

On Prayer

Excerpts from *The Way of the Ascetic* by Tito Colliander

Prayer is your first and incomparably most important means of fighting [the tendency for sinfulness]. Learn to pray, and you vanquish all the evil powers that could imaginably assail you.

Prayer is one wing, faith is the other, that lifts us heavenward. With only one wing no one can fly: prayer without faith is meaningless as faith without prayer....

Prayer is action; to pray is to be highly effective. For every kind of effectiveness needs practice...

Without prayer you can never expect to find what you are seeking. Prayer is the beginning and the basis of all striving towards God...

Prayer is the foundation of the world...

Prayer is humanity's intercourse and encounter with God. It is the bridge on which man crosses over from his carnal self with its temptations, to the spiritual, with its freedom...

Prayer and watchfulness are one and the same, for it is with prayer that you stand at the gate of your heart...

The Spider may be another example for you. In the middle of his web he sits and feels the smallest fly and kills it. Likewise prayer watches in the middle of your heart; as soon as a trembling makes it known that an enemy is there, prayer kills it.

To leave off praying is the same thing as deserting one's post. The gate stands open for the ravaging hordes, and the treasures one has gathered are plundered...

From the foregoing we understand that by prayer the holy Fathers are not referring to occasional prayer, morning and evening devotions and grace at meals, but for them prayer is synonymous with unceasing Prayer... "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

"Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8). It is for us to begin...

Some time you must take the first uncertain step—if you wish to crawl near to God. Do not be anxious about your clumsy beginning; do not yield to shyness and uncertainty, and the mocking laughter of enemies, who try and persuade you that you are behaving ridiculously and the whole thing is only a child of fantasy...

Do not wait for some extraordinary divine inspiration before setting to work...

The hardened criminal often is not conscious of his guilt; he is hardened. So it is with us. Do not let yourself be frightened by the harness of your own heart. Prayer will gradually soften it.

Follow the instruction of the prayer book:

"When you awake, before you begin the day, stand with reverence before the All-seeing God. Make the sign of the Cross and say:"

"In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

"Having invoked the Holy trinity, keep silence for a little so that your thoughts and feelings may be freed of worldly care. The recite [the prayers as outlined in your prayer book]."

Do not let your thoughts wander; imprison them again and again, and always begin anew from the point where you left off praying.

Your prayer must have four constituent parts, says Saint Basil the Great: adoration, thanksgiving, confession of sin and petition for salvation.

Prayer does not stop when morning devotions are over. Now it is a matter of maintaining prayer the whole day through, no matter what the day's complications. Chooses a suitable sort sentence... ["Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner" is among the most common]. As the day goes on, one may keep this prayer in mind and repeat it as often as possible, mentally or in a whisper, better still, aloud as soon as one is alone and unheard. In a bus or elevator, at work and during meals, constantly, as soon as one has the opportunity, one recaptures the prayer and fixes all his attention on the content of the words. Thus the day is filled until evening reading from the prayer book...

Frequent repetition is important: with frequent wing-beats a bird soars up over the clouds; the swimmer must repeat his strokes countless times before he reaches the desired shore.

Pray in this way hour after hour, day after day, without growing weary. But pray simply, not with pathos nor plodding nor with all manner of questions...

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