

“Luminous, radiant as lightning, and transformed with an extraordinary transformation”

## From the Sacred Ascension To Holy Pentecost



## The Purified Heart as a Foundation for the Mystical Ladder

### Prayer, Confession, and Deification

#### 1. “Purify your hearts...”

**L**ET US GATHER once again, all ye assemblies of those who love God, Christ, and the Comforter!

The deifying Grace of the Holy Trinity calls us, today, to the upper chamber of Pentecost: to a sacred *banquet!*

And it enlightens the Holy Fathers to remind us that there is a sacred *order*:

***“that the nous (mind) be led from the Spirit to the Son, and, through the Son, be led to the Father”***,<sup>1</sup>

and a mystical *ladder*:

***“Every provision of the good things that is made unto us proceeds through the Son in the Spirit.”***<sup>2</sup>

Now, after the glorious and God-befitting Ascension, we see Christ our Savior ***“going into Heaven,”*** and sitting ***“on the right hand of God, Angels and Authorities and Powers”*** and all of the Bodiless Ones ***“being made subject unto him.”***<sup>3</sup>

How, one wonders, can our *nous* ascend to such a height? And how will ***“the provision of good things”*** descend into our hearts?

Let us listen to the Divinely-inspired Holy Apostle James:

***“Purify your hearts, ye double-minded”!***<sup>4</sup>

The mystical *ladder* must have our purified *hearts* as its unshakeable foundation; such is the beginning and root of all external actions worked by the body. From the heart, our Lord assured us, spring forth all of the things that render man truly impure:

***“Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man.”***<sup>5</sup>

And how, O holy brother in Christ, will we, the fainthearted and ***“double-minded”*** Christians, be purified?

***“Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep”!***<sup>6</sup>

***“Be afflicted,”*** O ye Christians!” the Hesychast and new light of Athos explains; ***“that is to say, willingly suffer hardship and choose to walk the strait and narrow path of virtue”***; ***“mourn and weep,”*** because mourning and godly sorrow, and especially lamentation and tears, greatly aid man to cleanse the defilement of his heart and to receive forgiveness for his sins.”<sup>7</sup>



Holy Fathers, what else is needed to accompany blessed *affliction* and *mourning*?

*“Cleansing the heart, also,”* continues the saintly Nicodemus, *“is the continuous meditation in the heart of the prayer, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,’ with moderate retention of the breath; for that warmth that is engendered by the action of the holy Prayer consumes and burns*

*up the impurities of the heart.”*<sup>8</sup>

Yes! What is required is this sacred *“warmth,”* which the Comforter kindles in our *hearts* when we zealously seek, by means of the *Jesus Prayer*, *“the Kingdom of God which is within us.”*

*“A warmth is generated in the heart through this meditation,”* the chief of the Hesychasts, St. Gregory Palamas, assures us, *“which wards off evil thoughts like flies; and produces spiritual peace and solace in the soul; and grants sanctification to the body, according to the one who said: ‘My heart grew hot within me, and a fire was kindled in my meditation.’”*<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, the godly-voiced Prophet Isaiah encourages us in this saving activity of the purification of the *heart*:

*“Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts”!*<sup>10</sup>

God is sanctified, glorified, and worshiped primarily and truly within our clean and purified *hearts*, from which, by his Name, are expelled thoughts that are proud and blasphemous, wicked and full of hatred for one’s brother, shameful and impure.

## 2. “Bringing into captivity every thought...”

**O**UR Lord ascended, “gone into Heaven”<sup>11</sup> and all of the Heavenly Powers have submitted themselves unto Him.

And our *hearts*, in order to be raised, to become aerial and heavenly, and to become fellow-citizens of the luminous Angels, must first and foremost bring into captivity “*every thought to the obedience of God.*”<sup>12</sup>

O Divine Apostle James, how can we, the fainthearted and “*double-minded,*” achieve the unachievable?

“*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you!*”<sup>13</sup>

And you, Paul, who was raised to the heavens, do you perhaps agree?

“*Neither give place to the Devil!*”<sup>14</sup>

Yes! The Lord grants His Grace and strength to the humble, who unquestioningly submit themselves to His Will. With It, the sovereign and imperial *nous* valiantly withstands and battles against the Devil when he attacks us and tyrannically attempts to enter into our *hearts*, with blasphemous, wicked, and impure thoughts as his means of conveyance.

Watchfulness and prayer are needed, such that we do not give *place* in our *heart*—that is, that we do not open it—to the Devil, or yield ground for *coupling, communion, and consent* to thoughts.

When the cunning snake, the Devil, finds a *gap* or *entrance way*, he first inserts his head and then draws in his entire body—that is, the whole of his impure energy, and he completely dominates us. Then, the evil thoughts become *strongholds, high things, and errors*, which deprive us of the *unerring knowledge of Jesus Christ*.

The holy Ecclesiastes makes us take heed:



*“If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place!”<sup>15</sup>*

But do not lose heart! says the spirit-bearing Paul, bolstering us. The struggle is certainly great and unequal, but

*“the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”<sup>16</sup>*

And what else, O Saints of God, must we add to this valiant *resistance*, such that the Devil take flight, his *strongholds* and *high things* be pulled down, and that we might take captive and submit *“demonic conceptions to obedience and the unerring knowledge of Jesus Christ”*?

*“If you become accustomed,”* says the God-bearing Nicodemos, *“to meditating in your heart the short prayer: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,’ as the Holy Fathers, who are called ‘Neptic,’ instruct us, the holy and fearsome Name of Jesus, being meditated, becomes like a knife and scourge, scourging the Devil, and it expels him and the demons with him from the heart.”<sup>17</sup>*

### *3. “Whosoever shall confess...”*

**B**ELOVED Apostle of our Lord, how will we know that the *“provision of good things”* has descended from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, into our *hearts*?

*“Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit.”<sup>18</sup>*

The Holy Spirit descends from the mystical *ladder* and dwells in our purified *hearts*; with Him dwell and abide also the Father and the Son.

*“Wherever one Hypostasis of the Trinity is present,”* says the hierophant Chrysostomos, *“all of the Trinity is present.”<sup>19</sup> “The Holy and Blessed Trinity is indivisible*

*and united within Itself,”* continues St. Athanasios, the luminary of Alexandria, *“and when one speaks of the Father, His Word is present with Him, and the Spirit Who is in the Son”; for the Grace is one, from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.*”<sup>20</sup>

When we received Holy Baptism, *“born of God,”*<sup>21</sup> the *seed* of the Grace of the Holy Spirit came to dwell deep within the soil of our *hearts*, where, continuously increasing, it guides us *“unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”*<sup>22</sup> This *seed* of Grace, even when deeply buried by our voluntary sins, yet never dies or completely disappears; rather, as the God-bearing Nicodemus teaches us,

*“it is like the spark of fire buried in hot ashes; neither did it leave us completely, but is within us, awaiting our repentance—that is, that we first cleanse our hearts of the passions, which are the ashes that cover that spark of Grace of the Holy Spirit. And, having cleansed our hearts and found the hidden spark of Grace, we apply the virtues onto it like wood, and blowing upon it with manful alacrity, we shall light the fire: that is, we shall more purely and sensibly come to know the energy and strength of the Divine Grace dwelling within us, through the life-gushing warmth brought about in the heart. We shall be illumined by it and be caught up in revelations of the unutterable mysteries of the Spirit. And we shall be perfected according to the measure possible for man.”*<sup>23</sup>

O Chief of the Theologians, John, the Disciple of Christ, teach us the manner whereby Christ will be continuously in our *hearts*, while we will remain continuously in God!

*“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.”*<sup>24</sup>



God dwells and abides in him, who *confesses* Jesus as Son of God; and, *vice versa*, the *confessor* of this saving *confession* dwells in God.

This noetic union, relationship, and loving fusion, which is the consequence of our good *confession*, bears witness once again, in a truly revelatory manner, to the great value of the unceasing *Prayer of Jesus*: praying without ceasing, we unceasingly confess the Divinity of Christ; in consequence, we unceasingly have God in our hearts and simultaneously dwell unceasingly in God the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit!

*“That is why the Fathers who are called Neptic,”* infers the holy bird of Athos, *“persuaded by this saying of the Theologian, teach that all Christians must always meditate upon, and unceasingly pray using, this short and so-called ‘single-phrased’ (monologistos) prayer: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.’ When this prayer is constantly meditated in one’s heart, he confesses that Jesus is the Son of God; and this being confessed, he has God dwelling within him, and he dwells in God, and his heart is filled with Grace and is sanctified. He becomes a temple of God and is vouchsafed many and great spiritual gifts. And he enjoys a profusion of good things from God, as enumerated by the same Neptic Fathers.”*<sup>25</sup>

The continuous *confession* of our Savior as the Son of God is therefore necessary so that the Comforter might be continuously present within us, constantly rebuking the menacing waves and furious winds of the passions incited by the unclean spirits, and constantly bringing peace to our *hearts*.

*“And because the passions are mollified by prayer,”* St. Ignaty Brianchaninov advises us, *“when they rise up [within us], we must noetically, without haste and very calmly, say the Jesus Prayer (i.e. ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me’), which will gradually mollify and bring to an end the passions that are rising up. Sometimes the rising up of the passions and the onslaught of hostile thoughts*

*become so intense that they raise man up to a great spiritual battle. Then is the hour of an invisible martyrdom. It is necessary to confess the Lord in the face of our passions and demons with prolonged prayer, which will certainly bring victory.”<sup>26</sup>*

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*“The Lord was taken up into Heaven that He might send the Comforter unto the world.”<sup>27</sup>*

All ye who have been invited to the sacred *banquet* of Pentecost; all ye who love God, Christ, and the Comforter; as many as have been initiated into the sacred *order* of the ascent from the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father, but also of the descent from the Father, through the Son, to the Spirit; as many as have received the breath of Divinely-flowing Grace, let us all be luminous, all be radiant as lightning, and all be transformed with an exceedingly beautiful and extraordinary transformation!

With the help of the Mother of God and the Spirit-bearing Fathers, we have been vouchsafed to come to know that the Divinity’s essence of threefold splendor is equipotent, indivisible, and wise!

Hence, theologizing and confessing in an Orthodox manner, we glorify and magnify the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit unto the ages!

*“We on whom Divinely-flowing Grace hath breathed are made luminous and radiant as lightning, and are transformed with an extraordinary transformation of exceeding beauty; and acknowledging the indivisible, equipotent, wise essence of threefold splendor, we give glory.”<sup>28</sup>*



**6 and 7 June, 2005 (Old Style)  
+ Sunday and Monday of Pentecost**



To the Giver of All That Is Good,  
The Triune God,  
Glory and Thanksgiving!

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Notes

1. **St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite**, “Interpretation” of the Iambic Canon of Pentecost, First Ode, Irmos, *Commentary on the Great Feasts* (Venice: 1836), p. 555.

■ St. Nicodemus refers to St. Basil the Great:

*“In receiving the gifts, we firstly encounter the distributor (namely, the Spirit); then, we comprehend the sender (namely, the Son); then, we lead the reflection to the source and cause of good things (namely, the Father).”*

(**St. Basil the Great**, *On the Holy Spirit*, ch. 17, §37, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXXII, col. 133C.)

■ See also the following:

*“Thus, the way of the knowledge of God is from the one Spirit, through the one Son, to the one Father. And vice versa: the natural goodness, the sanctification according to nature, and the royal dignity extend from the Father, through the Only-begotten One, to the Spirit.”*

(*Idem*, col. 153CD/ ch. 18, §47).

2. *Ibid.*

3. I St. Peter 3:22.

4. St. James 4:8.

5. St. Matthew 15:19-20.

6. St. James 4:9

7. **St. Nicodemus**, on St. James 4:9, “Interpretation” of the seven General Epistles, (Venice, 1806), p. 52.

8. *Ibid.*

9. **St. Gregory Palamas**, “Homily XI ‘On the Holy and Life-giving Cross,’” *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. CLI, col. 129A; Psalm 38:4.

10. I St. Peter 3:15; Isaiah 8:13.

11. I St. Peter 3:22.

12. II Corinthians 10:5.

13. St. James 4:7.

14. Ephesians 4:27.

15. Ecclesiastes 10:4.

16. II Corinthians 10:5.

17. **St. Nicodemus**, on St. James 4:7, “Interpretation” of the seven General Epistles, p. 49.

18. I. St. John 4:13.

19. **St. John Chrysostomos**, “Homily XIII ‘On the Epistle to the Romans’” (§8), *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. LX, col. 519.
20. **St. Athanasios the Great**, “Epistle I to Serapion of Thmouis” (§14), *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XXVI, col. 565AB.
21. St. John 1:13.
22. Ephesians 4:13.
23. **St. Nicodemos**, on I St. John 3:24, “Interpretations” of the seven General Epistles, p. 259.
24. I. St. John 4:15.
25. **St. Nicodemos**, on I St. John 4:15, “Interpretations” of the seven General Epistles, p. 273.
26. St. Ignatios Brianchaninov, “The Action of Noetic Prayer,” in *Orthodox Witness* (Cyprus), No. 72 (Winter 2004), p. 39.
27. Great Vespers Service for the Ascension, *Sticherion Idiomelon* 1.
28. Iambic Canon of Pentecost, Seventh Ode, *Troparion* 1.