



An Elder Said...

Edifying Stories
and Teachings from
Ancient and Modern Times

The Benefit of Self-Reproach*

One must always blame himself for all things

An Elder recounted something like this to me:

“Once, I was staying for a short while at the Lavra of St. Gerasimos, where I made friends with someone. While we were sitting one day, discussing edifying subjects, I remembered the saying of Abba Poimen, that one must always blame himself for everything.

“And the individual said to me:

“Father, I know from experience the meaning of these words and the benefit that they bring. For I once had a true friend—a Deacon from the Lavra—, who became suspicious of me—I know not why—about some matter which caused him grief, and he began scowling at me. Seeing his sullenness, I asked him to tell me the reason. And he said to me:

““You did such-and-such a thing.”

“But as I was not conscious of having done any such thing at all, I started to tell him that I was not aware that I had done it. He said to me:

““Forgive me, but I am not convinced.”

“I then went to my cell and began to search my heart to see whether I had done any such thing, but I did not find anything. Anyway, I saw him holding the Holy Chalice and administering Holy Communion, and I vowed then and there that I was not conscious of having done that deed, but I did not convince him. When I was alone again, I remembered these words of the Holy



Fathers and put my faith in them. I changed my thinking a little and said to myself:

““The Deacon has genuine love for me; and, moved by love, he took courage to tell me what he felt in his heart about me, so that I might come to my

senses and be on my guard from now on and not act thusly.

““Yet, O my wretched soul, you who say that I did not do this action, have you not committed thousands of evil deeds and forgotten them? What about those things you did yesterday and the day before and ten days ago? Do you remember them?

““So, you did this also, just as you did the other things, and you have forgotten it, just as you forgot the previous ones.”

“And I provoked such an attitude in my heart: that I had, in fact, done it, but that I had forgotten it precisely as I had forgotten the earlier deeds. I then began to thank God and the Deacon, since, through him, God vouchsafed me to understand my fault, and I repented of it.

“I stood up with such thoughts in mind and went to make a prostration to the Deacon and to thank him, because through him I had come to know my fault. But as soon as I knocked on his door, he opened it and made a prostration to me first and said:

““Forgive me, because I was mocked by the demons, in that I had suspicions about you regarding that matter. For, in truth, God informed me that you have done no such thing.”

“And he said: “The Deacon did not even let me explain, saying:

““There is no need.””

“I was greatly benefited and I glorified the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity, to Whom are due dominion and majesty unto the ages of ages. Amen.”

* Source: John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow*, ch. 219 (based on a Modern Greek translation by a theologian from the Monastery of Stavronikita).