

PARADISE
OF
THE SPIRIT

Part 1
Second Edition

By
His Grace Bishop Youanis
Late Bishop of the Province of Gharbia,
Tanta, Egypt

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**Late Bishop of Gharbia
Tanta , EGYPT**

- 1. Repentance**
- 2. Confession**
- 3. Communion**
- 4. Humility**
- 5. Pride**
- 6. Honor**
- 7. The Life of Purity**
- 8. Anger**
- 9. Speaking Out and Keeping Silent**
- 10. Some Sins of the Tongue**
- 11. Condemnation**

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(Picture of)

**Saint Mark the Apostle
Founder of the Coptic Church of Egypt**

(Picture of)

**His Holiness Pope Shenouda III
117th Pope of Alexandria
Patriarch of the See of St. Mark**

(Picture of)

**Anba Youanis
Late Bishop of Province of Gharbia
Tanta, Egypt**

FOREWORD

Bishop Youanis wrote over 20 books in Egypt in the Arabic Language between 1960 and 1987 when he rested in the Lord. These books are considered a great wealth to the Coptic (Egyptian) Orthodox Church and indeed to the whole Christian Church. The first of these books is "Paradise of the Spirit" which he wrote in three parts.

Part 1 of "Paradise of the Spirit" deals with the 'Life of Repentance' and contains 11 chapters on: Repentance, Confession, Communion, Humility, Pride, Honor, Purity, Anger, Speaking and Keeping Silent, Some Sins of the Tongue, and Condemnation.

Part 2 of the same book deals with the 'Spiritual Means' and contains 8 chapters on: Praying, Fasting, Alms, Spiritual Readings, Holy Bible, Spiritual Exercises, Retreat, and Service.

Part 3 of the same book deals with the subjects of 'High Spirituality' and contains 10 chapters which are on: Love of God to Man, Love of Man to God, Love of Man to his Brother, Faith in God, Faith in the Miracles of the Lord Jesus, Hope, Life of Peace, Life of Submission, the Narrow Door, and the Kingdom.

St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Chicago translated into English the 3 parts of this book 'Paradise of the Spirit'.

The present book is the second edition of the English translation of part 1.

May this book become a blessing to our lives and help us to grow in the love of God.

April 2001

**Introduction of Part One of
Paradise of the Spirit
by
Monk Priest
Shenouda El-Soriany**

who later became

Bishop Youanis

THE STORY OF THIS BOOK

This book, first and foremost, is one of the fruits of pain. Pain, about which St. Paul said "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29). This state of pain went back to the time when I had to leave the Monastery for the world because of my illness, and ended by me serving in the Theological College in 'Anba Rowais' (Cairo, Egypt), where I was asked to teach the subject of 'Spiritual Theology', beside the spiritual supervision of the students.

When I started teaching this subject, I could not find books in Arabic, or even in other languages, which deal 'in detail' with 'Christian Virtues', except perhaps some booklets which included scattered glimpses of this subject. I was eager to present to the students of the Theological College, the 'Christian Virtues' defined in a frame, not just as preaching or meditating words.

About four years ago (1956) this idea began growing and my effort continued to grow with it until it ended with a modest result about a year ago (1959). At the end of that year, I had to leave the Monastery and return back to the world for treatment of an acute medical case and I stayed in bed for two and a half months. This last period was a great blessing to me, for in it I wrote this book in its final form, which is now in the hands of the reader, and I felt that the grace of God was very much overpowering my weakness.

I give thanks to God from the bottom of my heart for His Grace which accompanied me, and for His right hand which I felt was holding my right hand in whatever I was writing. Truly, I felt His grace intervening in every stage of producing this book.

I give thanks to God also for the grace which He gave to one of His faithful servants - the most reverend H.G. Anba Thawfilos, Bishop and head of the Monastery of St. Mary (known as El-Soryan) who participated in the uplifting of the monasteries in this generation. He supplied the library of the monastery with hundreds of books, among which were books about the Church Patristic and teachers which he imported from Europe and America. In this library and with the books which Anba Thawfilos imported, we studied. Hence we may truly and fairly say that this

book is also considered one of the fruits of the effort of this constructive enlightened Bishop. May God keep him for the sake of His Holy name.

I also give thanks to God for my fathers the monks of El-Soryan Monastery for their prayers, kindness and advice, specially a certain father who contributed greatly to the subject of this book by his own writings and with his valuable advice which was an important factor in presenting this book in the present form. We wanted to mention his name, but in self-denial he refused. May the Lord God compensate him and write his name in the everlasting book of everlasting life.

I cannot forget to express my sincere thanks to our dear Professor Dr. Wahib Attalla who kindly - in spite of his increasingly busy schedule - reviewed this book.

As I put this modest book into the hands of God Who loved and directed us, I ask Him to make it a blessing to all who read in it the words of Spirit and Life, and Whose grace I ask to be with me in producing parts 2 and 3 of this book.

May God be glorified in our weakness, and to Him be all glory for ever. Amen.

Monk Priest
Shenouda El-Soriany

14 July 1960
7 Abib 1676

Remembrance day of Anba Shenouda, the first hermit

Preface

Dear reader: In this book, we offer you the second edition of the English translation of the first part of the book "Paradise of the Spirit", by the late Bishop Youanis, Bishop of Gharbia, Tanta, Egypt, who slept in the Lord in November 1987.

(Picture of)

Father Samuel Thabet Samuel

May this book be a blessing in your life and help you to grow in the love of God, by the prayers of the father of fathers **His Holiness Pope Shenouda III.**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you

Father Samuel Thabet Samuel
St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Chicago

CONTENTS

	page
Foreword	
The story of this book	
Preface	
1. Repentance	
A- What does sin do to us?	
B- What does repentance do?	
C- Our merciful God Whom we worship	
D- How do I repent?	
E- Virtues characterizing the repentant	
F- Questions about repentance	
G- Models of repentant people	
H- From the sayings of the Fathers about repentance	
I- A prayer for repentance	
J- A prayer to decide living with God	
2. Confession	
A- The Importance of confession and its blessings	
B- The three elements of confession	
C- General guidelines	
D- Prayers before and after confession	
3. Communion	
A- The honor and work of the sacrament	
B- How do we benefit from this sacrament?	
C- What is communion?	
D- General Topics About communion	
E- Prayer before and after communion	
4. Humility	
A- A general word about humility	
B- Humility in the life of the Lord and His saints	
C- Humility is the basis of all virtues	
D- What does humility do?	
E- How do we possess humility?	
F- Acquiring humility	
G- Your life in the light of humility	
H- Humility in relation to some other virtues	

5. Pride

- A- Reality of pride and its essence**
- B- What does pride do?**
- C- Causes which lead to pride**
- D- One's pride in front of himself**
- E- Some features of pride**
- F- Pride concealed within virtue**
- G- How does one deal with his own pride?**

6. Honor

- A- Christianity and a person's honor**
- B- Why should I flee worldly honors?**
- C- How do I acquire honor?**

7. The life of purity

- A- The honor of the life of purity**
- B- Youth and the life of purity**
- C- Causes of the sins of youth**
- D- How do we attain purity?**
- E- Protective means**
- F- Treatment means**
- G- After the fall**
- H- Dreams and body discharges**
- I- Important instructions**

8. Anger

- A- Two kinds of anger**
- B- Holy anger**
- C- Wrong cause for anger**
- D- Wrong ways of expressing anger**
- E- Be slow in anger**
- F- Dealing with angry people**
- G- Some advice**

9. Speaking out and keeping silent

- A- The tongue, a dangerous member**
- B- Good and bad speech**
- C- Some guidelines concerning speech**
- D- Some etiquette of conversation**
- E- Some etiquette of discussion**
- F- Silence**

10. Some sins of the tongue

- A- Lying**
- B- Swearing (Oaths)**
- C- Gossip, slander and speaking evil**
- D- False witness**
- E- Revilement**
- F- Coarse jesting**
- G- Flattering**
- H- Murmuring**

11. Condemnation

- A- Seriousness of the sin of condemnation**
- B- Causes of condemnation**
- C- Why we should not condemn?**
- D- Consequence of condemning others**
- E- Getting rid of the sin of condemnation**

**ALL BIBLE QUOTATIONS ARE FROM "THE NEW KING JAMES" VERSION
EXCEPT THE APOCRYPHA
WHICH ARE FROM "THE NEW ENGLISH" VERSION**

CHAPTER 1

REPENTANCE

“But unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

(Luke 13:5)

- A) What does sin do to us?**
- B) What does repentance do?**
- C) Our merciful God Whom we worship**
- D) How do I repent?**
- E) Virtues characterizing the repentant**
- F) Questions about repentance**
- G) Models of repentant people**
- H) From the sayings of the Fathers about repentance**
- I) A prayer for repentance**
- J) A prayer to decide living with God**

God created man pure and holy in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). Because of man's disobedience to the Creator, he sinned and fell. His nature changed and he lost many blessings. He was expelled from the paradise where he used to enjoy God's presence. He lost his peace, his joy and his authority over the creation and was left with sin, the consequences of which he suffered. Of his own free will, he deprived himself from the light and warmth of the Sun of Righteousness.

Before we ride the boat of rescue to go through the sea of repentance on our way to the port of salvation, let us pose a very important question:

What is Sin?

Sin, no matter how lightly thought of or considered as trivial, is still a transgression and disobedience to God. (James 2:11). Sin is a rebellion against God. It is death itself. The Lord Jesus has said that the prodigal son, "was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found." (Luke 15:32)

Sin is weakness, defeat and failure. Man could not control himself but instead submitted himself to the authority of sin and its bondage.

A) WHAT DOES SIN DO TO US?

1. Worry and Loss of Peace:

As a result of his sin, man lost his peace and inherited worry. Therefore, worry is associated with sin; man loses his inner peace which is God's best gift and which St. Paul described as the peace which surpasses all understanding. (Philippians 4:7) The Prophet Isaiah said, "**The wicked are like the troubled sea, When it cannot rest,** Whose waters cast up mire and dirt. **“There is no peace,” Says my God, “for the wicked.”**" (Isaiah 57:20-21) What a description the Prophet gave about the wicked that "they cannot rest." Even if the wicked wants to rest, he cannot; for peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and worry is a fruit of sin. There is no fellowship between darkness and light.

The evil person has an enemy, which bothers him. This enemy is the conscience, to which our Lord Jesus asked us to agree with. “Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him.” (Matthew 5:25) That was evident in Cain’s life after he had killed his brother. He screamed to God saying, “From Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me. And the LORD set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him.” (Genesis 4:14) This mark caused Cain’s conscience to bother him more.

As long as man is away from God, he is a victim of worry until he returns to Him. This is the way God wanted that we should never find complete comfort and peace in this world; so we come back to Him. That is like the dove, which Noah sent out and did not find a comfortable place in the world so it returned to the ark. Again when Jonah escaped from God, he was in trouble in the sea and could not find any way of salvation except by returning to God. He prayed while he was in the whale’s belly and God rescued him.

We read about many criminals, who after the police fail in arresting them, surrender themselves of their own free will and confess their crimes even many years later. This is because they prefer to confess and be punished rather than hide and be bothered by their conscience.

In fact, there is nothing in the world that takes away our peace except sin. Job lost his cattle, sheep; camels and all his children, all in one day yet his catastrophe was not as great as David’s after he had sinned. Job’s temptation could not take away his peace for he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” (Job 1:21) But after David had sinned, we hear him saying, “I am weary with my groaning; All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears.” (Psalms 6:6)

2. Sorrow and Distress:

Sorrow and distress accompany sin. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, (Galatians 5:22) but sadness is a fruit of sin. When the Israelites were in the Babylonian captivity, they sat by the rivers of Babylon surrounded by beautiful willows. But all that magnificent nature could not make them forget the bitterness of captivity from which they were suffering. They mingled the river waters with their tears and instead of joyful songs; weeping and crying voices were heard. They hung their harps upon the willows, for there is no joy in captivity. “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion.” (Psalms 137:1) This psalm reminds us of the spiritual captivity and gives us a picture of the individual who is captured by the devil away from Jerusalem, the city of the Great King, (Matthew 5:35) to Babylon, the city of adultery. (Revelation 14:8, 18:2) That individual has lost his peace and joy saying, “How shall we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land?” (Psalms 137:4)

3. Loss of Hope:

As we have read, worry, sadness and distress are all fruits of sin. These fruits can grow until they reach the point of despair and committing suicide.

4. Bad Relationships with People:

Sin deprives me of my peace with God and fellowship with Him. **Moreover, it deprives me of my peace with people.** Love is the bond of perfection that binds people together; and sin has the opposite effect, for sin in itself is transgression. “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” (1 John 3:4) Sin is transgression against God’s commandments and against people too. What shall we say about the murderer, the thief and the adulterer? Are not their sins considered transgression against others?

5. God's Wrath:

Sin brings God's wrath on people. God cursed the earth which He had created. He told Adam after he had eaten from the tree of which he had been forbidden, “Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil shall you eat of it All the days of your life.” (Genesis 3:17) God burnt Sodom and Gomorrah because of sin and even the intercession of Abraham did not succeed in saving them. God destroyed the ancient world with the flood because of sin, saving only Noah and his family. (2 Peter 2:5-6) Also, God destroyed in one day twenty-three thousand Israelites because they had sinned with the Moabites. (1 Corinthians 10:8) Sin made David cry day and night, wetting his bed with his tears.

Sin deprives man from God’s help. When Achan, Carmi’s son, sinned, God did not help His people and they were defeated in front of the small village of Ai in spite of His previous help to them when they conquered many nations. (Joshua 7) Sin separates us from God and hence He does not hear our cries. “Behold the LORD’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you. So that He will not hear.” (Isaiah 59:1-2) David also said, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, The LORD will not hear.” (Psalms 66:18) Sin deprives us of God’s blessings. “Your iniquities have turned these things away, And your sins have withheld good things from you.” (Jeremiah 5:25)

6. Sin Brings Forth Disease and Shame:

Nothing brings shame to the soul and failure in life except sin. “Righteousness exalts a nation. But sin is a reproach to any people.” (Proverbs 14:34) If you want to know how sound these words are, look at the adulterers and the drunk. **Moreover, sin can cause diseases to the body** as Jesus said in the Bible to the sick man of Bethesda who had been sick for thirty-eight

years, “See, you have been made whole. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.” (John 5:14)

7. Sin Brings Forth Fear:

Man inherits fear and shame from sin, it deprives him of his control even over himself, and he becomes enslaved to bad habits. He becomes afraid of even trivial beings such as weak animals and small insects. That is after he used to live in the paradise with wild animals unharmed by them because they were all under his dominion. (Genesis 1:26) Man lost this dominion of his own free will when he sinned. Consequently, fear entered his life. But through repentance, he struggled to reach a state of righteousness which Adam enjoyed before he sinned. This explains why many saints were able to live with the beasts.

B) WHAT DOES REPENTANCE DO?

Repentance is the message of Christianity. John the Baptist, who prepared the way before the Lord Jesus, called the people to repentance. (Mark 1:4) The Lord Jesus Himself preached “the Gospel of Repentance.” and commanded His disciples to call people to repentance. “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The word "**Metania**" is a Greek word, which means repentance. In its original linguistic meaning, it means the changing of the heart and the changing of one's life. Repentance in the Orthodox understanding is a new life. St. Paul said, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Christianity calls for the renewal of everything and teaches that “No man puts a piece of a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins.” (Matthew 9:16-17) These words of the Lord Jesus explain the correct understanding of repentance. It is a complete change of the whole life, not just putting a new piece on an old garment.

Many saints have spoken about repentance. They said, “**It is a reconciliation with the Lord, second baptism, remission of sins, and a returning to God.** It repairs what sin has damaged and builds up what evil has destroyed. It renews the heart of the sinner and dresses the wicked with the clothes of righteousness. It removes all works of darkness and evil. It heals those who are sick with sin. It raises up those who are dead with transgressions. It is a sea in which all sins are washed away. It attracts those who are living in sin to the kingdom of heaven.”

When we sin, we lose our talents, virtues and blessings, and when we repent, we get them all back. Penance is an open door to salvation. It never closes, for it is God's compassionate bosom: “The one who comes to Me, I will by no means cast out.” (John 6:37)

Penance slows God's wrath. It saved Nineveh's people after the king, men, women and children felt sorry, put on sackcloth and sat in ashes.

C) OUR MERCIFUL GOD WHOM WE WORSHIP

1. The Prophets and Apostles Spoke About God's Mercy:

God's mercy is the basis for the concept of repentance. Because God knows our weak nature, He made this point very clear through His continuous promises in the Holy Bible. In the Old Testament, God said to His people, "**The LORD God is merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.**" (Exodus 34:6-7)

David praised God for His great and abundant mercy. In one of the psalms, he was so enthusiastic about God's mercy that he said, "Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies. **The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.** He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him, For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust." (Psalms 103)

David praised God in another psalm saying, "The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works." (Psalms 145:8-9) He said in a third place, "The earth, O LORD, is full of Your mercy." (Psalms 119:64) Also, "For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes." (Psalms 26:3) and "**Your lovingkindness is better than life.**" (Psalms 63:3)

Jonah, the prophet, who warned the people of Nineveh that their city would be destroyed because of their sins, became so annoyed with God's mercy that he said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore, I fled previously to Tarshish; for I knew that **You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.**" (Jonah 4:2)

God's great mercy became a subject of meditation for all the saints. Jeremiah, the prophet, says, "Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23) He saw and felt God's mercy new every morning.

These proclamations are given in the Old Testament. **For the New Testament, the covenant of grace and salvation is predominant.** The Bible shows God's great mercy in the

free salvation that God offered us. God's salvation is based on God's mercy because **without mercy, God would not have redeemed us, "He loved us for no reason." He loved us for his great mercy.**

Zachariah, being filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied saying, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, Through the **tender mercy of our God**, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us." (Luke 1:76-78)

St. Paul said, "But God, who is **rich in mercy**, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ." (Ephesians 2:4-5) He also said, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but **according to His mercy** He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5) St. Peter said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to **His abundant mercy** has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3)

2. Mercy and Redemption:

What is the relationship between redemption and God's mercy? This relates to the issue of forgiveness in general. For without God's mercy, there would have been no forgiveness and no repentance. I repent to receive forgiveness, for if, God does not forgive me, what is the use of repentance? Let us, then, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we shall die.

How can God forgive my sins? Is there a contradiction to God's justice, which states that "The wages of sin is death?" (Romans 6:23) This could have been true if God's mercy had not interfered. But God's mercy has met God's justice and that is what David stated, "**Mercy and truth are met together**; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other." (Psalms 85:10) God's mercy did not contradict His justice, but it found a solution. That solution is based on God's death to redeem man who sinned. God, who is unlimited takes a human body like us to save man who deserves an unlimited punishment because he disobeyed God's commandment. No angel, nor prophet could have done this deed of redemption.

3. The Merciful God Promises Forgiveness to those Who Repent:

Surely, we can say now that we live in the age of mercy, me. Let us go to Him repenting, confessing our sins, believing in the truth of His promises that He is opening His arms calling everyone, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) "The one who comes to Me, I will by no means cast out." (John 6:37) **He is ready to forget our sins and never remember them**, as the prophet Micah says, "Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. He will again have

compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast our sins Into the depths of the sea.” (Micah 7:18-19)

How numerous are God’s promises, which encourage us to go to Him repenting. He promised that He would forget all our sins and make us new creatures. The Lord says to us by Ezekiel, “But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. “Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?” says the Lord GOD, “and not that he should turn from his ways and live?” But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:21-24)

God also says by Isaiah, “Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.” (Isaiah 55:7) St. Peter said, “Repent therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” (Acts 3:19) and “Not willing that any should perish but all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

All these divine sayings comfort the burdened souls and give rest to the troubled hearts. The most important parable which shows God’s great mercy to sinners is that of “the Prodigal Son” (Luke 15) St. Luke started this chapter saying, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them”. (Luke 15:1-2)

Actually the parables which Jesus told, answering the complaints of the Pharisees and scribes and showing God’s great love to the sinners are three: **the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the prodigal son.** Each one of them speaks of God’s great love and His abundant compassion to sinners to such a great extent that one eventually submits to God’s call to repentance and says with Paul before his renewal, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (Acts 9:6) Let us now meditate on the parable of “**The Prodigal Son**”.

4. The Parable of the Prodigal Son:

The son who left his father’s house is an example of the souls who forsake God and His house. That son went to a far off country where he wasted his money in riotous living. Then he began to be in need. So he worked feeding the swines and he wanted to fill his belly with the husks that the swines did eat. **All this gives us a picture as to what sin and living away from God might lead to.** But as soon as that son felt how bad his situation was, he arose and came to

his father asking forgiveness. This parable shows us the steps toward repentance. The Lord Jesus said regarding that son, “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20)

How explicit this illustration is by which the Lord Jesus wanted to show His great love and compassion to sinners. “But when he was yet a great way off.” What do these words show us except waiting? The father, emotionally moved, waits for his son who had forsaken him and asked for the portion of goods that falls to him, without being ashamed of himself. If this is the case with the physical father whose life is full of weaknesses, how much then of the feelings of the Heavenly Father toward His children? He said to us saying, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:11)

What was the reaction of the father upon seeing his lost son? “He had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.” The father did all that toward his son even before the son uttered one word of apology or proved his sorrow. All these steps are not very appropriate for the father. Is not this more appropriate for the son? But that is love which forgets all sins. If the physical father showed that great love toward his sinful son, how much greater is God’s love toward His children whom the devil has enslaved under his authority? He is the One Who said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. For I did come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” (Matthew 9:12-13)

How did the son act toward his father? While the son was in the far off country, he promised himself to apologize to his father, saying, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.” (Luke 15:18-19) However, it happened that when he met his father, he uttered those words but the father did not let him say the last sentence which is, “Make me as one of your hired servants.” This behavior on the part of the father has a very important significance in our relationship with God for we never lose our sonship to the Heavenly Father, no matter how many sins we may have committed.

Therefore, our church, through which we become children of God, holds that baptism should never be re-administered, even if one denied the faith and repented. We should never forget the fact that we are the children of God. He paid His precious blood as price for this sonship. “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without Spot.” (1 Peter 1:18-19) The expression "Our Father" is a beautiful one, which the Lord rejoices in hearing. That is why He asked His disciples to use it. “When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven.” (Luke 11:2)

What happened after the lost son apologized and repented? The father ordered his servants to “Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on

his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; **for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.**” (Luke 15:22-24) The son became naked by sinning and the father put clothes on him. (Genesis 3:7) We might ask ourselves, Does not the older son, who spent his life obeying his father, deserve all that? But this is the compassion of the father, for the father pities the sick son more than the rest of his brothers. Likewise, the Heavenly Father pities the spiritually sick more than the ninety-nine who do not need a doctor.

The ring put on his hand is a sign of the covenant between the father and his son. He does not remember his sins anymore. All that the father cared was to cover his son’s nakedness so that he might look like a son again, as if he had not done any evil. All that the son offered his father were his feelings expressed in some words. But the father rewarded him with all his blessings. Likewise in our relationship with our Heavenly Father, we need only offer Him our feelings and some words and tears, and He will accept us and give us of His abundant richness and spiritual gifts to compensate all that we lose by sinning.

D) HOW DO I REPENT?

1. Examine Yourself:

The first step in repentance is to sit with yourself and examine it as the Prodigal Son did. Think how miserable you are and how you have lost your peace. Tell yourself, “How many hired servants of my Heavenly Father have bread enough to spare (spiritual gifts) and I perish with hunger (spiritually)? How did I lose my happiness, my comfort, my joy and peace? What have I gained from my dark life by living in sin? If you are frank and sincere with yourself, you will end up in a deep prayer from a heart full of shame and eyes full of tears, and you will start beating upon your chest in sorrow saying the same words, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before You and am no more worthy to be called your son, make me as one of Your hired servants.”

Truly, examining oneself is one of the major factors in building up the spiritual life. All the saints have talked about its importance. You may be ashamed to tell others about what is inside you, and you may not accept others to rebuke or direct you, but you are not ashamed of yourself when you rebuke it and be strict with it.

Examining oneself does not consist of looking at the negative factors only, that is remembering your sins, but at the positive too, that is, the virtues. He who does not continuously struggle may be indifferent in his emotions toward God; like a flying bird, it cannot go upwards if it does not flap its wings.

The purpose of examining oneself is to overcome one's mistakes and trespasses that one is enslaved to. Remember all the persons, circumstances and situations that caused you to sin. Then put the blame on yourself for your failings.

Example: If you get nervous frequently, ask yourself: Why did I lose my temper when such a person was talking to me? Why did I not accept his words with a simple heart? Even if his words frustrated me, why did I not endure him like Jesus Who endured all the evil doers? Are these insults like the ones Jesus endured? Am I a faithful disciple to the Lord who said, "A servant is not greater than his master, nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him." (John 13:16) The reason for losing my temper was my lack of love for that person, that is why I did not accept his words with love and I reacted in a rush.

The purpose of examining oneself is to find a cure for your sins and to be circumspect in your spiritual life. "See then that you walk circumspectly." (Ephesians 5:15)

Warning: Remembering our sins is beneficial but we need be warned here of something the devil might use to harm us. Sometimes, when one remembers his sins, the devil leads one back to the atmosphere of sin and excites his emotions. This happens in the case of the following sins: lust of the flesh, wrath, hatred and vainglory. Our church prays in the Divine Liturgy, "Purify us from all lust, deceit, hypocrisy, all evil deeds, and the memory of evil that entails death." As soon as you realize that the devil is fighting you in this respect, stop such thoughts immediately. If the devil fights you again, stop this method and use a different one.

When Do You Examine Yourself? The best time is:

1. Immediately after sinning so you would feel sorry and repent right away.
2. At the end of the day, so that you may start a new life the next day.
3. Before confession in front of the priest, so that your confession may be complete.
4. At the end of the week, so on the weekend you might have rest for the body and comfort of the soul.
5. At the end of the year: If we had behaved in God's fear and felt how much He helped us during the year, we say thankfully, "You crown the year with Your goodness, And Your paths drip with fatness." (Psalms 65:11) But if our life had not been acceptable in His eyes, and the tree of our life carried only leaves and not fruits, we remember the voice crying in the wilderness, "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 3:10) We supplicate the Lord saying, "Sir, let it alone this year also." (Luke 13:8)

St. Gregory the Theologian mentioned that the Christians used to do their yearly self-examinations during Epiphany because they renewed the covenant, which they had made with God when they were baptized.

End self-examination with a Prayer: After you sit with yourself to examine it, lift up your heart to God either confessing your sins and asking for forgiveness, or thanking Him for His grace and help - asking Him to help you to the end. When you examine yourself immediately after you committed a sin, lift up your heart to God either in sorrow and repentance or in thankfulness even if you are in a public crowded place.

2. Think of the Consequences of Sin:

Think of the consequences of sin that we have talked about previously in this chapter. **You have to realize that sin insults God, separates you from Him,** deprives you of your peace, and brings God's wrath upon you. That is why the saints used to weep for their sins. David, a great king, used to wet his bed with his tears every night because of a sin, which he had committed. He, the great Psalmist, said, "My sin is ever before me." (Psalms 51:3)

Sometimes we try to forget our sins and comfort ourselves by outer artificial means such as going to a recreational place. Remember your sins and cry and repent. Your tears will wash your sins. St. John Chrysostom said, "If you remember your sins, God will forget them; but if you forget them, God will remember them."

3. Comfort and Salvation Are Found Only in Jesus:

Know that true comfort and perfect joy and peace that passes all understanding cannot be obtained except from Jesus Who said, "**Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**" (Matthew 11:28) He gave His disciples perfect peace and left to all believers a permanent holy gift, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." (John 14:27)

Be sure that salvation from sin and its dominion is only through Jesus Christ, by believing in His name, His power, His help, by hoping for His mercy, and by using all the means of salvation which the church has laid for us. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) No matter how much you struggle against sin or try to overcome your bad habits, you cannot succeed without the help of Jesus Christ Who said, "For without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5)

Hence, do not depend on your will, your wisdom or your spiritual knowledge, but on the strong hand of God. Let God be everything in your life and remember the words of the Psalmist, David, "Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain." (Psalms 127:1)

4. Think How Trivial And Vain the World is:

You have to realize that the world is “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 1:2) **Use the world but do not let the world use you.** Live in the world but do not let the world live in your heart. Many great people and kings departed, but where are they now? If you go to the graves, can you distinguish the bones of a king from the bones of an ordinary man?

Do not let the glory of this vain world distract you from the salvation of your soul or tempt you. The devil dared even to tempt Jesus. “He showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and said unto Him, “All these things will I give You” Jesus said unto him, “Away with you Satan!” (Matthew 4:9-10) The glory of this world is compared to a lamp, which attracts the beautiful butterflies, which dance merrily around it, but soon they fall inside it and are burnt. Remember the parable of the foolish rich man who told himself, “Eat, drink and be merry.” The Lord told him, “You fool! This night your soul will be required of you” (Luke 12:19-20)

5. Know How Valuable Your Soul Is:

If you knew the value of your soul you would not neglect its salvation nor postpone your repentance. Your soul is worth more than the whole world. Jesus said, “For what is a man profited, if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26) The price of your soul is the blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed for your salvation. It is pathetic that some people do not care for their souls. If their shoes or clothes get dirty, they hurry to clean them, but they never care about cleaning their souls and straightening their ways. We live now in the age of mercy, but tomorrow you shall be in the age of justice. If you insult justice here, you may ask for mercy; but if you do not care for mercy here, what will be your status there?

6. Do Not Postpone Repentance:

Never postpone your repentance for there are many in hell now, who had departed from this world while they still had the hope of repenting sometime in the future. Beware of doing like the five foolish virgins whom when the bridegroom came and found not ready, and the door was shut, they cried in vain, “Lord, Lord open to us.” The answer was, “Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.” (Matthew 25:11-12) Remember also the rich man, who as his ground brought forth plentifully, thought of enriching his barns and never thought of his salvation. He said to himself, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” (Luke 12:16-20) God’s immediate response was, “You, fool, this night your soul shall be required of you.”

Solomon said, “To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under the heaven.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1) When is then the time for repentance? It is not old age, for salt is put on meat to preserve it, but what is the use of salt after the meat has been spoiled? It is of no use postponing repentance until you get old, after the smell of sin has been diffused It is

mentioned that one of the skillful photographers began drawing the picture of a human being starting from his feet. But soon he realized that the space provided was not sufficient to include the head, so the picture appeared without the head. Likewise, some people postpone repentance, which is the head. Neither a picture without a head is expressive nor life without repentance acceptable? One of the fathers said, "Repentance is the mother, look after the mother, it will produce children." He meant virtues.

One might say, "Why not postpone repentance?" The answer is that probably during the period in which you postponed repentance, you discover new ways of sinning which you come to like more and you might not become enthusiastic about living a holy life any longer. How do you know that your eagerness to lead a pure, holy life will remain with you in the future? During that period, your ideas and outlook on life might change and you might think that it is very hard to apply the Christian principles in this world. Again, during that period, your will power might weaken.

7. Beware of Despair:

Sometimes, when you remember your sins, the devil may lead you to despair. Look to your Master in His love to sinners. Remember His picture opening His arms, calling everyone to comfort, regardless of his sins, to free him from the bonds of the devil. Do not be afraid "for you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15) Ask God to grant you repentance. "Restore me, and I will return, For You are the LORD my God." (Jeremiah 31:18)

The request surely acceptable to God is the request for the salvation of your soul. This request is according to God's will as St. Paul says, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God, our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:3-4) I might make requests to God but He does not answer them as He knows that they are not good for my salvation, even when these requests were for certain virtues. God knows that such virtues are above my spiritual status and will lead me to pride, which God does not want. However, God will always accept the prayer for your salvation because this is His will. Mar Isaac said, "There is nothing more favorable and acceptable in the sight of God than a person praying for the forgiveness of his sins."

We have seen one kind of despair. Another kind is the one by which the devil tries to complicate God's way, tempting us with monotony and boredom. Nevertheless, we have to know that God's way is not covered with roses. It is enough that Jesus described it as narrow and straight, "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads unto life." (Matthew 7:14) At the beginning of the life of repentance, many might retreat. God led the Israelites out of Egypt, but as soon as they arrived in the wilderness, they started thinking back of the material blessings they had in the land of Egypt. They preferred the garlic they ate in the land of bondage to the food of the angels as they were free in the wilderness.

In our spiritual life, there is an important principle; the principle of “Struggle”: do not expect comfort and ease. If this were so, one would have not fasted, prayed or struggled in spiritual battles. Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent takes it by force.” (Matthew 11:12) Also, St. Paul said, “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.” (Hebrews 12:4) The more we struggle in the life of repentance, the more God’s help is granted to us. Mar Isaac said, “As much as one struggles and overcomes himself for the sake of God, as much as the divine help surrounds him and makes his struggle easy.”

God’s way does not remain that difficult, for God’s promises encourage us and His inner voice supports us. When God sees our perseverance in overcoming our weaknesses for His love, He fights for us and stops all the temptations. St. Macarius, the Great, said, “The more one strives for God’s sake, even if he forces himself unwillingly to do God’s will, the more chances that one day he will do it willingly and happily.” St. Sefemecky said, “Those who want to follow God’s way have to struggle greatly at the beginning and eventually they will be very joyful; like the ones who want to start a fire, at first their eyes will be full of smoke, but later, they will enjoy the fire.

8. All Sins Can Be Forgiven:

Every sin, no matter how evil it is, can be forgiven as long as one has a sincere intention to repent. **“Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemes they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation.”** (Mark 3:28-29) Blaspheming against the Holy Spirit which is never forgiven is not a sin by itself. It is a spiritual condition, which a person reaches. He wants to do evil and keeps being stubborn, not listening to the rebukes of the conscience and the Holy Spirit.

It is different from committing adultery, killing, or stealing. Any person may commit the worst sins or he may even blaspheme against the Son of God unbelievably. St. Paul did that before God renewed his life. All this can be forgiven by the influence of the Holy Spirit Who leads us to repentance. But he who refuses the work of the Holy Spirit does not listen to the voice of his conscience will not be granted the forgiveness of his sins forever. He has refused all the means which rebuke him. “And when He (the Holy Spirit) has come, He will convict the world of sin.” (John 16:8) The Holy Spirit reproves me of my sins. Hence, if I refuse His work or blaspheme against Him, I will never repent and will never be forgiven. **Mar Isaac said, “There is no sin that cannot be forgiven except the one without repentance.”**

9. Beware Of Carelessness:

After having discussed God’s great mercy and His love to sinners and His readiness to accept even the worst of them, we now draw your attention to an important point: Do not take advantage of God’s great mercy and kindness, lest this should lead you to carelessness. **God is**

not only merciful, but He is just as well. “His tender mercies are over all His works” (Psalms 145:9) yet He is still just.

St. John Chrysostom said, “You who do not believe in eternal punishment, tell me who killed with the flood all the people in Noah’s time? Who burnt Sodom, Gomorrah, and seven other cities? Who drowned Pharaoh and all his soldiers in the Red Sea? Who killed the six hundred thousand Jews in the wilderness? Who burnt Abiram? Who ordered the earth to open its mouth and swallow Korah, Dathan and Abiram? Who killed seventy thousand in David’s time? Who killed eighty-five thousand of the Assyrians in one night? Therefore, never take advantage of God’s mercy. Remember what Jesus said about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, and about the eighteen upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3)

We live now in the age of mercy, but tomorrow we will be in the age of justice and there is a big difference by which God treats people in both ages. God was incarnate and granted us eternal redemption; and He is coming again in His glory to judge the living and the dead and to reward everyone according to his deeds.

In His first coming, “He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:7-8) In His first coming, He came as a shepherd seeking the lost sheep; but in His second coming, He will come as a judge, in His glory and the glory of His Father surrounded by all the angels and saints.

In His first coming, no man shall hear His voice in the streets; a bruised reed shall He not break and smoking flax shall He not quench. However, in His Second Coming, He will come in His glory with the song of the trumpet and the falling of the planets. In His first coming, He was long suffering, kind to sinners, did not condemn them, although He is the Judge. He even said to the adulterous woman, “Neither do I condemn you.” (John 8:11) When a man asked Him for dividing the inheritance with brother, He answered, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” (Luke 12:14) He endured the blasphemers, forgave those who insulted Him. However, in His Second Coming, He will come as a just judge giving everyone according to his deeds.

In His first coming, He came as a Bridegroom to Whom we were all engaged. He said to everyone in love and meekness, “Listen O daughter, Consider and incline your ear, Forget your own people also, and your father’s house, So the King will greatly desire your beauty.” (Psalms 45: 10-11). He compared us to the virgins who are waiting for the Bridegroom and He paid His precious blood as an expensive dowry. In His Second Coming, He will come as a King conquering the rebellious. He had sent apostles and missionaries of peace. The sinners did not listen to them and killed them. In the Second Coming, He comes to judge the world. “For the hour is coming in the which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and shall come forth –

those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." (John 5:28-29)

On this day, what will the sinners do? "And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:15-17).

But thanks be to God Who is very patient with us and Who gives us a chance to repent and bring forth fruits. He lifted the axe kindly on the root of the tree and said, "Leave it another year." Let us all repent for the days are evil and let us all wake from our carelessness for the day of our life is far spent.

E) VIRTUES CHARACTERIZING THE REPENTANT

The life of repentance is a special life which has its own characteristics and its virtues which spring out of the repentant's heart. If such virtues do not exist in the life of the repentant, we cannot consider him a true repentant. **Some virtues are:**

1. Broken Spirit:

A repentant is a person who rises up from sin; all his sins and evil thoughts are not forgotten but they remind him of his weakness and of his evil heart. All his sins remind him of his inability to resist sin, the devil, the flesh and the world - all of which are shameful to him. Therefore, he develops a broken spirit inwardly and a humble appearance outwardly. He is like a person who woke up from his sleep and found himself empty in front of God. He has not done a single good deed and whenever he looks at his life, he feels so ashamed of himself. His past is full of sins and his future is unpredictable - he might fall again as he did before.

A broken spirit and remembering one's sins are two important matters in the life of repentance. If one forgets his sins, his broken-spiritedness gradually cools down. If one remembers his good deeds, he loses his broken-spiritedness. Happy is the man who remembers his sins, and keeps them in front of him all the time. His tears bring him humility and forgiveness. St. Antony said, "If we remember our sins, God will forget them, and if we forget our sins, God will remember them."

Two repentant persons with broken spirits are reminding themselves of their sins. The first one has led a long life of repentance, forgotten his sins but reminds himself of them. He struggles and leads a new life and do good deeds. Yet, he keeps reminding himself of them until he goes back to his broken-spiritedness. The second person has not forgotten his sins. They are constantly in front of him. Neither the time nor the good deeds can make him forget his sins. This is what happens to the sensitive person with a good conscience. As time goes on and more opportunities for growth in the holy life are available, he feels how awful and bad his sins are and regrets more having committed them. He sees his sins above his good deeds, so he does not remember his good deeds but constantly remembers his sins.

Blessed is the repentant who examines himself everyday and reminds himself of his sins and confesses them to God and prays with tears. Blessed is he if he reminds himself of his sins every time people or the devil praises him.

Blessed is the repentant who grows in grace and constantly examines himself and discovers his weaknesses every day. Blessed is he because he never forgets his sins but rather discovers new sins in himself daily. Blessed is he because he evaluates himself and finds

himself still deficient. Whenever he reads about a new virtue or commandment in the life of a saint, he tries to train himself to acquire it.

Blessed is he who realizes that a broken spirit is a virtue not only for beginners in their early life of repentance, but it continues throughout the repentant's life. St. Paul continued to remember his sins, although it was due to ignorance. Even after having been caught up to the third heaven, having seen a revelation of the Lord, having heard and seen things which cannot be told or uttered, and after many years of performing miracles, he still said, "I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." (1 Corinthians 15:9)

2. Tears:

The tears of a repentant are always present. Whenever he stands in front of God, he cries. Whenever he remembers his sins, he cries. Moreover, whenever he sees others' sins, he cries. In his quiet time, in his readings, in his prayers and sometimes in his talks, his tears are always present. The prophet David said, "I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears." (Psalms 6:6) also, "I have eaten ashes like bread. And mingled my drink with weeping." (Psalms 102:9)

The tears of the repentant are not tears of fear, but tears of sensitivity, tears of sorrow and feeling deficient, tears of a person who feels that he has despised his Beloved and made Him sad. In spite of the forgiveness of his sins, the sensitive person cannot imagine how he did all that to his Beloved and feels very sorry; so, he weeps.

A person can think before he does any action, and if he does not like it, he is free to refuse doing it; but if he has already done the action, he is not free to choose. He has nothing to do, if the action was wrong, except to weep - the weeping of a crippled who cannot undo a wrong action which has already been done. A person can apologize or do a good deed to make up for the bad consequences, but he cannot undo the action since it has already been done. Then, when all doors are closed, the door of tears opens so he enters through it in order that he might find some comfort.

The tears of the saints are plentiful. Some of them are tears of love, tears of joy, or tears of emotions, and some are tears of repentance. An example of how sensitive a person is in the life of repentance is the following story, which St. Bebenouda related about himself. He said, "When I was young, I saw a cucumber falling from a camel on the ground. I picked it up and ate it. Whenever I remember that incident, I weep." This happened when he was a boy. When he grew up, he became a monk, grew in grace, and performed miracles. He succeeded St. Macar and became the father of many monks and still whenever he remembered that incident, he wept.

3. Taking the Last Seat:

A person with a broken spirit is humble inwardly as well as outwardly because his inner feelings are reflected in his behavior. In his inner self, he certainly knows that he is a sinner and the worst of all people. In his eyes, his sins are the biggest burden and are more than the sins of all people. Therefore, he does not condemn anyone and whenever he sees any person sinning, he wishes that his own sins were that light and not as awful as they are. Hence, he realizes that he is the least of all people, he takes the last seat considering himself unworthy of even that last seat.

Whenever he is invited by God's blessed people to a meeting, a special party or a spiritual gathering, he attends it while he is ashamed of himself and he tells himself, "Who am I to sit with those saints? Blessed is the Lord who did not reveal my sins to them lest they prevent me from attending." He enters the meeting place and never sits in a front seat but rather in the back, still thinking that his presence is spoiling the beauty of this gathering. He rebukes himself saying, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Whenever he enters the church, he does it hesitantly and in fear, then stands in an unnoticed place while praying, "Let not your anger come on this holy place because of me." In spite of his not sitting in the front seat or not daring to enter the altar or to raise his voice, he remains in his last seat fearing that any of his old friends might see him and wonder about his presence in the church saying, "How could this evil person dare enter here?"

This last seat accompanies him everywhere and in every behavior. For example: if people talk, he remains quiet feeling that he is not worthy to talk. If people ask him to give his opinion, he tells himself, "How can I give my opinion about good deeds while I am an evil person? It is better for me to keep quiet." If he has to talk, he is the last one to talk, saying to himself, "Who am I to talk?"

In his entire behavior, he prefers others to himself, and gets away from all opportunities, which give him glory. He respects everyone, big and small, considering himself the least of them all. He tells himself, "All those people will enter the kingdom of heaven before me, and will be better than me if I am worthy to be with them." He respects even the sinners and never condemns them but is kind to them because he has experienced sin and has known how severe it is. He feels that all sinners are better than himself because they have not fallen to the extent he has fallen.

People might say that he is a humble person, but in fact, he does behave like that to be humble but because of his feeling of unworthiness. If people ignore him or neglect him, he does not feel that he is being humiliated, but he tells himself, "I have been treated fairly and I do not deserve anything except that."

He also forbears others and feels, deeply in his heart, that he deserves any insult from others and tells himself, "This was because of my sins. Therefore, he is never angry with anyone

and says with the right hand thief, “We fairly deserve this.” He always blames himself assuring himself that his sins are the cause of it all.

4. Humility

Such person, who has a broken spirit, who feels that he deserves all blame, is certainly a humble person. He can never be proud or praise himself. He never talks of his good deeds because he remembers his awful deeds. He does not feel it is right to give others a distorted idea about himself by talking about his good deeds and not showing his awful sins.

Whenever he is tempted to talk about himself or about his new spiritual experiences, he says, “Can I tell people about the rest of my life and reveal to them my awful sins?” As he refuses to praise himself, he refuses to accept praise from others too. He tells himself, “Anyone who is a sinner like me does not deserve to be praised by others, or else he is a hypocrite who does not show others the truth about himself.”

He never excuses himself and does not defend himself even if he is unjustly accused. If he is tempted inwardly, he tells himself, “Why do I complain when I am accused of an evil deed which I did not do and I did not complain when people praise me for virtues I do not possess or good deeds which I did not do? Moreover, this evil deed which I am accused of is nothing compared to the numerous sins I have committed in my life. Even if I am not guilty this time, I did commit sins before, so I fairly deserve this accusation.”

5. Caution:

A repentant, who has experienced sin and knows its pressure on him and his own weakness to overcome it, is very cautious. He fears that he might fall again, so he is cautious even with trivial matters because he is afraid they might lead into major sins. In his repentance, he never thinks he can overcome sin, but always thinks he is weak at overcoming the smallest sin; therefore, he escapes from sin and the ways leading to it.

This extreme caution is one of the major factors, which made the saints never go back to their sins.

6. Mingling All His Virtues With the Spirit of Repentance:

The virtues of the repentant are characterized by a special spirit. They are all mingled with a broken spirit and a feeling of unworthiness. For example: he fasts not only to bring his body into subjection, but also because he feels his unworthiness to eat food. He sometimes tells himself, “Many have committed evil sins like mine and are now in prison; they do not have the freedom to eat whatever they want and here I am free and enjoying food. This is because my sins are not known. Those prisoners are better than me because their sins are apparent and they have

received their due punishment, but my sins are not known and I have not received my punishment. The least I do is to deprive myself of enjoying food.”

This story is about a soldier who repented and became a monk. When people tried to honor him, he deserted that place telling himself, “Let me go away and eat the food of the beasts since I have committed evil sins like the beasts.” This applies not only to fasting but also to prayers, tears, etc.

F) QUESTIONS

1. Are There Stages In Repentance?

The repentance of some of the saints, like St. Augustine and St. Moses the black, were sudden and perfect because of God’s grace and the readiness of their hearts. However, the common procedure is that the repentant go through certain stages.

The first stage: Contrition for sin as we discussed earlier.

The second stage: Struggling with sin. When someone is sorry for his sins, this does not mean that the devil will not tempt him any more. The devil will fight him but all his attempts will fail. The devil will try to remind him of his previous sins and his past life. The repentant have to be very watchful for all the temptations of the devil during this stage. He has to surround himself with a pure environment. If he is tempted by sin, he should get away from it. St. Paul called this stage, “The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another.” (Galatians 5:17)

The third stage: Mental victory over sin. We mean that he is convinced that sin, with all its means and ways, is wrong. No doubt, this is considered victory for him.

This does not mean that the repentant has completely rid himself of sin, but there may still be an inner struggle to forsake it from his heart. In this stage, the repentant needs certain kinds of struggle and spiritual exercises upon which he trains himself under the guidance of the spiritual father.

All of these steps do not mean that the repentant have reached a perfection of repentance, for this means the hatred of sin. This is what St. Paul said, “Abhor what is evil.” (Romans 12:9)

2. Life with God is characterized with joy, while that of repentance, by regret and sadness because of sin. Is there contradiction between the two?

There is no contradiction between being joyful and being sorrowful in the life of the repentant. He is sorrowful but hopeful at the same time. He is happy because he is returning to

God. Hope is a great Christian virtue besides faith and love. (1 Corinthians 13:13) The sorrow of the repentant should be mingled with hope and hope produces joy, peace, and quietness.

The repentant is sad because he feels he has insulted God and has met His great love with ingratitude, but at the same time, he put God's promises of accepting the sinners joyfully and that Jesus Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

Moreover, the joy that fills the heart of the repentant is the result of his feeling that he has reached God himself, God who has revealed Himself to him and has rebuked him on his sins and lit for him the road of life. When the repentant reads St. Paul's words that he was earlier a persecutor of the church, and the words, "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more," (Romans 5:20) he feels embarrassed in front of God's great love and compassion and how he had treated God's blessings with his sins. Therefore, his eyes are filled with tears, that of a broken heart from God's great love, and that of joy for His wonderful salvation.

G) MODELS OF REPENTANT PEOPLE

1. David the Prophet and King: (2 Samuel 11-12)

David looked at a woman who was bathing and his heart was filled with lust and he could not resist sin. Sin enslaved him without pity and made him fall in two terrible crimes: the sins of adultery and killing. However, God's great mercy interfered and sent him Nathan, the prophet, to rebuke him. David then confessed his sin in humility and with a broken heart. God accepted his true repentance by forgiving him. Nathan told David, "The LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die." (2 Samuel 12:13) **In spite of that, David wept for his sins and wet his bed with his tears.** He cried out saying, "My sin is ever before me."

2. St. Moses the Black (Fourth Century):

He started his life as a murderer, a robber and a gang leader but ended his life as a great saint and a spiritual leader to thousands of saints. One day, while he was walking in the Nitria Valley, probably escaping from the authorities, he found himself in front of an old saint. He was bored from his life of robbery and murder so his heart was open to the words of the saint. He decided to repent and stay in the wilderness of Sheheat. He longed for the monastic life, so he went to his spiritual father, St. Isidoros, and confessed his sins. He struggled in his ascetic life. He was very harsh on himself, trying to make up for what had passed from his life in sin and evil. Even his spiritual guide used to advise him to be less severe in his struggle. Many became his disciples and he was well known all over the wilderness. His body lies beside his spiritual father in the Baramous Monastery.

3. St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.):

He was one of the greatest teachers in the East and West. He was an author, a writer, a philosopher, **a bishop and the saint whose repentance had exceeded his sins and his holiness exceeded the ignorance of his youth.** His mother was a righteous Christian who taught him the principles of Christianity and spiritual life since his early childhood. However, as soon as he finished his preparatory school years, under the influence of atheist teachers, he started forgetting the principles of religion. In addition, his reading of many books by atheist philosophers influenced his life greatly until he deviated and indulged in adultery. After he repented, he said, "I used to be ashamed of not doing evil." However, his righteous mother did not stop praying with tears for him. When St. Ambrose saw her weeping, he told her, "The son of these tears cannot perish."

He knew God's way at the age of thirty-three and started the life of repentance and tears. His mother died after she rejoiced at the repentance of the fruit of her womb. Then he sold his possessions and distributed the money to the poor and became a monk. He started the ascetic life, prayer, study, writing and ministry of the Word and Church. He was ordained a

priest, then a bishop of one of the cities of North Africa and became one of the greatest philosophers of Christianity and very famous in Bible commentary. He also struggled in defending the faith and answering the heretics. He became an authority in the Christian dogma in his generation. His numerous books are in our hands. In one of his famous books, "Confessions," we read his excellent phrase, "Lord, You have created us for You and our hearts will remain restless till we find our comfort in You."

4. St. Baiesa (Fourth Century):

She was born in the town of "Menouf" in Egypt, from rich, righteous parents. She followed their example in righteousness. When they died, she made her house a refuge for strangers and the needy. She spent all her money on the poor. However, some evil people influenced her to change her house into a house of prostitution. The elders of Sheheat heard about her and were very sad, so they sent St. John the Short to her. As soon as he saw her, he said, "Why did you insult your Lord Jesus Christ and bring this evil matter to your house?" She was troubled from his words and her heart was touched.

Then St. John looked to the ground and started weeping. She asked him, "Why do you weep?" He told her, "Because I see the devils playing on your face." She asked him, "Can I repent?" He said, "Yes, but not in this place." She answered, "Take me wherever you want." She hurried after him until they entered the wilderness. When it was dark, he told her, "You stay here," and he went farther away from her.

While he was praying at midnight, **he saw a pillar of light descending from heaven to the earth and the angels of the Lord carrying her soul.** He approached her and found her dead. He wanted to know whether her repentance was accepted by God and that she was saved. He prayed to God to reveal her secret to him. **Then he heard a voice telling him, "Her repentance was accepted on the same hour she had repented more than those who repented for many years and did not show such fervent repentance."** After the elders buried her body, he told them what had happened and they glorified God. The Coptic Church celebrates her departure on 2nd day of the Coptic month Misra.

5. St. Mary the Egyptian (First half of the fifth century):

She left her father's house at the age of twelve to live in sin and evil in the city of Alexandria. She lived seventeen years in adultery. One day she saw a ship sailing to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Cross. She went on just to satisfy her dirty lusts.

In Jerusalem, she tried to enter the church to receive a blessing from the holy cross, as other Christians were doing. She felt an invisible hand preventing her from entering the church.

She tried several times but all her attempts failed. Suddenly, she felt how terrible her life was and she started crying bitterly in front of St. Mary's icon and promised God to devote the rest of her life to worshipping God in the wilderness. Then she was able to enter the church and receive the blessing from the holy cross.

She left this church and went to another where she confessed to the priest and received communion. When she was 29 years old, she went to the wilderness of the Jordan. She lived there a life of repentance for 47 years, worshipping God very piously fighting the devil who was tempting her very harshly. She progressed in the spiritual life and God granted her to prophecy and know the future. She did not meet any person until the last year of her life when she met father Zosima who gave her the Holy Communion before she departed.

6. Deacon Habib Farag (1941):

I have known this man who was a servant in Sunday school. **He started his life away from God but ended his life a righteous man who wrote in his diary the date and hour of his departure.** He started his life a stubborn person completely against religion, who lived to the world and for the world. One of the youth kept inviting him to attend the Bible Study meeting at St. Antony's Church in Shoubra, but he refused constantly. Finally, one day he accepted to go to the church on condition that no one would ask about him if he did not want to attend the meeting again.

He was touched by the words he heard at the church meeting and he saw a strange vision that night. He saw St. Mary taking him to Hades where everyone was suffering and crying. He became terrified and asked to get out of that place. Then St. Mary took him to the Paradise where he saw the saints shining. St. Mary started pointing at the saints, saying: "This is our father Abraham, this is David the Prophet, this is St. Antony, etc. He noticed that the saints were sitting on strange lighted chairs. One of these chairs was empty. He asked surprisingly, "Who left his chair empty?" St. Mary answered him, "This is your chair if you follow Jesus Christ."

He woke up determined to repent and to reach that chair which was waiting for him. He started his spiritual struggle very severely. He worked in the government and stayed there until he departed at a young age. God was glorified in his short life by many miracles. Many saw a great light surrounding him while he was praying in his own room and his hands lifted up were like lit candles. Finally, he departed at the age of twenty-seven.

H) FROM THE SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS ABOUT REPENTANCE

1. Mari Afram the Syrian:

My fathers and brothers let us hear a saying, which saves our souls. Let us buy the salvation of our souls. Let us find eternal life. Fill your eyes with tears, then the eyes of your minds will open. Come, all of you, rich and poor, employers and employees, old and young, girls and boys, anyone who wants to be saved from the eternal punishment and inherit eternal life.

Let us say with David; “Open my eyes so I may see wonders out of Your law.” “Enlighten my eyes lest I die.” Let us cry with the blind man, “O Son of God, have mercy on me.” If people try to stifle us, let us scream louder so that Jesus opens the eyes of our hearts because He is the Giver of Light. Draw near Jesus, come closer to Him and be enlightened and your faces will not be ashamed.

Let us repent, my brethren, as long as we have time. You have heard what Christ said, ”There is great joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.” O sinner, why are you late, do not lose hope. **If there is great joy in heaven if you repent, why are you weary? The angels will be happy, so why are you slow? The Lord of the angels wants you to repent and you flee away! The Holy Trinity to Whom is the worship, is calling you and you are still late!**

Everyone will be rewarded according to his deeds at the day of judgement. Everyone will reap what he sowed. We all have to stand bare in front of the throne of Christ and everyone has to give an account for himself and no one can help the other in that hour. The parents cannot help their children or the children their parents, nor friends or brothers nor husbands nor wives can help each other.

Why do we not get ready while we still have time? Why do we neglect the Holy Books and the words of Christ? Or do you think His sayings and the sayings of the saints will not condemn you on that day if you do not keep them? You have heard what the Lord said to His disciples, “He, who hears from you, hears from Me. He who does not hear from Me, I do not condemn him but the word itself will condemn him on the last day.”

Blessed are those who are thirsty and hungry, for they shall be filled. Woe to the full for they shall be hungry and thirsty. Blessed are those who are poor and mourn for they shall be comforted. Woe to those who laugh now for they shall weep. Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Woe to those who have no mercy.

He who came down from the bosom of the Father and became a Way for salvation teaches us repentance by His divine voice, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repent.” (Mark 2:17) These are not my sayings, but they are the Lord’s sayings, so why do you neglect your life? If you know that your thoughts and deeds are evil, why do you keep hiding your wounds? From whom are you afraid? From the Physician? He is not severe nor without mercy. He does not use a bitter medicine because he cures by mere words. If you want to come to Him, He is full of compassion and kindness. He came for you from the Father’s bosom. He was incarnated for you, so you may proceed to Him without fear. He became a man for you to cure your hidden wounds. By His great love, He calls you, “O sinner, come and be cured easily. Remove the burden of your sins.” Supplicate God with tears, for this Good Heavenly Physician cures your wounds by tears and prayers! Do you know what hour the Heavenly Physician will close His door? I beg you to proceed and be cured, for He wants the Heavenly hosts to rejoice at your repentance.

O friend, until when are you going to serve the carnal desires and be enslaved to them? Till when are you going to do what pleases the devil? Listen to my advice and you will live. Purify your soul and body. Proceed to the Savior with a fervent repentance. Get away from the scorpion that bit you. Flee the serpent that you have experienced its poison for he, whose feet stumble twice, are blind and cannot see what should be avoided. Look at Nineveh, which was full of sin, how God had ordered its destruction. However, when He saw the people wearing ashes and ashes, in hunger, fasting and weeping, he had compassion on them, forgave them, and saved them. He preferred to go back in His words rather than to punish them.”

2. St. John Saba (The spiritual elder):

O great mercy, how abundant you are! O Lord, can anyone not marvel from Your mercy? Can anyone not confess Your Grace? You came that we be born from the womb of repentance as You were born from the Blessed Virgin Mary Your mother. We have lived in evil and wickedness but repentance can purify and enlighten us.

Adam can bear children from Eve, which resemble the physical world. Likewise, Jesus, from baptism and repentance, can bear children who resemble the spiritual world. He says to us, “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” How can we find repentance if it is close? **Repentance is the mother of life, blessed is he who is born from it, he will never die..** Christ calls everyone to repent, but the devil prevents people from hearing that calling. Repentance saves those who are captives to sin.

Repentance changes adulterers to celibates. It is fire, which burns the weeds. It is the water for the holy plants. It is the intercessor of the captives. **Who is he who does not love you, O repentance; you carry all the blessings? Only the devil hates you for you have taken away his wealth, properties and made him empty from his inheritance which he once plundered.**

No one who puts his hope in you ever fails. No one ascended to heaven without you. Who can see God without repentance? Who repented and did not reap the fruits of joy? Who did not wipe his face with the tears of repentance and did not see God in his heart? You have saved David from sin and the people of Nineveh, even after God's judgement on them.

Blessed are you O mother of forgiveness (Repentance). God has granted repentance to be the intercessor of sinners. God will never close His door if you ask Him, for He has given you the keys of the kingdom.

I) A PRAYER FOR REPENTANCE

By

Saint Shenouda the Archimandrite

O God, forgive me, I am a sinner, for I cannot raise my eyes up to You because I am ashamed of my many sins. O God, forgive my sins and have mercy on me in Your kingdom. My Lord, I supplicate You and ask You for my wretched soul and body.

Lord, grant me to do Your will and let Your mercy guide me. My Lord and God, forgive my sins and hide my iniquities, save me from Your wrath and anger. What shall I say when I come between Your hand and what will justify me when You judge me? Lord Jesus, direct and shield me from the snares of the devil. Place Your peace and Your Holy Name in me, O Lord Who dwells in Heaven, so Your mercy might come and shield me. Do not deliver me in the hands of the enemy.

I have put all my worries on You, Jesus, Son of God, do not leave me. If I lean towards evil, do not forsake me and do not let me walk according to my evil desires. Do not delay rebuking me until the day of judgement. Do not punish me according to my sins. Cover the shame of my nakedness before Your fearful throne. Purify me, so I will not be defiled when I come before Your hands. O God, Lover of mankind, fortify my soul with Your precious blood. Lord, subdue my desire to sin by Your fear. Awaken me from the slumber of negligence that springs out of the sin. Keep me from going astray and the slip of my lips.

Let Your angel expel the blasphemies of sin. Prepare me so Your Holy Spirit might find me a temple for Him. Grant O Lord, my soul and spirit to praise You all the days of my life. Answer me O Lord according to Your great mercy and accept my prayer and supplication. Save

me from sinning against You and grant me the way to do Your will. Do not take away Your blessings from me and do not keep me away from Your help.

Keep me a holy temple for You. Purify my heart, tongue and all my senses. Take away from me the stony heart and grant me a contrite one to worship You. Do not refuse me, for You have called me . Have mercy on me, You Who have the authority to grant mercy. Make me worthy to praise You all the time until my last breath.

Confirm Your holy words in my heart and soul. Save me from all the snares of the evil one. Direct my life to the way it pleases You. Have mercy on me and listen to my cry. Answer my supplication and accept my prayer. Accept my prayer and do not keep away Your mercy from me. Let my prayer reach Your presence. Listen to my voice and let my cries come to You. Let my prayer be upright before You as the aroma of sweet incense in Your Hands. Do not judge Your servant for no one is faultless before You. For Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the Glory, forever. Amen.

J) A PRAYER TO DECIDE LIVING WITH GOD

O Holy Father, Who does not wish anyone to perish but all to repent, I thank You for Your long suffering with my many sins and for bringing me to this hour.

How many times I promised to live in Your obedience, and not to insult Your holy name but I broke my promise and went against Your commandments.

O merciful Lord Who made known His great love for the sinners in Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, grant me the blessing to please You and to live in Your obedience to the end. Strengthen me, my God, for I am weak before my many enemies surrounding me. Lord, You know everything, You know that I love You, although my love is lukewarm.

Lord, I find no peace away from You, no rest except in living with You. There is no security or permanence for anything in this world for all pass away. Blessed are You O Lord Who is faithful in Your love and who does not change.

O Heavenly Father, in my weakness, naughtiness, and reckless thinking, I put myself into Your hands confident of Your protection, believing that You are capable of keeping me until the end. Seal, O God, my covenant with Your blessings and keep me undefiled until Your second coming for Yours is the Glory from now and forever. Amen.