and the [142](#)nd, it is not as though someone else were being persecuted but out of his own experience that he renders praise to God. And every other Psalm is spoken and composed by the Spirit in the selfsame way: just as in a mirror, the movements of our own souls are reflected in them and the words are indeed our very own, given us to serve both as a reminder of our changes of condition and as a pattern and model for the amendment of our lives.

This is the further kindness of the Saviour that, having become man for our sake, He not only offered His own body to death on our behalf, that He might redeem all from death, but also, desiring to display to us His own heavenly and perfect way of living, He

expressed this in His very self. It was as knowing how easily the devil might deceive us, that He gave us, for our peace of mind, the pledge of His own victory that He had won on our behalf. But He did not stop there: He went still further, and His own self performed the things He had enjoined on us. Every man therefore may both hear Him speaking and at the same time see in His behaviour the pattern for his own, even as He himself has bidden, saying, *Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.* [Mt 11:29] Nowhere is more perfect teaching of virtue to be found than in the Lord's own life. Forbearance, love of men, goodness, courage, mercy, righteousness, all are found in Him; and in the same way no virtue will be lacking to him who fully contemplates this human life of Christ. It was as knowing this that Saint Paul said, *Be ye imitators of me, even as I myself am of Christ.* [1 Cor 11:1] The Greek legislators had indeed a great command of language; but the Lord, the true Lord of all, Who cares for all His works, did not only lay down precepts but also gave Himself as model of how they should be - carried out, for all who would to know and imitate. And therefore, before He came among us, He sketched the likeness of this perfect life for us in words, in this same book of Psalms; in order that, just as He revealed Himself in flesh to be the perfect, heavenly Man, so in the Psalms also men of good-will might see the pattern life portrayed, and find therein the healing and correction of their own.

Briefly, then, if indeed any more is needed to drive home the point, the whole divine Scripture is the teacher of virtue and true faith, but the Psalter gives a picture of the spiritual life. And, just as one who draws near to an earthly king observes the formalities in regard to dress and bearing and the correct forms of words lest, transgressing in these matters, he be deemed a boor, so he who seeks to live the good life and learn about the Saviour's conduct in the body is by the reading of this holy book first put in mind of his own soul's condition and then supplied with fit words for a suppliant's use. For it is a feature of this book that the Psalms which compose it are of many different sorts. Some such as [73](#), [78](#), [114](#), and [115](#), are narrative in form; some are hortatory, like [32](#), [97](#), and [103](#); some are prophetic, for example, [22](#), [45](#), [47](#), and [110](#); some, in whole or part, are prayers to God, as are [6](#), [16](#), [54](#), [102](#); some are confessions, notably the [51](#)st, some denounce the wicked, like [14](#); while yet others, such as [8](#), [98](#), [117](#), [125](#), and many more, voice thanksgiving, praise, and jubilation, Psalm [66](#) alone of these having special reference to the Resurrection of the Lord.

It is possible for us, therefore, to find in the Psalter not only the reflection of our own soul's state, together with precept and example for all possible conditions, but also a fit form of words wherewith to please the Lord on each of life's occasions, words both of repentance and of thankfulness, so that we fall not into sin; for it is not for our actions only that we must give account before the judge, but also for our every idle word. Suppose, then, for example, that you want to declare anyone to be blessed; you find the way to do it in Psalm [1](#), and likewise in [32](#), [41](#), [112](#), [119](#), and [128](#). If you want to rebuke the conspiracy of the Jews against the Saviour, you have Psalm [2](#). If you are persecuted by your own family and opposed by many, say Psalm [3](#); and when you would give



thanks to God at your affliction's end, sing [4](#) and [75](#) and [116](#). When you see the wicked wanting to ensnare you and you wish your prayer to reach God's ears, then wake up early and sing [5](#); and if you feel yourself beneath the cloud of His displeasure, you can say [6](#) and [38](#). If any plot against you, as did Ahithophel against David,, and someone tells you of it, sing Psalm [7](#), and put your trust in God Who will deliver you.

Contemplating humanity's redemption and the Saviour's universal grace, sing Psalm [8](#) to the Lord; and with this same Psalm or the [19](#)th you may thank Him for the vintage. For victory over the enemy and the saving of created things, take not glory to yourself but, knowing that it is the Son of God Who has thus brought things to a happy issue, say to Him Psalm [9](#); and, if any wishes to alarm you, the [11](#)th, still trusting in the Lord. When you see the boundless pride of many, and evil passing great, so that among men (so it seems) no holy thing remains, take refuge with the Lord and say Psalm [12](#). And if this state of things be long drawn out, be not faint-hearted, as though God had forgotten you, but call upon Him with Psalm [27](#). Should you hear others blaspheme the providence of God, do not join with them in their profanity but intercede with God, using the [14](#)th and the [53](#)rd. And if, by way of contrast, you want to learn what sort of person is citizen of heaven's kingdom, then sing Psalm [15](#).

When, again, you need to pray against your enemies and those who straiten you, Psalms [17](#), [86](#), [88](#), and [140](#) will all meet your need; and if you want to know how Moses prayed, you have the [90](#)th.[Headed in the Septuagint, A Prayer of Moses, Man of God.] When you have been delivered from these enemies and oppressors, then sing Psalm [18](#); and when you marvel at the order of creation and God's good providence therein and at the holy precepts of the Law, [19](#) and [24](#) will voice your prayer; while [20](#) will give you words to comfort and to pray with others in distress. When you yourself are fed and guided by the Lord and, seeing it, rejoice, the [23](#)rd awaits you. Do enemies surround you? Then lift up your heart to God and say Psalm [25](#), and you will surely see the sinners put to rout. If they persist, their murderous intent unslaked, then let man's judgement go and pray to God, the Only Righteous, that He alone will judge according unto right, using Psalms [26](#) and [35](#) and [43](#). If your foes press yet harder and become a veritable host, that scorns you as not yet anointed, be not afraid, but sing again Psalm [27](#) [The title of Psalm [27](#) in the Greek is Of David, before he was anointed. The Christian reference is to chrismation, i.e., Confirmation, which was conferred as part of the same rite with Baptism in the early Church]. Pay no attention either to the weakness of your own humanity or to the brazenness of their attack, but cry unceasingly on God, using Psalm [28](#). And when you want the right way of approach to God in thankfulness, with spiritual understanding sing Psalm [29](#). And finally, when you dedicate your home, that is your soul in which you receive the Lord and the house of your senses, in which corporeally your spirit dwells, give thanks and say the [30](#)th and, from the Gradual Psalms [[Psalms 119 - 133](#)], the [127](#)th.

Again, when you find yourself hated and persecuted by all your friends and kinsfolk because of your faith in Christ, do not despair on this account nor be afraid of them, but go apart and, looking to the future, sing Psalm [31](#). And when you see people baptized and ransomed from this evil world, be filled with wonder at the love of God for men, and in thanksgiving for them sing the [32nd](#). And whenever a number of you want to sing together, being all good and upright men, then use the [33rd](#). When you have fallen among enemies but have escaped by wise refusal of their evil counsel, then also gather holy men together and sing with them the [34th](#). And when you see how zealous are the lawless in their evil-doing, think not the evil is innate in them, as some false teachers say, but read Psalm [36](#) and you will see they are themselves the authors of their sin. And if you see these same wicked men trying, among other evils, to attack the weak and you wish to warn their victims to pay no heed to them, nor envy them, since they will soon be brought to nought, both to yourself and others say the [37th](#).

When, on the other hand, it is your own safety that is in question, by reason of the enemy's attacks, and you wish to bestir yourself against him, say the [39th](#); and if, when he attacks, you then endure afflictions, and wish to learn the value of endurance, sing Psalm [40](#). When you see people in poverty, obliged to beg their bread, and you want to show them pity, you can applaud those who have already helped them and incite others to like works of mercy by using [41](#). Then again, if you are aflame with longing for God, be not disturbed at the reviling of your enemies but, knowing the immortal fruit that such desire shall bear, comfort your soul and ease your pains with hope in God, and say the [42nd](#). When you wish to recall in detail the loving-kindnesses which God showed to the fathers, both in their exodus from Egypt and in the wilderness, and to reflect how good God is and how ungrateful are men, you have the [44th](#), the [78th](#), the [89th](#), the [105th](#), [106th](#), [107th](#), and also the [114th](#) and [115th](#). And the [46th](#) will supply your need when after deliverance from afflictions you flee to God, and want to give Him thanks and tell of all His loving mercy shown towards yourself.

But suppose now that you have sinned and, having been put to confusion, are repenting and begging for forgiveness, then you have the words of confession and repentance in Psalm [51](#). Or you have been slandered, perhaps, before an evil king, and you see the slanderer boasting of his deed: then go away and say Psalm [52](#). And when they persecute and slander you, as did the Ziphites and the strangers to King David [1 Kings 23:13ff], be not disturbed but with full confidence in God sing praise to Him, using Psalms [54](#) and [56](#). If still the persecution follows hard on you, and he who seeks your life enters (though he knows it not) the very cave in which you hide [1 Kings 24:3], still you must not fear; for even in such extremity as this you have encouragement in Psalm [57](#) and also in the [142nd](#). The plotter, it may be, gives orders that a watch be kept over your house, and yet you manage to escape; give thanks to God, then, and let Psalm [59](#) be written on your heart, as on a pillar, as a memorial of your deliverance. And if not only your enemies cast you in the teeth but those also whom you thought to be your friends reproach and slander you and hurt you sorely for a time, you can still call upon

God for help, using Psalm [55](#). Against hypocrites and those who glory in appearances, say for their reproach the [58th](#). But against those whose enmity is such that they would even take away your life, you must simply oppose your own obedience to the Lord, having no fear at all but all the more submitting to His will as they grow fiercer in their rage, and your form of words for this will be the [62nd](#) Psalm. Should persecution drive you to the desert, fear not as though you were alone in it, for God is with you, and there at daybreak you may sing to Him the [63rd](#). And if even there the fear of foes and their unceasing plots pursues you, be they never so many or so insistent in their search for you, still you must not yield; for the toy arrows of a child will be enough to wound them, while Psalms [64](#), [65](#), [70](#), and [71](#) are on your lips.

The [65th](#) Psalm will meet your need, whenever you desire to sing praise to God: and if you want to teach any one about the Resurrection, sing the [66th](#). When asking mercy from the Lord, praise Him with the [67th](#). When you see wicked men enjoying prosperity and peace and good men in sore trouble, be not offended or disturbed at it but say Psalm [73](#). When God is angry with His people, you have wise words of comfort in Psalm [74](#). When you have occasion to testify concerning God, [9](#), [71](#), [75](#), [92](#), [105](#) to [108](#), [111](#), [118](#), [126](#), [136](#), and [138](#) all fit the case; and Psalm [76](#), when used intelligently, provides you with an answer for the heathen and the heretics, showing that the knowledge of God is not with them at all, but only in the Church. And when the enemy takes possession of your place of refuge, even though sorely harassed and afflicted, do not despair but pray: and when your crying has been heard, give thanks to God, using Psalm [77](#). And if they have profaned the house of God and slain the saints, throwing their bodies to the birds of prey, do not be crushed or frightened at such cruelty, but, suffering with those that suffer it, plead you for them with God, using Psalm [79](#).

Psalms [81](#) and [95](#) are suitable if you want to sing on a festival, together with other servants of the Lord; and when the enemy once more muster round you, threatening God's House and joining forces against His holy ones, do not you be frightened of either their numbers or their strength, for you have a very anchor of hope available in Psalm [83](#). If, moreover, you behold the House of God and His eternal dwelling, and have a longing for them, as the Apostle had, then say the [84th](#); and when at length their anger is abated and you are free again, voice your thanksgiving in the [85th](#) and in the [116th](#). To see the difference between the Church and schism and to confound schismatics, you can say [87](#). To encourage yourself and others in the fear of God and to show how fearless is the soul that hopes in Him, say [91](#).

Do you want to give thanks on the Lord's Day? Then say the [24th](#); if on a Monday, then the [95th](#); and if on a Friday, your words of praise are in the [93rd](#), for it was when the Crucifixion was accomplished that the House of God was built, for all the enemy attempted to prevent it, so it is fitting we should sing on Friday a song of victory, such as that Psalm is. Psalm [96](#) is apt, if God's House has been captured and destroyed and then re-built; and when the land has rest from war and peace returns, sing that *The Lord*

is King in [97](#). You want to sing on Wednesday? The Psalm then is [94](#); for it was on the fourth day from the Sabbath [This Psalm is headed in the Septuagint, A Psalm of David for the fourth day from do Sabbath] that the Lord through His betrayal entered on His Passion, by which He should redeem us and by the which He triumphed gloriously. So when you read in the Gospel how on the Wednesday the Jews took counsel against the Lord, seeing Him thus boldly challenging the devil on our behalf, sing the words of this Psalm [94](#). And again, when you see the providence and power of God in all things and want to instruct others in His faith and obedience, get them first to say the [100th](#) Psalm. And when you have yourself experienced His power in judgement (for always His justice is tempered by His mercy) the next Psalm [[101](#)] will express your need.

If through the weakness of your nature and the strain of life you find yourself at times downcast and poor, sing for your consolation Psalm [102](#), and use the two that follow it [[103](#), [104](#)] to lift your heart in thankful praise to God, as in and through all circumstances we should always do. Psalms [105](#), [107](#), [113](#), [117](#), [135](#), and [146](#) to [150](#) not only show the reasons why God should be praised, but tell you how to do it. Have you faith, as the Lord bade, and believe in the prayers you utter? Then say the [116th](#) Psalm, from the tenth verse on. You feel that, like the Apostle, you can now press forward, forgetting all the things that lie behind? [Phil 3:14] Then you have the fifteen Gradual Psalms [Psalms [119](#) - [133](#)] for every step of your advance.

Another time, perhaps, you find you have been led astray by others' arguments—well, then, the moment you perceive it, stop your sinning, sit down and weep, as they did of old by Babylon's waters, using the words of Psalm [137](#). Since it is precisely by being tempted that one's worth is proved, Psalm [139](#) will meet your need when you thank God for testing safely past. And if the enemy once more gets hold of you and you desire to be free, then say [140](#). For prayer and supplication, sing Psalms [5](#), [141](#) to [143](#), and [146](#). Has some Goliath risen up against the people and yourself? Fear not, but trust in God, as David did, and sing his words in Psalm [144](#). Then, marvelling at God's kindnesses to everyone and mindful of His goodness to yourself and all, praise Him, again in David's words, with Psalm [105](#). You want to sing to Him? Use [96](#) and [98](#). If, weak as you are, you yet are chosen for some position of authority among the brethren, you must not be puffed up as though you were superior to them, but rather glorify the Lord Who chose you and sing Psalm [151](#), which is especially the Psalm of David. And for Psalms in praise of God, having some of them the title Alleluya, you have all these, [105](#) to [107](#), [111](#) to [118](#), [135](#), [136](#), [146](#), [147](#), [148](#), [149](#), and [150](#).

If, again, you want to sing Psalms that speak especially about the Saviour, you will find something in almost all of them; but [45](#) and [110](#) to relate particularly to His Divine Begetting from the Father and His coming in the flesh, while [22](#) and [69](#) foretell the holy cross, the grievous plots He bore and how great things He suffered for our sakes. The [3rd](#) and [109th](#) also display the snares and malice of the Jews and how Iscariot betrayed Him; [21](#), [50](#), and [72](#) all set Him forth as judge and foretell His Second Coming in the



flesh to us; they also show the Gentiles' call. The 16th shows His resurrection from the dead, in flesh, the 24th and 47th His ascension into heaven. And in the four Psalms 93, 96, 98, and 99, all the benefits deriving to us from the Saviour's Passion are set forth together.

Such, then, is the character of the Book of Psalms, and such the uses to which it may be put, some of its number serving for the correction of individual souls, and many of them, as I said just now, foretelling the coming in human form of our Saviour Jesus Christ. But we must not omit to explain the reason why words of this kind should be not merely said, but rendered with melody and song; for there are actually some simple folk among us who, though they believe the words to be inspired, yet think the reason for singing them is just to make them more pleasing to the ear! This is by no means so; Holy Scripture is not designed to tickle the aesthetic palate, and it is rather for the soul's own profit that the Psalms are sung. This is so chiefly for two reasons. In the first place, it is fitting that the sacred writings should praise God in poetry as well as prose, because the freer, less restricted form of verse, in which the Psalms, together with the Canticles and Odes, [The reference is probably to the hymns in Exodus 15: 1-18, Deuteronomy 32: 1-43, and Habakkuk 3, which are called Odes in the Septuagint. Some other Old Testament hymns, e.g. the Song of Hannah and the Benedicite, may be included.] are cast, ensures that by them men should express their love to God with all the strength and power they possess. And, secondly, the reason lies in the unifying effect which chanting the Psalms has upon the singer. For to sing the Psalms demands such concentration of a man's whole being on them that, in doing it, his usual disharmony of mind and corresponding bodily confusion is resolved, just as the notes of several flutes are brought by harmony to one effect; and he is thus no longer to be found thinking good and doing evil, as Pilate did when, though saying *I find no crime in Him*, [Jn 18:38] he yet allowed the Jews to have their way; nor desiring evil though unable to achieve it, as did the elders in their sin against Susanna - or, for that matter, as does any man who abstains from one sin and yet desires another every bit as bad. And it is in order that the melody may thus express our inner spiritual harmony, just as the words voice our thoughts, that the Lord Himself has ordained that the Psalms be sung and recited to a chant.

Moreover, to do this beautifully is the heart's desire and joy, as it is written, *Is any among you happy? Let him sing!* [Jas 5:13] And if there is in the words anything harsh, irregular or rough, the tune will smoothe it out, as in our own souls also sadness is lightened as we chant, *Why then art thou so heavy, O my soul, why dost thou trouble me?* and failure is acknowledged as one sings, *My feet were almost gone*, and fear is braced by hope in singing, *The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do to me.*

Well, then, they who do not read the Scriptures in this way, that is to say, who do not chant the divine Songs intelligently but simply please themselves, most surely are to blame, for *praise is not befitting in a sinner's mouth.* [Ecclus 15:9] But those who do sing as

I have indicated, so that the melody of the words springs naturally from the rhythm of the soul and her own union with the Spirit, they sing with the tongue and with the understanding also, and greatly benefit not themselves alone but also those who want to listen to them. So was it with the blessed David when he played to Saul: he pleased God and, at the same time, he drove from Saul his madness and his anger and gave back peace to his distracted spirit. In like manner, the priests by their singing contributed towards the calming of the people's spirits and helped to unite them with those who lead the heavenly choir. When, therefore, the Psalms are chanted, it is not from any mere desire for sweet music but as the outward expression of the inward harmony obtaining in the soul, because such harmonious recitation is in itself the index of a peaceful and well-ordered heart. To praise God tunefully upon an instrument, such as well-tuned cymbals, cithara, or ten-stringed psaltery, is, as we know, an outward token that the members of the body and the thoughts of the heart are, like the instruments themselves, in proper order and control, all of them together living and moving by the Spirit's cry and breath. And similarly, as it is written that *By the Spirit a man lives and mortifies his bodily actions*, [Rom 8:13] so he who sings well puts his soul in tune, correcting by degrees its faulty rhythm so that at last, being truly natural and integrated, it has fear of nothing, but in peaceful freedom from all vain imaginings may apply itself with greater longing to the good things to come. For a soul rightly ordered by chanting the sacred words forgets its own afflictions and contemplates with joy the things of Christ alone.

So then, my son, let whoever reads this Book of Psalms take the things in it quite simply as God-inspired; and let each select from it, as from the fruits of a garden, those things of which he sees himself in need. For I think that in the words of this book all human life is covered, with all its states and thoughts, and that nothing further can be found in man. For no matter what you seek, whether it be repentance and confession, or help in trouble and temptation or under persecution, whether you have been set free from plots and snares or, on the contrary, are sad for any reason, or whether, seeing yourself progressing and your enemy cast down, you want to praise and thank and bless the Lord, each of these things the Divine Psalms show you how to do, and in every case the words you want are written down for you, and you can say them as your own.

There is, however, one word of warning needed. No one must allow himself to be persuaded, by any arguments what-ever, to decorate the Psalms with extraneous matter or make alterations in their order or change the words them-selves. They must be sung and chanted in entire simplicity, just as they are written, so that the holy men who gave them to us, recognizing their own words, may pray with us, yes and even more that the Spirit, Who spoke by the saints, recognizing the selfsame words that He inspired, may join us in them too. For as the saints' lives are lovelier than any others, so too their words are better than ever ours can be, and of much more avail, provided only they be uttered from a righteous heart. For with these words they themselves pleased God, and in uttering them, as the Apostle says, *they subdued kingdoms, they wrought righteousness,*

*they obtained promises, they stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens, women received their dead by resurrection. [Heb 11:33-36]*

Let each one, therefore, who recites the Psalms have a sure hope that through them God will speedily give ear to those who are in need. For if a man be in trouble when he says them, great comfort will he find in them; if he be tempted or persecuted, he will find himself abler to stand the test and will experience the protection of the Lord, Who always defends those who say these words. By them too a man will overthrow the devil and put the fiends to flight. If he have sinned, when he uses them he will repent; if he have not sinned, he will find himself rejoicing that he is stretching out towards *the things that are before* [Phil 3:16] and, so wrestling, in the power of the Psalms he will prevail. Never will such a man be shaken from the truth, but those who try to trick and lead him into error he will refute; and it is no human teacher who promises us this, but the Divine Scripture itself. For God commanded Moses to write the great song [Deut 31:19] and to teach the people, and him whom He had appointed leader He bade also to write Deuteronomy, to have it ever in his hand and to meditate unceasingly upon its words [Deut 17:18-19]; because these are sufficient in themselves both to call men's minds to virtue and to bring help to any who ponder them sincerely. It is a certain fact that when Joshua, the son of Nun, entered the land of promise and saw the ordered ranks of the heathen and the Amorite kings all drawn up against him [Josh 8:9], in face of all these swords and weapons he read Deuteronomy in the ears of all and reminded them of the words of the Law, and then, having thus armed the people, he overcame the foe. King Josiah also, when the book was found, and had been read through to all, no longer feared his enemies. [4 Kings 22:8(2 Kings 22:8)] And at any time when war was threatening Israel, the Ark in which the tables of the Law were kept was carried out before the host, and was sufficient help against any array, except when there was among those who bore it or, elsewhere among the people, any prevailing hypocrisy or sin; [Josh 3:2; 1 Kings 2-4(1 Sam 2-4)] for faith and an honest state of mind are always necessary if the Law is to be an effectual ally in the fulfilment of man's vows.

And I have heard, said the old man, from wise men, that in old days in Israel they put daemons to flight by reading of the Scriptures only, and in the same way uncovered plots made by them against men.

For this reason he rebuked as being worthy of the utmost condemnation people who neglect the Scriptures, while making use of impressive words from other sources for the purposes of exorcism so-called. [Acts 19:14-16] Those who did that were playing with the sacred words, he said, and offering themselves as to daemons, as did those Jews, the sort they tried in that way to exorcise the man at Ephesus. On the other hand, daemons fear the words of holy men and cannot bear them; for the Lord Himself is in the words of Scripture and Him they cannot bear, as they showed when they cried out to Christ, *I pray you, torment me not before the time.* [Lk 8:28; Mt 8:29] In the same way Paul

commanded the unclean spirits, [Acts 16:18] and daemons were subject to the disciples. [Lk 10:17] The hand of the Lord was on Elisha the prophet also, and he prophesied about the waters to three kings, when the minstrel played and sang according to His bidding.[4 Kings 3:15(2 Kings 3:15)] So also is it with us today: if any one have at heart the interests of those who suffer, let him use these words, and he will both help the sufferer, let him use these words, and he will both help the sufferers more and at the same time prove his own faith to be true and strong; thus God, perceiving it, will grant the suppliants perfect health. Well knew the holy Psalmist that, when he said in Psalm 119, *I will meditate in Thy judgements: and I will not forget Thy words; and again, Thy statutes were my songs in the place of my sojourning.* For with these words they all worked out their own salvation, saying, *If Thy law were not my meditation, then had I perished in my humiliation.* Paul also strengthened his disciple with like words, saying, *Ponder these things, abide in them, that thy progress may be manifest.* [1 Tim 4:15]

And so you too, Marcellinus, pondering the Psalms and reading them intelligently, with the Spirit as your guide, will be able to grasp the meaning of each one, even as you desire. And you will strive also to imitate the lives of those God-bearing saints who spoke them at the first.