



EDIFICATION AND CONSOLATION

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

Simple Catechism Drawn From the Experience of the Orthodox Church

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✠ CONTENTS ✠

- **Text 1:** “They knew how to live!”
Hope: The Oxygen of Heaven
- **Text 2:** Constantly Vigilant
The Light of the Commandments
- **Text 3:** Our Christ
“He Is Our Friend”
- **Text 4:** “Mother, here we have the sin of murder...”
“I Cannot Contradict Myself”
- **Text 5:** “The bounds of nature are overcome”
The Three Most Brilliant Starts of the Theotokos
- **Text 6:** Respect for the freedom of others
Nobility in Christ
- **Text 7:** Without delay!
Understanding: the Most Genuine Kind of Love
- **Text 8:** Attending to one’s conscience
“One Day Closer to Paradise”
- **Text 9:** Words of spiritual consolation
Innocence, Love, and Compassion
- **Text 10:** Almsgiving
“Only what we give to others belongs to us!”

“They knew how to live!”

Hope: The Oxygen of Heaven*

“They valiantly made their way through it all!”

Hope is the fruit of faith in love and in the protection of God.

An experienced monastic Elder used to say:

“Be careful not to let Satan make you wear the dark glasses of pessimism, or else you will see everything in a dark light.

“Take care not to complain. Complaining is wearisome to those around us and displeasing to God, since it signifies a lack of faith and ingratitude.”

And he would add:

“Begin your day with prayer and a smile!

“Remember, that is what the older generation would do. They would write ‘Καλημέρα’ (‘Good day’) and ‘Glory to God’ on their mirrors and face towels. They knew how to live!



“Maybe they did not have any troubles, illnesses, and poverty back then? And yet they valiantly made their way through it all!

“They knew how to pray, to endure, and to overcome...”

(*) “The Great Grace of the Panagia of Varnakova” [in Greek], (Sisterhood of the Convent of the Panagia of Varnakova: 2011), p. 57.

■ The testimony of an actress

The Light of the Commandments*

“She wanted to be constantly vigilant”



Arenowned French actress, Fanny Ardant, in a recent interview with a Greek newspaper (BEMA), said the following:

“Success is something that you can almost not even grasp. Whereas with failure, you can give a logical explanation for it, since it brings you face to face with yourself. In general, I cannot stand compliments. Compliments are like perfume. You put it on; it is fragrant for a while and pleases you. Then you get accustomed to the scent and no longer smell it at all; only those around you will smell it until it evaporates, and then nobody smells it anymore. An offense or insult, on the other hand, however unfair it may be, is like a light in the darkness that shows us what we should be or what we should have done. So an insult is more helpful, oddly enough. I once read that a famous singer would keep only the letters containing disparaging or offensive comments about her. I understand why she did this: she wanted to be constantly vigilant.”

* * *

The Saints of the Church had an even more profound and better understanding of the foregoing valuable lessons from their life experience:

“Abba John the Short was once sitting in front of the Church. The brothers were gathered around him, taking his counsel regarding their thoughts. When one of the Elders saw this, he was over-

come with envy and said to the Abba: ‘Your pot is filled with poison.’ Abba John quietly said to him: ‘So it is, Abba. But you said this on seeing what is on the outside. If you could see what is on the inside, then what would you say?’” (*The Gerontikon*, Ekdoseis Asteros, p. 45).

How did Abba John attain to such heights of humility, such that he could be benefited (and benefit others!) even by malevolent and envious behavior? Very simply, by putting into practice the following Commandment of Christ:

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven” (St. Matt. 5:44).

* * *

The testimony of an actress holds a special significance for us. We often have the attitude: “the Commandments of Christ are grievous” (1 John 5:3). And when we hear of spiritual achievements such as those of Abba John, we say: “But we are not holy ascetics!”

Well then, here we have a worldly woman who, without invoking the holy Gospel, confesses that the Commandments of Christ, which the Saints practiced to perfection, are “a light in the darkness that shows us what we should be or what we should have done.”

It is a thousand times worthwhile to struggle, as far as possible, to follow in the footsteps of the Saints, so as to attain to their spiritual rest and eternal delight.

(*) Archimandrite Nikon Koustides, www.agiazo-ni.gr/article.php?id=47339715044697675667 (in Greek).

“He Is Our Friend... We Know That He Loves Us...”*

We should feel that Christ is our friend. He is our friend indeed. He Himself assures us of this when He says: “Ye are my friends.” Let us look upon Him and approach Him as a friend.

Have we fallen? Have we sinned? Let us run to Him with familiarity, love, and confidence, not with the fear of being punished by Him, but with boldness coming from the sense of our intimacy with Him. Let us say to Him: “My Lord, I did it; I fell. Forgive me.”

At the same time, we should also feel that He

loves us, receives us with tenderness and love, and forgives us. Let our sins not separate us from Christ. If we believe that He loves us and that we also love Him, we will not feel estranged or separated from Him, even when we sin. We have the assurance of His love for us and we know that He loves us whatever we do.



(*) “Protaton,” [a Greek-language magazine] No. 119 (July-September 2010), p. 95.

■ She had an abortion

**“I Cannot Contradict Myself.
It Was I Who Ordained:
‘Thou Shalt Not Kill.’” ***

**Love for the
Mother of God Is Salvific**

She appeared to be an active member of the Church, since she would participate in the charitable activities of her parish, went to confession, and communed. Everyone said that Kyra [Mrs.] Froso was a very good Christian.

She lived in a town not far from Thessalonica. Athonite Fathers would come from the Holy Mountain to confess the inhabitants.

Kyra-Froso also went to them for confession. She had a special love for the Panagia and would often call upon Her. While cooking or sweeping, she would whisper, “Most Holy Mother of God, save us.”

Indeed it was the Panagia who eventually saved her through her intercessions, since Kyra-Froso, who otherwise was a good woman, unfortunately did not make a full confession of her sins. She had concealed from her spiritual Father her greatest sin. When she was young, she had committed a murder! She had killed her little child inside her womb; she had an abortion.

God awaited her repentance. He kept waiting, but in vain. So one day she suddenly died. Everyone in her parish grieved over her death and they gathered for her funeral the next morning. However, while the funeral service was being chanted, the reposed woman rose from the dead! At first everyone was seized with panic, but some, quickly regaining their self-control, tried to help her along with the Priest. When she had completely come to her senses, she tearfully asked them to listen to her.



Contrite and humbled, she told them that, when she died, her Guardian Angel led her before the dread Judgment Seat of the Lord.

The Lord, Who is the knower of hearts, said that she had not confessed the sin of murder, and thus it was not possible for her to enter into His Kingdom. Then, the compassionate Lady of the universe intervened and began to beseech Him for the salvation of this soul.

The Lord replied: “Mother, here we have the sin of murder. It was I Who ordained the Commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ I cannot contradict Myself!”

The Mother of God, however, continued Her supplications before Her Son, and eventually the All-Good Lord yielded to her entreaties and said: “The only thing that can be done for her is to return her to life on earth, and, if she wishes to confess this grave sin, she will be saved.”

“So at the Lord's command I returned to my body, as you see,” she said. “But now I want to confess before all of you the sin that I have concealed until now.”

She confessed with tears and all those present wept together with her. When she finished, the Priest read the prayer of absolution over her and then, with her conscience at rest, she slept the sleep of the Righteous.

* * *

This event became known throughout all of Greece and the local press wrote about it some decades ago. But such resurrections are extremely rare. It is possible to repent only in this world. In eternity there will be recompense and retribution, and we will be faced with the consequences of our choices that we made here on earth.



(*) *Messages from Heaven* [in Greek] (Dorida: Sisterhood of the Convent of the Panagia of Varnakova, 2005), pp. 86-87.

On the Occasion of the Venerable Dormition of All-Immaculate Virgin Mary

The Three Most Brilliant Stars of the All-Venerable and All-Beloved Theotokos*

"The bounds of nature are overcome in Thee, O Immaculate Virgin"

a. The plenitude of Graces



The universally joyous Dormition and preternatural Translation of the Mother of God Who is Full of Grace, more than any other of Her Feasts, prompts the faithful who love the *Theotokos* to bless and sing

praises to the Immaculate child of God.

The Most Pure one is truly a wellspring of joy and blessedness, and as the Saints of our Faith say: "the *Theotokos* renders blessed those who constantly and reverently praise Her."¹

But how and with what mind, and with what hands, and with what lips shall we, the sinners, capture the wonders of the Most Blessed One and sing Her praises, Who is the **Mother of Graces**? How is it possible for us to bless the All-Graced Virgin, Who is full of all the graces of the Holy Spirit?

"The *Theotokos* contains in Herself a multitude of graces," says St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, "and She received all the rivers of the gifts, which all the noetic and sensible created things, along with the Angels and men, possess to a certain extent,"² and therefore "She alone stands on the boundary between the Creator and creation."³

The Virgin Maiden, the Queen of all, received the "plenitude of graces" at three points in time: before the Birth of God the Word, during His Birth, and after Her preternatural Translation; "the first was great, the second was greater, and the third was the greatest."⁴

Who can speak of the marvels of the Virgin? Who can tell of all those things which God, the Lover of mankind, wrought in Her beyond nature and notion? For "He adorned Her with three most brilliant stars and with three special privileges, which had not been bestowed upon any other woman, namely, to be rendered

Virgin before Childbirth, during Childbirth, and after Childbirth, and thus to remain Ever-Virgin."⁵

For this reason, pious Iconographers make zealous efforts to manifest "enigmatically," through their iconographic art, the eternal virginity of the Mother of God.

"When painting Icons of the Mother of God," writes St. Nicodemos, "[iconographers] paint three stars: one on Her immaculate and virginal head, one on Her right shoulder, and one on Her left shoulder, so as to make manifest that the Lady *Theotokos* was a Virgin before childbirth, was preserved a Virgin during childbirth, and remained a Virgin after childbirth."⁶

b. The three wondrous lilies

With the hope that the Most Blessed Lady will forgive our pious venture to speak about Her infinite and ineffable marvels, "which things the angels desire to look into,"⁷ we cite a thrice-graced miracle, which in its own way honors, glorifies, magnifies, exalts, extols, and praises the *Theotokos*, Who, according to St. Andrew of Crete is "the greatest marvel of the awesome Economy (of God)" and "the New myrrh-vessel of the inexhaustible Myrrh."⁸

* * *

Around 700 AD, there lived in Athens a Christian man wise in learning and wiser still in virtue, who was called Aegidios. After the death of his parents he distributed his belongings to the poor and departed for Jerusalem. There he made his dwelling in the far desert leading a strict monastic life in a cave, which was close to a clump of trees by a spring. He lived on a small amount of uncooked greens and engaged himself in the undistracted worship of God by means of *hesychia*, its faithful companion, *theoria* (divine contem-



plation), and prayer. Thus he attained to many spiritual gifts through the Grace of the Holy Spirit, amongst which the gift of foresight.

In the vicinity of his hermitage there was a castle where there lived a teacher. The devil once sowed weeds of disbelief in his mind and he began to ask himself:

“After the Birth of the Lord, how is it possible for the Mother of God to be both a Mother and a Virgin at the same time?”

This thought tormented him and he could find no answer to set his mind at rest.

Upon learning that the anchorite Aegidios possessed both the Grace of God and human wisdom, he went to his hermitage in order to ask the ascetic about his thought, in the hope that he might be able to deliver him from his mental blasphemy.

When the teacher was on his way to the hermitage, the Saint came out of his cave to meet him, having been informed by divine Grace about his coming and his thoughts.

When the teacher was close to the Abba's cell and they approached one another, the teacher prostrated himself to the ground before the Saint, who did not respond. He just struck a rock with his rod and said aloud:

“A Virgin before childbirth.”

Immediately a wonderful lily with a heavenly fragrance sprang up.

Then the Abba said again:

“A Virgin during childbirth.”

Another beautiful lily, just like the first one, sprang up.

Then he struck the rock with his rod a third time and said:

“And She remained a Virgin after childbirth.”

And immediately another most marvelous lily appeared.

Then the Saint returned to his cell, without saying another word.

The teacher was left astonished at this extraordinary miracle, and thus he was delivered from his evil thought and proclaimed this wondrous event to everyone, so that the All-Pure Mother of Emmanuel might be glorified.⁹



(*) Source: “Agios Kyprianos” No. 315 (July-August 2003), pp. 249-250.

1. St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, *Κήπος Χαρίτων* [Garden of Graces], (Thessaloniki: Ekdoseis B. Regopoulou, 1979), p. 208b. 2. Ibid., pp. 190b, 191a, footnote. 3. Ibid., pp. 196b, 215b. 4. Ibid., p. 211a. 5. Ibid., p. 211b. 6. Ibid., p. 212a. 7. Cf. I St. Peter 1:12. 8. St. Andrew of Crete, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. XCVII, col. 1096D, 1097C/ Discourse 14, “On the Dormition of our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos.” 9. Archimandrite Theophylactos Marinakis, *The Gerontikon of the Panagia* (Thessaloniki, 2000), pp. 139-140.



Nobility in Christ

Proud Respect for the Freedom of Others

I ask you to listen to me without judging me.

I ask for your opinion without your counseling.

I ask you to trust me without demands.

I ask for your help without your making decisions for me.

I ask you to care for me without setting me aside.

I ask you to look at me without projecting yourself onto me.

I ask you to support me without imposing yourself on me.

I ask you to approach me without intruding on me.

I ask you to embrace me without smothering me.

I ask you to show me the way without pushing me to do it.



■ “Very few have ears to hear...”

Understanding: the Most Genuine Kind of Love*

“If you touch even a spiny hedgehog softly and with affection, none of its spines will prick you...”



Our Lord, as our Father and Fashioner, bestows on us supreme **understanding**. He also exhorts us to mutual understanding by His words: “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (St. Luke 6:31).

This Divine **understanding** of man’s frailty and unquenched thirst for Paradise, which he lost because of the fall, explains the long-suffering and patience God shows man, who is ailing in soul, in order to save him.

Understanding certainly does not mean approval and acceptance of a sinful condition, but rather an affectionate approach to a person who is plagued by sin or ignorance—if, to be sure, he is well-disposed and wishes to be approached.

The thirst for **understanding** is more intense in the age we live in than at any other time, since individualism has become the plight of our age.

Very few people have ears to listen to their fellow man and to relieve him of the weight of his cross by their **understanding**. Yet life would be so beautiful if there were **mutual understanding**, the sweetest and most beneficial “painkiller,” which is so easy to offer to our neighbor, if only we wanted to. Thereupon God will also offer it to us, if people will not!

Today hundreds of youths travel to the Holy Mountain and to other parts of Greece in order to visit holy elders. What else does this signify than that they are in search of men of God who will listen to them, **understand**, console, and advise them, enlightened by God’s Grace. May God make manifest such spiritual Fathers and Mothers, who will quench the thirst of His people for **understanding** and guidance.

However, amongst members of a family there should also be mutual understanding and affectionate concern, primarily for the spiritual needs of each individual; otherwise the consequences are often tragic: aloofness, feelings of desolation, bitterness, and a wide gap between members of the family.

It is not difficult to change our attitude if we take into consideration that a particular person, who is an image of God living and breathing close to us, awaits our **understanding**, our smile, and our help. Our neighbor is an image of God, however coarse and fallen this image may seem to be!

Let us not forget the proverb which says: “If you touch even a spiny hedgehog softly and with affection, none of its spines will prick you.”

* * *

A Fatal Delay

Our insensitivity and lack of understanding when our neighbor is in a spiritually difficult state may have tragic consequences, as in the following case.

This terrible incident happened to an elderly man, despite the fact that he was a good Christian and warden of his parish. He remembered it as long as he lived and would always weep with remorse.

One morning he set off for the Episcopal residence to meet the Bishop and to discuss a certain church matter. While he was ascending the road towards the central avenue, he met an acquaintance of his, a fairly young man, who seemed frantic and angry, his hair disheveled, and with a desperate look on his face.

The warden was taken aback.

“What’s wrong, George? What’s the matter with you?” he managed to say.

The young man exploded:

“Let me be, Kyr [Mr.]-Demetres! I can’t bear it any more at home. I will drown myself!”

“What are you saying!” exclaimed the warden.

“What you just heard me say! Do you have a moment so that I can get it off my chest?” he asked Kyr-Demetres, hoping that he would show understanding and would take some time to listen to him.



■ Attending to one's conscience

“One Day Closer to Paradise”*

A Blessed End



Acertain pious woman was constantly diligent in occupying her mind with the memory of death, and at the same time contemplating Paradise.

She would take care to examine her conscience daily, and if she her conscience accused her of anything, she would go to her spiritual Father to confess.

Thereby she acquired the pious habit of saying: “Another day has gone by and I am one day closer to Paradise.”

As the days went by, she would repeat the same words every night: “One day closer to Paradise.”

She married, had children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, but she continued with the same spiritual activity every night: “one day closer to Paradise.”

* * *

One afternoon she felt unwell. In the evening, when her children came to offer her a cup of tea, she said to them: “My children, one more day closer to Paradise.”

The following day, when she awoke, she called for her daughter, who rushed to her side. Then she said to her daughter: “The day has come! Maria, my child, I am leaving today. Let everyone know.”

Then everyone gathered to receive her blessing. Having blessed them, she continued to repeat unceasingly: “The day has come! The day has come! The hour has come! The moment has come!”

Suddenly, her face lighted up and a heavenly smile appeared on her lips. Everything became inundated with light and her soul flew up to Heaven. All those present, young and old, were left speechless for some time, marveling at the beauty of her countenance, which expressed her joy, since her soul flew up to Paradise accompanied by Angels, and thenceforth delighted in the heavenly beauties.

(*) Protopresbyter Stephen K. Anagnostopoulos, *Steps in the Christian Journey* [in Greek] (Piraeus: 2011), p. 80.

Unfortunately, Kyr-Demetres did not size up the situation wisely and told him:

“I will listen to you, my friend, but just now I have a meeting with the Bishop. Would you like to meet me at the café in the afternoon?” he suggested.

Frustrated, the young man dryly answered “Fine!” and left more agitated than before.

At noon the warden returned home for lunch. While he was eating, the phone rang. His wife answered the phone and what she heard made her freeze on the spot, with the receiver hanging in her hand. Alarmed, the warden asked her what was wrong. She replied “They told me that George drowned himself by jumping from the seawall. They found him a short while ago.”

If lightning had struck the warden, he would have been less shocked!

“My wife, I killed him,” he shouted, and broke out in tears of despair.

His wife tried in vain to console him.

“Oh! Why did I put off listening to him? As if the Bishop would have taken it the wrong way if I had explained it to him!”

He confessed the incident and received remission of his sin, but remained grief-stricken to the end of his life.

* * *

Let us give serious thought to the suffering of this Christian and show concern for the spiritual needs of our neighbor, asking for both illumination and the Grace of God, so as to be able to offer understanding, consolation, and active assistance.



(*) *Expressions of the Spiritual World, Heavenly Messages, and Wondrous Events* [in Greek] (Eupalio Dorida, Phokis: Monastic Sisterhood of the Panagia Varnakova, 2009), pp. 222, 231.

■ **Words of Spiritual Consolation**

Innocence, Love, and Compassion

● **Just** as we should esteem the innocence of children, we should also esteem another kind of innocence: that of acquired innocence. When our Lord says that you must “become as little children,” He means that you must divest yourself of all the layers of self-complacency, hypocrisy, and inanity that have accumulated within yourself.

● **The** more you receive, the more your hands are filled. The more you give, the more your heart is filled.

● **Let** us give ourselves to our Brother, so that Christ will be given to us.

● **When** someone is filled with self-love, he isolates himself from God, as if with a sort of *insulation*.

● **Miserliness** conceals egoism, since a *miserly person* is also ungrateful. A mean person grumbles, gets angry, is selfish and obstinate, whereas a generous person appreciates everything.

● **Sharing** in others’ suffering (that is, being compassionate), along with offering words of consolation, is tantamount to saying a prayer for them, which often is fulfilled.

● **Better** a squanderer than a stingy person. If I am thrifty I will go broke. When I would treat my guests to *loukoumia* (Turkish delight) and would cut them in half, then the *loukoumia* would never be enough. Whereas, when I began to offer them a second *loukoumi*, then I would have more than enough!



■ **An inducement to give alms**

“Only what we give to others belongs to us!”*



In 1992, one of our monks from the Monastery of Hilander went to Jerusalem and happened to arrive at the Patriarchate at the same time as a group of Serbian pilgrims.

The pilgrims were happy to meet a Serbian monk from the Holy Mountain and he was also happy to see them. They spoke about many different things. During their conversation, the monk said to them:

“Only what we give to others belongs to us!”

Among the pilgrims was an elderly woman who, tired from the journey, was sitting off to the side. She heard the monk’s words and became disquieted.

She was a wealthy woman from Belgrade. Her son lived in France and her daughter in Vienna. She and her husband were very well off before the war. In fact, they had made a large part of their fortune abroad.

Upon her return to Belgrade from the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, she sent a large sum of money by bank transfer (from a bank in Frankfurt) to the Monastery of Hilander: 100,000 Deutsche Marks in September, 100,000 in October, and 100,000 in November – a total of 300,000 Deutsche Marks!

With this money we were able to repair a seven hundred square meter leaking roof at the monastery, and to build a kitchen, since at that time we had just begun leading a coenobitic life.

All this thanks to the monk’s words: “Only what we give to others belongs to us!”

Had her children not taken notice of these donations to the monastery, she would have given more money. However, they became aware of it and prevented her, since they could not understand why she was giving it away.

This woman had within her something very positive, but up until that point no one had brought it to the surface so that she could activate it. You see, these words “unlocked” her heart.

(*) Manolis Melinos, *Athonites of the Balkans* [in Greek], p. 126

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