



Brief Patristic Messages



Repose for the Soul: *Self-Reproach as a Therapeutic Treatment*

† His Eminence, Metropolitan
Cyprian of Oropos and Fili

SORROWS and temptations are interwoven into the life of the pious person; such is the fulfillment of the word of our Lord: “*In the world ye shall have tribulation.*”

That which aggravates *sorrow*, however, transforming it into unrelieved *sadness* and *listlessness*, and finally leads a person to despair and induces incurable psychological problems is *self-justification* and the absence of a profound faith that everything happens in accordance with the providence of God, the Lover of mankind.

It may be that the cause of the spiritual sickness of many contemporary Christians is found at this point.

Constantly to justify ourselves, to avoid admitting our errors, and to fear lest we *sink in other people’s estimation*—all of these things display an absence of humble-mindedness and a state of repentance.

This attempt at continual *self-justification* repels the Grace of the Holy Spirit and the soul is deprived of peace and repose.

But why, my brother, do you drive away God’s mercy? Why do you become agitated, refuting every accusation and everything that gives you offense? If you were not in error today, have

you forgotten that you have erred in the past and have grieved our Lord? Why, then, do you rebel, becoming indignant and distressed?

Abba Zosimas, that God-inspired spiritual physician, advises us and reminds us of the following:

He who injures and insults you is a 'cautery of Jesus,' delivering you from avarice and pride.... If, however, you do not tolerate such things and not only do you not give thanks, but even spin a web of thoughts against the person who has grieved you, then it is as if you were saying to Jesus: 'I do not want You to heal me, I do not accept Your medicine, and I desire to rot in my wounds.' What, then, is the good Lord to do with you? Know, O brother, that one who flees beneficial temptations, flees from eternal life.

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THEREFORE, let us never forget that everything is allowed for our advantage, by our Savior's love for mankind, for purely therapeutic reasons:

"He precisely wishes to be saved," says St. Maximos the Confessor, "who does not resist the doctor's medicine; these things are the pains and sorrows brought about by divers circumstances."

As a consequence, we must *ascribe* all things to God—even the simplest and basest things. Since *that is how God wishes it*, we ought to submit ourselves to His Fatherly Providence with calmness and complete trust.

The Holy Fathers tell us that precisely this is the *great task* of man: always to have his sins before him, to condemn himself, and to expect temptations and trials until his last breath.

"Abba Anthony said to Abba Poimen: 'Such is the great work of man: to assume responsibility for his sin before God and to expect temptation until his last breath.'"

Hence, my brother, do not continually shift the blame onto others; do not justify yourself; do not look with such human eyes at the things that happen to you; for, by this approach, you will always have inner agitation and *sorrow*.

May you learn to *reproach yourself*, to repent, to humble yourself, and to look at everything in the light of the Will of God; and never forget that the admission of our guilt—whether we are truly to blame or not—has *therapeutic* results.

Remember the Prophet David, who said these memorable words when Shimei was cursing him:

“Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction and requite me good for his cursing this day” (II Kings 16:11-12).

May this magnificent *self-reproach* on the part of the Prophet-King David be your sure guide, especially during involuntary trials and sorrows, that you may preserve your peace, your soul find repose, and your heart be healed.

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