



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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The Most Blessed *Theotokos*: A Teacher of Orthodox Asceticism*

"Let mercy always be preponderant within you..."

Come, blessed Christians!

Let us gladly take up, with faith and piety, the prophetic invitation: "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord!"¹

Let us ascend the "shady and densely wooded mountain"² of the Mother of God, by means of *praxis*; that is, Orthodox asceticism.

And if our asceticism is genuine, we will then be vouchsafed to behold and to magnify the *new* and *extraordinary wonders* of the *Theotokos*.

In the All-Pure Maiden the most unprecedented things came to pass. "All things pertaining to" Mary, the Birth-Giver of God, "are extraordinary"³: she incorruptibly carried our Savior in her womb; she proved to be a Mother who knew not man; she lent flesh to the Creator Who is in need of nothing; she became a vessel of the One Who cannot be encompassed and a confine of the boundless and unconfined Word; and, finally, her immaculate body was preserved incorrupt and was raised, assumed, translated, and glorified by her Son and God!

* * *

All things pertaining to the Immaculate Mother of God are truly *new* and *extraordinary wonders*, and give rise to awe, astonishment, and *theoria*.

Especially after the Ascension of her Son, our Lady the *Theotokos* continued her **asceticism**, which was also a *new* and *extraordinary wonder*, in conjunction with **love**.

The Mother of God, “on account of the great gifts that God bestowed upon her, was herself zealous and earnest to struggle in fasting, prayer, prostrations, and every kind of asceticism,” “and in prayer and diligent care for the whole world.”⁴

In this way, the Most Blessed One has passed on to us a *model*, educating us as an infallible teacher of genuine **Orthodox asceticism**.

Within the confines of the Orthodox Church, *asceticism* does not constitute an end in itself, nor does it have any value in and of itself; *asceticism* is a means by which our self-love is gradually brought under control until it is obliterated, such that we are rendered capable of loving; *asceticism* is a heroic *exodus* from the *boundaries* of our own selves and an offering of sacrificial love for our neighbor.

We see that the *Theotokos*, being profoundly conscious of the supernatural gifts of God to her, conducted herself with **grateful asceticism** for the rest of her life; hence, *asceticism* is revealed to us as a Divine gift, which is subsequently offered to our neighbor and to all of creation.

This explains the profound truth that, even if Orthodox *asceticism* is a cross, nevertheless it ultimately gives birth to life, joy, and freedom.

When our *asceticism* is genuine, it is dominated by mercy. Any ascetic labor that is not accompanied by mercy—that is, a merciful and compassionate attitude—is truly in vain, if not in danger of being exploited by evil spirits.

The Saints are unambiguous and absolute on this crucial matter of life in Christ: “Let mercy always be preponderant within you, until the moment that you feel within you the compas-

sion that God has for the world.”⁵

Let us never forget that *asceticism*, as a constant battle against self-love, egocentrism, and self-esteem, by the Grace of God unshackles and liberates our *mind* from the sinful tyranny of the passions and leads it to the rediscovery of its lost beauty, to illumination, and to divinization.

In this supernatural state, **Light** prevails in our hearts: “for the *mind* is immersed in Thy light/ and is made radiant and is rendered light/ like unto Thy Glory.”⁶ And **mercy** prevails as well: “a burning of the heart for all of creation, for people, for the birds, for the animals, for the demons, and for all of creation.”⁷

May light and mercy, O All-Hymned Mother, be unceasingly poured out upon our lowly existence, which is on the *cross of asceticism*, by the Grace of Christ our Savior.

May light and mercy never cease to be poured out; for thou art the “steward and guardian of all the treasures and gifts of God, the Heavenly King, not that thou alone mightest enjoy them, but rather that thou mightest transmit and share them with all of creation, both noetic and sensible!”⁸

† **Metropolitan Cyprian**
of **Oropos and Phyle** († 2013)



* **Source:** *Άγιος Κυπριανός*, No. 339 (July-August 2007), pp. 57-58

1) Isaiah 2:3. 2) Cf. Avvakoum 3:3. 3) **St. Andrew of Crete**, *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XCVII, col. 1084B/Discourse 13, “On the Dormition of our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos, (Discourse II on the Dormition). 4) **St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite**, *Κήπος Χαρίτων* [Garden of Graces], (Thessaloniki: Ekdoseis B. Regopoulou, 1979), p. 217b, note (with a reference to St. Gregory Palamas). 5) **Abba Isaac the Syrian**, *The Complete Extant Ascetical Works* [in Greek], Discourse 34, “On Prostrations...” (Athens: Ekdoseis Ch. Spanos), p. 151. 6) **St. Symeon the New Theologian**, *Works*, Vol. III, “Hymns of Divine Love,” 39, cols. 61-63, (Thessaloniki: Ekdoseis “Orthodoxos Kypsele,” 1990), p. 295. 7) **Abba Isaac the Syrian**, op. cit., Discourse 81, “On Various Virtues...” p. 306. 8) Cf. **St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite**, op. cit., p. 217a.

The Sanctity of Daily Life in the World

Overcoming Self-love:

Self-sacrificial Love*



Every Sunday morning there were more beggars on the steps leading up to the Church.

One would be displaying her medicine, another sat with a baby in her arms, and yet another was clearly a drug-addict.

A young woman was going up the steps.

“Help me, my girl. I don’t want money, just something to eat.” • The beggar was middle-aged, his clothes and dignity frayed.

The young woman stopped in her tracks. “Just a minute,” she said, and went back down the steps. Walking over to the corner bakery, she bought two cheese pies and a loaf of bread.

“Here you are,” she said, upon returning to the beggar. “Something for now and the bread for later.”

The drug-addict had been watching and decided to try his luck.

“Hey, you,” he said with a dull look, “maybe you got a cigarette on you?”

The young woman put her hand in her pockets. “I don’t smoke, but here, take this to go buy some.”

“The guy at the kiosk won’t give me any; we had a fight.”

The young woman turned around again. The kiosk was a block away.

When she returned, the old lady sitting on the Church steps asked for medicine. “Maybe you have some of this at home, my dear?” she asked, showing

her empty bottle. “I don’t need it now, no not now... I don’t want to put you to any trouble. If you could just bring it to me next Sunday.”

The young lady nevertheless turned around again, for the third time. She had to take her car to get to the pharmacy. It was some four blocks away; she had noticed it on her way to Church.

When she finally entered the Church, the Priest was delivering his sermon, deploring those who come late to the Divine Liturgy and miss the Gospel reading.

“And it is the passage about the Good Samaritan today,” he said, with a certain show of displeasure....



(*) Basilios Argyriades, "As Much As You Can," *Mikro Gerontikon Poleon* [in Greek] (Athens: 2013), pp. 25-27.

A new series of catechetical pamphlets from our Holy Metropolis

The following issues have now been published in Greek:



- 1) Women Ought to Pray With Covered Heads.
- 2) Journey to Pascha.
- 3) Almsgiving: The Heart of Virtue.
- 4) The Resurrection of our Lord... The Feast Day of Women
- 5) Panagia "The Unexpected Joy"
- 6) The Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos "The Surety of Sinners"
- 7) The Blessing of Grapes at the Feast of the Transfiguration.

St. John Chrysostomos on Almsgiving

The Power of the Poor Box*

May Our House Become a Church

Put a poor box at the place where you stand for prayer, and **whenever you come in to pray, first deposit alms and then offer up your prayers.**

Just as you would not wish to pray with unwashed hands, so also **do not pray without giving alms.**

For depositing alms is no less important than having a Gospel Book by your bed. If, of course, you merely place the Gospel Book there without doing anything else, you are in no way benefited; but in having a poor box, you possess a weapon against the Devil, give wings to your prayer, and make your home holy, having food laid up therein for the king.

Let this poor box, then, be near your bed, and your nights will be free from satanic fantasy. Only let nothing acquired by unjust means be placed therein, because it is meant for almsgiving. It cannot be that almsgiving should ever spring forth from hardheartedness.

* * *

Would you like me to tell you the resources from which you should give, so that I might make such a contribution easier for you?

The craftsman, such as the cobbler, leather-cutter, coppersmith, or any other artisan, **when he sells any article of his trade, let him dedicate to God the first-fruits of his earnings; let him cast a small portion herein, and assign something to God out of his portion, no matter how scanty it may be.**

I am not, of course, asking something very great, but let us, who look forward to Heaven, at least cast in as much as did the spiritual infants among the Jews, who were filled with countless evils.

And this I say not as laying down a law, neither as forbidding more, but as recommending **a deposit of no less than a tenth part of one's income.** Let those who possess fields

observe this law in regard to their rents, and indeed all those who earn their living in a just fashion. I am not addressing myself to those who demand interest, nor to soldiers who extort from others and take advantage of other people's misfortunes, for God does not want to accept anything from them. Rather, I say these things to those who make their living with honest work.

If we establish ourselves in this kind of habit, we will henceforth be stung by our conscience if we ever forsake this rule, we will not reckon it a difficult matter, and we will gradually be able to reach greater measures. And when we have trained ourselves to disdain money and completely eradicate the root of evils, we will live the rest of our lives on earth free from cares and will attain to the future life, which I pray we all may achieve, by the Grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ.

* * *

In this way, may the house of each become a Church, where this fund of sacred money is stored up. Indeed, the offertory boxes that exist here are an indication thereof.

Wherever there is money for the poor, such a place is inaccessible to demons. And the money gathered for the poor protects one's house more securely than a spear, a shield, weapons, human strength, or a multitude of soldiers.



(*). St. John Chrysostomos, *Ἡ Ἐλεημοσύνη - Ἡ καρδιά τῆς ἀρετῆς* (Almsgiving: The heart of virtue) (Χρυσσοσομικός Ἄμβων, Vol. IV; Holy Mountain: Synodia Spyridonos Hieromonachou [Nea Skete], n.d.), pp. 178-179, 258 (for the original Greek, see *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LXI, cols. 373-374; *Ἑλληνες Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 732-738).

■ **A lack of patience and hope**

“Let Me Die, God!”*

The Love for Mankind of Our Guardian Angel and the *Theotokos*

How many people utter such words at difficult moments! **M**ost, however, are not aware that this is a sin which stems from a lack of patience and hope in God’s aid.

The following account, recounted with great humility and emotion by a certain venerable Priest, is sure proof of this.

* * *

“Since the time I became a Priest, I have been pursued by slander (the martyrdom of our days). In one way or another, there were many who hurt me and discredited me with false accusations. This happened repeatedly. I was so grieved and worn out by all of this that I cracked under the strain and would often say: ‘Let me die, God!’ And, in the end, He did!”

Everyone listening to the Priest gazed at him in astonishment, pondering how blameworthy those who make accusations against others, and particularly against clergymen, are. **H**ow much sin they place on their souls, especially when they drive those whom they accuse to despair! **A**s if God had given them the authority to judge the world...

The humble Priest continued his story, saying:

“**I** had a heart attack. It happened in Athens, when I was surrounded by my acquaintances and spiritual children. They immediately took me to the hospital, where the doctors made every effort to get my heart started again, but to no avail. In the end, they said: ‘There’s nothing more we can do for the Priest. Take him to the morgue.’

“**N**ow as for me, just what I went through during those six hours that I was dead! **F**irst of all, **I** felt my Guardian Angel accompanying and protecting me on a path that was initially rather difficult, but which then ascended towards a heavenly, sweet light.

“**D**uring the journey, many evil spirits shouted out aggressively with accusations against me.

“**O**ne of the accusations was as follows:

“**W**here are you taking him? He was avaricious. He took vows of poverty but had money

of his own!”

“**T**he Holy Angel, however, refuted them, saying: ‘That is not true! The money he had belonged to the monastery and he simply managed it.’

“**W**e finally arrived at a place that appeared to be the frontier between two separate regions. There, I heard the following **dialogue between my Angel and the Most Holy *Theotokos***—I could hear her sweet, yet somewhat stern voice. My Angel was saying:

“**M**ost Holy *Theotokos*, should I lead the Priest into the Kingdom of your Son?”

“**S**he answered: ‘No! He has committed a serious sin.’

“**W**hat sin, my Lady? The Priest was a good person’—**he began to defend me, and I could feel his hot tears roll onto my neck**— ‘he built a monastery, helped many people to be saved...’

“**T**hat is true,’ replied the *Theotokos*. ‘**B**ut **he was not patient in his struggles and would say to my Son “let me die, let me die.”** **S**o then, take him back so that he can complete his struggles with patience, and then he will enter into the Kingdom of my Son.’

“**A**s the Holy Angel led me back, I saw Paradise and Hell. **W**hat is written in the books of God is true! I saw it all with my own eyes!

“**W**hen we reached the hospital, I reentered my cold, dead body with repulsion. **I**t took me eight hours to be able to move the first joints of my fingers! **F**rom the fluttering of my eyelids, my sister was the first one to become aware that I had risen from the dead, and the entire hospital was set into a flurry of commotion.

“**I** gradually recovered, and **from then on I have been careful to be uncomplainingly patient no matter what God in His love sets before me. We have to attain Paradise, my brethren; in our patience we must possess our souls!**”

* * *

This is what the Priest said, and at his last words, his voice broke with emotion...



(*) *Messages from Heaven* [in Greek] (Dorida: Hiera Mone Panagias Varnakova, 2005), p. 81-82.

The power of faith, the Mysteries of the Church, and prayer

The Demonic Nature of Pathological Love*

"I was the one who killed them..."



Many years ago, a certain woman had a pathological love for her only son.

When her son grew up, he received a good education and became an excellent teacher. At his school, he met and married a charming colleague of his, who, alas, died during their first year of marriage.

Two years later, the son remarried, but the second wife also died after a strange illness, and indeed when she was eight months pregnant. The son was at his wits' end. At that time, in the market village in which they lived, it was difficult to have an autopsy performed in order to find out the cause of death.

Three or four more years went by, and the young man married a third time. His wife, apart from her impeccable Christian upbringing, was also very intelligent and discerning. She thus was quickly able to perceive her mother-in-law's feelings of aversion and hatred for her. Unfortunately, they lived together, since her father-in-law had died long before.

* * *

The young wife thus began to pray for two or even three hours every evening, beseeching that her mother-in-law be enlightened and come to repentance. To her surprise, how-

ever, every time she would finish her prayers, she would vomit.

One summer afternoon, the mother-in-law lay down for a siesta. Her daughter-in-law, passing through the open room, saw that she was uncovered, so she promptly and kindly went to pull the cover over her. As she did so, she heard her talking in her sleep, and the words that reached her ears made her shudder with a terrible fear.

She nonetheless continued her prayers, but always with the same result: after praying, she would unfailingly vomit.

* * *

Not much time passed, and the mother-in-law went insane. Before taking her to a mental clinic, her son and his wife called for the Priest from their parish to read a prayer over her.

Just listen to what she said in her madness:

"It was I who killed the other two girls, Helen and Evdoxia, because they stole my son! But this one didn't die! She didn't die! She didn't die!"

And that "she didn't die," she repeated many times over.

Then it was that the Priest, together with the woman's son and his wife, who were also present, understood with horror why the daughter-in-law had been vomiting: **The mother-in-law had poisoned the two previous wives.**

The vibrant faith of the third wife, however, combined with her participation in the salvific Mysteries of the Church and her fervent prayers, brought to naught the malice of the unfortunate old woman, who subsequently died in that wretched condition in a mental hospital in Thessalonica.

(*) Protopresbyter Stephanos K. Anagnostopoulos, *Tais kata prothesin kletois*, 2nd ed. (Piræus: 2013), pp. 123-124.

Two married women living in the world
surpassed the virtue of St. Makarios the Great!



God Bestows His Spirit and Mercy on All Those With a Good Disposition*

Once, when he was in his cell praying, St. Makarios the Great heard a voice from on high telling him:

“Makarios, you must know that, despite your prayers and asceticism, **you have not yet reached the measure of the virtue of two women living in such-and-such a city.**”

In the morning, the Elder got up, took his wooden staff, and set off on the road for that city. **W**hen he arrived, he asked where the women in question lived and knocked on their door.

One of the women opened to him and invited him into the house with a glad face. **W**hen the Elder had sat down to rest, the other woman also arrived. **H**e then called both of them near him, and when they had sat down he said:

“**I** undertook this entire journey and endured great fatigue in coming from the desert all the way here. I beg you, then, to tell me **what your spiritual work is and what virtues you struggle to attain.**”

The women, with great simplicity, replied:

“**B**elieve us, holy Elder, that we share marriage beds with our respective husbands; what spiritual work, then, do you expect of us?”

The Elder then made a prostration to them and begged them to reveal their virtue to him.

* * *

Seeing his great patience, they said to the holy Elder:

“**W**e are strangers to this world and happened to marry husbands who were brothers according to the flesh. • **F**rom the time that we began living in this house with our husbands, **we do not**

recall ever having quarrelled or spoken a nasty word between us. All these years, we have lived in peace and harmony, with love for one another. • **A**t one point, we had a peculiar thought: to leave our husbands and to go live in a convent. **W**e made every effort and begged our husbands to let us go, but could not convince them. • **T**hus, since we could not achieve our desire, each of us made a pledge to God that **we would nevermore let a worldly, vain word out of our mouths.**”

* * *

Hearing this, that holy Elder marvelled and said:

“**I**ndeed, it is does not matter if a person lives in virginity or in marriage, or is a monastic or a layperson, for God to grant such a one His Spirit and mercy; the only thing He asks of us is our good disposition.”

Having derived great spiritual edification from their virtue, the Elder returned to his cell in the desert, giving glory to God.

(*) P. B. Paschou, *Women of the Desert, The Small Gerontikon* [in Greek], (Athens: Akritas, 2007), pp. 18-19.



Importance and Usage — Symbolism and Life

As Orthodox Christians, in our daily devotional life, we make use of various objects such as candles, incense, oil lamps, Prospora, Andidoron, and the Cross, and we take part in sacred Rites, such as the Blessing of Loaves, Memorial Services, and the Mysteries of the Church, etc.

While we make use of these things, however, we remain ignorant of their meaning and correct usage.

Pure Candles*

Symbolism

Pure and soft wax symbolizes the **malleability of our soul**. • Just as wax melts noiselessly and gives off light, so we also, by the Grace of God, should "wear" ourselves "out" until our last breath, sacrificing ourselves for our neighbor. • We should illumine and do good to those around us, quietly and without display, out of love for Christ.

The candles lying on the counter at the entrance of the Church symbolize our "dead" self. • When we light them and place them upright on a candle stand, as a symbol of the Resurrected Christ, we also confess our own resurrection. • Whereas we were once spiritually dead, Christ has raised us up and we have become lights of Christ: "when we were dead in sins, He hath quickened us together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5).

With the candles at funerals and memorial services and that we place on bowls of *kollyva*, we confess our faith in the resurrection of the dead.

With the pure candles that we hold at Pascha, we confess our own resurrection "in Christ." • Nonbelievers, atheists, and the unrepentant are not benefited by such a confession since they are spiritually dead.

With the lit candle at the Mystery of Baptism we confess the spiritual resurrection of the baptized person, who was buried with Christ in the Baptismal font and then risen with Him.

With the lit candles at the Mystery of Marriage, we confess that, just as the pure candles give off light, so we also, by the Grace of God, will serve as shining examples for our children and will not betray the sanctity of matrimony.

Pure beeswax or paraffin?

God requires that we offer him what is most pure. • Thus, candles should be made from pure beeswax. • Unfortunately, the commercialization of every imaginable thing has also had its effect on candle-making. • Let us make every effort to use pure beeswax in our homes. • Priests should also make sure that pure beeswax candles are placed at the Church counter and used in the Altar.

Does lighting many candles bring about a better result;

The custom of lighting many candles reveals a mistaken way of thinking and often causes problems. • It is sufficient to light one or two candles on behalf of the living and the dead. • When we light them with piety, we can pray thus: "O my Christ, Thou art the Light of the world. Help me so that in my life I will 'melt' with love for my neighbor and shine like the humble light of this candle."

Or, more simply:

"O Lord, illumine all of my brothers and sisters and family and forgive the souls of my departed brethren."

Let us be careful in our way of life, because no matter how many candles we light, they will not save us if we do not live with repentance, confession, prayer, and Holy Communion.

(* Presbyter Georgios A. Kalpoyzos, *Handbook for Orthodox Devotional Life (Self-Evident Matters of Which We Are So Ignorant)* [in Greek] (Athens: Photodotes, 2008), pp. 8-10.



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