

ON DIVINE EROS

FROM THE HOLY FATHERS



or have we contributed to the existing chaos? For this reason we must always strive to perfect our thoughts.

Death, the Judgment, heaven, and hell. We must have a remembrance of these things all the time. As for our attention, it must be focused on the words of the prayer.

The Lord only appears to us when the need is great. We are too weak to be able to recognize a vision from the other world and we have no discernment. This is very dangerous for the soul. The Holy Fathers have often prayed never to have any visions. When the soul is unable to find comfort anywhere in the world, then the Lord Himself comes to comfort it. This only happens in extreme necessity.

23. QUESTION: Father, I am trying to make my mind descend into my heart by controlling my breathing, as the Holy Fathers teach, but I feel as though there is no place in my heart, I feel something like a light pressure and a slight discomfort. What should I do?

ANSWER: This is because your mind has not descended into your heart at all, but has produced thoughts on its own. This is dangerous and there is the possibility of losing one's mind. It sometimes happens to students as well, when there is too much stress on the blood vessels in their brain. You should not attempt to do this without an experienced spiritual guide who will explain to you how to let your mind down into your heart. It is difficult to find such a spiritual guide today. What you can do is understand that every task you do is done for God. When you have realized and accepted that, then you no longer need to think about letting your mind descend into your heart.

You think that your mind is in your heart, but your mind is still where it was before, in your head. Many have practiced the Jesus Prayer by themselves but have lost their minds.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ON LOVE

1. God is Love. And if we call upon God in our life as the Holy Fathers teach us, then we are calling upon Love. If we know and believe that He is present everywhere at all times and if we are united with Him in our hearts, He will teach us how to love our neighbor. For we do not know how to love either the Lord or our neighbor. The evil spirits often so interfere with the Divine love given us by God that they often lure us away from the path of real and true love. Their suggestions are full of the physical and emotional aspects of this world: enjoyment and lust, which is nothing but enslavement.

It often happens that a person, either young or old, falls in love with another person or even an object. Some people fall in love with gold and cannot bear to be separated from it or from their wealth, house, and possessions, and they become enslaved. If someone were to take this from them, they would become desperate. Many times the powers of evil bring such people to the brink of self-destruction.

Is this love? The spirits of evil often come and meddle with the Divine love that God has planted in us. That kind of love [corrupted by the evil spirits] is without discernment. But the love of God is boundless.... Love is perfection, says the Apostle (cf. Rom. 13:10). God is perfect, He is faultless. And so, when Divine love becomes manifest in us in the fullness of Grace, we radiate this love not only on the earth, but throughout the entire universe as well. So God is in us, and He is present everywhere. It is God's all-encompassing love that manifests itself in us. When

this happens we see no difference between people—everyone is good, everyone is our brother, and we consider ourselves to be the worst of men, servants of every created thing.

In this kind of love we are humbled; our soul is at peace and in humility. And humility is the perfection of the Christian life. It is not in the raising of the dead or in working miracles that Christian perfection lies, but in extreme humility. When we are illumined by the Grace of the Holy Spirit in the fullness of Divine love, then we want to serve everyone and help everyone. Even when we see a little ant struggling, we want to help him.

So, love is sacrifice. Love sacrifices itself for its neighbor.

2. The Lord is always waiting for us to unite ourselves with Him in love, but instead we drift further and further away from Him. We know that there can be no life without love. This means that there is no life without God, for God is Love. But His love is not according to the understanding of this world. The love that the world gives us consists of suffering and enslavement because the spirits of evil interfere with it. There is a little bit of love, but mostly it is just enslavement. The spirits of evil try to enslave us so that we become tied to certain people or things, in order to prevent our hearts from going out to God, the Source of life and love. For they know that if our hearts unite with Him, then they cannot come close to us. The man who is given Grace and who is united with God's love is also protected by this Divine love, and the evil spirits cannot come close to him.

3. Love is the most powerful means of defense there is. There are no weapons and no power that can measure themselves against love. Everything is defeated before love.

4. All of nature is a great mystery, from the plants and birds to man, for God is present everywhere. He discloses a small part of this great mystery to those who truly love Him—to men of

pure heart. God is an incomprehensible energy. Man also has incomprehensible energy. When these two energies are in harmony, we have paradise on earth, joy, and all-encompassing love.

5. We can all be good if, with all our hearts, we unite ourselves with the Source of life, God. He will give us strength to love both ourselves and our neighbor. Without God it is not possible to love oneself, even. Many people become depressed and hopeless and attempt to take their own lives, for without God we cannot even love ourselves, let alone our friends, family, and neighbors—or our enemies for that matter. All is possible with God, for He is our strength and our life. We must give our heart to someone, and if we give it to any person on this planet, this person can harm us. We all seek boundless and unchangeable love and infinite peace, but who can give it to us? Not even our parents, our brothers, or our sisters. Every one of them can abandon, despise, or harm us. Why? Because we are all limited by time and space and we all battle against the unclean powers, which are constantly defiling our thoughts.

6. To whomever we give our heart, this person can harm us or abandon us. The spirits of wickedness are constantly putting evil thoughts into our feeling of love and preying on us. Divine love is boundless and all-encompassing, whereas we are attached to men and the lifeless things of this world. Our hearts have been imprisoned by the things of this world, and if those things are taken away from us, our hearts are saddened and they suffer.

One must love God first, and only then can one love one's closest of kin and neighbors. We must not be as idols to one another, for such is not the will of God.

St Basil the Great says, "The God who loves mankind provides consolations in proportion to afflictions, and He encourages the humble not to fail in their struggle though they are burdened by exceeding sorrow."²¹¹

Chrysostom says, "The righteous suffer for the purpose of being trained in righteousness, while the unrighteous suffer as a conviction of sin."²¹² For this reason Scripture calls the sufferings of the righteous 'afflictions', while the sufferings of sinners it calls 'plagues' and 'scourges'. Life is full of difficulty, and it is necessary for both the righteous and the unrighteous, both the pious and the impious, to suffer. However, there is a great difference between the two kinds of suffering. For it is one thing to be chastised as one belonging to God, and another to suffer scourges as a stranger to Him. The son receives strikes, and the servant also. But the latter receives them as a slave who has fallen into sin, while the former receives them as a free man and son possessing the hope of restoration. Sufferings do not render anyone equal.

★ When the pious suffers the same thing as the impious, he is not made his equal, but the chastisement is reckoned to him as an 'affliction' and a trial, while to the impious it is reckoned as a 'scourge' and a punishment."

As Synesius says, "Through affliction good things come to those who wait, while evils come through vainglory." And again Chrysostom says, "No man that walks the path of virtue is without sorrow, affliction, pain, and temptations."²¹³ "Affliction is a great benefit; and this we learn from our own children, for without pain none of us would ever learn anything of value."²¹⁴

²¹¹ Basil the Great, *Letter 127*.

²¹² Cf. Jn. 16:8.

²¹³ Chrysostom, *Commentary on 2 Timothy* 8.3.

²¹⁴ Chrysostom, *Commentary on Acts* 42.4.

1. On divine eros

= knowledge

Divine eros is the perfect love of God, which is manifested as a ceaseless yearning for Him. Divine eros is born in the purified heart, for God's grace dwells therein. Eros for God is a divine gift bestowed on the chaste soul when divine grace visits and reveals it to her. Divine eros does not come to anyone apart from divine revelation, for the soul that has not received divine revelation does not yet have grace acting upon her and still remains insensitive to divine eros. It is impossible for divine eros to be engendered without divine power working upon the heart. Divine eros is the energy of God's grace dwelling in the heart.

Lovers of God are drawn to divine eros by the grace of God, which acts upon their pure hearts; this grace is revealed to the soul and draws it close to God. The lover of God is first loved by God, and then loves Him. The lover of God first becomes a son of love, and then he comes to love his heavenly Father.

The heart of one who loves the Lord never sleeps, but is always awake because of the abundance of its eros. The person sleeps of natural necessity, but the heart remains vigilant, praising God.²¹⁵

St John Chrysostom says about spiritual love that "spiritual eros is so captivating that in no season does it subside, but it ever keeps hold of the loving soul and allows for no affliction or pain to overcome her."²¹⁶

The soul that loves God holds fast to Him, puts her trust in Him, placing all her hope in Him. Her eros for God lifts her up to Him and she converses with Him day and night. The soul that is wounded by divine eros desires nothing but the highest good. She counts all else as being of little worth and looks upon these lesser matters with contempt.

The soul that loves God meditates on His words and dwells in His tabernacles.²¹⁷ When she speaks she tells of the wonders of God, and when she opens her mouth she describes His glory and majesty. She sends up songs of praise to God unceasingly and worships Him with divine yearning. So

²¹⁵ Song of Songs 5:2.

²¹⁶ Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians* 1.3.

²¹⁷ Cf. Ps. 118, 83:2, 11.

greatly does divine eros unite the soul to God, transforming her and bringing her closer to Him.

The soul that has fallen in love with God knows God personally, and this knowledge fans the flame of her divine eros. Such a soul is blessed, for she has attained the divine desire that satisfies her longings. Any desire, longing, or yearning that is alien to divine love she despises as base and unworthy of her attention.

How greatly rewarded is the love of God! How high does divine love lift up the soul that loves God! This divine love raises the soul aloft like a light cloud, bearing her up to the perpetual source of love, to Love Eternal, and fills her with eternal light.

The soul that is wounded by divine eros is ever rejoicing, exulting, and dancing for joy, for she reposes in the love of the Lord by the water of rest.²¹⁸ None of the world's afflictions can disturb her peace and tranquility, none of its sorrows can remove her joy and gladness.

The soul that loves God is raised to such great heights by love that, in a manner, she goes beyond the bodily senses and even outside the body itself. She becomes forgetful of herself in her perfect devotion to God.²¹⁹

The indescribable sweetness of divine love enraptures and enthralls the heart, drawing the mind to the Divine so that it might delight in God with rejoicing.

Divine eros brings about familiarity with God, and familiarity is followed by boldness. Boldness brings such a taste of divine love that causes an ever increasing hunger.

The soul that has been touched by divine eros can think of nothing else, nor can she desire anything else, but she constantly sighs, saying, "Lord, when will I come and appear before Your face? My soul longs to come to You, O God, just as the hart pants after springs of water!"²²⁰

Such is the divine eros that captivates the soul!

2. On divine love

²¹⁸ Ps. 22:2.

²¹⁹ Cf. 2 Cor. 12:2-3.

²²⁰ Ps. 41:2-3.

O love, sure and true! O love, likeness to the divine image! O love, my soul's sweetest delight! O love, divine fulfillment of my heart's desire! O love, the strength of my soul's power! O love, my mind's continual meditation! Ever entralling my soul, you give her care and fervent warmth. You give her life and lead her to godly affection. You burn my heart with the flame of divine eros and ignite its yearning for the ultimate desire. You fill my soul with strength, fortifying her by your life-giving power, so that she may offer due worship to God who is Love. You captivate my mind, liberating it from earthly bonds and giving it freedom to rise unhindered to the celestial love of the heavens. You are the most precious treasure of the faithful, for you are the most priceless of divine gifts. You are the godlike glory of the heart and soul, for you show forth the faithful as sons of God. You are the adornment of believers, for you clothe in majestic array those who love you. You are the only lasting good, for you are eternal. You are the most splendid garment of the friends of God, for when believers are clothed in you they are worthy to stand before the throne of divine love. You are the sweetest delight of the faithful, for you are the fruit of the Holy Spirit. You introduce the believers you sanctify into the very kingdom of heaven. You are the gladsome fragrance of the pious. Through you believers partake of the pleasure of Paradise. Through you the light of the noetic sun shines forth in their souls. Through you the noetic eyes of believers are illumined. Through you the faithful become partakers of divine glory and life unending. Through you comes our yearning for heavenly goods. You restore the kingdom of God upon the earth. You bestow peace to men. You assimilate the earth to heaven. You unite men with angels and raise the harmony of their hymn unto God. In all things you emerge victorious. In all things you prove superior. You truly reign over everything. You hold all things together and preserve them. You never fail.²²¹

O love, my heart's fulfillment! O love, dearest imitation of our dearest Jesus! O love, most sacred emblem of the Lord's disciples! O love, symbol of the sweetest Jesus! Wound my heart with longing and fill it with goodness and kindness and flood it with joy. Make it the abode of the grace of the All-Holy Spirit. Wholly enkindle it with your divine flame to burn its base passions, that you may sanctify it and draw it into unceasing hymnody. Fill my heart with the sweetness of your love, so that I may love the only sweetest Jesus Christ, my Lord, that I may sing endless hymns to Him with all my soul, with all my heart, with all my strength, and with all my mind. Amen.

St John of the Ladder says about love for God, "Love is the provider of prophecy. Love is the producer of miracles. Love is a bountiful abyss of illumination. Love is a fountain of fire. The more it streams forth, the more it

²²¹ 1 Cor. 13:8.

increases the thirst of him who drinks of it. Love is the station of angels, the progress of men. Tell us, O fair one among virtues, where do you tend your sheep? Where do you camp at noon? Enlighten us, quench our thirst, guide us, show us the way. For we desire to ascend to you."²²²

3. On God's love, that it is a divine attribute and that all good things originate from it.

O love! divine attribute, for "God is love," and so whoever abides in love abides in God and God in him. "Love is the good disposition of the soul that values no created thing more than the knowledge of God."²²³ Love teaches us to preserve the divine commandments, and the manifest proof of our love for God is the observance of His divine laws. Love for God leads us to keep the commandments, which in turn raise us to the knowledge of God. He who has received divine eros despises all earthly things and tramples over bodily pleasures. He looks beyond wealth and glory as well as the honor given by men. He considers a royal garment no better than the woven thread of a spider's web. He counts precious gems with the pebbles that lie on river banks. He neither considers physical health a blessing, nor does he call illness a curse. He neither declares poverty a misfortune, nor does he ascribe happiness to wealth and pleasure; but he wisely reasons that all these things are much like trees that stand by riverbanks; each is eventually swept away by its torrents, none of them remain."²²⁴

"Truly, spiritual love is like a fortified city, which cannot be conquered or besieged by the devil, whether by undermining or overpowering; nor is it susceptible to Satan's battering rams, for it is guarded by the Sovereign Christ."²²⁵ "Adornment with the diadem of love serves to make manifest the genuine disciple of Christ, not only to us [who believe], but also to unbelievers. For Christ says, 'By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.' So this is the greatest sign of all, through which the disciple is recognized. Even if some perform a thousand miraculous signs, yet still oppose each other, they will be ridiculed by unbelievers. On the other hand, though they perform no miraculous sign, but still perfectly love each other, they will remain respected and irrefragable before all."²²⁶

²²² John Climacus, *Step* 30. Trans. note: the passage recalls the moment that Jacob falls in love with the 'fair' Rachel at the well. Cf. Gen. 29.

²²³ St Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Love* 1.1.

²²⁴ Theodoret of Cyrillus, *Discourse on Divine and Holy Love*.

²²⁵ *Acts of the Third Ecumenical Council* 1.1.3.

²²⁶ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, 32.8.

Love is the icon of the Lord's disciples, the insignia of God's servants, and the attribute by which the Apostles are recognized; "for by this all people will recognize you."

Love, the transcendent Good, is the highest attribute of the disciples of Christ. The Christian is characterized by love, which is the greatest of all miracles. "It is the guardian and sustainer of all the other commandments. Just as beams hold buildings together, so love completes everything and unites the members of the body." When it is present, it binds them tight, whereas in its absence they disperse or dissolve into an empty show of hypocrisy. "Love never fails,"²²⁷ which is to say, it never falls short of its aim, but succeeds in everything, or better yet, it never dissolves into disunity, it cannot be impeded, it never ceases, but will even remain in the age to come, when everything else will be rendered unnecessary. "It does not err, but abides forever, safe and undeterred, ever remaining unshaken."²²⁸ "Love never fails." Even if others revolt and rejoice in wars, even if they seek supremacy and are inflamed with envy, even if they rule with hands of iniquity and turn everything upside down, love will never fall from its rightful ascendancy and excellence.

God is named Love, and as such Love "is not an emotion, but a Personal Being who loves His creations and cares for them."²²⁹ Our God is Love, and God is more pleased with this name than any other.

The love of God supremely surpasses all other forms of love. "Not only does He care for us, but He has eros for us, and loves us exceedingly with an incomprehensible eros, which is dispassionate, but also blazing, all-powerful, genuine, invincible, and inextinguishable."²³⁰

"What is there that God has not done for us? The world that He made corruptible for us, this He has also made incorruptible for us. He suffered His prophets to be mistreated for our sake, He sent them into captivity for us, He let them be cast to the fiery furnace for us, allowed them to endure myriads of evils for us. He appointed them as prophets for our sake, and apostles for our sake, He delivered His Only-Begotten for us, and places all the devil's power under restraint for us."²³¹

²²⁷ 1 Cor. 13:8.

²²⁸ Theodoret of Cyrillus, *Commentary on Colossians*.

²²⁹ Didymus the Blind, *Fragments on the Gospel of John* 1. Trans. note: *Ousia* is here translated as "personal being", since it refers to the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

²³⁰ John Chrysostom, *Προς τους σκανδαλισθέντας επι ταις δυημεριας* 6.

²³¹ *Ibid. Commentary on Romans*, 14.8.

“God came among humankind for our sake; for the sake of our corrupted nature ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,’²³² the Benefactor among the ungrateful, the Liberator among the captives, the Sun of Righteousness among those who sit in darkness; the impassible One went unto the Cross, Life went unto death, the Light went down to Hades, becoming the Resurrection for those who had fallen. He gave us the Spirit of adoption as sons of God, the distribution of spiritual gifts, the promise of crowns, and so much more, which it were no small task to enumerate them all.”²³³

“It was all for our sake that God came and dwelt among men, that the Holy Spirit was distributed, that death was abolished, that He gave us the hope of resurrection, divine injunctions to bring our life to perfection, a path to God through the commandments, that He has prepared the kingdom of heaven, and a crown of righteousness for those who do not shrink back from toils for virtue’s sake.”²³⁴

“It is the love of God that revealed God Himself on earth. It is the love of God that made the Master assume the form of a slave. It is the love of God that motivated the Beloved to give Himself up for His enemies, the Son for those who hated Him, the Master for His servants, God for men, the Free One for His subjects. And neither did He stop at that, but called us to things yet higher; for not only did He deliver us from our former evils, but He promised things far greater than this.”²³⁵

The love of God is resplendent wisdom, which God shall provide to those who love Him. He who loves God keeps His word, and God loves him and manifests Himself to him. “If anyone loves me,” says the Lord, “he will keep my word and My Father will love him, and We shall come to him and make our dwelling with him.”²³⁶

“All things work together unto good for those who love God.”²³⁷

“If anyone loves God, he is known by Him.”²³⁸

²³² Jn. 1:14.

²³³ Basil the Great, *Homily on the Martyr Julitta* 7.

²³⁴ Ibid., *Homily on ‘Attend to Yourself’* 6.

²³⁵ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Ephesians* 4.

²³⁶ Jn. 14:23.

²³⁷ Rom. 8:28.

²³⁸ 1 Cor. 8:3.

God provides communion with Himself to those who preserve their friendship with Him. And communion with God is life and light and delight in His bountiful goodness.

God is not the God of all men, but of those who become akin to Him through love. Love is the bond of perfection; “love is the fashioner of every virtue.”²³⁹

Love for God “is born of sincere faith, for he who truly believes in God cannot bear to be parted from it.”²⁴⁰

Sooner will the grass withstand a blazing fire than the devil will be able to defy the flame of love; it is sturdier than any bulwark and more impenetrable than any diamond.

Love does not consist in fine words and professed feelings, but entails genuine care and proof through deeds; that is to say, by alleviating poverty, by attending to someone in illness, by delivering the imperilled from danger, by supporting those in need, by weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice.²⁴¹

He who loves God, since his heart overflows with divine love, loves his own enemies, blesses those who curse him, treats well those who hate him, and prays for those who disparage and persecute him.²⁴²

The demonstration and substantiation of perfect love for God is the constant habit of genuine goodwill towards one’s neighbor. “By this we recognize love, that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”²⁴³

“Love covers a multitude of sins.”²⁴⁴

And it is love that will give us boldness on the Day of Judgment.

4. Confession of faith

²³⁹ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on First Corinthians* 33.6.

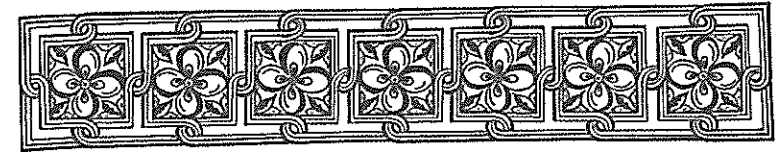
²⁴⁰ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on 1 Timothy* 2.1.

²⁴¹ Rom. 12:15. Ibid., *Commentary on Romans* 7.5.

²⁴² Lk. 6:27-28.

²⁴³ 1 Jn. 3:16.

²⁴⁴ James 5:20.



CHAPTER ONE

The Inexhaustible Love of God and Our Love for God

God “bombards” us with His love

Geronda, sometimes I feel the love of God intensely and am pained by my lack of gratitude. – I hope and pray that you will respond to the many benefactions of God. David said, “*Your mercy, O Lord, shall follow me all the days of my life.*”¹ You should also say this, because it is true that the same thing is also happening to you; but it is also true that you acknowledge it, and thank and glorify God.

When one acknowledges the love of God, then God “bombards” him with His love. The word “bombards” may seem strange to you, but it takes divine bombs, made out of the love of God, to break through the scales or granite encasing our heart. Once its casing is shattered, the heart becomes sensitive, and a person is moved even by the smallest blessings of God. One feels completely indebted to God and is deeply moved at all times, because,

1. Prokeimenon for Tuesday Vespers. Cf. also Ps 23:6 (22:6 LXX).

while he is thinking of ways to pay off his debt, God is showering him with more and more blessings, until his *philotimo-filled* heart has been melted by the love of God.

– Geronda, why does God love us so much?

– Because we are His children; I can't add more to that!

– Geronda, although one may be struggling, doesn't it displease God if he constantly falls into the same sins? Doesn't he disappoint Him?

– Is God expecting any progress from us in the first place? No. But we are His children and He loves us all the same. One of the children of a father I once saw was mentally handicapped, and although he kept wiping his runny nose on his sleeves, his father hugged him, kissed him and caressed him, just as much as his other children. God does the same thing. Being the Good Father He is, God not only loves His accomplished children, but He also loves those who are spiritually weak for Whom He is all the more pained and concerned.

No one can grasp how much God loves man! His love is incomparable! It is boundless! His love is so vast and powerful that our earthen heart cannot withstand even the slightest bit we may feel of it; His love dissolves the heart because the heart is made of earth.

God often allows His love to fall profusely upon His creatures, such that our soul becomes heated and we see that divine love is so sweet, so immense, that it becomes unbearable, and we come to the point of saying, "It is enough, God! Turn down Your love a bit because I cannot bear it." This is God's way of showing us that although He is fully inclined to give His profuse love to us, He doesn't, because our battery is small and weak. We need to enlarge our battery so that it can take in more divine

love, because the divine current of God's love comes to us in proportion to our capacity.

– Geronda, how can this capacity be increased?

– The greater the cleansing of our heart, the greater its capacity – and the greater will be its acceptance of divine love, which is boundless, undivided and inexhaustible.

The good distribution of love

– Geronda, can my love for a saint diminish my love for God?

– No, because when one has great love and devotion for a particular saint, naturally within that love is concealed his great love and devotion for the Triune God and *Panaghia*.

Whoever honours the saints, certainly honours *Panaghia* much more; and greatly honouring *Panaghia* means to honour the All-Holy Trinity even more so. You see, when you are close to a saint and feel great gratitude toward him, you could even sacrifice yourself for his sake. But, if you were to sacrifice yourself for a saint, would you not again be sacrificing yourself for God?

Love toward Christ, toward *Panaghia*, toward the Saints is a great matter. It is a love incomparable to any other love. It is solid and reciprocal.

– Geronda, is it possible for one to love God but not love his fellow men?

– No, because when you love God, it is impossible not to love your fellow men, the images of God. Our love for God leads to love for our neighbour, because whoever is close to God is also close to mankind, just like the Saints. Concealed within our love for our neighbour is our great love for God.

When one gives his heart to God, he loves everything; he not only loves all people, he also loves the birds and the trees, even the snakes. He reveres with devotion not only God and the saints, but also all human beings, the images of God. Since he considers all of creation to be a blessing from his Creator, he holds each creation – large or small, precious or insignificant, little sticks and stones – and kisses each with reverence, just as one would reverence a large or small object that has been blessed by a person he esteems.

Ascent to Heaven

– Geronda, how does one reach God?

– There are two ways by which one may ascend, high, up to God so that He may condescend to bend over him and stay with him. The first is sincere repentance, and concerns the very sinful. When they become aware of their great falls into sins and have been greatly humbled, then God loves them very much for their great repentance and He raises them to Heaven. “*More joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner who repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance...*”² as the Gospel tells us. Then, of course, the sinners also love God very much for having forgiven them so much debt. The second way is this: When a person remains pure from mortal sins, he must be grateful to the benevolent God Who has protected him since childhood so that the garment of his soul has not been sullied. Take yourself for instance... If Christ had not protected you like a chick beneath His

2. Lk 15:7.

wings ever since you were a little girl, you might have become the greatest sinner in the world. This is why you must praise the benevolent God for His great gift, day and night, and shed tears of joy and gratitude before Him. Those tears have the same power – perhaps even greater – as tears of repentance, and can raise one to Heaven, where he reaches God and praises Him endlessly, like the Angels. And although he lives on earth, it is as if he is in Heaven. Then, all of one’s life becomes a doxology; he even awaits death with a doxology, because he contemplates that he will be near God as a permanent resident, since it is his ultimate destination. It is then that he bursts into the greatest doxology: “*Glory to Thee, the manifestation of light...*”

We should give our love to Christ

– Geronda, what do I have to do in order to love God?

– In order to love God, you should start with sacrifice. When a person does not take himself into account and sacrifices himself instead, then things are in order: he loves his neighbour – he loves God. Those who claim to love God but fail to make a single sacrifice for their neighbour have “*loved Him with their mouths and they lied unto Him with their tongues.*”³

– Geronda, how is love for God increased?

– By keeping your mind constantly on God, by thinking of God; invoke the Jesus Prayer; speak with God. When a person practises this, he will, at first, sense a little bit of the love of God; later, as he advances, he will feel it all the

3. Cf. Ps 78:36 (77:36 LXX).

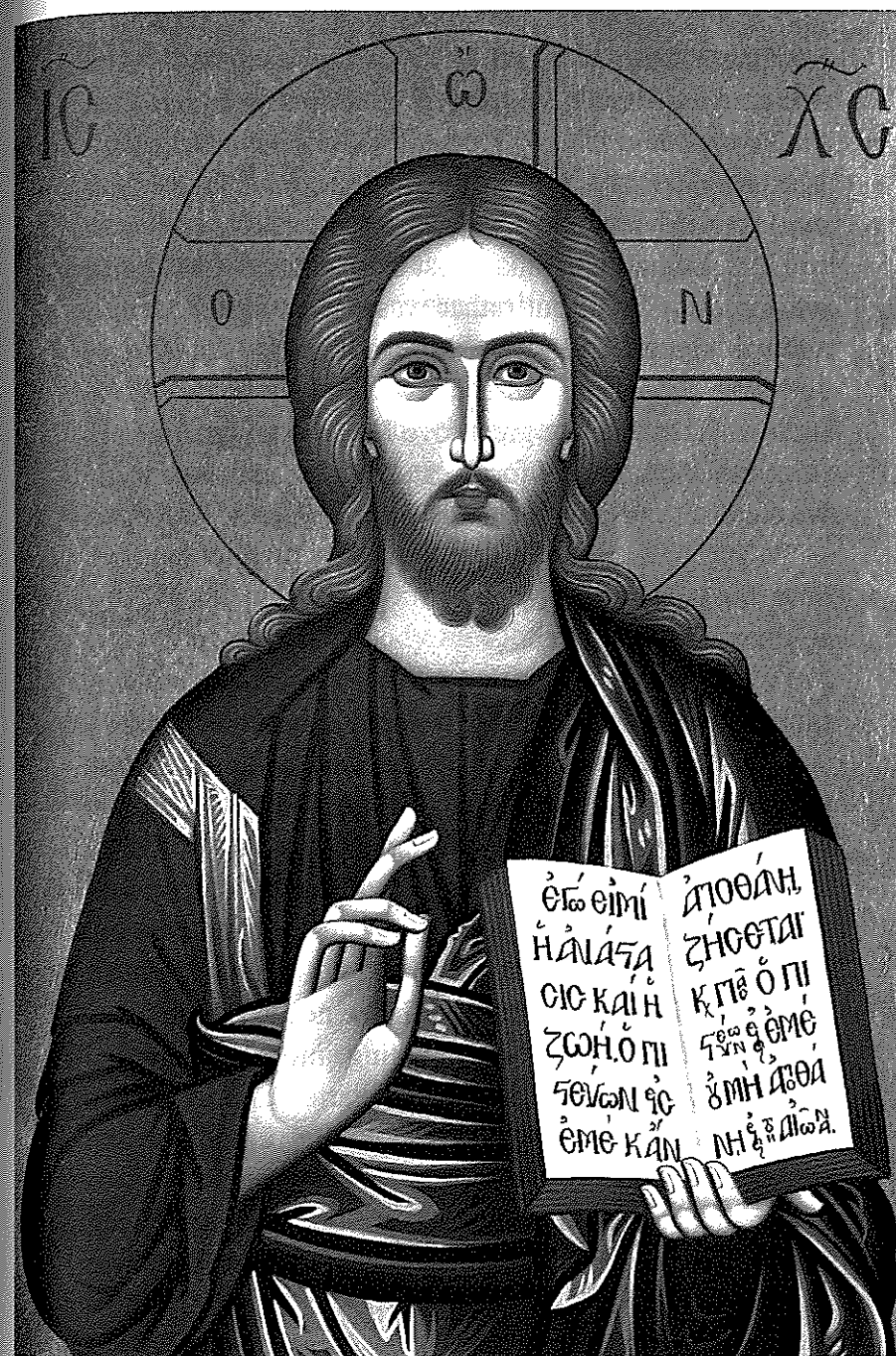
more. In time, his mind is permanently fixed on God and he is no longer moved by anything earthly or vain. Ablaze with the love of God, his heart is filled and he doesn't want to think of anything else except God. No longer interested in any worldly matters, he thinks constantly of the Heavenly Father. You see, those involved with inventions and discoveries are deeply absorbed by their study. However, how deeply absorbed are we by Christ?

– What is it that we are lacking, Geronda, that we do not seek Christ with such zeal?

– We are not lacking anything. We have our mind; we have our maturity. The only obstacle is our own self.

If we do not discard our own self, how is Christ to enter our heart? If we throw away our own self so that the bad tenant, that is, the old self, departs, then the new man of the New Testament will dwell in the vacuum of our heart and fill our temple, all of our being, with love, because Love, Christ Himself, will lodge within us. Then the heart becomes forevermore a bell that incessantly and joyously rings so resonantly that the ribs seem ready to burst out of their sides, since they are merely plastered with clay that became flesh at the command of God. And if you find yourself in a desert and there is no temple, then your body becomes the temple and your heart the bell.

When one gives his heart to God, then even his mind is consumed by love for God and his heart leaps constantly for joy; his head feels light, and his body feels as light as a feather. And when love for God exceeds the heart's capacity, then one's heartbeat can be heard by those around him, because the body itself is also participating in this exalted state.



One heart is so small, yet it can love so much! And if the love of one is so great for God, just imagine what the love of God is like! I mean this in terms of quantity, because in terms of quality the love of God is the same as our love, provided our love is also spiritual.

It is such a shame that most of us do not want to give our love to Christ, but rather waste it on earthly, cheap and vain things! Even if we were to live a thousand years and have a thousand hearts, they would not be enough to offer to Christ for the great love He has shown and continues to show us; He forgives us; He bears with us and He cleanses our polluted souls with His divine blood.

The flame of God's love

– Geronda, why can't I love God in the same way that I love another human to whom I want to be near?

– This happens gradually, after struggling; otherwise people would catch on fire and be burned by the love of God. Even if the weather was cold, they would feel as if they were on fire and many would take to the mountains. During the war, a soldier left his unit and went up a mountain. There was such a burning flame in his heart that he could not contain himself; he needed to go away and pray. He did not take anything into consideration. He found a cave, went inside and started to pray! When the other soldiers went out on patrol, they found him and seized him. "You're a deserter!" they shouted. He was then called for an interrogation by the ranking officer: "What have you done?" "Sir, I was burning inside; I was burning for Christ. Do you have any idea of what it is like to be burning for Christ?" And the officer retorted, "Fine,

but am I not also burning?" "But, Sir, do you understand that I am truly burning?" the soldier repeated emphatically to the officer, as if to say, "If you are burning, then, you, too, should go away!" But God protected him and he avoided a court-martial. If a soldier leaves his post even in a time of peace, he can be court-martialled, but in a time of war it is far more serious!⁴

– Geronda, when one is in this state, does the entire body become feverish?

– Yes, but mostly in the chest area. Once spiritual love is kindled, the entire chest area is inflamed. One burns with the great, sweet flame of the love of God; he soars; he loves with an authentic, maternal love.

This inner flame, kindled by Christ Himself with His love, warms the body far more than any perceptible fire, and has the power to raze every impurity, every bad thought the devil aims at us – even every wicked desire, and every ugly image. It is then that the soul feels divine pleasures, which are incomparable to any other pleasure!

Ah, this flame has not yet entered into any of you! If it is kindled and blazes up in your heart, you will never again be moved by the vain things of this world. I pray that God may burn your hearts with His love!

Divine eros

– Geronda, is divine *eros* the love we feel for God?

– Divine *eros* is something far superior to one's love for

4. The Elder, who was always known to be law-abiding, uses this example of an insubordinate soldier to help us understand that if one is aflame with the love of God, then "even the mind of man is consumed by the love of God", and he reaches the point of doing things that cannot be easily understood or justified.

God. It is a kind of madness. "Love – *eros* – madness" – is along the same lines as "malice – hatred – murder". Divine *eros*, replete with its sacrifices, is a priceless love for God; it simmers slowly inside the heart and then, just like steam which cannot be contained, it bursts forth and unites with God.

Divine *eros* softens even the toughest bones so much that a person can no longer stand upright; he actually falls down! He becomes like a tall wax candle in a warm environment that cannot stand firmly upright. It leans to one side, then to the other side ... you straighten it, but again it leans, again it falls because of the heat of its environment, which is too hot for it to bear... When a person finds himself in such a state and he needs to go somewhere or do something, he cannot... He struggles; he has to actually struggle to get out of that state...

– Geronda, if one has pain while he is in a state of divine *eros*, does he feel the pain?

– If the pain is very intense, it is subdued and becomes bearable. If the pain is minimal, it disappears all together. Haven't you seen how those who are in love are completely oblivious? They can hardly sleep. A monk once told me, "Geronda, my brother has fallen in love with a gypsy woman and he can't even sleep. He keeps repeating her name over and over again. Is he bewitched? I don't know what to do! I have been a monk for so many years, and even I don't love *Panaghia* as much as my brother loves that woman! My heart does not leap like that at all!"

Unfortunately, there are many spiritual people who are scandalised by the term "divine *eros*". They haven't understood what it means and want to remove the phrase

from the liturgical books of the *Menaia*⁵ and the *Parakletike*⁶, claiming that it scandalises. What have we come to! On the contrary, when you speak about divine *eros* to lay people who have experienced worldly *eros*, they immediately say, "That must be something more sublime." So many young people who have experienced worldly *eros* have been helped when I speak to them about divine *eros*. I ask them, "Have you ever been knocked off your feet because of the love you felt for someone? Have you ever felt as if you couldn't move, as if you couldn't do a thing?" They immediately realise that divine *eros* is something extraordinary, something more sublime, and then we understand each other perfectly. They reply, "If we can feel something special because of worldly *eros*, we can just imagine what that heavenly *eros* must be like!"

Divine madness

– Geronda, how does one go crazy because of his love for God?

– Well, by keeping company with ... the insane so that they can infect you with their spiritual madness! I will pray that I see you ... completely crazy someday! Amen.

I, too, have some small experience of this divine madness which is derived from divine *eros*. When one is

5. *Menaia* (*Menaion* – sing.) – The Liturgical texts, one for each month, containing the services for the saints commemorated on each day, as well as the Great Feasts of the Lord and the Theotokos.

6. *Parakletike* – A Liturgical text, containing the *Troparia* and Canons for the Vespers and Matins services for each day of the week in the eight tones of Byzantine Music. Its name, "*Parakletike*" is derived from the petitionary character of the majority of its hymns.

in that state, he reaches the point of divine absentmindedness and wants to think of nothing but God, divine matters, the spiritual, the heavenly. Being full of divine *eros*, a person inwardly feels sweetly ablaze, and outwardly, he erupts, madly, within the godly realms of modesty, glorifying his God and Creator day and night, like an Angel.

– Geronda, is this what we call “ecstasy”?

– Yes. It is when one is “beside himself”, in the good sense, of course. This is the meaning of the verse, “*Be ecstatic with awe, O Heaven!*”⁷

Divine madness takes a person beyond the earth’s pull; it lifts him up to the throne of God and makes him feel like a puppy licking his master’s feet with joy and devotion.

Divine inebriation

– Geronda, I am afraid that I might not be saved.

– Do not be afraid; we will go up together. Only tell the Abbess to give us two large bottles for the road – make sure that they are plastic, not glass, so they do not break on the way! We will fill them up with water and by the time we get to Heaven, we will drink them out of exhaustion. We will leave only three finger-widths of water in our bottles which we will ask Christ to bless and turn into wine, and then we will drink it while being near Christ and become spiritually inebriated.

– Geronda, what is this water you are talking about?

– It is love for Christ and for our sisters and brothers.

– And the inebriation?

7. The Eirmos of the 8th Ode of the Canon of Holy Saturday.

– It is the inebriation that comes from the Holy Spirit. Those who are inebriated by the Holy Spirit are constantly elated by the affection of God, their Father.

If a person is spiritually inebriated with the heavenly wine, his life here on earth becomes a martyrdom, but in the good sense. He becomes useless to the world, is indifferent to all earthly things, and “*counts them as refuse.*”⁸ You see, those who drink a lot and get drunk don’t have a care in the world. “Uncle Thanasi, your house is burning down!” they shout to an old man whose house is on fire. “Let it burn!” he replies, because he is drunk.

The other type of inebriation, the heavenly one, is good, but one must always be right next to that bottomless barrel, the heavenly one. I pray that you find that divine tap of Paradise and constantly drink and get drunk on the good wine of Paradise. Amen.

8. Cf. Php 3:8.

ON DIVINE EROS

*He who loves little, gives little. He who loves more, gives more.
And he who loves beyond measure, what has he to give?
He gives himself!*

Christ is our love, our desire

Christ is joy, the true light, happiness. Christ is our hope. Our relation to Christ is love, *eros*, passion, enthusiasm, longing for the divine. Christ is everything. He is our love. He is the object of our desire. This passionate longing for Christ is a love that cannot be taken away. This is where joy flows from.

Christ himself is joy. He is a joy that transforms you into a different person. It is a spiritual madness, but in Christ. This spiritual wine inebriates you like pure unadulterated wine. As David says, *You have anointed my head with oil and your cup intoxicates me most mightily.* Spiritual wine is unmixed, unadulterated, exceedingly strong, and when you drink it, it makes you drunk. This divine intoxication is a gift of God that is given to the *pure in heart*.

Fast as much as you can, make as many prostrations as you can, attend as many vigils as you like, but be joyful. Have Christ's joy. It is the joy that lasts forever, that brings eternal happiness. It is the joy of our Lord that gives assured serenity, serene delight and full happiness. All joyful joy that surpasses every joy. Christ desires and delights in scattering joy, in enriching his faithful with joy. I pray that *your joy may be full*.

This is what our religion is. This is the direction we must take. Christ is Paradise, my children. What is Paradise? It is Christ. Paradise begins here and now. It is exactly the same: those who experience Christ here on earth, experience Paradise. That's the way it is, just as I tell you. This is right, it's true, believe me! Our task is to attempt to find a way to enter into the light of Christ. The point is not to observe all the outward forms. The essence of the matter is for us to be with Christ; for our soul to wake up and love Christ and become holy. To abandon herself to divine *eros*. Thus He too will love us. Then the joy will be inalienable. That is what Christ wants most of all, to fill us with joy, because He is the well-spring of joy. This joy is a gift of Christ. In this joy we will come to know Christ. We cannot come to know Him unless He first comes to

know us. How does David put it? *Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain that build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.* Ps. 126:1 [127:1]

These are the things our soul desires to acquire. If we prepare ourselves appropriately, grace will bestow them on us. It's not difficult. If we acquire grace, everything is easy, joyful and a blessing from God. Divine grace is constantly knocking at the door of our soul and waiting for us to open so that it can enter our thirsty heart and fill it. The fullness is Christ, our Holy Lady, the Holy Trinity. What marvellous things!

If you are in love, you can live amid the hustle and bustle of the city centre and not be aware that you are in the city centre. You see neither cars nor people nor anything else. Within yourself you are with the person you love. You experience her, you take delight in her, she inspires you. Are these things not true? Imagine that the person you love is Christ. Christ is in your mind, Christ is in your heart, Christ is in your whole being, Christ is everywhere.

Christ is life, the source of life, the source of joy, the source of the true light, everything. Whoever loves Christ and other people truly lives life. Life without Christ is death; it is hell, not life. That is what hell is — the absence of love. Life is Christ. Love is the life of Christ. Either you will be in life or in death. It's up to you to decide.

One thing is our aim — love for Christ, for the Church, for our neighbour. Love, worship of, and craving for God, the union with Christ and with the Church is Paradise on earth. Love towards Christ and towards one's neighbour, towards everyone, including enemies. The Christian feels for everyone, he wants all to be saved, all to taste the Kingdom of God. That is Christianity: through love for our brother to arrive at love for God. To the extent that we desire it, to the extent that we wish it, to the extent that we are worthy, divine grace comes through our brother. When we love our brother we love the Church and therefore Christ. And we too are within the Church. Therefore when we love the Church we love ourselves.

*There is one thing, O Christ, that I want, one thing I desire, one thing I ask for,
and that is to be with You*

Let us love Christ and let our only hope and care be for Him. Let us love Christ for His own sake only. Never for our sake. Let Him put us wherever He likes. Let Him give us whatever He wishes. Don't let's love Him for His gifts. It's egotistical for us to say: 'Christ will place me in a fine

John 14:2-3 mansion which He has prepared, just as the Gospel says: *In my Father's house there are many mansions...so that where I am you may be also.* What we should say rather is: 'My Christ, whatever Your love dictates; it is sufficient for me to live within Your love.'

As for myself, poor soul... what can I say... I'm very weak. I haven't managed to love Christ so very fervently and for my soul to long for Him. I feel that I have a very long way to go. I haven't arrived at where I want to be; I don't experience this love. But I'm not discouraged. I trust in the love of God. I say to Christ: 'I know I'm not worthy. Send me wherever Your love wishes. That's what I desire, that's what I want. During my life I always worshipped You.'

When I was seriously ill and on the point of leaving this life, I didn't want to think about my sins. I wanted to think about the love of my Lord, my Christ, and about eternal life. I didn't want to feel fear. I wanted to go to the Lord and to think about His goodness, His love. And now that my life is nearing its end, I don't feel anxiety or apprehension, but I think that when I appear at the Second Coming and Christ says to me: *Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?* I will bow my head and I will say to Him: 'Whatever you want, my Lord, whatever your love desires. I know I am not worthy. Send me wherever your love wishes. I am fit for hell. And place me in hell, as long as I am with You. There is one thing I want, one thing I desire, one thing I ask for, and that is to be with You, wherever and however You wish.'

I try to give myself over entirely to the love and worship of God. I have consciousness of my sinfulness, but I live with hope. It is bad to despair, because someone who despairs becomes embittered and loses his willingness and strength. Someone who has hope, on the contrary, advances forward. Because he feels that he is poor, he tries to enrich himself. What does a poor man do? If he is smart, he tries to find a way to become rich.

And so in spite of the fact that I feel weak and that I haven't achieved what I desire, I nevertheless do not fall into despair. It is a consolation to me, as I've told you, that I don't cease to try continually. Yet I don't do what I want to. Pray for me. The point is that I cannot love Christ absolutely without His grace. Christ does not allow His love to show itself if my soul has not done something to attract Him to me.

And perhaps that's what I'm lacking. And so I entreat God and say, 'I'm very weak, O Christ. Only You with Your grace will be able to allow me to say along with Saint Paul the Apostle, *It is no longer I who live; Christ lives in me.*'

Gal. 2:20

That is what preoccupies me. I try to find ways to love Christ. This love is never sated. However much you love Christ, you always think that you don't love Him and you long all the more to love him. And without being aware of it, you go higher and higher!

When Christ enters your heart, your life changes

When you find Christ, you are satisfied, you desire nothing else, you find peace. You become a different person. You live everywhere, wherever Christ is. You live in the stars, in infinity, in heaven with the angels, with the saints, on earth with people, with plants, with animals, with everyone and everything. When there is love for Christ, loneliness disappears. You are peaceable, joyous, full. Neither melancholy, nor illness, nor pressure, nor anxiety, nor depression, nor hell.

Christ is in all your thoughts, in all your actions. You have grace and you can endure everything for Christ. You can even suffer unjustly. You can endure injustices for Christ, and indeed with joy. Just as He suffered, so you too can suffer unjustly. Did you choose Christ in order to avoid suffering? What does Saint Paul say? *I rejoice in my sufferings.* This is our religion: for our soul to awake and love Christ and become holy, to give herself over to divine eros. And so He, too, will love her. Col. 1:24

When Christ enters your heart, your life changes. Christ is everything. Whoever experiences Christ within himself, experiences ineffable things — holy and sacred things. He lives in exultation. These things are true. People have experienced them — hermits on the Holy Mountain. Continually and with longing they whisper the prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ...'

When Christ enters your heart, your passions disappear. You are unable to swear, or hate, or seek revenge or anything. How could there be hatreds, dislikes, censures, egotisms, anxieties, depressions? What holds sway is Christ — and longing for the unsetting light. This longing makes you feel that death is a bridge that you will cross in an instant in order to continue the life of Christ. Here on earth you have an impediment and so you need faith. This impediment is the body. After death, however, faith is abolished and you see Christ as you see the sun. In eternity, of course, you will experience everything more intensely.

When you don't live with Christ, however, you live immersed in melancholy, affliction, anxiety and vexation. You don't live aright. Then many irregularities appear in your body, the endocrine glands, the liver, the bile, the pancreas, the stomach. They tell you: 'In order to be healthy,

have a full breakfast of milk, egg, butter and toast.' But if you live properly, if you love Christ, you are fine with an orange and an apple. The great medicine is for you to devote yourself to the worship of Christ. Everything is healed. Everything functions normally. The love of God transforms everything; it sanctifies, amends and changes the nature of everything.

Our soul will be greatly comforted when we yearn for the Lord. We will not then concern ourselves with everyday and lowly things, but with spiritual and higher things. We will live in the spiritual world. When you live in the spiritual world, you live in the world in which your soul delights and for which it longs. This does not mean that you are indifferent towards others. You wish for everyone to find salvation, light and sanctification and for everyone to enter into the Church.

Love for Christ is insatiable

Christ is the summit of desire; there is nothing higher. All sensible things lead to satiety, but with God there is no satiation. He is everything. God is the summit of desire. No other joy, no other beauty, nothing else can rival Him. What is higher than the highest?

Love for Christ is something else. It is without end, without satiety. It gives life; it gives strength; it gives health; it gives, gives and gives. And the more it gives, the more the person wishes to fall in love. Human love and passion, by contrast, may be destructive and even drive a person mad. When we love Christ, all other loves abate. Other loves have a point of satiety. The love of Christ has no point of satiety. Love of the flesh has a point of satiety. Thereafter jealousy and disgruntlement may set in, and may even lead to murder. Love in Christ knows no alteration. Worldly love remains for a time, and is gradually extinguished, whereas divine love continually grows and deepens. Every other kind of love can lead a person to despair. Divine *eros*, however, raises us up into the sphere of God; it bestows on us serenity, joy and fullness. Other pleasures enervate us, but of this pleasure we can never have enough. It is an insatiable pleasure, which you never tire of. It is the highest good.

At one point only does satiety cease: when a person is united with Christ. He loves, loves and loves, and the more he loves the more he sees that he wants to love even more intensely. He sees that he has not achieved union, that he hasn't abandoned himself to the love of God. Constantly he has the inclination and joyous longing to reach Christ, the summit of desire. He fasts, makes prostrations and prays ever more intensely, and yet he is never satisfied. He fails to realize that he is already

in possession of this love. He does not feel that what he desires has filled him, that he has received it, that he experiences it, that he lives it. All ascetics yearn for this divine *eros*, this divine love. They are intoxicated with divine inebriation. With this divine intoxication the body may grow old and pass away, but the spirit becomes youthful and blossoms.

The hymns of our Church are filled with divine *eros*. Listen to the Canon of the Holy Apostle Timothy:

*Burning for the highest of desires
And therewith through love co-mingled,
You led a life concordant with this craving,
O man possessed by God,
Your eyes transfixed forever on your love,
And with His aspect sated.**

How marvellous are the words of this hymn! 'Co-mingled' (συμκραθείς) means at one, united with your lover, and 'sated' (πυμπλάμενος) means filled full, gluttoned. You should make a collection of such words denoting divine love and divine madness. You cannot have enough of them. Yes, love towards Christ is never enough. The more you love Him, the more you believe that you don't love Him and the more you desire to love Him. At the same time, however, your soul is flooded by His presence and your joy in the Lord is inalienable. You don't want then to desire anything. Abba Isaac the Syrian writes similarly:

'The joy that is in God is stronger than this present life. And he who finds this joy, not only will he not pay attention to the passions, but he will not even give a thought to his own life, nor will he have awareness of anything else, if his experience of this joy is true. Love is sweeter than life. And the concord with God from which love is born is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. It does not seem grievous to Love to undergo a bitter death for the sake of her beloved... And to the heart which has received this joy every sweetness of this world seems superfluous. For there is nothing which can be likened to the sweetness of the knowledge of God.'†

And in the *Soliloquies* of Saint Augustine we read:

'I love You, Lord my God, and I desire to love You ever more intensely. For You are truly sweeter than any honey, more wholesome than any milk and brighter than any light; for me You are infinitely

* Sung at his feast on 22nd January (3rd troparion of the 4th Ode).

† Isaac the Syrian, *Ἀσκητικά*, Homily 38. Cf. *The Ascetical Homilies of St Isaac the Syrian*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984, p. 297.

more precious than gold or silver or precious stones... O love that is ever boiling over and never cooled! Consume me with your heat! I shall love You, Lord, because You first loved me. And where shall I find words sufficient to describe all the signs of Your greatest love for me?... You flooded me with the light of Your countenance and set Your glory as a sign above the door of my heart...^{*}

With divine love everything becomes Christ, everything becomes Paradise

The poetic canon in honour of Saint Pachomios written by Theophanes speaks very beautifully about divine love:[†]

*By passionate love of impassion possessed,
the material roots of the passions
you caused to waste away,
and winged on love you attained,
most blessed father Pachomios,
all the welling splendour of the godhead.*

*In the love of God you conversed with the Spirit's teachings,
and illumined by these, you attained the height of virtue,
having rid your soul of the passions.*

*Punctured by longing for the Master,
through self-restraint you extinguished
the susceptibility of the flesh to the passions,
and the whole of your life, O Pachomios,
you offered as a sacrifice most fragrant.*

Ah, that's a real treasure. These words are very precious. Theophanes is a great poet. The 'height of virtue' is the love of God which is perfect and absolute. 'Punctured': when our soul is 'punctured', when she is wounded by divine longing, the susceptibility of the flesh to the passions withers away. Divine craving defeats every pain, and so every pain is transformed and becomes love of Christ. Love Christ and He will love you. All pains will pass away, they will be defeated and transformed. Then everything becomes Christ, Paradise. But in order to live in Paradise, we must first die — die to everything and be as if dead.

^{*} (Pseudo-)Augustine, *Soliloquia*, Chapter 19 (*Patrologia Latina* 40. 880-81).

[†] Sung on his feast on 15th May (*troparia* from the 1st, 5th and 4th Odes). Theophanes the Branded, Hymnographer and Confessor (775-845).

Then we will live truly; we will live in Paradise. If we do not first die to our old self nothing happens.

I'm very fond of the poem by Veritis called 'In company with Christ':

*I longed to live in company with Christ,
His warming love enclosed within my breast,
To open up the strictures of my heart,
That loving more, it never love enough.**

That the heart may never love enough! The more wine you drink, the more you want to drink. The more you give yourself to the love of Christ, the more you want to give yourself. We must love Him with all our soul, heart, strength, power and mind. We must plug our heart into His love and be united with Him. That is what the Lord demands, not for Himself out of selfishness, but for us, so that He can give us everything — joy and happiness.

The poet achieved this. He loved Christ and was loved by Him. He had discovered the secret of divine love. It's not difficult. On the contrary, it's very easy to discover it. It depends on our preparation and the way we approach Him. It requires an Orthodox spirit.

This love, this passion and this enthusiasm lead even to martyrdom. They make you sacrifice yourself and disregard all else. You fear nothing and may retreat far from the world into caves and holes in the earth. The saint who inspired me, Saint John the Hut-dweller, had this divine madness. And the saints and martyrs who were filled with this divine madness didn't hold back before any impediment, they rushed with joy and enthusiasm to martyrdom. He who loves little, gives little. He who loves more, gives more. And he who loves beyond measure, what has he to give? He gives himself!

On account of their love for Christ the saints did not feel the pains of martyrdom, however intense they were. Recall the Three Youths in the fiery furnace. As they sang hymns and praises to God, they were cooled in the midst of the furnace. Remember Saint Demetrios, Saint George, Saint Catherine, Saint Barbara, Saint Paraskevi, and the Forty Martyrs in the frozen lake. *A cloud of witnesses* as Saint Paul the Apostle says.

Cf. Dan. 3:50
[Song of the
Three Youths
v. 27 DC]

Heb. 12:1

All these saints and martyrs, just as they did on earth, so now, and much more, sing hymns and praises to the Lord in heaven. They are in Paradise and behold the countenance of God *face to face*. And that is everything. How do the Prayers of Thanksgiving after Holy Commu-

1 Cor. 13:12

^{*} G. Veritis, *Ἡ ὕμνος τοῦ Ἀγαπητοῦ* (*The Ode of the Loved One*), Athens, 1947, p. 11.

nion put it? Don't they mention at one point, 'those who behold the ineffable beauty of Your countenance'? Paradise is for one to see forever the face of God. It is an experience higher than the sight of flowers and exotic birds, of clear gurgling water and roses and of all the beauties that exist on earth, and higher than all lesser loves.

When you love Christ, in spite of all your weaknesses and your consciousness of them, you have the certainty that you have overcome death, because you are in communion with the love of Christ. These are the things I struggle for — may God have mercy on me! These are the things I devote myself to day and night. That's what happens when you love Christ — you want to suffer for Christ.

Let us pray that God will grant us to see the face of the Lord, even here while we are on earth.

Christ is our friend

John 15:14 We should regard Christ as our friend. He is our friend. He asserts this Himself when he says, *you are my friends...* Let us stretch out to Him and approach Him as a friend. Do we fall? Do we sin? With familiarity, love and trust let us run to Him — not with fear that He will punish us, but with the confidence which we derive from the sense of being with a friend. We can say to Him, 'I have fallen, forgive me.' At the same time, however, let us have the sense that He loves us and that He receives us with tenderness and love and forgives us. Don't let sin separate us from Christ. When we believe that He loves us and we love Him, we don't feel strangers and distanced from Him, even when we sin. We have secured His love, and however we behave, we know that He loves us.

Rom. 8:35, 38-9 If we love Christ truly, there is no fear that we will lose our respect for Him. Here those words of Saint Paul the Apostle hold good: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation or distress...for I am persuaded that neither death nor life...nor height nor depth...shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* The relation of the soul to God is a higher, unique relationship which nothing can sever and which nothing can threaten or shake.

Cf. Matt. 8:12 & 13:42 Certainly the Gospel tells us in a symbolic language that the unjust man will find himself in a place where there is 'grinding and gnashing of teeth' — because that is what it is like far from God. And among the Fathers of the Church, who teach vigilance and prayer, there are many who speak about the fear of death and hell. They say, 'Have constant remembrance of death.' If we explore these words deeply, they create in

us the fear of hell. In our attempt to avoid sin, we invoke these thoughts so that our soul will be filled with fear of death, hell and the devil.

Everything has its meaning, its time and its place. The concept of fear is good in the initial stages. It is for beginners, those in whom our ancestral fallen nature lives on. The beginner, whose sensibility has not yet been refined, is held back from evil by fear. And fear is essential since we are men of flesh and blood and earth-bound. But that is a stage, a low level of relationship to the divine. We think in terms of a business deal in order to win Paradise or escape hell. But if we examine the matter more closely we see that it is governed by self-interest. That's not something that appeals to me. When someone progresses and enters into the love of God, what need does he have of fear? Whatever he does, he does out of love, and that is of infinitely greater value. For someone to become good out of fear of God and not out of love is not of such value.

As we progress, the Gospel leads us to understand that Christ is joy and truth, that Christ is Paradise. Saint John the Evangelist says, *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. The person who fears is not perfected in love.* As we exert ourselves out of fear, we gradually enter into the love of God. Then the torment of hell, fear and death all disappear. We are interested only in the love of God. We do everything for this love, as the bridegroom does for the bride. 1 John 4:18

If we wish to follow Him, then this life, too, with Christ, is joy, even amid difficulties. As Saint Paul says, *I rejoice in my sufferings.* This is our religion, and that's the direction we must move in. It is not the outward formalities that count; it is living with Christ that matters. When you achieve this, what else do you want? You have gained everything. You live in Christ and Christ lives in you. Thereafter everything is easy: obedience, humility and peace. Col. 1:24

Christ is the Bridegroom of the soul

The Song of Songs by Solomon the Wise grew out of this adoration for Christ. This book cultivates divine craving, divine love, adoration and vigilance in relation to the heavenly Bridegroom. What wonderful words — erotic, full of love and passion, divine *eros*! They appear like human words, but they are divine. 'For I have been wounded by your love'* says

* These words appear in a hymn which is frequently sung at the commemoration of women martyrs, e.g. Saint Euphemia (16th September and 11th July), Saint Kyriaki (7th July) and Saint Marina (17th July). The words of the hymn are as follows: (see overleaf)

one of the hymns. That is, 'I suffer, I am pained, my soul desires You, she longs for You who are my light, my life, my God, my Lord and my God.'

More than anywhere else, in the Song of Songs we see Christ as the Bridegroom. Christ is the Bridegroom of our soul. Our soul is His bride, and follows Him in everything — even to martyrdom, to Golgotha and the Crucifixion, but also to the Resurrection. When we attain to this love, Christ will stoop over us and pervade our soul.

Fix your gaze unwaveringly upwards towards Christ. Become familiar with Christ. Work with Christ. Live with Christ. Breathe with Christ. Suffer with Christ. Rejoice with Christ. Let Christ be everything for you. Let your soul long for and cry out to her Bridegroom, 'I crave for You, O my Bridegroom...'* Christ is the Bridegroom, He is the Father, He is everything. There is nothing higher in life than love for Christ. Whatever we desire we find in Christ. Christ is everything: all joy, all gladness, all Paradise. When we have Christ within us, we possess all magnificence. The soul that is in love with Christ is always joyful and happy, however much pain and sacrifice this may cost.

No one can deny that Christ is the fullness of life. Those who deny this truth are soul-sick and possessed by an evil spirit. They deny that which they are lacking. And so the devil finds their soul empty and enters in. And just as a child is deeply traumatized if he is deprived of his father and mother in his life, so too, and much more so, is the person who is deprived of Christ and His Holy Mother.

In the Song of Songs the bride says of Christ the Bridegroom, *I sleep, S. of S. 5:2 but my heart awakes. The voice of my beloved knocks at the door.*

The bride stays awake and dreams of Him. Even if she sleeps, her soul turns towards Him. Thus she expresses her love and complete devotion. She has Him constantly in her mind and in her heart, even when she is asleep. She adores and worships Him. Do you understand? Worship must spring from the whole soul and whole heart. What does that mean? Your only thought must be God. But the thought of God is unlike other thoughts. It is different. It is a kind of worship of Christ. This is the thought that beguiles and delights. It is not something that is

* Words from a dismissal hymn commonly sung at the commemoration of women martyrs.

'At the right hand of the Saviour stood the virgin, victor and martyr, arrayed in the invincibility of the virtues, coloured with the oil of purity and the blood of contest, and with lighted torch crying out to Him in rejoicing: I have run to the fragrance of your myrrh, O Christ God, for I have been wounded by your love; do not part from me, O heavenly Bridegroom. Through her supplications, send, almighty Saviour, your mercies on us.'

done under duress. You feel a spiritual delight and pleasure. It's not like the homework a child does for school. It is like the passionate love between two people, but higher and spiritual.

And as a woman in childbirth draws near the time of delivery and in her pain cries out, so have we been towards Your Beloved on account of Your fear, O Lord. We have conceived, we have been in travail and we have brought forth, says the Prophet Isaiah.

Isa. 26:17-18

Thus our soul cries out to God on account of the pain she feels when she craves for Him. And she makes an effort; she strains herself. What do the effort and tears of the 'woman in childbirth' mean? Is it not the pain and travail until Christ enters us. This pain is the greatest of all. Those who have experienced it know what it is. It is an unbearable torment...

Whoever wants to become a Christian must first become a poet

The soul of the Christian needs to be refined and sensitive, to have sensibility and wings, to be constantly in flight and to live in dreams, to fly through infinity, among the stars, amidst the greatness of God, amid silence.

Whoever wants to become a Christian must first become a poet. That's what it is! You must suffer. You must love and suffer — suffer for the one you love. Love makes effort for the loved one. She runs all through the night; she stays awake; she stains her feet with blood in order to meet her beloved. She makes sacrifices and disregards all impediments, threats and difficulties for the sake of the loved one. Love towards Christ is something even higher, infinitely higher.

And when we say 'love', we don't mean the virtues that we will acquire, but the heart that is pervaded by love towards Christ and others. We need to turn everything in this direction. Do we see a mother with her child in her arms and bending to give the child a kiss, her heart overflowing with emotion? Do we notice how her face lights up as she holds her little angel? These things do not escape a person with love of God. He sees them and is impressed by them and he says, 'If only I had those emotions towards my God, towards my Holy Lady and our saints!' Look, that's how we must love Christ our God. You desire it, you want it, and with the grace of God you acquire it.

But are we inflamed by love for Christ? Do we run to the Beloved when we are exhausted to find rest in prayer, or do we do it as a burdensome duty and say, 'Now I have to do my prayers and prostrations...?' What's missing when we feel like this? Divine *eros* is what's

missing. Prayer of this kind is not worth the saying. Indeed it could even be harmful.

Matt. 18:22 If the soul is disfigured and becomes unworthy of Christ's love, Christ suspends the relationship, because Christ does not wish 'uncouth' souls in His proximity. The soul needs to regain her composure in order to become worthy of Christ. She needs to repent, *even unto seventy times seven*. True repentance will bring sanctification with it. You mustn't say, 'all my years have been wasted; I'm not worthy,' etc. Instead you can say, 'I remember all the empty days when I didn't live close to God...' And in my own life there will have been such empty days. I was twelve years old when I left to go the Holy Mountain. Don't these count as years? I may have been a small boy, but nevertheless I lived for twelve years far from God. So many years!

Listen to what Ignatius Brianchaninov says in his book, *On the Prayer of Jesus*:*

Matt. 11:12 'Every physical and spiritual task which does not involve pain, toil and trouble never bears fruit for the person who engages in it, for the Kingdom of Heaven is taken by violence and *the violent lay hold of it* — 'violence' here meaning the laborious exercise of the body in everything.'

When you love Christ you exert yourself, but in blessed exertions. You suffer, but with joy. You make prostrations and pray because these are things you crave for with divine craving. They are at once pain and longing, passion and yearning and exaltation and joy and love. Prostrations and vigils and fasting are exertions which are made for the Beloved, exertions in order to experience Christ. But this exertion is not made under duress; you don't protest and rebel. Whatever you do under compulsion is very harmful both to you and to the work you are doing. The pressure and coercion provoke opposition. Exertion for Christ, true desire for Christ, is love, sacrifice and dissolution of self. This is also how David felt: *My soul longs and faints for the courts of the Lord. My soul longs with craving and melts away out of love for God.*

Ps. 83:3
[84:3]

It requires care and effort in order to understand the words one reads and take them to heart. This is the effort you need to make. Then you will enter into compunction, ardour and tears without effort. They follow as a gift from God. Does passionate love require effort? When you understand the words of the hymns, poetic canons and Scripture you are

* Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*, tr. Archimandrite Lazarus Moore, St John of Kronstadt Press, 1995.

drawn towards God with a sense of joy, you enter into truth joyfully. *You have given joy to my heart*, as David says. You enter into a state of compunction spontaneously, without bloodshed. Do you understand? Ps. 4:8 [4:7]

I, poor wretch, long to hear the words of the Fathers and of the ascetics, and the words of the Old and New Testaments. These are the things my heart wishes to devote itself to and take delight in. These are the things that cultivate divine eros. I desire them fervently and try, but I am unable. I have fallen ill; *the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*. I am unable to make prostrations. Not one. I long passionately to be on the Holy Mountain, to make prostrations, to pray, to celebrate the Divine Liturgy and to be with another hermit. It's better when there are two together. Christ himself said so: *Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* Matt. 26:41
Matt. 18:20

Humility and selflessness in the worship of God

Christ stands outside the door of our soul and knocks for us to open to Him, but He doesn't enter. He doesn't want to violate the freedom which He Himself gave us. The Book of Revelation says this in so many words: *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and I will dine with him, and he will dine with me.* Christ is courteous. He stands outside the door of our soul and knocks gently. If we open to Him, He will enter us and give us everything — Himself — secretly and silently. Rev. 3:20

We will not be able to know Christ unless He knows us. I can't explain these things very precisely; they are mysterious. Listen to what Saint Paul says, *Now that you have known God, or rather are known by God...* Nor can we love Him unless He loves us. Christ will not love us if we are not worthy for Him to love us. In order for Him to love us, He must discover something special in us. You may desire, demand, struggle and entreat, but you receive nothing. You prepare yourself to acquire those things which Christ desires in order for divine grace to enter you, but it cannot enter when that special ingredient you require is lacking. What is that? It is humility. Without humility, we cannot love Christ... humility and selflessness in the worship of God... *Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.* Gal. 4:9
Matt. 6:3

No one must see you; no one must understand the motions of your worship towards the divinity. All these things must be hidden and secret, as with the hermits. Do you remember what I told you about the nightingale? It sings in the middle of the forest, amid the silence. Can

you say that anyone hears it or applauds it? Not a soul. Such breathtakingly beautiful singing in the midst of the wilds! Have you seen how its throat puffs up? That's what happens also to the person who falls in love with Christ. If he starts to love, his throat swells, he is overcome, his tongue moves incessantly. He finds a cave, a hidden dell, and lives with

Rom. 8:26 God secretly, *with groanings that cannot be uttered*. This is a sign that he is living with God 'in whom all things live and move,'* because *in him*

Acts 17:28 *we live and move and have our being*.

When you arrive at such a degree of humility and you compel the grace of God to dwell within you, then you have gained everything. When you have attained humility, when you have become a captive of God — a captive in the good sense, that is, a vessel of divine grace — then you can say along with Saint Paul, *it is no longer I who live; Christ*

Gal. 2:20 *lives in me*. It is very easy for this to happen, that is, for us to do what God wants. Not simply easy, but extremely easy. It suffices for us to make the opening. When we make the opening to receive the divine, we become worthy of God, for Christ to condescend to enter us. And if Christ stoops within us, He grants us freedom. Where can you find words to describe those mysteries! The whole secret is love, passionate love for Christ, *eros*, abandonment to the spiritual world. You don't feel loneliness, or anything else. You live in another world, in a place where the soul rejoices, where it is glad and where it is never sated.

Holy Scripture and the Fathers cultivate divine eros

Everything proceeds from Holy Scripture. You must read it continually in order to learn the secrets of spiritual struggle. In the ninth chapter of my beloved Wisdom of Solomon it says:

O God of my fathers and Lord of mercy, who made all things by your word, and by your wisdom formed man to have dominion over the creatures you have made, and to rule the world in holiness and righteousness, and to pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul, give me the wisdom that sits by your thrones, and do not reject me from among your servants.

Wisd. 9:1-5 *For I am your slave and the son of your maidservant, a man who is weak and short-lived, with little understanding of judgment and laws.*
[DC]

We see here how the wise Solomon asks God in such a humble way for His wisdom. And God gave it to him in abundance. All these wise things that he writes are not his own. They are inspired by the

* First Antiphon of the Hymns of Ascent from Sunday Matins, Tone 3.

same Spirit which inspired the words of the poetic canons written by the hymnographers of the Church. That's why I love them so much. Read them, study them and delight in them. That's how you will acquire divine *eros*. Listen to some of the words of one of the Trinitarian canons:

*Three divinely reigning hypostases we hymn,
of one single nature, an unchanging form,
a good God and lover of mankind,
who for our transgressions grants atonement to us.**

Tell me, how do I know all this? I have an obsession, an intoxication, a divine inebriation. I cannot have enough of it all. The first prayer of thanksgiving after Holy Communion says:

'And thus setting aside this earthly sojourn in hope of life eternal, I shall attain to everlasting rest, in that place where there is the unceasing sound of festal joy and the boundless pleasure of those who behold the ineffable beauty of your countenance. For you are the true desire and inexpressible delight of those who love you, O Christ our God, and all creation hymns you unto the ages.'

It is one great festivity, and the focus of all the delight is the person of Christ. What it is exactly, we cannot ultimately understand, because God is infinite; God is a mystery; God is silence. God is infinitely hidden, but everywhere existent. We live in God, we breathe God, but we cannot sense His greatness, His providence. He frequently conceals the actions of His divine providence. But when we acquire holy humility, then we see everything and experience everything. We experience God openly and manifestly and we sense His mysteries. Then we cannot but start to love Him. And that is something which He asks for. It is the first thing which He demands for our own happiness, as He says, *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind; this is the first and great commandment.*

Matt.
22:37-8

Such was the love the saints had. Such was the love possessed by the saint whose name I bear, Saint Porphyrios of Gaza. One of the hymns sung on his feast day says:

*The dart of your true desire attained its mark,
For through continence you humbled the passions
And you advanced towards God in rejoicing,*

* From the Sunday Midnight Office (Tone 6, 1st troparion of the 1st Ode).

*And now you stand with the highest of all you crave, Porphyrios,
Most perfect model and yardstick for bishops and shepherds.**

'The dart of your true desire attained its mark... and you advanced towards God in rejoicing...': from the object of craving up to the very highest; you loved the 'summit of desire'. The summit of desire is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All three persons are one among themselves and one also with the Church.

O Christ, you are my love!

I don't think about death. Whatever the Lord desires. I want to think about Christ. And you too, open your arms and throw yourselves into Christ's embrace. Then He lives within you. And you constantly think that you don't love Him very much and you want even more to come close to Him and be with Him. Show disdain for the passions and don't concern yourselves with the devil. Turn to Christ. For all this to happen it is necessary for grace to come: "The divine grace which ever makes good what is weak and supplies what is lacking."[†]

* Sung on 26th February (1st troparion of the 6th Ode).

† Words from a prayer spoken at services of Ordination.

ON PRAYER

*Pray to God with fervour and love in a calm state of mind,
with meekness and gentleness, without forcing yourself*

The Lord Himself will teach us how to pray

Man seeks joy and happiness in heaven. He seeks what is eternal far from everyone and everything. He seeks to find joy in God. God is a mystery. He is silence. He is infinite. He is everything. Everyone possesses this inclination of the soul for heaven. All people seek something heavenly. All beings turn towards Him, albeit unconsciously.

Turn your mind towards Him continually. Learn to love prayer, familiar converse with the Lord. What counts above all is love, passionate love for the Lord, for Christ the Bridegroom. Become worthy of Christ's love. In order not to live in darkness, turn on the switch of prayer so that divine light may flood your soul. Christ will appear in the depths of your being. There, in the deepest and most inward part, is the Kingdom of God. *The Kingdom of God is within you.*

Luke 17:21

Prayer is made only with the Holy Spirit. It teaches the soul how to pray. *For we know not what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.* It's not necessary for us to make any effort. We should address ourselves to God in the manner of a humble servant with a voice of entreaty and supplication. Then our prayer will be well-pleasing to God. Let us stand devoutly before the Cross of Christ and say: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' That says everything. When the mind moves in prayer, divine grace comes in a split second. The person then becomes full of grace and sees everything with different eyes. The important thing is to love Christ, prayer and meditation on His words. In prayer human effort represents only a tiny millionth part.

Rom. 8:26

Before we pray the soul must prepare itself with prayer. Prayer for prayer. Listen to the prayer which the priest recites secretly during the Divine Liturgy while the Apostle is being read:

'Shine in our hearts, O loving Master, the pure light of your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our mind to understand the proclamations of your Gospel. Instill within us fear of your blessed commandments, so that trampling down all fleshly desires we may lead a spiritual

healing the soul, but to heed it requires great and ardent resolution – to the point of self-hatred.^{vi}

^{vi} cf. Luke xiv:26

I

Yearning for God

My soul yearns after the Lord and I seek Him in tears.

How could I do other than seek Thee, for Thou first didst seek and find me, and gavest me to delight in Thy Holy Spirit, and my soul fell to loving Thee.

Thou seest, O Lord, my grief and my tears . . . Hadst Thou not drawn me with Thy love, I could not seek Thee as I seek Thee now; but Thy spirit gave me to know Thee, and my soul rejoices that Thou art my God and my Lord, and I yearn after Thee even to tears.

My soul yearns after God and I seek Him in tears.

O Merciful Lord, Thou seest my fall and my distress. Humbly I entreat Thy mercy. Pour upon my sinful self the grace of Thy Holy Spirit. Recollection of Thy grace draws my spirit to seek out Thy compassion anew.

O Lord, grant me Thy spirit of humility that I lose not Thy grace again, and weep for it as Adam wept for paradise and for God.

In the first year of my life in the Monastery my soul apprehended God in the Holy Spirit.

The Lord loves us greatly. This I know by the Holy Spirit Whom the Lord gave me in His singular mercy.

I am an old man, preparing for death, and I write of truth for the sake of the people.

The Spirit of Christ whom I had of the Lord desires the salvation of all, that all should know God.

The Lord gave the thief paradise. Thus will He give paradise to every sinner. With my sins I am worse than a noisome cur but I began to beseech God for forgiveness, and He granted me *not only forgiveness but also the Holy Spirit*, and in the Holy Spirit I knew God.

Do you see God's love for us? And who shall describe such mercy?

O my brethren, on my knees I beg you to believe in God – believe that there is a Holy Spirit Who bears witness to Him in every church, and in my soul.

The Holy Spirit is love; and the souls of all the saints who dwell in heaven overflow with this love, and on earth this same Holy Spirit is in the souls of them that love God.

In the Holy Spirit all heaven beholds the earth, and hears our prayers and carries them to God.

My soul knows that the Lord is merciful but His mercy passes portrayal. He is exceeding meek and lowly, and when the soul sees Him she is all transformed into love for God and her neighbour, and becomes meek and lowly herself. But if a man lose grace, he will weep like Adam cast out of paradise. Adam wept and the whole desert heard his groaning. His tears were bitter with affliction, and he wept them for long years.

In such wise the soul who has known and lost the grace of God yearns after God and cries,

'My soul yearns after God, and I seek Him in tears.'

I am a sinful man yet I have witnessed the Lord's great love and mercy toward me.

While still a child I would pray for those who gave me offence. I used to pray, 'O Lord, lay not sins on them because of me.' But though I loved praying, I did not escape sin. Still, the Lord remembered not my sins, and gave me to

love people, and my soul longs for the whole world to be saved and dwell in the Kingdom of Heaven, and see the glory of the Lord, and delight in the love of God.

I judge by my own case: if the Lord so loved me, it must mean that He loves all sinners in the same measure as He loves me.

O love of God, no power can describe it, for it is immeasurably great and wonderful.

The grace of God gives strength to love the Beloved; and the soul is drawn to pray unceasingly, and cannot even for a second forget the Lord. O Lord, Lover of mankind, how came it Thou didst not forget Thy sinful servant but didst look down in mercy upon me from Thy glory, and inscrutably reveal Thyself to me?

Always I wounded and grieved Thee. Yet I had but to turn to Thee and Thou, O Lord, wouldst give me to know Thy great love and immeasurable goodness.

Thy meek and gentle gaze captured my soul.

With what shall I requite Thee, O Lord? What hymn of praise shall I sing unto Thee?

Thou givest Thy grace that the soul may evermore burn with love, and day and night she knows no rest from love of God.

Remembrance of Thee warms my soul, and she finds no peace on earth save in Thee, wherefore I seek Thee in tears, and lose Thee again, and again my mind would delight in Thee, but Thou shewest not Thy Face, for which my soul longs day and night.

O Lord, grant me to love Thee alone.

Thou didst create me, Thou didst enlighten me through holy baptism, Thou forgivest my sins and sufferest me to partake of Thy most pure Body and Blood. Do Thou enable me at all times to dwell in Thee.

O Lord, grant unto us the repentance of Adam, and Thy holy humility.

My soul languishes here on earth and longs after the things of heaven.

The Lord came down on earth to raise us to where He Himself dwells, together with His Holy Mother who served Him on earth for the sake of our salvation, and all the disciples and followers of the Lord.

The Lord calls us thither, despite our sins.

There shall we see the holy apostles in glory for their preaching of the Gospel. There shall we see the holy prophets and prelates – the teachers of the Church. There we shall see the venerable fathers, who wrestled in fasting to humble their souls. There those who assumed folly for Christ's sake are glorified because they overcame the world.

There all those who mastered themselves will be glorified, who prayed for the world, bore the burden of the whole world's sorrows, for theirs was the love of Christ, and love cannot suffer a single soul to perish.

It is there that the soul would take up her abode but naught unclean shall enter there, where those who enter in arrive by way of great tribulations and chastening of the spirit, and many tears. Only children, who have not lost the grace of holy baptism enter therein without affliction, and there in the Holy Spirit they know the Lord.

My soul ever yearns after God and prays day and night, for the name of the Lord is sweet and dear to the prayerful soul, and warms the soul to love of God.

I have lived a long life on earth, and seen and heard many things. I have heard much music which delighted my soul, and I would think, If this music is so sweet, how greatly must the heavenly singing in the Holy Spirit, glorifying the Lord for His sufferings, delight the soul!

We live a long time on this earth, and we love the beauty of the earth – the sky and the sun, lovely gardens, seas and rivers, forest and meadow, music, too, and all the beauties of the world. But when the soul comes to know our Lord

Jesus Christ, she has no further desire for the things of the earth.

I have seen emperors in their glory, and delighted in the sight, but when the soul comes to know the Lord, all the glory of kings counts for little, and the soul but yearns unceasingly for the Lord, and day and night longs unsatiably to behold the Invisible, to touch the Intangible.

If your soul knows the Holy Spirit, He will make you to understand how He teaches the soul to know the Lord, and the sweetness that lies therein.

O merciful Lord, Enlighten Thy people that they may know Thee; that they may know how Thou lovest us.

Wondrous are the works of the Lord! Out of the dust of the ground He created man, and gave this creature of dust to know Him in the Holy Spirit, so that man exclaims, 'My Lord, and my God;' and utters the words in the fulness of faith and love.

What more could the soul seek on earth?

Here is a great miracle – the soul *on a sudden* knows her Creator and His love.

When the soul sees the Lord, how meek and humble He is, then she herself is *thoroughly humbled*, and desires naught so much as the humility of Christ. And however long the soul may live on earth, she will always desire and seek this humility which passes all understanding, which she cannot forget.

O Lord, how greatly dost Thou love man!

O merciful Lord, bestow Thy grace on all the peoples of the earth, that they may know Thee; for without Thy Holy Spirit man cannot know Thee and conceive of Thy love.

O Lord, send down on us Thy Holy Spirit, for knowledge of Thee and all that appertaineth unto Thee

cometh solely through the Holy Spirit,
Whom in the beginning Thou didst give unto Adam,
and after him to the holy prophets,
and then to Christian people.

O Lord, let all Thy peoples discern Thy love,
and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit,
that men may forget the sorrows of this world,
and forsake all that is evil,
and cling unto Thee in love, and live in peace,
doing Thy will to Thy glory.

O Lord, vouchsafe unto us the gift of the Holy Spirit,
that we may perceive Thy glory,
and live on earth in peace and love.
And let there be neither malice, nor wars nor enemies,
but may love alone reign,
and there will be no need of armies, or prisons,
and life will be easy for everyone on earth.

I pray Thee, O merciful Lord, for all the peoples of the
earth, that they may come to know Thee by the Holy Spirit.

As Thou didst suffer my sinful self to know Thee in Thy
Holy Spirit, so let all the peoples of the earth know Thee,
and praise Thee day and night.

I know, O Lord, that Thou dost love Thy people, but
men do not comprehend Thy love, and the nations are flung
about the surface of the earth, and the wind chaseth their
thoughts hither and thither like clouds.

People have forgotten Thee, their Creator, and seek after
their own freedom, not perceiving that Thou art merciful,
and lovest the repenting sinner, and givest him the grace of
Thy Holy Spirit.

Lord, Lord, grant the strength of Thy grace, that all
nations may know Thee in the Holy Spirit, and praise Thee
in joy, just as Thou didst give to my unclean and odious self

the joy of desiring Thee, so that my soul is drawn day and
night to crave Thy love.

O the measureless mercy of God toward us!

Many a rich and powerful man would pay dearly to see
the Lord, or His most Holy Mother, but God does not reveal
Himself to riches but to the humble soul.

And of what use to us is money? Spiridon the Great turned
a snake into gold, and as for us, we have need of naught
save the Lord. In Him is fulness of life.

If the Lord has left us ignorant of the ordering of many
things in this world, then it means it is not necessary for us
to know. We cannot compass all creation with our minds.

But the Maker Himself of heaven and earth and all created
things gives us to know Him by the Holy Spirit. In this
same Holy Spirit we know the Mother of God, the Angels
and the Saints, and our spirit burns with love for them.

But he who will not love his enemies cannot come to
know the Lord and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit teaches us to love our enemies, so that
the soul pities them as if they were her own children.

There are people who desire the destruction, the torment
in hell-fire of their enemies, or the enemies of the Church.
They think like this because they have not learnt divine love
from the Holy Spirit, for he who has learned the love of
God will shed tears for the whole world.

You say that So-and-so is an evil-doer and may he burn
in hell-fire.

But I ask you – supposing God were to give you a fair
place in paradise, and you saw burning in the fire the man
on whom you had wished the tortures of hell, even then
would you really not feel pity for him, whoever he might
be, an enemy of the Church even?

Or is it that you have a heart of steel? But there is no place
for steel in paradise. Paradise has need of humility and the
love of Christ, which pities all men.

The grace of God is not in the man who does not love his enemies.

O merciful Lord, by Thy Holy Spirit teach us to love our enemies, and to pray for them with tears.

O Lord, send down Thy Holy Spirit on earth that all nations may know Thee, and learn Thy love.

O Lord, as Thou Thyself didst pray for Thine enemies, so teach us, too, by Thy Holy Spirit, to love our enemies.

O Lord, all peoples are the work of Thy hands – turn them from enmity and malice to repentance, that all may know Thy love.

O Lord, Thou didst command us to love our enemies, but it is hard for us sinners, if Thy grace be not with us.

O Lord, pour down Thy grace on the earth. Let all the nations of the earth come to know Thy love; to know that Thou lovest us with a mother's love, and more than a mother's love for even a mother may be forgetful of her children, but Thou forgettest never, because Thy love for Thy creation is boundless, and love cannot forget.

O merciful Lord, by the riches of Thy mercy save all peoples.

It is given to our Orthodox Church through the Holy Spirit to fathom the mysteries of God, and she is strong in the holiness of her thought and her patience.

The Orthodox soul is taught by grace to hold fast to the Lord and His most holy Mother, and our spirit rejoices in the contemplation of God Whom we know.

But we can only know God by the Holy Spirit, and the proud man who aspires to know the Creator with his intelligence is blind and foolish.

With our minds we cannot know even how the sun was made; and when we beg God to tell us how He made the sun, the answer rings clear in our soul: 'Humble thyself, and thou shalt know, not only the sun but the Creator of the sun likewise.'

But when the soul comes to know the Lord, for very joy she forgets the sun and all creation, and abandons anxiety for earthly knowledge.

The Lord reveals His mysteries to the humble soul.

Their whole lives through, the saints humbled themselves and wrestled with pride. I, too, humble myself day and night, and still am not humble as I should be; but the Holy Spirit has given my soul to know the humility of Christ which He bade us learn of Him, and my soul is drawn to Him without cease.

O the humility of Christ! Fountain of indescribable joy in God! From love of God the soul forgets both earth and heaven, and all her desire reaches out towards God.

O the humility of Christ! So fragrant and pleasant, and only to be found among the angels and saints! But we must count ourselves the worst of all men, and then the Lord by the Holy Spirit will give us to know the humility of Christ.

The Lord and His glory, and all things heavenly, are made known only in the Holy Spirit.

The Lord gave us the Holy Spirit, and we learned the song of the Lord, and so we forget the earth for sweetness of the love of God.

The Lord's love is an ardent love, and allows no thought of the earth.

He who has experienced this love seeks it tirelessly, day and night, and is drawn towards it. But this love is lost to us with the approach of pride and conceit, hostility, fault-

finding and envy. This love forsakes us because of an incontinent thought or attachment to earthly things. For all these, grace departs, and the soul, desolate and despondent, then yearns for God, as our father Adam yearned after his exile from paradise.

Weeping, Adam cried to God:

'My soul yearns after Thee, O Lord, and I seek Thee in tears. Look upon my affliction, and lighten my darkness, that my soul may rejoice again.

'I cannot forget Thee. How should I forget Thee? Thy gentle, meek gaze drew my soul, and my spirit rejoiced in paradise, where I beheld Thy countenance. How could I forget paradise, where the love of the Heavenly Father gladdened me?'

If the world knew the force of Christ's words, 'Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart,'ⁱ then the whole world, the whole universe, would abandon all other knowledge for to study this heavenly science.

Men are ignorant of the power of Christ's humility, and that is why they aspire to the things of this earth; but without the Holy Spirit they cannot know the force of these words of Christ. But he who has learned will never relinquish his knowledge, even were he to be offered all the kingdoms of the world.

O Lord, grant me Thy humility
that I may be filled with Thy love,
and Thy holy fear may dwell in me.

Life is burdensome without love for God. The soul feels sombre and stale; but with the coming of love her joy passes description.

My soul thirsts after the humility of Christ, and yearns

ⁱ Matt. xi: 29

for it day and night, and ever and anon I cry with a loud cry:

'My soul yearns after Thee, O Lord, and weeping I seek Thee.'

O Lord, how Thou lovest Thy creation!
The soul invisibly beholds Thy grace,
and in awe and love returns reverent thanks unto Thee.

My brethren, I weep as I write these lines.

When the soul comes to know the Lord by the Holy Spirit, she stands in everlasting wonder before God's compassion and majesty, and His might. But if the soul has not yet learned but is only learning humility, she will be subject to vicissitudes: at times she will find herself in conflict with intrusive thoughts, and know no rest, while at others she is released from such thoughts, and can contemplate the Lord and perceive His love. Wherefore the Lord saith:

'Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'ⁱⁱ

And if a man will not learn humility, love and goodness, the Lord will not let that man to know Him. But the soul that has come to know the Lord in the Holy Spirit is transfixed by His love and cannot forget Him. Just as a sick man is always mindful of his sickness, so the soul that loves the Lord is always mindful of the Lord and of His love for the whole human race.

What shall I render unto Thee, O Lord?

Thou, O merciful One, didst raise my soul from sin,
and gavest me to know Thy mercy toward me,
and my heart fell captive to Thee,
and reaches unceasing toward Thee, my Light.

ⁱⁱ Matt. xi: 29.

What shall I render unto Thee, O Lord?

Thou didst raise my soul to love Thee and to love my neighbour, and Thou gavest me tears to pray for the whole world.

Blessed is the soul that knows her Creator, and has grown to love Him, for she has found perfect rest in Him.

The Lord is merciful beyond bounds.

My soul knows His mercy toward me, and I write of it in hope that even one soul may come to love the Lord, and be turned to Him by the fire of repentance.

If the Lord had not given me to know His mercy in the Holy Spirit, I should have despaired by reason of the multitude of my sins, but now He has enraptured my soul, and my soul loves Him and forgets all that is of the earth.

O Lord, humble my heart
that I may be ever pleasing in Thy sight.

All ye peoples of the earth, see how greatly the Lord loves you; how in His mercy He calls you to Himself:

'Come unto me, and I will give you rest.'ⁱⁱⁱ

'I will give rest both on earth and in heaven, and ye shall behold my glory.'

'Ye are not able to understand this now, but the Holy Spirit will give you to comprehend My love toward you.'

'Tarry not, come unto Me. I await you with longing, like dear children, and I will give you peace, and ye shall abide in joy, and your joy shall be everlasting.'

Dear brethren, I weep as I write these lines.

When the soul has come to know the Lord in the Holy Spirit she stands in ceaseless wonder before God's compassion, before His majesty and might, and the Lord Himself by His grace mercifully teaches the soul good and humble

ⁱⁱⁱ Matt. xi: 28.

designs – as a mother teaches a beloved child – and makes the soul to feel His presence, that He is near, and the soul in humility contemplates the Lord with pure contemplation.

The Lord loves man, and His grace will be in the Church until the Day of Judgment, as it has been in times before.

The Lord loves man, and though He created him from dust He adorned him with the Holy Spirit.

By the Holy Spirit we know the Lord, and in the Holy Spirit we love the Lord, but without the Holy Spirit man is but sinful dust.

The Lord instructs His children by the Holy Spirit, and with His most pure Body and Blood, and all who follow after the Lord are in the likeness of their Lord and Father.

The Holy Spirit has made us kin with the Lord. Know, then, that if thou feelest within thyself the peace of God and love towards all men, thy soul is in the likeness of the Lord.

The grace of God has taught us this, and the soul knows when she is enriched by grace; and in like manner the soul feels when she loses grace, and senses, too, the approach of the enemy.

In the past I did not know this, but when I lost grace, then the experience made it clear to me.

Therefore, brethren, with all your might preserve the peace of God which is freely given to us, and when any man vexes us, if needs be let us constrain ourselves to love him, and the Lord, seeing our pains, will help us with His grace.

Thus speak the Holy Fathers; and the experience of many years goes to show that toil is imperative.

The grace of the Holy Spirit makes every man like unto the Lord Jesus Christ while still here on earth.

He who is in the Holy Spirit is like unto the Lord even here on this earth, but the man who does not repent, and believe, resembles the enemy.

The Lord vouchsafed us to be in His likeness, but the Lord is so meek and lowly that wert thou to see Him, from much

joy thou wouldst want to exclaim, 'O Lord, I melt with Thy grace,' but at that moment thou art unable to utter a single word concerning God, for thy soul is transformed from the abundance of the Holy Spirit. Thus it was with St. Seraphim of Sarov – when he beheld the Lord, he was unable to speak.

The Lord bids us love Him with all our heart and all our soul – but how is it possible to love Him Whom we have never seen, and how may we learn this love? The Lord is made known by His action on the soul. When the Lord has visited her, then the soul knows that a dear Guest has come and gone, and she yearns for Him and seeks Him in tears: 'Where art Thou, my Light, where art Thou, my joy? Thy trace is fragrant in my soul but Thou art not there, and my soul yearns after Thee, and my heart aches and is downcast, and nothing rejoices me because I have grieved my Lord, and He hath hidden Himself from my sight.'

Were we simple like children, the Lord would show us His paradise, and we would behold Him in the glory of the Cherubim and Seraphim, and of all the heavenly host, and the Saints, but we are not humble, and therefore we torment ourselves and those we live among.

What joy is ours that the Lord not only forgives our sins but allows the soul to know Him, so soon as she humbles herself. The poorest wretch can humble himself and know God in the Holy Spirit. There is no need of money or possessions in order to know God, only of humility. The Lord gives Himself freely, for His mercy's sake alone. I did not know this before but now every day and hour, every minute, I see clearly the mercy of God. The Lord gives peace even in sleep, but without God there is no peace in the soul.

The Lord does not reveal Himself to many men because of their intellectual pride, yet they still think they possess much knowledge. But what is their knowledge worth, if they know not the Lord, know not the grace of the Holy

Spirit, know not how this grace comes and wherefore it is lost?

But let us humble ourselves, brethren, and the Lord will show us all things, as a loving father shows all things to his children.

Consider with your mind what happens in the soul. If there is a small measure of grace, there is peace in the soul, and a feeling of love for all men. If the measure of grace be larger, there is light and great joy in the soul. And with more grace still, the body, too, is sensible of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

There is no greater grief than to lose grace. The soul then languishes for God, and to what shall I liken her longing? I will liken it to the lamentation of a mother bereft of her one beloved son, who cries out: 'Where art thou, beloved fruit of my womb? Where art thou, my joy?'

Thus, and even more grievously, does the soul yearn after the Lord when she loses grace and the sweetness of divine love.

'Where art Thou, my merciful God? Where art Thou, O Light that never sets? Wherefore hast Thou hidden Thyself from me, and I no longer behold Thy meek and radiant countenance?'

'Rare are the souls that know Thee. With but a few is it possible to talk of Thee. Men are more often saved through faith. But as Thou Thyself didst say to Thomas the Apostle, "Thou hast seen me and felt me with thy finger, but blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."^{iv} Likewise, not every one perceives the Holy Spirit but all those will be saved who fear God and keep His commandments, for the Lord loves us without stint, and I could not have known this love had not the Holy Spirit taught me Who teaches every good thing.

^{iv} cf. John xx: 29.

My heart loved Thee, O Lord,
and therefore I yearn for Thee,
and seek Thee in tears.

Thou hast adorned the sky with stars, the air with clouds,
and the earth with seas and rivers and green gardens where
birds sing, but my soul is filled with love of Thee and
knows no desire to look upon this world, beautiful though
it be. Only for Thee does my soul long, O Lord. I cannot
forget Thy meek, gentle gaze, and weeping I pray to
Thee:

'Come and take up Thine abode, and cleanse me of my
sins. From the heights of Thy glory Thou seest how my
soul yearns after Thee. Forsake not Thy servant. Hear me
as I cry unto Thee like the Prophet David: "Have mercy
upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness." 'v

O Holy Apostles, you preached to all the earth: 'Know the
love of God.' And it was given to my sinful soul to know
this love by the Holy Spirit; but I have lost this Spirit, and
yearn after Him, and I beseech you to entreat the Lord that
He may give back to me the gift of the Holy Spirit, Whom
my soul knows, and I will pray for the whole world, that
peace may come upon earth.

O all ye Saints, entreat the Lord God for me. You behold
the glory of the Lord in the heavens, since on earth you
loved God with all your souls and with all your minds. You
overcame the world by the power of the grace which the
Lord gave you on account of your humility; you bore with
every affliction for love of God; and my spirit burns to
behold you in contemplation of the glory of the Lord, and
my soul yearns day and night for the Lord, and longs to
delight in His love.

All good elders are humble and in disposition like unto
Christ. Their lives are living examples. They have obtained

^v. Ps. li: 1.

peace and like the tree of life in paradise, they nourish many
with their fruits – that is, with the fruits of this peace.

The tree of life in the heart of paradise is Christ. All men
may now approach this tree and find nourishment, and feed
on the Holy Spirit.

When we have no worthy spiritual director, we must give
ourselves up in humility to the will of God, and the Lord
by His grace will then instruct us in wisdom, for the Lord's
love for us is so great that it cannot be expressed and the
mind cannot comprehend it, and only by the Holy Spirit,
through faith, can we know this love of God for us which
is not made known through the mind.

Some there are who argue about faith, and there is no end
to such disputes, but we must not quarrel about faith, but
only pray to God and His Mother, and the Lord will
enlighten us not by means of argument – and will enlighten
us speedily.

Many men have made a study of all the faiths but the true
faith they have not come to know as they should; but if a
man will pray to God in humility that the Lord may
enlighten him, the Lord will make known to him how great-
ly He loves mankind.

The proud man thinks he can comprehend everything
with his mind but God does not grant this.

But we know the Lord: He has made Himself manifest to
us in the Holy Spirit, and the soul knows Him, and is joyful
and glad and at ease, and in this lies our hallowed life.

The Lord said, 'Where I am, there shall also my servant
be,'^{vi} and he shall see My glory. But we do not understand
the Scriptures – they are, as it were, incomprehensible. But
when the Holy Spirit teaches, then everything becomes com-
prehensible and the soul feels as if she were in heaven, for
the same Holy Spirit is in heaven and on earth, in the Holy

^{vi}. John xii: 26.

Scriptures and in the souls of them that love God. But without the Holy Spirit men go astray and though they study endlessly they cannot come to know God, and have not discovered what it is to rest in Him.

The man who has come to know the love of God himself loves the whole world and never murmurs at his fate, for temporary affliction endured for God's sake is a means to eternal joy.

The soul that is not humble and has not surrendered herself to the will of God cannot come to know anything, but flits from one idea to another and so never prays with an undistracted mind, or glorifies the majesty of God.

The soul that has surrendered humbly to God's will invisibly beholds God every second, yet finds no words for all this, even to herself, and cannot describe it, but only by experience learns to know the mercy of God, and know when the Lord is with her. The soul has surrendered to Him like a little child who receives food every day but is ignorant whence comes this food. Thus is it that with God the soul feels that all is well with her but cannot explain how this is.

O Lord, by Thy Holy Spirit enlighten Thy people that all may know Thy love.

The Lord Himself inspires us to pray for others, and Himself gives us the strength for this prayer, and rewards the soul when she prays. Such is the mercy of the Lord towards us.

From my childhood days I loved the world and its beauty. I loved woods and green gardens, I loved the fields and all the beauty of God's creation. I liked to watch the shining clouds scurrying across the blue sky. But after I came to know my Lord, and He made my soul His prisoner, everything changed, and now I no longer want to contemplate this world – my soul is continually drawn to that other world where lives the Lord. On this earth my soul pines like a bird in a cage. Like a bird straining to get out of its cramped

cage and fly off to the green grove, so my soul strains to behold the Lord anew, for He has drawn her to Himself and she yearns for Him and cries,

'Where hast Thou taken up Thy habitation, my Light? Thou seest how I seek Thee, weeping. Hadst Thou not revealed Thyself unto me, I could not seek Thee as I do now. But Thou Thyself didst seek me out, a sinner, and give me to know Thy love. Thou madest me to see that Thy love for us brought Thee to the cross and to suffering and death for our sakes. Thou gavest me to know that Thy love led Thee down from heaven to earth and even into hell that we might behold Thy glory.

'Thou wast moved to compassion for me, and to reveal Thy face to me, and now my soul is drawn to Thee, O Lord, and nowhere finds rest, neither by day nor by night, and I weep like a child that has lost its mother.

'But even a child will forget its mother and a mother her child when they behold Thee: seeing Thee, the soul forgets the whole world. Thuswise is my soul drawn to Thee, and yearns for Thee, and has no wish to look upon the beauty of this world.'

When the soul in the Holy Spirit comes to know the Mother of God, when in the Holy Spirit she becomes kin with the Apostles, Prophets, prelates and holy Fathers, and all the Saints and the righteous, she is irresistibly drawn to their world and cannot be restrained but yearns and pines and weeps, and cannot tear herself from prayer, and, although her body succumbs and would rest, even lying abed the soul strains towards the Lord and the Kingdom of the Saints.

Old age has come upon me, my body is grown feeble with the years and I would fain lie on my pallet but my spirit rests not – my spirit reaches out with longing towards God, her heavenly Father. He hath made us kin with his Body and most pure Blood and with the Holy Spirit. He has given us to know the essence of eternal life. We know in part : the Holy Spirit is eternal life. The soul lives in the

love of God, in the humility and meekness of the Holy Spirit; but we must give the Holy Spirit room in our souls, that He may dwell therein, that the soul may be sensible of His presence.

He who on earth through the Holy Spirit dwells in the love of God will be with the Lord in the other world, too, for love cannot disappear. But lest by reasoning we fall into error, let us humble ourselves according to the word of the Lord:

'Become as little children, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.'^{vii.}

Woe is me, for it was given to me to know the Lord in the Holy Spirit, but I lose Him and cannot enter into His fulness, even though I perceive God's mercy towards me.

The Lord loves us more dearly than we can love ourselves; but the soul in her distress supposes that the Lord has forgotten her, even has no wish to look upon her, and she suffers and pines.

But it is not so, brethren. The Lord loves us without end, and gives us the grace of the Holy Spirit, and comforts us. It is not the Lord's desire that the soul should be despondent and in doubt concerning her salvation. Believe, and be sure that we continue in suffering only until we have humbled ourselves; but so soon as we humble ourselves there is an end to affliction, for the Divine Spirit discloses to the soul, because of her humility, that she is saved.

Great glory be to the Lord that He loveth us so dearly, and this love is made known in the Holy Spirit!

My soul yearns after the Lord, and I seek Him in tears.

How could I not seek Him? He revealed Himself to me in the Holy Spirit, and my heart loved Him. He drew my soul to Himself, and she yearns for Him.

The soul is like a bride, and the Lord the Bridegroom;

^{vii.} cf. Matt. xviii: 3.

and they love each other, and yearn for one another. The Lord in His love longs for the soul, and grieves if there is no place in her for the Holy Spirit; while the soul, having come to know the Lord, yearns after Him, for in Him lie her life and her joy.

A sinful life is death to the soul, but the love of God is that sweet paradise in which our father Adam dwelt before the Fall.

O Adam, our father, tell us how thy soul loved the Lord in paradise?

This is past understanding, and only the soul that has been touched by the love of God can in part comprehend it.

And the Mother of God – what was her love for the Lord, her Son?

No human being can conceive of the nature of her love, save the Mother of God herself. But the Spirit of God opens our eyes to love. And in her was and is this same Spirit of God, Which is love, and therefore he who has come to know the Holy Spirit is able in part to conceive of the nature even of her love.

How happy are we Christians! What a God is ours!

How much to be pitied are those who do not know God. They do not see the everlasting light, and when they die they enter into eternal darkness. We know of this because the Holy Spirit in the Church reveals to the saints the like of heaven and the like of hell.

O, unhappy, erring peoples! They cannot know what true joy is. They make merry and laugh but their laughter with which they laugh, and their mirth when they make merry, will be turned to weeping and affliction.

But our joy is Christ. By His sufferings He has inscribed us in the Book of Life, and in the Kingdom of Heaven we shall be with God for ever, and we shall see His glory, and delight in Him. Our joy is the Holy Spirit, so pleasant and delectable. He bears witness to the soul of her salvation.

O brethren, I beg and pray you in the name of God's compassion, believe on the Gospels and in the witness of the Holy Church, and you will, while still here on earth, savour the blessedness of paradise. For the Kingdom of God is within us; with the love of God the soul knows paradise. Many princes and prelates abandoned their thrones when they came to know the love of God. And this we can understand, because the love of God is a consuming love – it gladdens the soul to the point of tears by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and no earthly things can compare with it.

The things of this earth we may learn with our minds but knowledge of God and of all heavenly matters comes only through the Holy Spirit, and cannot be learned merely with the mind.

He who has come to know God by the Holy Spirit is forgetful of the earth, as if it did not exist; but when his prayer is over he looks with his eyes and sees the earth again.

Brethren, the Saints in the Kingdom of Heaven behold the glory of God; but let us humble ourselves, and the Lord will love us and give us on earth all things profitable for our souls and bodies, and reveal to us His every mystery.

Men have attached their souls to the things of this earth and have lost the love of God, and so there is no peace on earth. Many there are who spend their whole life in trying to find out, for instance, how the sun is fashioned, but they are not solicitous to know God. But the Lord did not speak to us of the sun: He told us of the Father and the Kingdom of Heaven. He said that the righteous in the Kingdom of the Father would shine forth as the sun.^{viii} And the Scriptures declare that in Paradise the Lord will be the light thereof,^{ix} and the Light of the Lord will be in the *souls and minds and bodies* of the Saints.

^{viii} cf. Matt. xiii: 43.

^{ix} cf. Rev. xxi: 23; xxii : 5.

We live on earth, and see not God, and are unable to see Him. But if the Holy Spirit enter into the soul, we shall see God, as St. Stephen the Archdeacon saw Him. In the Holy Spirit soul and mind will at once realise that this is the *Lord*. Thus St. Simeon by the Holy Spirit recognised the Lord in the child whom he took up in his arms in the Temple; and St. John the Baptist, likewise by the Holy Spirit, knew the Lord and shewed Him to the people. But without the Holy Spirit no man can know God and how greatly He loves us. Although we may read of His love, how He suffered for our sakes, for love of us, if we ponder these things with our minds only, our souls do not rightly comprehend the love of Christ; but when we are taught of the Holy Spirit, we are plainly sensible of this love, and have our being in the likeness of the Lord.

O Merciful Lord, teach us all by Thy Holy Spirit to live according to Thy will that we may everyone of us in Thy Light know Thee, the true God, for without Thy Light we cannot comprehend the fulness of Thy love.

Enlighten us by Thy grace,
and Thy grace will kindle our hearts to love of Thee.