



## Brief Patristic Messages



### The Discernment of the Wise

*“For this is philosophy: that one ever be watchful even in the least and smallest of things that happen to him.”*  
(Abba Isaac the Syrian)

*† His Eminence, Metropolitan  
Cyprian of Oropos and Fili*

**T**HE HOLY FATHERS, as true scientists of the art of Unseen Warfare, advise us with particular emphasis to pay attention to small things, in order to be delivered from the great.

**This means** that we must be marked by spiritual wisdom, such that, in our fight and resistance against our ailing nature and the homicidal Devil, we might not enter into great struggles and wars. We must exhibit patience and fortitude in the small battles against the passions incited by the Evil One without allowing great conflagrations to flare up, which are then not easy to put out.

*“He who is easily vanquished by small things,” says St. Mark the Ascetic, “of necessity becomes enslaved to the great; but he who despises the small will resist great things through the Lord.”*

**In other** words, in the case of so-called “small things,” Satan exploits our indifference and negligence, so that by one seemingly

insignificant thing or one small oversight or concession, he might darken our mind and dominate our heart.

*“The passions are like little dogs that hang around the meat markets. If you shout at them, they flee. But if you ignore them, they draw near and attack like great lions.”*

**The first** movements of sin, then, are initially like “*little dogs*,” which, however, become “*great lions*” when neglected.

**This**, consequently, is the discernment of the wise according to God who, implicitly accepting the experience of the Holy Fathers, banish right from the outset, with watchful vigilance and a valiant spirit, not only the “*small dogs*,” but even the “*ants*” of the passions, before they grow up into fearsome “*lions*”:

*“That is why the struggler,”* St. Neilos the Ascetic advises us, “*must battle against the passions when they are like ants, showing themselves to be insignificant by way of ‘bait.’ For if they arrive at the strength of a lion, they become difficult to conquer.*”

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**HENCE**, diligence, patience, and persistence are required in “*small*” and feeble things, that the “*great*” and fierce things might be warded off; for if the trifling and bearable are not surmounted, how will we resist the serious and unbearable?

**If you** willingly accept inner self-praise and self-admiration, how will you abhor and rid yourself of the desire to be pleasing to others that arises from honors shown to your person?

**If you** give in to the Enemy, who prompts you to look with passion at an indecent magazine, how will you then banish the fierce desire to scrutinize your neighbor’s corporeality in a depraved way?

**If you** neglect the daily prayers prescribed by the Church, how will you deal with *slothfulness*, which persistently prevents you from cultivating *unceasing prayer*?

**If you** allow yourself to judge and mentally condemn your brother, how will you manage not to judge him verbally—and before others, at that?

**If you** are not always abstemious and temperate with your food, rather becoming a slave to gluttony and over-eating out of self-love, how will you resist its offspring, that is, the lion of fornication?

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**LET US**, then, take heed of *small* things and the *beginnings* of evil. Let us not give room to the Devil, opening doors and passageways towards the *great*; for that most evil one

*“ever stands, facing us, surveying to see through which pathway of our senses—which has been opened by our negligence—he may enter into us; and when he understands that one path is unguarded, he visits his own [attacks] on us. Let us exchange great pains for the small, and we will easily conquer him.”*

*Third Sunday of St. Luke  
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