



# EDIFICATION AND CONSOLATION

“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men for edification and exhortation and consolation”  
(I Corinthians 14:3)

Simple Catechism Through the Experience of the Orthodox Church

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## ENCYCLICAL

for the Feast of the Nativity of our Savior Christ

# Hope and Vision

*From the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word  
to the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*



**O**n this great day, gathered together yet again in the Temple of the Glory of our Lord, participating in the Supper of the Kingdom of God, and guided by the Divine Comforter to the True Light, we worship with all reverence the ineffable Mystery of the Incarnation of

our Savior Christ.

Glory and thanksgiving to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

**The Good** News, the joyous Tidings, the Gospel message that **God the Word has become flesh**, when continually confessed, constantly proclaimed, and unceasingly announced, renews our Hope and revives **our Vision**.

Now, why is this?

**It is** because one Mystery leads us to another. The Incarnation of the Word—the first Mystery—discloses to us the Holy Trinity—the second Mystery.

\* \* \*



**Today**, it is revealed to us that **God is Love**; that is, He is not a monad, He is not a Person alone by Himself. Rather, He is a Union of Persons, a Community of Three Divine Persons, a Communion of Love.

**God** does not only *have* love, but *is* Love itself. He is absolute Love; He is the Source of Love; He is an Ocean of essential, natural Love. He possesses Love in the literal sense, truly, and in His essence.

**And** when it is revealed to us that “**God is Love**,” this means that the entire Holy Trinity in common is, and is called, Love, and that the Persons of the Holy Trinity are united, joined together, and mutually interpenetrate each other unconfusedly, both by reason of Their one Essence and on account of this essential Love.

**It** is precisely this Great Truth, this Good News, that first and foremost renews **our Hope**: God, as Love, sustains and preserves all things, guiding and drawing them to Himself unceasingly. He is not forgetful of His Creation or of us His creatures, but is constantly concerned and solicitous to restore us to communion among ourselves and with Him, to communion according to the image of the Holy Trinity.

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**This** Good News, this Gospel, likewise renews **our Vision**, which is in danger of fading amid the dullness of daily life, notwithstanding the liturgical exhortation: “Let us love one another, that we may with one mind confess: Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit, Trinity one in essence and undivided.”

**Only** if we abide in Love; only if we have Love among us; only if we experience a communion of Love; only if we are united in mutual interdependence—only then do we abide in the Holy Trinity and the Holy Trinity in us; only then do we become a Temple, an abode, and a dwelling-place of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; only then is the yearning of Christ fulfilled, “that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us.”

**Hope and Vision!** Let us not allow **our Hope** and **our Vision** to be darkened and lost amid the debris of any crisis or ordeal whatsoever.

**Our** Faith and our Confession, today and always, that “**The Word became flesh**” and that “**God is Love**,” are the most precious gifts to ourselves and to our brothers and sisters, gifts which regenerate us and unite us in mutuality.

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**May** the prayers of our much-revered Elder, Metropolitan Cyprian, through the intercessions of the Most Blessed *Theotokos*, strengthen, guide, and protect us, so that we might offer a consistent witness to the Christification of Man, to the Great Mystery of the Encounter between God and Man, unto the glory of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, unto the ages of ages. Amen!

† **The Holy Nativity  
of Our Savior Jesus Christ, 2012**

Your humble intercessor  
before our Incarnate Lord,  
† Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi,  
*Acting President of the  
Holy Synod in Resistance*



The Passion of Judging Others  
is Hateful to God

We Must be  
Vigilant Not to  
Condemn Anyone \*

An Elder recounted the following: “When I was once living in remotest part of the desert, I was visited by a brother from a *coenobion*. I asked him: ‘How are the Fathers faring?’ ‘Well, by your prayers,’ he replied.

“I then asked about a certain brother who had a bad reputation, and he answered: ‘Believe me, Father, he has not freed himself from that reputation.’

“When I heard this, I said, ‘Ugh!’ As soon as I said this, I was overcome by sleep and fell into ecstasy.

\*\*\*

“I saw myself standing before Golgotha and our Lord Jesus Christ crucified between the two thieves.

“I started forward to worship Him, but when I came close, He turned to the Holy Angels who were standing by and said in a loud voice: ‘Cast him out, since, as far as I am concerned, he is an antichrist; for before I could pass judgment, he himself has condemned his brother.’

“As I was being chased out of that place, my *rason* suddenly got caught in the door; leaving it there, I departed and awoke from sleep.

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“Pondering on the things that I had seen, I told the visiting brother: ‘This has been a bad day for me.’ ‘Why so, Father?’ he



Noetic Prayer  
(or “Prayer of the Heart”)  
and Spiritual Fatherhood

The “Jesus Prayer”  
in Today’s World \*

In a city of the Peloponnese, I once met a Christian man, some thirty-two years of age, who gave off a sweet scent of something akin to rosemary.

My astonishment increased yet further when he began to speak about the Jesus



asked. I then related to him what I had seen, and I said: ‘I was deprived of my *rason*, which represents God’s protection.’

“From that time hence I spent seven years in the desert regions, in the sight of the Lord of Glory, neither tasting bread, nor living under a roof, nor encountering any man, until I once more saw my Lord on Golgotha giving permission for my *rason* to be returned to me.”

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As for us, when we heard these things about this wondrous Elder, we exclaimed: “If even this righteous one is barely saved, and only with great difficulty, how then will the impious and sinful dare to appear before God?”

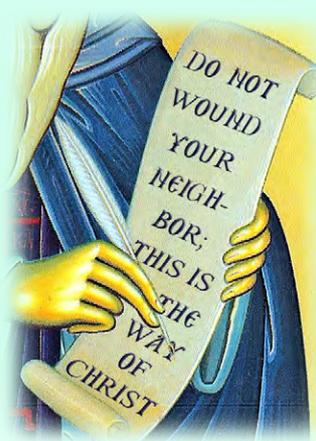
(\*) *The Evergetinos: A Complete Text*, Book III, Hypothesis II, §H.36, ed. and trans. Archbishop Chrysostomos, Hieromonk Patapios, et al. (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 2008), p. 31.

Prayer—“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me”—and I understood that the ineffable fragrance of the All-Holy Spirit was coming forth from his mouth.

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He had learned how to use a prayer rope and to recite the Jesus Prayer on the Holy Mountain [of Mt. Athos] years before, and thenceforth he would say it unceasingly, day and night, oftentimes without stopping to take a break, even during the night. The Prayer made up for his natural need for sleep.

Thus, the Jesus Prayer gradually became spiritual and noetic in his heart, and he partook of its glorious fruits. He was not, however, able to explain just how the Prayer was being said in his heart, filling him with a great sense of sweetness, without



his consciously saying it either aloud or in his thoughts. Such is the greatness of noetic prayer.

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**Once**, in such a state, he was so overwhelmed by the Grace of God that, in his own words:

- **I** completely forgot myself; it was as if I had disappeared, when suddenly I felt that my soul was in the open hands of my spiritual Father, Father G. K., who was praying in front of a Heavenly and radiant throne, filled with the Light and Glory of God.

- **Soon**—when exactly, I do not know—my spiritual Father became bathed in this Heavenly Light to such an extent that I felt that I closed the eyes of my soul. How I saw and how I closed them, I do not know.

- **Tightly** bound as my soul was in my spiritual Father's embrace, I could hear him praying to our Lord Jesus Christ for me. I dared not raise the eyes of my soul, but I could nevertheless feel the resplendent luminosity wash over me, such that I was literally bathed in it, and I was filled with joy, gladness, peace, wonder, and rejoicing.

- **At** some point, I came to myself. I felt myself in the air, and the prayer of the Name of Jesus Christ continued of itself infinitely within me: 'My Jesus... my Jesus... my Jesus...'

- **For** three or four days I neither ate nor drank a drop of water, nor did I sleep, but only experienced an unceasing Heavenly gladness which cannot be described in words, and sweet tears streamed continually down my face..."



(\*) by Protopresbyter Stephanos K. Anagnostopoulos, p. 77, Piraeus 2007.



**Ten Gifts That Cost Nothing But Prayer and a Good Disposition**

## **Ten Commandments for Living in Harmony with Others**

1. Take the initiative in speaking with them.
  - **Even** a simple warm greeting is very encouraging!
2. Smile when you meet.
  - **Keep** in mind that it takes seventy-two muscles to frown, and only fourteen to smile!
3. Call them by their name.
  - **The** dearest word to each person is his or her own name!
4. Behave in a friendly manner and be eager to offer assistance.
  - **If** you want friends, you must be a friend first!
5. Show cordiality.
  - **Speak** and act in such a way as to show others your sincerity!
6. Be truly interested in them.
  - **Show** them by your deeds that you care about them and support them! Give them your attention!
7. Always offer them a good word.
  - **A** genuine compliment, or giving someone a "boost," helps to bring about a meaningful relationship!
8. Always show understanding.
  - **Besides**, there are always three points of view for every matter: yours, theirs, and the correct one!
9. Have genuine love for them.
  - **In** words and deeds, without expecting something in return!
10. Conduct yourself with humility of mind.
  - **Everyone** loves a humble and considerate person!

The Evil Spirits  
Fear the *Theotokos*

## Frank and Full Confession \*

**D**r. Michael Igorivich, Elder Gabriel's former personal physician, was a man who had never given any thought to matters of the faith and salvation, and always had a "natural" explanation for everything that happens in life.

Elder Gabriel once asked him:

"Do you believe in the existence of evil spirits, of demons?"

"Well now, you know.... I have very little faith."

"Please, then, before you do anything else, examine me to see if I am a normal person mentally."

The doctor smiled and said that he considered Father Gabriel to be in perfect (mental) health and in his right mind. His body, on the other hand, and in particular his heart, was in a very weak condition.

\* \* \*

"Good," Father Gabriel continued. "This evening, then, at six o'clock, I began to have trouble breathing. While I was in this state, evil spirits—demons—appeared in front of me."

"Hallucinations!" interrupted the doctor.

"I do not think so. They were demons, because they pressed upon me and said: 'God does not exist. You are ours; you will die.'

"No, I am not yours,' I answered, 'and I will not die. I believe that Christ will take me to Him.'

"They laughed, 'Ha ha ha! Neither He nor God exists.'

"If God does not exist, then what is your purpose?" I replied. 'Who created you? If God does not exist, then you do not exist either. You are liars! You are falsehood personified,

you are slanderers! Flee far away from me. I believe in God, and He will save me!'

"Ha ha ha... Where will you end up? We shall see. You are a sinner!'

"Yes, I am a sinner; you are the ones who provoke me. I have repented, though, and confessed to my spiritual Father, and my sins have been forgiven.'

"Yes, that is true, but your repentance was not pure. You would always make one excuse or another to justify yourself to your spiritual Father.'

"If that is the case,' I insisted, 'it was out of shame. Filled with the sense that my sin was very great, I was ashamed. But you demons provoked this shame and fear in me, in your attempt to make me your prey and to destroy me. And now you have come to frighten me, but you will not succeed. I believe in and confess Jesus Christ the Son of God, Who 'came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief' (I St. Timothy 1:15).

"I then began to pray and to cry out to the Lord: 'Lord, save me.' The demons, however, continued tempting me.

"Ha, do you hear what are you saying? What can you hope to gain, you sinner?"

"I prayed again: 'Saints of God, help free me from the slanders and assaults of the demons.'

"The demons, for their part, kept shouting: 'No, no, you will be damned!'

"No! I am still in my body. I can repent. I will not be lost.'

"They then began showing me all of my sins, even those that I had not considered to be sins. They presented them all in front of me.

"Now there you have it. Do you see them? Are they not your sins?' the unclean spirits continued to accuse me. 'And those Saints of yours were the same as you. Sinners, all of them.'

"When I heard these words, I lifted my head and replied with boldness: 'What? The Saints were sinners like me? They were saved. So



then, why should there not be salvation for me also? I am still in my body and can repent. No, I am alive, and there is salvation for me!

And at that the demons were vanquished.

“I remembered that in the past I had prayed to the Mother of God to protect me at the hour of death, when I would no longer have the strength to pray. Thus, that old prayer of mine came to my mind, and I turned with tears to the Intercessor of all who sorrow: ‘My Lady, the hour has come for you to protect me from the demonic powers. I have besought this of you.’

At that moment, the demons became terrified and shouted with one voice: ‘We are off!’ as they fled for the door. On this table in front of you lay a Chinese plate. The demons snatched it and threw it with all of their might to the floor, where it shattered into a thousand pieces.

“Now then, what do you have to say to that, Michael Igorovich, except that there is no material evidence? And I will tell you something else: When my cell attendant, Joseph, came in, and saw the pieces of china, he asked me: ‘Was the plate in somebody’s way? Who was here?’”

Taken aback, the doctor was at a loss.

“Of course, that is rather unusual.... That is not a hallucination.”

\* \* \*

**When** the demons had departed, Father Gabriel immediately called for his spiritual Father, Father Epiphani. With the frightful image of the throng of his sins—both those of which he had been aware and those the demons had revealed to him—fresh in his mind, he repented and made a candid confession.

Later, Father Gabriel would say that if he had not had faith in our Savior, or if his faith had been shaken, he would surely have died out of despair and fear of the demons. His steadfast faith in our Lord protected and saved him. And at the name alone of the *Panagia*, the demons had vanished in fright, cursing and blaspheming. With God’s help, they had assisted Father Gabriel—albeit unintentionally—in gaining release from his sins, recovering his peace of mind, and becoming calm and joyful.

\* \* \*

**The demons’** apparition made Father Gabriel more vigilant. He discerned every thought passing through his head that was contrary to his salvation.

Through the illumination given to him by unceasing prayer, and with the aid of Divine Providence, he could clearly see the movements of his mind and the evil thoughts, which he considered to be his foes, and he expelled them at their very inception by the Name of Jesus.

Taking such thoughts to be proof of his weakness, he wept and repeatedly repented until the time of his death. “Repentance is a gift of God,” he would say.

Likewise, the demons’ hideous appearance and the frightful impression they had left behind acted positively on Father Gabriel.

He would reflect on death and his passage into eternity, as well as on the torments his soul would undergo while passing through the toll booths.

How can man protect himself from them? How can he receive Christ’s help and be strengthened by the intercessions of the Queen of

Heaven, whose protection is so terrible to the demons?

Father Gabriel would pray to God, beseeching him to have mercy on him at the hour of death.

As an answer to his prayer, he began to feel that his faith was growing, and his soul was filled with joy and hope for his salvation.

Love entered his heart, and he felt a flame within him that strengthened his prayers and led all of his thoughts to God.

He no longer had to struggle to collect his mind and his thoughts. His love led him straight to God; it exalted his senses and gave his mind the capacity for *theoria* [Divine vision], which freely and effortlessly led him to ascend to the things on high.

“Later, a tremendous awe would overcome me,” Father Gabriel was to write.



(\*) Petros Botse, *Elder Gabriel the Anchorite* (Athens 1998), p. 125-129.



Two Very Edifying Revelations

Genuine Repentance\*



**O**ne day, the Staretz had invited his spiritual children to eat with him at a common table, when he suddenly arose and called out: **“There now, my Pelagia! My goodness, how she is repenting, how she is beseeching me to forgive her her sins. And with such tears!**

Wait, my children; leave your food and pray together with me.”

**The Staretz** went before the Icon corner, read the Prayer of Absolution, and blessed his repentant spiritual daughter.

“Where is she now and repenting, Father?”

“She is in the North at the moment. When she arrives here, I will ask her about her repentance. Note the day and hour.”

• **And** indeed, Pelagia reached her homeland six months later and told the Staretz how profoundly she had repented and wept, beseeching the Staretz to forgive her precisely the day and hour that he had read the Prayer of Absolution over her.

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**Something** similar happened with two women who were walking towards the Staretz’ cell.

One of them **repented of her sins every step of the way:**

“My Lord, how sinful I am! I have sinned in this way and that; I have judged someone; forgive me, O Lord...” and her heart and mind lay prostrate at the feet of our Lord. “Forgive me, O Lord, and grant me the strength not to cause Thee offence again. Forgive me, O Lord.”

As she reflected on her entire life, **she remained in constant and profound repentance.**

• **The other** woman, on the other hand, walked nonchalantly towards the Staretz.

“I will arrive,” she thought, “and confess that I am guilty of everything, and tomorrow I will commune. But now, while I am on the way, let me think what material to buy for my daughter’s dress—what color I should choose that would go with her complexion...”

These and other such worldly thoughts occupied the heart and mind of the second woman.

**They** entered Father Zacharias’ cell at the same time. To the former, the Staretz said:

“Kneel, and I will immediately read the Prayer of Absolution over you.”

“But, Father, how can you do that? I have not told you anything yet.”

“It is not necessary for you to say anything. You continually said all of your sins to the Lord. You were in a state of repentance as you walked here, and I heard it all. That is why I will forgive you now and give you my blessing to commune tomorrow.”

“You, on the other hand,” the Staretz addressed the other woman a moment later, “go, of course, and buy the material for your daughter’s dress. Choose the color, sew it—do as you like. **And when your soul comes to repentance, then come again to confess. I will not hear your confession now.**”

(\*) Translated from the Greek, 4th ed. (Ormylia: *Ekdo-seis Hierou Koinobiou Evangelismou tes Theotokou*, 2002).



The Warfare of Shameful Thoughts

“I was in your heart...”

**Someone** asked Staretz Ambrose of Optina: “Father, when, against my will, unclean thoughts pass through my mind, am I sinning?”

• “Listen, my child,” the Staretz replied.

“A certain ascetic, Ekaterina Seneiskaya, was vexed for a long time by unclean thoughts. In the end, Christ visited her and immediately drove them away.



“Where were You all this time, my sweetest Jesus?’ she asked him.

‘I was in your heart,’ he replied.

‘In my heart? But how can that be, since it is full of unclean thoughts?’

‘I was in your heart, because you did not accept any of those thoughts. On the contrary, you endeavored to banish them. You could not free yourself from them and were in distress, but you struggled against them. Thus, you made room for Me in your heart.’

• “What conclusion can we draw from this, then? When we do not consent to unclean thoughts, we bear no guilt for them.”

The Power  
of the Holy Icons



The Devil  
Abhors Their  
Veneration \*

**O**ne of the Elders recounted to us that Abba Theodore the Aeliote would tell about a certain recluse on the Mount of Olives who was a great spiritual struggler and who was warred upon by the demon of fornication.

One day, then, while undergoing one such violent attack, the Elder in question began to lose heart and said to the demon:

“Will you never withdraw from me? Just leave; we have grown old together.”

The demon then appeared before him and said:

“Swear that you will tell no one what I am about to tell you, and I will cease waging war against you.”

So the Elder swore:

“By Him Who dwells in the Heavens, I will tell no one what you say to me.”

“Do not venerate this Icon and I will war against you no longer,” said the demon,

indicating an Icon of our Lady, the Holy *Theotokos* bearing our Lord Jesus Christ in her arms.

“Give me time to think about it,” replied the recluse.

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The next day, then, he sent word to Abba Theodore the Aeliote (the one who related this to us), who lived at that time in the Lavra of Pharan. When the Abba arrived, he told him what had come to pass.

Then Abba Theodore said to him:

“Truly, Father, you have been led astray by making such an oath, but it is good that you have revealed this to me. For it would be better for you not to leave a brothel in this country unvisited than to refuse to venerate our Lord Jesus Christ and His Mother.”

Having supported and strengthened him by these

and other words, Abba Theodore returned to his dwelling.

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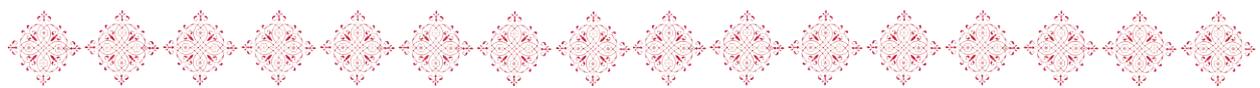
The demon then reappeared to the recluse and said:

“What have you done, you false monk? Did you not swear not to tell anyone? So how is it that you told it all to that one who visited you? I am telling you, you false monk, that you will be judged as an oath-breaker on the Day of Judgment.”

The recluse replied:

“I know that I swore and then broke my oath, but I did so for the sake of my own Master and Creator. To you I will not listen; for to you, as being responsible for both the evil counsel and the violation of the oath, is reserved inescapable punishment.”

(\*) John Moschos, *From The Spiritual Meadow (Leimonarion)*, Chapter 45, (*Ekdoseis Hieras Mones Stavroniketa*, 1983) p. 54-55.



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