

**AN
ELDER
SAID...**



**Edifying Stories
and Teachings from
Ancient and Modern Times**

Self-Reproach, Contrition, and Mourning

Small Sacrifices for the Sake of Christ*

A young man once complained to his Elder that his heart was so hardened that he could not weep even during prayer.

"I sin day and night, yet I cannot weep," he said. "Every day I go from bad to worse. I want to repent, to weep, but I cannot. I am almost never contrite. Why am I inwardly so stony? What is wrong with me? What am I lacking?"

To these tragic and agonized questions, the Elder replied:

"You are lacking self-reproach and mourning. Thus, if you eat and sleep more than you need, mourning is dampened, the mind is darkened, and the passions gain strength. If on a daily basis you judge others, talk too much, and are proud and vainglorious, then mourning leaves you completely and permanently.

That is why you need to make small sacrifices every day for the sake of Christ."

"What kind of sacrifices?" asked the young man with some puzzlement."

"Look here... very small sacrifices, which make no impression on us at all when we hear about them, but which help to create and forge in us a Christ-like character.

"For example: • on the table there is fresh bread; leave it and take stale bread for the love of Christ. • Eat leftovers instead of today's freshly-cooked and tasty food. • If someone brings you





fine and choice wine, dilute it with water, or even pour some vinegar in it for the sake of Him Who was given gall and vinegar on the Cross. • From among the fruit on the table, choose the worst and rotting for yourself. • Every now and then, use a hard pillow or none at all on your bed, in remembrance of Christ our Savior Who had “nowhere to lay His head.” • If you are cold at night, never

complain, since Christ on the Cross was naked and cold for your sake. • Are you hungry and thirsty? Be patient and do not grumble; keep in mind that Christ also hungered and thirsted in the desert for your sake.

“Thus, if in everything you do you blend in a little affliction, a little self-denial, and a little pain, and you do so with all your heart, then be sure that you will acquire contrition and mourning.”

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This great spiritual Father and Elder, with his wisdom and experience, bequeathed to us—not just monastics, but also struggling Christians in the world—a wondrous spiritual legacy as to how to acquire blessed Christian mourning.

(*) Protopresbyter Stephanos K. Anagnostopoulos, *Spiritual Reflections on the Beatitudes* [in Greek](Piraeus 2009), p. 73.