

# THE PRAYER OF ST. EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN (4 c)

O Lord and Master of my life do not give me the spirit of sloth, despondency, lust of power and idle talk.

But give me rather the spirit of whole mindedness, humility, patience, and love.

Yes, O Lord and King grant me to see my own sins and not judge my brothers and sisters; for You are blessed unto the ages of ages. Amen.

# INTRO

"(Lent) It is indeed a school of repentance to which every Christian must go every year in order to deepen his faith, to re-evaluate, and, if possible, to change his life. It is a wonderful pilgrimage to the very sources of Orthodox faith- a rediscovery of the Orthodox way of life. (Fr. Schmemmann, Great Lent)."

## Prostrations: a distinctive characteristic of Lenten worship

- ❖ The prayer is said at every Lenten Service (Sunday Eve-Friday Morning)
- ❖ After each petition of the prayer we make a prostration.
- ❖ In the long and difficult effort of spiritual recovery, the Church does not separate the soul from the body. The whole man has fallen away from God; the whole man is to be restored, the whole man is to return.
- ❖ Christian asceticism (Spiritual Disciplines, fasting, prayer, almsgiving) is a fight, not *against* but *for* the body. For this reason, the whole man – soul and body – repents. The body participates in the prayer of the soul just as the soul prays through and in the body. Prostrations the 'psycho-somatic' sign of repentance and humility, of adoration and obedience, are thus the Lenten rite *par excellence*." (Schmemmann)

# THE WAY TO LIFE IN CHRIST & THE PATH THAT LEADS AWAY TOWARDS SPIRITUAL DEATH

The first four conditions which are the path towards spiritual death are *sloth, despondency, lust of power and vain talk*.

- ❖ Each has consequences which form an ever increasing fall into a deeper and deeper crevasse that leads further and further away from God.
- ❖ Each condition gives birth to the next.
- ❖ Together they form a spiritual check list for ailments of the soul

There are four *principle conditions* which lead to life; they are *whole-mindedness, humility, patience and love*.

- ❖ Wholeness is the condition of communion with God that begins with prayer and leads to a sober-mindedness
- ❖ The fruit of following the way of life is adapting the virtues of Christ as I grow in my communion with Him. It is not about “trying harder” its about trying less and getting out of the way so that God can work in and through our lives.

O Lord and Master of my life do not give me  
*Κύριε καὶ Δέσποτα τῆς ζωῆς μου... μή μοι δῶς.*

Lord (Yahweh) – the name for God in holy scripture, God is the Lord

Master (Despota) as a Royal Ruler, One who have to obey, I am the servant of my Master

Of my Life - of everything that I am, I do, God is the Lord and Master – we belong to Him like bonded slaves, He owns us because He paid the price for our redemption on the Cross (Hopko)

The “seal” of the Gift of the Holy Spirit – our entire person is “branded” – God has ownership over our lives

...do not give me

... μή μοι δῶς.

Written in Syriac originally and translated into Greek and Church. Aramaic/way of praying, God is the Master of ALL, of demons as well as angels... If we have evil spirits in us they are sent to us by God. (Fr. Hopko)

“And all the demons besought Him, saying, “Send us to the swine, that we might enter into them.” And straightway Jesus gave them leave. And the spirits, the unclean ones, went out and entered into the swine (now they were about two thousand); and the herd rushed down the cliff into the sea, and they were drowned in the sea. [Mk. 5:12,13]

DONE GIVE TO ME - I DO NOT WANT THEM , DO NOT PERMIT THEM TO ENTER ME

# THE PATHAWAY FROM GOD TOWARDS SPIRITUAL DEATH

**Sloth – (*ἀργία* lit. means “not Working, Unemployed) the root of all sin IS becoming spiritually indifferent**

- ❖ The word *sloth, laziness, indolence* is being used in the sense that there is a neglect caring for one’s spiritual life

<sup>14</sup>Do not neglect the gift of grace in thee, which was given thee by prophecy with laying on of the hands of the presbytery. <sup>15</sup>Keep on meditating upon these things; keep on being in these things, that thy progress may be manifest in all things. <sup>16</sup>Be taking heed to thyself and to the teaching. Keep on continuing in them, for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and those who hear thee. [1 Tim. 4:14-16]

“It is that strange laziness and passivity of our entire being which always pushes us ‘down’ rather than ‘up’ – which constantly convinces us that no change is possible and therefore desirable. It is in fact a deeply seated cynicism which to every spiritual challenge responds, ‘What for?’ and makes our life one tremendous spiritual waste (Fr. Schmemmann, Great Lent).”

# THE PATHAWAY FROM GOD TOWARDS SPIRITUAL DEATH

*Despondency* – (περιεργίας – a busy body, meddling, gossiping, going around in circles, wasting our time and doing nothing).

This is a deliberate turning away from oneself and becoming obsessed with the problems of others (Face Book).

“Despondence is the impossibility for man to see anything good or positive; it is the reduction of everything to negativism and pessimism . . . it is the suicide of the soul because when man is possessed by it he is absolutely unable to see the light and to desire it (Fr. Schmemmann, Great Lent).”

- ❖ In psychological terms, a despondent soul has *barrier* issues because the painful consequence of neglecting the soul is artificially soothed by obsessing in the perceived problems of others.

# THE PATHAWAY FROM GOD TOWARDS SPIRITUAL DEATH

*Lust of Power – (φιλαρχίας – love of ruling others,  
Being a person of importance)*

Once despondency has been created in the soul, the next consequence is to place oneself above everyone else

“The lust of power is thus a fundamental depravity in my relationship with other beings, a search for their subordination to me. . . It may result as well in indifference, contempt, lack of interest, and respect (Fr. Schmemmann, Great Lent).”

“If God is not the Lord and Master of my life, then I become my own lord and master – the absolute center of *my* own world, and I begin to evaluate everything in terms of *my* own needs, *my* ideas, *my* desires, and *my* judgments (Fr. Schmemmann, Great Lent).”



# THE PATHAWAY FROM GOD TOWARDS SPIRITUAL DEATH

## ▣ *Idle Talk – ἀργολογίας*

“The good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and the evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. <sup>36</sup>” But I say to you, that every idle word, whatsoever men shall speak, they shall render an account concerning it in *the* day of judgment. <sup>37</sup>” For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” [Mt. 12:35-37]

*Idle talk* does not refer to meaningless, unedifying talk, it is a power which seeks the destruction of others. To use speech as a weapon. Instead of the tongue being employed to praise God and build up one another, it utters malicious comments and slander

## GIVE TO ME - THE PATHAWAY TOWARDS LIFE

Whole mindedness- Σωφροσύνη - soundness of mind, self-control, sobriety

- ❖ Virtue has as its source God, we participate in virtue when we turn towards God and away from sin.

“Christ restores wholeness in us and He does so by restoring in us the true scale of values by leading us back to God (Fr. Schmemmann, Great Lent).”

“Saint Gregory of Nyssa: “‘The kingdom of God is within you [Lk. 17:21].’ By this we should learn that if a man’s heart has been purified from every creature and all unruly affections, he will see the image of the divine nature in his own beauty,...for God imprinted on our nature the likeness of the glories of His own nature.”

# GIVE TO ME - THE PATHAWAY TOWARDS LIFE

Humility (Ταπεινοφροσύνης, low or humble mindedness of oneself) – the first fruit of wholeness

**Humility is learned from Christ Himself, Who Is Humility**

“Take up My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and humble in heart; and you shall find rest to your souls. [Mt. 11:29]

**Humility is a Divine Gift, the holy work of repentance – freely changing one’ inner heart**

When Archimandrite Zachariah (Zacharou) was asked, “What is divine humility?” He answered, “To have the imprint of Christ in one’s heart and to see how far away one is from it.”

Holy humility had this to say, “The one who loves me will not condemn someone, or pass judgment on anyone, or lord it over someone else, or show off his wisdom until he has been united with me. A man truly **joined to me** is no longer in bondage to the Law” (note 1 Tim. 1:9). (John of The Ladder, Step 25)

# GIVE TO ME - THE PATHAWAY TOWARDS LIFE

Patience (ὑπομονῆς, remaining under) – God is patient because he sees the depth of all that exists. There is a “self-forgetting” that happens when we love in Christ

“The closer we come to God, the more patient we grow and the more we reflect that infinite respect for all beings which is the proper quality of God (Fr. Schmemmann, Great Lent).”

This virtue only sees the good in others and with a discerning eye, understands others in light of having personally experienced God’s patience and His loving us unconditionally despite wrong decisions and sins.

This is expressed as *being present* when someone is talking to us. It is seen when our own of tasks that I would like to accomplish in a day are quickly abandoned when the needs of others demand our attention.

# GIVE TO ME - THE PATHAWAY TOWARDS LIFE

Love ( ἀγάπη, Agape is one of four words for love in Greek, it is used specifically as referring to a "Christ-like" love which is unconditional, the highest form of love is to empty oneself of self-love and to love the other.

C. S. Lewis uses *agape*... to describe what he believes is the highest level of love known to humanity: a selfless love that is passionately committed to the well-being of others.

The last line of the prayer reads: "Yes, O Lord and King grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brothers and sisters; for You are blessed unto the ages of ages. Amen."

The goal of the spiritual life, of fasting and prayer is to love one another with the love with which we have been loved.

Enter into a deeper communion with God, enlarges the heart towards others

The last thing we do before singing Christ is risen is to forgive one another. It is the first and last action of Great and holy Lent because it is indeed the test of whether or not we are truly His disciples and following the WAY OF LIFE.

"... when we "see our own errors" and "do not judge our brothers," when, in other terms, chastity, humility, patience, and love are but one in us, then and only then the ultimate enemy--pride--will be destroyed in us." (Schmemmann)