

PARADISE OF THE SPIRIT

By

Bishop Youanis

**Late Bishop of Gharbia
EGYPT**

Part Two

Second Edition

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Second Edition

- 1. Prayer**
- 2. Fasting**
- 3. Almsgiving**
- 4. Spiritual Readings**
- 5. The Holy Bible**
- 6. Spiritual Exercises**
- 7. Retreat**
- 8. Service**

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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 Out 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: Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving, Spiritual Readings, the Holy Bible, Spiritual Exercises, Retreat, and Service.

Part 3 deals with 'Advanced Spirituality' and contains 10 chapters which are: 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, U.S.A., translated into English and published the 3 parts of this book "Paradise of the Spirit".

The present book is the second edition of the English translation of Part 2 of "Paradise of the Spirit".

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

May 2001

**Introduction of Part Two of
Paradise of the Spirit
by
Monk Archpriest
Shenouda El-Soriany (Late Bishop Youanis)**

THIS BOOK

The first part of this book "Paradise of the Spirit", saw the light around the middle of 1960. In it we mentioned that there will be two more complementary parts. Since then, people were eagerly and persistently asking when will part two of that book appear. I thank God for the grace which He gave to part one in the eyes of many, and I thank all those beloved who expressed their loving feelings in appreciation of this book. Yet, I wish to tell them that publishing a book is not an easy matter.

It was possible to publish part two of this book a little while after publishing part one. In this case, it would have appeared in a different form and with different contents to what I intended. We declined to present part two to the Church, except in an almost complete form.

Writing this second part took a tremendous, and in most cases, a continuous effort. A mother gives birth to her child in a few hours, but it took me almost 6 full years to give birth to parts one and two of this book. During those years, I read whatever books I could get hold of about the Church's saintly fathers. Some of those books were manuscripts and others were translations from live languages, as well as many other books.

This part contains eight subjects. They are the fruit of reading more than 200 books. Some of these books cannot be grasped by the ordinary reader, because they are either not available or difficult to read. I mention that, as some people may consider the two and a half years which lapsed since publishing part one, a long time to account for and requires an apology. They rather realise that to author and write a book is a tedious and difficult task. Let people read this book eagerly, knowing that reading a book like this one, spares them the effort of searching and reading tens of other books.

We refer to the effort spent in producing this part, not for glory, rather we believe that this modest "Spiritual Paradise" is a plant from God, and is the fruit of many prayers which many

people raised, asking God to be kind and give grace. We have no excellence in anything then, if we speak, we speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11), and if we work, it is from the grace which God gives.

It is a pleasure to realise that the two parts of this book "Paradise of the Spirit" - which are the beginning of our production - appeared during the reign of His Holiness Pope Kyrillos VI. May God guard his safety, give him a long life and affirm his seat with goodness and justice for the benefit of the Church. To him we present this modest work to bless, asking God - with his prayers - to make it a means of blessing for many.

I find it my duty to offer my sincere thanks to the fathers in the blessed Monastery of St. Mary (El-Soryan), who supported me with their prayers. In their forefront is the most Reverend His Grace Anba Thawfilos, Bishop and head of this Monastery, the star of the holy Sheheit desert and the enlightened Bishop who does not spare an effort in serving the Church, prospering monasticism, and helping his sons the monks. He does that in a spirit of love, meekness, sacrifice and self-denial. May the Lord guard his life, recompense him for his toil, and multiply his pious disciples, by the supplication of the Virgin Mary and the Saints.

In part 1 of this book, I gave thanks to one of the fathers in the Monastery, who shared in the substance of this book, by his writings, guidance, and advice. Yet he declined - in an ascetic self-denial - that we do not mention his name. In this part again I give thanks to this Father, but after the Lord fulfilled His promise in him, and the Church refused to leave a shining light under a basket. The Church raised and put him on a lampstand to give light to all who are in the house (Matthew 5:15). This shining light moved from the depth of the desert to the heart of the Theological College, and Sunday Schools, in Cairo, Egypt. Against his desire, he moved from a hermit's cave to the teaching and ministering position. It gives me pleasure to give my thanks to His Grace Bishop Shenouda [in November 1971, Bishop Shenouda became Pope Shenouda III]. May the Lord God guard his life and multiply the fruits of his hands.

I also offer my thanks to the brethren who are ministering in the field of Sunday Schools in the city of Giza for their help in publishing the two parts of this book. Thanks are also due to many dear brothers who helped in one way or the other in the production of this book. May the Lord compensate all of them in the heavenly Jerusalem.

As I put this modest book in the hands of God Who loved and guided us, I ask Him to make it a blessing to all who read in it the words of the Spirit and the Life, particularly, the brothers and dear students of the Theological College, and the Sunday School teachers, all over the See of St. Mark. I ask Him to support me with His grace to produce part 3 of this book.

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

**Monk Archpriest
Shenouda El-Soriany**

19 March 1963, 10 Baramhat 1679
Remembrance day of the discovery of the Holy Cross.

Preface

Dear reader: In this book, we offer you the second edition of the English translation of part 2 of the book "Paradise of the Spirit", by His Grace Bishop Youanis, late Bishop of Gharbia, Egypt, who slept in the Lord in November 1987.

Picture of Father Samuel Thabet Samue

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

May 2001

CONTENTS

	page
Foreword
This book
Preface
How?
Worshipping men
1. Prayer
A) Prayer: its superiority and power
B) Our need of pray
C) Conditions of acceptable prayer
D) Secret of answered prayer
E) Encouragements for prayer
F) Delay in answering prayer
G) How do we pray?
H) Some problems with prayer.
I) The ceaseless prayer
J) Praying according to rules
2. Fasting
A) Spiritual understanding of fasting
B) Significance of fasting for spiritual life
C) Why do I fast?
D) How do I fast?
E) Advice and guidelines
F) Fasts of the Coptic Church
3. Almsgiving
A) A general word
B) God's commands about giving

- C) How do we present our offerings?
- D) Tithes
- E) Some objections against giving
- F) Examples of generous givers

4. Spiritual Readings

- A) The material of spiritual readings
- B) The purpose of spiritual readings
- C) Benefits of spiritual readings
- D) How to read
- E) Time of reading and its quantity

5. The Holy Bible

- A) God's Book
- B) Blessings of the Bible
- C) The Bible in the lives of the men of God.
- D) Place of the Bible among our readings
- E) Why do we study the Bible?
- F) How do we study the word of God?
- G) Means for studying the Bible
- H) The Coptic Church and the Bible

6. Spiritual Exercises

- A) Benefits of spiritual exercises
- B) Sources of spiritual exercises
- C) Characteristics of spiritual exercises
- D) Duration of spiritual exercises
- E) Exceptions to spiritual exercises
- F) Purposes and incentives of spiritual exercises
- G) A notebook for spiritual exercises
- H) Examples of spiritual exercises

7. Retreat

- A) Introduction
- B) The blessings of retreat
- C) What is retreat?
- D) The servants need for retreat
- E) How to spend the retreat?
- F) Where to spend the retreat?

8. Service

- A) What is service?**
- B) God's servant**
- C) Factors of strength in the life of a servant**
- D) Spiritual leadership**
- E) Avoiding service**
- F) Everyone is invited to serve**
- I) From Jerusalem to the uttermost part of the earth**
- J) A final word**

**All Bible Quotations are from the New King James Version
Except for
the Apocrypha which are from the New English Version**

HOW?

“Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood”

(Mark 12:41-44)

Jesus sat in the temple opposite the treasury where people present their donations and offerings, and watched the proceedings. The unexpected conclusion was contrary to what was anticipated by everybody. A poor widow who did not throw more than two mites, was commended

by the Lord as having put in more than all others who had given to the treasury.

We notice here that the Lord Jesus did not sit opposite the treasury to see how much money people put, but how do they put in their money. People can see and realise the "How much", but God alone knows the "How", and nobody else except Him understands its essence. We mention this point in relation to what we are about to study from the "means of grace" which is the subject of this book.

The Lord Jesus Who sat in the temple opposite the treasury at that time, **is Himself present in your temple, which is created by Him, and sees the treasury of your heart.** He does not care for "How much" as He cares for "How", and He is going to judge the people on the Last Great Day according to "How" and not according to "How much". **He is going to ask me:**

"How did I pray?", and not how many prayers I said, how many psalms I learned, and how many prayers I recited? I might have prayed for a long time, but without spirit, and the Lord repeats His words to me "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63).

How did I pray, and not how many hours I used to pray during the day. I might have stood a long time praying, but my mind was wandering around the world during the prayer. I should "pray with the spirit, also pray with the understanding" (1 Corinthians 14:15).

How did I fast, and not how many days or even how many years I fasted! Did I fast from the food of the body only, or from "every evil and with purity and goodness"? Did I fast the fasting of the body or the fasting of the spirit? How did I eat? Did I eat lavishly or did I eat for the sake of supporting the body and its strength?!

How did I give alms, and not how much money did I give. Did I give to be glorified by people or for the love of God and his poor people who are my brothers? "If a man would give for (instead of) love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised" (Songs 8:7). The two mites of the poor widow had a great value in the hands of the Lord, because of the holy desire which moved her to "put in all that she had, her whole livelihood" (Mark 12:41).

God will ask me "How did you read the Holy Bible?" Not how many chapters or how many books did I read. Did I really feel that this reading was food for my spirit or was it just reading?

God will ask you also how was your heart, was it inflamed for the sake of glorifying His name and the coming of His kingdom, and not how long did you spend in serving him. Did you serve "with eye service, as men-pleasers, or as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God

from the heart" (Ephesians 6:6).

HOW ..., HOW ... AND HOW?!

"How" is the spirit with which things are made and are achieved. It is love without which all we do are vain. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit" (John 4:24) and this spirit is "How".

The widow whose giving was praised by the Lord exceeded all those who gave their offering before her, and surpassed those who paid more than her. "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Matthew 19:30).

Who would imagine or believe that this poor widow put in more than all those who had given to the treasury; and who would believe that the value of the two mites became more than the large amounts of money. Who could believe that, except for the witness of the Lord Himself Who searches the hearts and knows the desires and the intentions?!

Without the "How", the rich can inherit the kingdom with their offerings and money; but they cannot. The Lord Jesus is sitting opposite my heart and sees how do I give alms, how do I pray, how do I fast, how do I struggle against my thoughts, how do I defeat desires, and in general how do I live.

This "How" always pushes me to look towards God. He is the only One Who knows it. Why then do I care for men, and why do I go after pleasing them, as long as they judge according to appearance?!

Talking about **"How"** leads us to talk about another error which we often commit, namely, **"Worshipping men"**, which means that a person aims to please the people in all that he does.

WORSHIPPING MEN

What do you aspire to in your worship and in your pious activities? Do you aim to please men or to please God? Listen my brother to the answer of Apostle Paul **"For I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ"** (Galatians 1:10). The whole worship should be offered to God alone and to nobody else. But if you aim in your worship and in your entire life to please men,

then this is worshipping men. In this case, you are worshipping men, even when you do not realise or admit it.

REVIEW TO SOME OF YOUR ACTIVITIES:

Your Prayers:

What is your feeling when you stand to pray with others? What do you do when you are asked to pray in a certain meeting? Some when they stand for prayer with others and are asked to pray, tend to tidy their prayers, and augment them with verses and quoted terms. Each word of such prayers takes into consideration those who pray with him. This prayer is offered to the people not to God. **Free yourself from worshipping people, and assume that you are alone during prayer even if you are praying with a multitude of people.**

In church also, when you stand to pray, feel that you are alone. Do not worship (bow down) because the people, or most of them do so, or because there are some people present in the church who know you and have a good opinion about your spiritual life in the church.

Many people are not aware of when to stand, when to sit or when to bow down as they imitate each other in the church. There is a group of those people who perform the outward form of worship, in prayers and bowing down, so that they may be seen by others. Such people have a "form of godliness". This is not worship of God, but of men. Do not sit because others sit, and do not stand because others stand.

Feel the reverence of the place and say with Jacob Israel "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Genesis 28:16, 17). **Feel that you are standing in front of Christ and care about nobody else. Christ is in front of you on the altar.**

Your Almsgiving:

Why do you give your offerings in the church during the Eucharist? Do you put money in the plate because the carrier of the plate knows you, so as not to feel embarrassed? Do you put a large amount of money for his sake, or because the person who sits next to you knows you? If you give for their sake, to be admired by them or not to feel embarrassed, then this is worshipping men. Arrange your life in your own way, do not be embarrassed by anybody, and do not behave in any

way to please any man whoever he is. This is fleeing from worshipping men.

Remember the poor widow who gave two mites and remember the praises of the Lord for her deed, because he looked to "how" she used to give. Imitate her and recall the words of the Apostle "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

There are many people who give to the churches and care for nothing except for having their names mentioned to others and being admired by men. Those are miserable people, and let them hear the words of the Lord about them "Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward" (Matthew 6:2).

Your Service:

When you receive some comfort in your ministry, praise God. Do not try to glorify yourself. It happens many times that a minister wants to know the feeling of the people towards his service and what do they say about it and about him. He might utter a negative remark to some of his hearers, such as "I was so tired that day and I felt that the words I said were lukewarm". His hearer may answer him in a courteous way and start to praise him and his service. Then he says "I am weak, ..., this is the work of God". In fact these words pleased him and what happened **was men's worship so let us not lie to ourselves or deceive ourselves.**

FEATURES OF WORSHIPPING MEN IN THE SERVICE:

Consider a minister who preaches in a meeting of farmers, workers or of Sunday School teachers, or who teaches a class of small children. If it happens that an important personality comes to hear the preaching or the teaching of this minister, he may start to raise the level of his talk above the level of those whom he preaches or teaches. In this case he is not considering those he ministers to, as he wants to please this important person who came to listen to him. Is this not a kind of worshipping men? If not, what is it then?!

A deacon who serves in the church during the Eucharist, inside or outside the altar and "glories" with his voice, presents his service to the people to admire and praise him. Poor is this person who leaves Christ Who is present on the altar, misses pleasing Him in order to please the people. The responses of the deacons should be spiritual, with piety and steadfastness.

BLESSINGS OF FLEEING FROM WORSHIPPING MEN:

* **Zacchaeus got rid of worshipping men.** He did not think about what would the people say about him when he climbed up a sycamore tree, like the youngsters. It was a holy desire which got hold of his heart, as he wanted to find out who Jesus was. For this reason, Jesus left the multitude crowding on the two sides of the road and looked up to this man who loved Him and opened his heart to accept Him. Jesus told him "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house" (Luke 19:5). The word "must" means "Zacchaeus, you forced me with your behaviour to stay at your house", and Zacchaeus gained salvation, he and all his household.

* **The sinful woman** in the city, who when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the house of Simon the Pharisee, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil (Luke 7:37, 38). The people who were present were murmuring about her and about the Lord Himself and were saying "This man (Jesus), if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39).

This woman did not care for peoples' praise and did not care about their whispers and their mumbling, and did not delay her repentance until Jesus left this particular house, but forgot all that. She had in front of her a sacred aim which is her repentance and her salvation. For this reason she deserved to hear from the Lord the verdict of her guiltlessness "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48).

* **Why do you care about people that you worship them and enslave yourself to them?** Free yourself from them and feel that you are always standing in front of God. We are His children and from Him we ask for His pleasure and for His best reward.

* **What do I profit if all the world testified to my devout behaviour and my piety.** Will this benefit me?

Let me be with the Lord and let me always repeat the sweet song "My beloved is mine, and I am His" (Songs 2:16).

CHAPTER 1

PRAYER

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you"

(Matthew 7:7)

- A) Prayer: its superiority and power**
- B) Our need of prayer**
- C) Conditions of acceptable prayer**
- D) Secret of answered prayer**

- E) Encouragement for prayer**
- F) Delay in answering prayer**
- G) How do we pray?**
- H) Some problems with prayer**
- I) The unceasing prayer**
- J) Praying according to rule**

A) PRAYER: ITS SUPERIORITY AND POWER

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Do not think dear brother, that this is a simple easy question, and do not imagine that you can answer it with ease and simplicity. The disciples of the Lord themselves used to lack this knowledge, and had to ask Him one day "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). The saints also differ in their answers about the definition of prayer. Each saint and each man of prayer described it in a particular way, not as he heard or as he read about it, but as he himself experienced it in his holy life with God. One says **it is the key to heaven, healing for the sick, guardian for the healthy. Another says it is a sharp weapon, a mighty helper, and an influential intercessor. A third describes it as a safe haven, valuable treasure and the work of spiritual people.**

St. John Chrysostom said "Prayer is a great weapon, an endless treasure, richness which never falls, quiet haven, ... It is the source and basis of countless blessings. It is strong, even stronger than strength itself".

St. Basil the Great defines prayer as "Being attached to God in all moments and situations of life. Then life becomes one prayer, without interruption or disturbance".

St. Augustine defines prayer by saying "It is the key of heaven, by its power you can do everything. It is the shield of our lives, source of all virtues, the ladder upon which you rise to God, the work of the angels, and the basis of faith".

St. Isaac, who was great among the learned people, defines prayer according to his experience as "Prayer is the continuous remembering of God in the heart of His fearers. It is the sailing of our minds to God. It empties the conscience from all present matters, is a heart whose sight is completely fixed on the longing for the coming hope. Prayer is the pulse of the live will by God, dead to the life of the flesh. Real prayer and death to the world are the same. That is, denying one of himself is being regular in prayer. **Prayer is the cry of the mind, which calls without will from the anguish in the heart**".

Prayer is a means for man to come close to God. It is the essence of religion, even its heart, as there is no religion without prayer. It is the oldest known statute and most widely spread. Many believe that it is older than the times of sacrifices, because it is the basis of the sacrifices in all religions. From early centuries, people started to "call the name of God".

Prayer is an inborn instinct, and it is among the most discreet actions and psychological states, which is difficult for a person to describe well. It challenges every description and every expression, and it is more profound than any language man speaks.

Prayer is the continuous beating of the heart, the words on our lips, the thoughts of our minds, the deeds of our lives. It is the arrival of our spirit to the Source of Grace, like a container from which we receive the substance of life and peace.

We do not overstate in what we have said about prayer. It is enough that the Lord Jesus gave it all power and might to function "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22). For this Apostle Paul attracts the attention of the believers to it, its importance and its priority and says "Therefore **I exhort first of all** that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, ... **For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior**" (1 Timothy 2:1-3). "**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication,** with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

SUPERIORITY OF PRAYER:

We have seen how "prayer avails much" (James 5:16). No wonder then that **the work of prayer is superior and distinguished over any other work. Because of the superiority of prayer, the Lord appointed the angels to present it to Him.** "Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And he was given much incense, **that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne**" (Revelation 8:3, 4).

The prayer which is practised well pleases God much, and delights the angels and the heavenly hosts. **John in his revelation expressed** that when he was talking about the twenty-four priests, by saying "Each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Revelation 5:8). **St. John Chrysostom says** "Prayer was described as incense because of its good smell and because it purifies the soul from the rot of sin". **The angel said to Tobit** "When you and Sarah prayed, **it was I who brought your prayers into the glorious presence of the Lord**" (Tobit 12:12).

St. Isaac said "Personal bargaining with God is the work of the heavenly orders, and was presented to the people by the Son of God who descended to our world and showed us the work of the unseen hosts. This is the economy which is bound to be for all people in the general resurrection. Prayer is a deed elevated above all virtues, and a virtue more honorable than all deeds. It is the work of the saints the children of light, the work of Mikhail and Gabriel".

St. John Chrysostom said "When you pray, do you not speak with God? Is there a privilege like this?"

ITS SUPERIORITY:

SOME SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS

St. John Chrysostom said 'Think' in the high level of joy you reach by prayer and of the honor of the glory related to it. **With it you converse with the Almighty and recollect with Christ.** With it you request all what you desire. No tongue can describe the great honor of visiting with God, and the great benefit of that. In the world, those who live with the wise and the learned become wise and clever by pursuing them, and a person becomes virtuous by dealing with virtuous people. How much benefit we receive by being regular in visiting God!! **The Psalmist said "They looked to Him and were radiant"** (Psalm 34:5).

He also said "**There is nothing stronger than prayer. There is nothing which is equivalent to it.** A man goes to speak with the king in a private matter in the presence of all the

members of the army, officers and leaders of different high ranks. They all look at him with respect and regard. This is what happens to those who pray. Imagine a person who comes in with courage and determination in the presence of angels, the Seraphim, the Cherubim, and all the unseen hosts, and approaches the King of all these forces and speaks with Him. What an honor!!".

He also said "Prayer resembles a source of water in the centre of a garden. Anything without it is dry and fruitless, and everything with it is moist, fruitful and bright. Prayer keeps all the holy sprouts in a state of continuous growth, ... I mean the virtues".

If prayer has this great honor and endless power, how much should we thank God for that! **If God for example made a particular appointment - once a month - to answer everyone who has a request, is this not considered a immense grace, which we should thank God for?!** If a worldly king did something like that with his people, do they not count that as a great gesture? If this is so, how much should we consider the grace presented to us by God - not once a month only, but every day and every moment!! **The Prophet David said: "Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice. He has redeemed my soul in peace"** (Psalm 55:17, 18).

There is another prospect to the superiority of the work of prayer, which we realise from what St. John Cassian said: "Prayer is the support of the three duties laid upon the Christian person. The first is his relation to God, the second to himself and the third to the relative. Our duty towards God is shown by prayer, as we call upon His name and show our love, faithfulness to Him, and our faith in Him as we confess Him as the source of all blessings. As for our duty towards ourselves, by prayer we search ourselves and measure our spiritual lives and endeavour to be worthy of the sonship of God. Our duty towards the relative is perceived by asking and demanding for him what we ask for ourselves".

B) OUR NEED TO PRAY

How much does a person need to pray for both his spiritual and physical needs. The relation between prayer and the life of the spirit is very strong and is inseparable. The life of the spirit requires - as a vital matter - the life of continuous prayer. I am under the leadership of the Spirit, constantly, if I live the life of continuous prayer.

Without prayer the spiritual life is not straightened. In prayer there is healing of all our ills. It is a faithful means for securing ourselves in virtue. It is everything in the life of a true believer because it is the fellowship with his Creator. If we are branches in the True Vine, we make sure always to receive the necessary sap from the source, otherwise we wither and fall.

This is what we receive by prayer "**The grace of abiding in God**". **Prayer is a strong tie which binds us to God, pulls us to heaven, and spares us the evil of falling and deviating. It saves us from all difficulties and troubles. Even if we encounter some lukewarmness in prayer, there is no cure for this state except by prayer itself!!** Prayer for the spiritual life is like the hand for the body. The hand is a general member for the whole body, and also it is a special tool for itself by which it serves itself. If the hand is sick, the hand treats itself, if it is dirty, the hand washes itself and if it feels cold, the hand makes itself warm. In total, the hand does everything, and prayer is the same.

There is a strong resemblance between breathing and the necessity of prayer. Breathing is necessary for the physical life. Likewise, prayer is necessary for the growth of the spiritual life. Physical death is certain if we stop breathing and if we stop praying, spiritual death will follow. Breathing is the expansion and contraction of the lungs for air necessary for life to enter our bodies, and prayer brings us the love of God necessary for our spiritual being.

There are differences - no doubt - between breathing and prayer. Breathing is a natural mechanical process done without awareness, and we can hardly stop it even if we try. But prayer - on the other hand - requires a will and an effort. It is easier to breathe than not to breathe, yet it is easier not to pray than to pray. We have to know how to pray, stage by stage, and press ourselves for that.

The wings of a bird want to fly, the fins of a fish like water. Likewise, the instinct of the heart aims towards God. This is well expressed by a contemporary person who said "My heart is greatly in need of You God, my heart is greatly in need of You! There is no member in my being which needs You like my heart. Everything in me except my heart - may be satisfied with Your gifts: daily bread satisfies my hunger, earthly water quenches my thirst, the heat of the fire drives away my feeling of cold, outer rest gets rid of my fatigue. Yet no external means is able to purify my heart. This world does not take my heart into account. It takes my eyes and my ears into account, but it does not account for my heart".

We may realise our need of prayer from the following points:

1 - IT IS THE SECRET OF OUR VICTORY:

There is no doubt that prayer is the secret of victory. Nobody dares to say he is not in need of prayer. He who dares to say that, hints inclusively that he is not in need of God Himself and of His help! **St. John Chrysostom said "If you notice somebody who does not like to pray, know in this case that there is nothing good at all in him. He who does not pray to God is dead and there is no life in him".**

In His eternal plan, what God intended to offer to the souls, He planned to offer through their prayers "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). **This is like the ladder which Jacob saw in his dream which was set up**

on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending it (Genesis 28:12). That is in order to present our requests to God, and to bring back His blessings to us.

How weak is Man and how many are his physical and spiritual needs. So many are his spiritual enemies!! Because of that, it is very fitting for you to always repeat the words of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, which he said when the people of Moab with the people of Ammon came to battle against him "O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, **but our eyes are upon You**" (2 Chronicles 20:12).

The Lord Jesus revealed to us the secret of victory over our spiritual enemies when He said "This kind (the devil) can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29). The saintly fathers experienced prayer in this sense, which made one of them say "**There is nothing fearful for the devil more than seeing a man praying**".

It was mentioned once about St. Tadros the Egyptian that while he was in his room in the Eskeit desert, a devil came and tried to enter the room, but he could not because the saint tied him down outside the room by prayer. Another devil came and tried to enter the room, but again the saint tied him down by prayer. A third devil came and found the two first ones tied down outside the room, and asked them for the reason. They replied that there is someone inside the room praying, preventing them from entering. This third devil became angry and tried to push his way into the room, but was also tied down by the saint's prayer. The devils were frustrated and begged the saint to let them loose. The saint untied them and told them to go away with shame, and they went away with great shame.

After St. Paul mentioned a number of different spiritual weapons (Ephesians 6:13-17), he added this last phrase "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18). That is, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, are not enough without prayer.

There are many sayings by the saintly fathers in this regard. St. Augustine says "None of the elected can gain his own salvation without God's help, and nobody deserves this help except by prayer". St. John El-Dargy who is known for his virtues says "The secret of continuous grace and virtue is continuous prayer. He who leans on the stick of prayer, his feet do not slip. Even if his feet slip he does not completely fall, because prayer is a help to him who walks in the road of piety".

One father said "Prayer is the means of our spiritual growth. God planned to increase our human nature by marriage, and the land becomes fertile by planting it. Likewise, the economy of His Divine Care plans that the souls receive many graces by prayer. For this reason, the Lord Jesus said in the Holy Bible "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7)".

St. Augustine calls it "the key of heaven". Truly, it is a great key which opens all the doors of heaven and all the safes of all heavenly treasures. By prayer, the door of repentance opens for us and we are forgiven. In this St. Isaac says "He who is careless in prayer, and thinks that he has another door for repentance, is deceived by the devil".

By prayer, the fear of God stays in our hearts - and "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10) - and how true what one of the fathers said "Prayer, the mother of virtues cry out "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Psalm 34:11)".

Finally, prayer saves us in the Great Day of Judgement. The Lord Jesus said "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. **Watch therefore, and pray** always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:34-36).

2 - A MEANS FOR RECEIVING BLESSINGS:

In the forefront of the blessings of prayer are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, whether in consecrating the sacraments in the church or in our own lives. The Lord Jesus said "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father **give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!**" (Luke 11:13). When the disciples prayed after they were threatened by the high priests because they healed the lame man "the place where they were assembled together was shaken; **and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit,** and they spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

Truly, there is a strong relation between the Holy Spirit and prayer. The Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of Prayer". It was called that in (Zechariah 12:10) "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem **the Spirit of grace and supplication;** then they will look on Me ...". Also in the Epistles of St. Paul, twice it was mentioned in relation to prayer "you received

the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father"" (Romans 8:15), and "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"" (Galatians 4:6). The Lord Jesus used the same words "Abba, Father!" in His farewell prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36).

In the two previous verses of St. Paul we read the word "cry out" in one verse and the word "crying out" in the other verse. That is, it is the Holy Spirit Himself who cries out, which without doubt, shows the amount of help which God gives to man in prayer!!

The matter may become lucid when we meditate on the words of Apostle Paul which he wrote in his Epistle to the Romans "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. **For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered.** Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26, 27). It is clear from the words of the Apostle that if we are left to ourselves, we do not know how to pray, but the Spirit of God interferes and joins us in our weaknesses "and makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered".

Prayer makes us ready to receive many spiritual blessings. We here mention some of them from the sayings of St. Isaac El-Soriany:

* **"A person who prays, not only he belittles spiritual wars, but also he scorns the body which is the source of warfare".**

* **"By prayer, the work of repentance is completed,** which is the feeling of sadness and the sorrow of the soul. By it also the soul moves in a way far above the motion of the body and the self, which the fathers call the spiritual economy".

* By continuing steadfastly in prayer, the feeling of shyness and decency in front of God grows and increases in the person who prays. **Moreover, from continuously looking to and meeting God in prayer, pains do not affect him easily.**

* **"If continuous meditation unites with pure prayer, the words of the Lord "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20) are fulfilled. And the three mean the soul, body and spirit, or the mind, continuous meditation and pure prayer".**

* **"The heat of prayer and continuous meditation burn the pains and the thoughts like fire does".**

* Give yourself to the work of prayer, and you will hear what you cannot hear from anybody, as nobody by himself is qualified to hear it!!

* Familiarity with Almighty God is formed from continuous bargaining with and continuous talking to God in prayer".

* **St. Isaac explains that by prayer we obtain purity by which we see God.** He says "Not by much knowledge and different books we obtain or find purity, but by caring for prayer".

* **Finally this saint explains to us that by prayer we arrive to the Divine Love which is the highest virtues and levels** "The level of Divine Love is superior to prayer, yet without supplication, prayer and continuous sorrowful tears with watching and asceticism, we do not obtain this Love".

We have seen that prayer qualifies us for the mercy, help and grace of God. Our teacher St. Paul said "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, **that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need**" (Hebrews 4:16). How much man is in need of the mercy and grace of God. All the treasures of mercy and grace are stored for him who asks "**Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full**" (John 6:24). Perhaps this last verse explains to us also **that prayer is the road to complete joy - not only because by it we get all we ask for, but what is more profound and beautiful is that prayer makes God a touched reality. When we ask God for a specific thing and He offers it to us, God becomes for us not an imaginary idea, but a strong live reality.**

There is no joy in heaven or on earth which equals the joy of the fellowship with God. This joy of prayer is the joy which the Psalmist spoke about as a blessing "in Your presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11).

There is not enough space for us to mention in detail all the blessings which we receive by prayer. The truth is that God made prayer a means by which we gain all His graces and blessings. Apostle James explains that adequately by saying "**Yet you do not have because you do not ask**" (James 4:2). Hence if we review the weak points in our spiritual lives, the apparent failure and the lukewarmness in the Church ministry in general, and tried to understand their causes, we find that the answer to all that is in the last words of the Apostle "**Yet you do not have because you do not ask**".

3 - THE LORD JESUS AS AN EXAMPLE:

There is no stronger proof for the necessity of prayer for man, and his real need of it, than the fact that it was an integral part of the life of the Lord Jesus when He was in the flesh. The Scholar Tertelian said "What is more than the fact that the Lord Himself prayed, to let realise the importance of prayer!!". He was not in need of prayer because all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), but He left us an example, that we should follow in His steps (1 Peter 2:21).

When Jesus was baptized "He prayed" and the heavens were opened and the Spirit of God descended like a dove and alighted upon Him (Matthew 3:16). **After Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law from the fever,** He prayed "in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; **and there He prayed"** (Mark 1:35). **Before He chose His twelve disciples** "He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12).

In the event of Transfiguration "He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening" (Luke 9:28, 29)!! We also read the Great Farewell Prayer of the Lord Jesus which is cited in (John Chapter 17), in which He prayed for Himself, for His Disciples and for all who believe in Him by their words.

4 - THE APOSTLES THEMSELVES AS EXAMPLES:

The Apostles - Disciples of the Lord - Leaders of the First Church, made prayer number one in their lives. When they wanted to choose a disciple to replace Judas the betrayer, they prayed and the lot fell on Matthias (Acts 1:24-26). **After the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them on the day of Pentecost,** the writer of the book of Acts describes them as continuing steadfastly in prayer (Acts 2:42). **After the event of healing the person who was lame from birth,** and the threats of the high priest family to them, they assembled together and "they raised their voice to God with one accord ... " (Acts 4:24), "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

When their responsibilities increased, and they thought of appointing seven deacons to help them, their logic was: "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; **but we will give ourselves**

continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2-4).

And when Herod apprehended St. Peter and put him in prison, intending to kill him, the writer of the book of Acts says "Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the Church" (Acts 12:5). Then when Peter was delivered by an angel and came to the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, "there were many gathered together **praying**" (Acts 12:12).

We can easily now understand the secret behind the power of the first Church. The reason is that she was "a Church of prayer".

If we take St. Paul as a model for the Disciples, we find his Epistles full of the riches of reverence, depth of worship, supplications, and fullness of thanksgivings. The Epistles of this Apostle signify the richness of his spiritual life, in a pious worshipping language, which elevates the soul to the presence of God. Without intension, St. Paul drew a picture in his Epistles, of himself in its different stages, from crossing the pitch darkness of night, to the arrival to daylight, and from leaving the prison of sin to the enjoyment of the glories of the children of God. **He has expressed all that with inmost sighs and strong supplications, which overflow in his Epistles.**

St. Paul sailed in the high sky of prayer; he received guided revelations from God about His will towards him (Galatians 1:12, 2:2). He received from God answers to his prayers "For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar"; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you" (Acts 27:23, 24). No wonder that he continued "Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me" (Acts 27:25).

He who studies the life of this Apostle realises that he was in continuous fellowship with God, feeling his constant presence with the Almighty. When he commanded the believers in Thessalonica saying "Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), he was transmitting his own life. **We have no doubt that the spiritual life of Paul is explained by this short verse which was written in the dawn of his new life, and which was revealed to Ananias in Damascus; "he is praying"** (Acts 9:11).

Even in the darkest times in his life, Paul was praying. When he was imprisoned in Philippi with Silas, he was put into the inner prison and his feet were fastened in the stocks, and everybody was asleep, but at midnight Paul was praying and singing hymns to God. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed (Acts 16:24-26)!!

Paul asked for himself, prayed for others and gave supplications for the Churches he founded, appeals for the tribes of Israel and intercessions for the whole of the human race.

We are able to appreciate the inflamed spirit of prayer which was working in the soul of this missionary saint, "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request ..." (Romans 1:9, 10). "Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:15, 16)... "For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1:9)... "Night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?" (1 Thessalonians 3:10)... "I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day" (2 Timothy 1:3).

POWER OF PRAYER

Without doubt, prayer has power. The most spiritual people, the strongest in their faith, the early fathers, the prophets and the Disciples, ..., all of them found power in prayer.

Communicating with God and the unseen world, is not only a proven reality for those who pray, but also is accompanied always with active power which they feel "But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

When an electric circuit between two opposite poles is closed, electricity flows, lamps are lit and machines work. Likewise, when man communicates with God in true prayer, he is enlightened and receives mighty power with which he is able to do everything, the works that Jesus did; and greater works than these he will do (John 14:12).

When man gets hold of God by prayer, God gets hold of man ... "Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and billows have gone over me" (Psalm 42:7). The depth of our poverty calls forth the depth of the mercies of God. We know the power of prayer from its nature, from our experiences and from the assurance of the Word of God, whether in the form of a command, a promise or as an example.

In the past God spoke to Prophet Moses concerning the poor and said "And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am gracious" (Exodus 22:27). God gave Solomon this great

promise after he built the temple **"I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice ... if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place"** (2 Chronicles 7:12-15).

The Book of Psalms is full of Divine Promises which confirm to us that prayers are answered and they have power: "He does not forget the cry of the humble" (Psalm 9:12), "For the Lord is righteous, he loves righteousness; his countenance beholds the upright" (Psalm 11:7), "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry (Psalm 34:15), "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4), "When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me" (Psalm 56:9), "He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved" (Psalm 62:2).

"My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God" (Psalm 62:5-7), "Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; for You render to each one according to his work" (Psalm 62:12), "For the Lord hears the poor, and does not despise His prisoners" (Psalm 69:33), "Sing aloud to God our strength; make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob" (Psalm 81:1), "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You" (Psalm 86:5).

"He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him" (Psalm 91:15), "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth" (Psalm 145:18) ... "He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, and shall not despise their prayer. This will be written for the generation to come, that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord. For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven the Lord viewed the earth, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to release those appointed to death" (Psalm 102:17-20).

He who reads the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Zephaniah, and Zechariah, finds that all of them are full of great and valuable promises for those who pray.

Add to the above that the door which was partially opened in the Old Testament, is now wide open in the New Testament, and offers us exceeding enjoyment of the promises of our Great God, which He puts in the hands of everybody who prays:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be

opened" (Matthew 7:7, 8). The Lord of Glory continues with a definite assurance by saying "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 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 7:9-11)...

"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:19)... "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22)... "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you" (John 16:23).

For this reason, believers in all times come boldly to the Throne of Grace and they obtain mercy, and find grace in help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16)... , they pray for themselves, for one another and for the Church, because they know that "the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16)... How many miracles happened and still happen by prayer. We have from the many answered prayers in the Holy Bible more convincing proofs than the promises which we have referred to. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, David, Elijah, Elisha, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Manasseh, Daniel, Jeremiah, ..., all of them witnessed by their lives and by their answered prayers to the power of prayer.

C) CONDITIONS OF ACCEPTABLE PRAYER

There are some essential points concerning prayer and the person who prays for prayer to be acceptable; prayer should be:

1 - FROM A PURE HEART:

The pure heart is a temple for God and a dwelling for the Holy Trinity, and where God is, there exists everything which the believer needs. **There are hindrances to prayer, the matter which St. Peter referred to by saying "That your prayers may not be hindered"** (1 Peter 3:7). **Perhaps the strongest hindrances to prayer are the desires entrenched in the heart. St. Nelles of Sinai said "A tied person cannot run, and the mind attached to desires does not find a place for a spiritual prayer. Moreover, he is always caught and pulled here and there by lustful thoughts".**

How true is the expression of the Prophet Isaiah "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). The Divine Revelation expressed that in different words on the tongue of the Prophet Ezekiel saying "Son of man, these men **have set up their idols in their hearts**, ... Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?" (Ezekiel 14:3). How precise is the Divine Revelation in this last verse **"Have set up their idols in their hearts"!!!, and how numerous are the desires which have got hold on our hearts by our wills, which the Divine Revelation calls the "Idols".**

The pure heart is not only the one purified from sin, but also which is not divided on itself. We mean the heart which wavers between the love of the world and the love of God. This is what God meant and emphasized in His saying "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). David the Great said "With my whole heart I have sought You" (Psalm 119:10).

How numerous are the blessings which we receive by prayer uttered from a pure heart. **St. Isaac said "The altar upon which the sacraments are offered has to be designated and dedicated, for the offerings to become the living sacrifice of the Flesh and Blood of our Lord, not simple bread and unacceptable sacrifice, even if the High priest offers many prayers on it. This is like the altar of the inner heart, which is not purified and not complemented by the light of the lack of pains (sins), and sanctified by the presence of the Holy Spirit".**

2 - ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD:

John the beloved of the Lord Jesus said **"If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us"** (1 John 5:14). That is, everything we ask should be according to His perfect love and

wisdom. God Who commands us to ask and Who promises us that he answers, does not forsake His wisdom because of our ignorance, in case we ask something which is not useful for us for example!! "For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought" (Romans 8:26). It happens sometimes that we ask and pray with urgency and fervour for something, as the matter appears clear in our eyes and we seem justified in asking for it, but God does not answer us. Yet later on, we find that it was better that God denied us such requests.

In this case we resemble a young boy who cries with tears asking for a harmful thing, such as a pointed edged piece of metal whose bright colour attracted him. But no doubt, it is the love of his father which denies him this piece of metal. **St. John Chrysostom said** "God knows exactly the time in which if He gives us something, it will be most useful for us. The child cries, protests and gets angry to get hold of a knife, and the love of the parents refuse giving it to him. This is how God deals with us. He gives us better than we ask for".

There is another matter which St. Paul attracts our attention to, concerning this point, which shows our ignorance as how to pray. He assures us that in our weakness and our inability to see properly, we get the help of the Holy Spirit Who "intercedes for the saints" - but even the Holy Spirit Who is God Himself, makes this intercession - as the Apostle explains - according to the will of God "Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because **He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God**" (Romans 8:27).

Someone may say why do I pray then as long as I do not know what is the will of God. Let me leave the matter to God Who is perfect in goodness and wisdom, and Who knows my needs. But the Lord Jesus in **His parable about the persistent widow and the unjust city judge** (Luke 18:1-8), taught us to be persistent in prayer, and "**that men always ought to pray and not lose heart**" (Luke 18:1). The Lord Jesus in His prayer in the Garden in the night of His suffering, asked His Father three times to take this cup away from Him; but He added by saying "Nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Let us then ask whatever we want from God, beseeched by the same wish "Nevertheless not my will, but Yours, be done". Let us pray from a heart full of the spirit of submission, which is what the Lord taught us in the Lord's prayer when we say "**Your will be done**" (Luke 11:2).

3 - IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS:

In His last speech in the Upper Room, the Lord Jesus - as recorded by St. John the Evangelist - commanded His Disciples, time and again, in remarkable repetition, to always in

their prayers ask "in His name", and this is how their prayers are answered. Five times, the Lord requested His disciples to present their prayers in His name:

"And whatever **you ask in My name**, that I will do", ... **"If you ask anything in My name**, I will do it" (John 14:13, 14)... **"That whatever you ask the Father in My name** He may give you" (John 15:16)... **"Until now you have asked nothing in My name**. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24)... **"In that day you will ask in My name"** (John 16:26).

Not only the asking is presented in "His Blessed Name", but the answer of the request also, is given in the power of His Holy Name. We notice that the Lord Jesus said to His Disciples **"In that day"** (John 16:23). This phrase related to His previous speech (John 16:7-16), in which He spoke about His promise of sending the Holy Spirit and about the Spirit's work. Thus when Jesus said **"In that day"**, He meant the time when the Holy Spirit would have descended on the believers, and not before "that day", because without the Spirit of God we can do nothing. In the beginning, everything was waiting for the day of Pentecost, and now also everything depends on the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Everything depends on the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, we do not even have the strength to confess His Lordship "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Yet what is the meaning of praying in the name of Jesus, and why should I present my prayers in His Name?

It is known that man was in a state of enmity with God before the Salvation which was completed by Christ. Then he was reconciled to God through the death of His Son (Romans 5:10). However, this reconciliation collapses when he commits sin which offends God, as the Apostle says "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Thus the peace and the atmosphere of this reconciliation is upset by Man's sins. A remote analogy would be, a man who attempts to withdraw some money from his account in a bank, when his account is empty. The employee of the bank will certainly refuse to give him any money. But if he presents a signed cheque of a person who has an account with positive balance in the bank, he will be able to cash this cheque. **Likewise, we do not deserve anything from our Heavenly Father, but we have immense merits in His Son Jesus Christ our Lord "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus"** (Hebrew 10:19).

For this reason the Church presents all her petitions in this way "In Jesus Christ our Lord", "Through the grace, compassion and the love of mankind of Your Only Begotten Son our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ ...". Indeed - when we do that - we remind God of His love, mercy, salvation and His death on our behalf which was completed by Christ and by Him. The Lord Jesus granted us to use His name, and to present our petitions to the

Heavenly Father in His name in order to receive through Him and from Him all our needs.

4 - IN COMPLETE OBEDIENCE:

The same Apostle John who spoke about the promises of God in answering our requests if they are according to His will, and are presented in His name, he notifies us about another condition which makes our prayers acceptable. He says **"Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight"** (1 John 3:22). He explains to us the secret behind answering our prayers - that we live the life of believing obedience, "because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight".

Let us contemplate in the depth and strength of these blessed words **"Whatever we ask we receive from Him"**. There is neither a short nor a long prayer which is not capable of reaching its destination. The secret lies behind the words of the Apostle "Because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight".

We often ask: why do we not receive what we ask for in prayer? Why do we not say with the Apostle "Whatever we ask we receive from Him"? The reason is not that John was an Apostle and we are mere ordinary believers, but that John was able to keep God's commandment and do what pleases Him. Can we do likewise? The Lord Jesus said "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). How beautiful are the words which the Divine Revelation uttered on the tongue of Apostle Paul about the Lord Jesus "Then I said, Behold, I have come - in the volume of the book it is written of Me - to do Your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7).

5 - WITH COMPLETE FAITH:

Apostle James said "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. **But let him ask in faith, with no doubting**, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1:5-7). These words of the Apostle are practical explanation to the words of the Lord "For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be removed and be cast into the sea", and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, **whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will**

have them" (Mark 11:23, 24).

This is what St. Paul meant in his Epistle to the Hebrews "**Let us therefore come boldly** to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16), and this boldness which the Apostle sets as essential is faith itself (Hebrews 11:1).

Prayer without faith is powerless, as faith is among the bases which the Lord laid down - upon which - we present our petitions to Him. Faith is not the greatest virtue, as it is said "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2). Yet if faith is not the greatest virtue, it is the first virtue. Faith without love is nothing, and love without faith is impossible, because I cannot love who I do not trust (who I do not have faith in).

It is not necessary when we ask in faith, that we oblige God to answer our prayer. The whole of the Holy Bible should be understood in one accord. When we do not receive what we ask for, we should wait until God's plan is revealed. It is not for us "to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7), and if our faith is a healthy faith, it will accompany patience with it.

Much was written about faith "for whatever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). "But without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6). **The Lord gave faith all the power to work and to receive ... and prayer has no power without faith.** Imagine with me that you went to a great person to ask him for something and you feel in your heart that this person is not able to do this job for you. Do you not consider this an insult to him? **When you want to know if your prayer is answered or not, ask your heart, as it is written "May He grant you according to your heart's desire, and fulfil all your purpose"** (Psalm 20:4).

St. John El-Dargy says "Faith is the wing of prayer. Without it prayer returns back to the person's bosom". John Cassian said "He is absolutely sure that his prayer is not answered!! Who is this miserable person? He is who prays and does not believe that he will receive an answer".

St. Augustine after reviewing the parable of the persistent widow and the unjust city judge, comments on the words of the Lord "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) and says:

"If faith dies, the power of prayer stops, because who is he who prays to whom he does not believe in?" For this the Apostle said "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved"

(Romans 10:13), and to explain that faith is the source of prayer he continues "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" (Romans 10:14). Hence we have to believe in order to pray, and in order for this faith not to perish, we have to pray. Faith generates prayer and the generation of prayer gives force - even to faith itself. Again in order that faith avoids temptations, the Lord said "Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation" (Luke 22:46). What is entering into temptation except keeping afar from faith!! For this, the Lord said "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail" (Luke 22:31, 32).

6 - WITH THANKSGIVINGS:

The Lord had repeated the command of thanksgiving many times in the Holy Bible; it is mentioned countless times in the Old Testament. Even among Temple presentations which a Jewish person should offer was the "Sacrifice of Thanksgiving". This matter is reiterated again in the New Testament.

God is saddened from the "lack of thanking Him", which is the sin of many. When the Lord cleansed the ten lepers, and only one of them came to thank Him, He said sorrowfully "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?" (Luke 17:17). How many times God looks sadly to us because of our lack of thanking Him for His abundant blessings.

The writings of Apostle Paul show a spirit of continuous thanksgivings, which he was careful to transmit to the believers. He commanded the believers of Ephesus to "**giving thanks always for all things**" (Ephesians 5:20). After that he speaks about the definite will of God "**In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you**" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). **He said to the Colossians that if they were "rooted and built up in Him" and "established in the faith", they have to be "abounding in it with thanksgiving"** (Colossians 2:7).

Paul explains to us that thanksgiving is among the supporter of prayer and he says in his Epistle to the people of Colossi "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2). He also wrote to the Philippians saying "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything **by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving**, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). On that depends a valuable promise "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

How little we thank God for His countless goodness, and how much we thank each other

for services we do one to the other. With different methods and ways we express our thanks and gratitude to people. At the same time we appear ungrateful and unappreciative to the Lord Who fills us from His blessings. It is good to thank our brethren, and even better to thank the First and the Greater Giver.

Our Church teaches us a lesson in the necessity and the spirit of thanksgiving. With the "Prayer of Thanksgiving", the Church begins all her worship and prayers; in raising of incense, liturgies, "Candel prayers", commemorations, weddings, funerals, and in baptism services. In all that she starts by the prayer of thanksgiving.

How deep are its words and expressions "Let us give thanks to the beneficent and merciful God, ..., for He has protected, aided, kept and accepted us, had compassion upon us, supported us and brought us to this hour, ..., we thank You on every occasion, in every condition and for all things ...".

Thanking God implies confessing His love, care, mercy and wisdom, and a declaration of submitting the life to Him. St. Nelles of Sinai says **"Prayer is an expression of joy and thanksgiving"**.

Thus let us have the spirit of thanksgiving in general, not only for our own sake, but also for the sake of everything else. Commanding his disciple Timothy, our teacher St. Paul says "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, **and giving of thanks be made for all men, ... For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior**" (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

Yet we should not forget to give special thanks to God for every goodness He does to us. When we stand to pray, let us not offer God a general thanksgiving, but rather enumerate our thanksgivings according to His numerous goodness to us. **Our continuous thanksgiving to God, urges Him to give us more. St. Isaac said "There is no giving without extra giving, except that which lacks thanksgiving"**.

Let not our thanksgivings be limited to the things we asked from God and was answered, but also to the matters which we asked for and was not answered. In this case we thank God for His wisdom. St. John Chrysostom said "If we get or not get what we asked for, we should carry on praying. Let us thank - not only when we take, but also when we do not take, because we do not know what is good for us, but God knows. Therefore we should consider taking and the lack of taking as equal gifts and thank God for this and for that".

All capable men of prayer, in both the Holy Bible and in Church history, were men who gave themselves to thanksgiving and to giving glory God. **Among them is David the Great whose Psalms overflow with the spirit of thanksgivings to God...** "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all

that is within me, bless His holy name!" (Psalm 103:1), "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1), "I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever" (Psalm 145:1, 2).

7 - WITH FORGIVENESS:

In the model prayer which the Lord gave to His Disciples, He explained that it is not permitted for us to ask forgiveness of our trespasses from God, without asking Him at the same time to forgive us in the same way and same degree by which we forgive those who trespassed against us. In the "Sermon on the Mount" He taught us to pray like that "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

After this model prayer He continued teaching us by saying "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14, 15). In order that no confusion occurs, the Lord Jesus revisited this subject in His last week on earth. After He spoke about prayer, He told His Disciples "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. **But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses**" (Mark 11:25, 26).

St. Nelles of Sinai said "Leave your gift there before the altar - says the Lord - and go and reconcile to your brother" (Matthew 5:24). After that, when you return you will pray without trouble, because hatred darkens man's mind and hides his prayer in the dark. Those who pray with sadness and hatred in themselves resemble he who pours water in a punctured bucket".

He also said "Let him who is in debt by ten thousand Dinaries teach you that if you do not forgive him who is in debt to you, your Lord will not forgive you. Because it is said "And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him"" (Matthew 18:34).

D) SECRET OF ANSWERED PRAYER

We spoke earlier about "Conditions of Acceptable Prayer", and mentioned some basic points for answered prayers. We wish here **to add some other points which multiply the power of prayer and speed its answering.**

(First) HUMILITY:

Humility of man in front of God multiplies the power of prayer, gives it closeness to Him and hastens its answer. Humility may be in any of its forms; lowliness of the heart or thought, fasting and what accompanies it from ascetic deeds, prostration, or tears. **Humility is not only a powerful means for aspiring God's pleasure but the Almighty also calls us to it on the tongue of the Prophet Joel** "Now, therefore, says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning". So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm"" (Joel 2:12, 13).

(A) CONTRITION:

This was clear in the personality of Daniel as it was the reason for answering his request. When he was praying for Jerusalem and for the people in captivity, Daniel says about himself **"Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.** And I prayed to the Lord my God, and made confession, and said, O Lord, great and awesome God, ... we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments... O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face... O Lord to us belongs shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You... O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us. Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications,... for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act!" (Daniel 9:3-19).

Daniel continued in his humility and mourned for three weeks in which he did not eat appetizing food. Meat nor wine did not enter his mouth, and he did not anoint himself, until angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him **"Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words"** (Daniel 10:12).

Ahab was an evil king as the Bible depicts him "But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord" (1 Kings 21:25). Yet as soon as he heard the words of the Prophet Elijah concerning what will happen to him and his household from disasters "he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning" (1 Kings 21:27). Then the Lord told Elijah "See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days; but in the days of his son..." (1 Kings 21:29). Hence we see the result of contrition and humility in prayer.

The saints spoke much about this matter. St. John Chrysostom said "The tax collector cried with a lowly and contrite heart saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Luke 18:13) and he went down from the presence of God justified rather than the Pharisee, and here the contrite prayer supersedes over the haughty deed! The Pharisee showed his piety by careful fasting and regular tithes, and the tax collector presented a broken heart without deeds. The Lord does not listen to words only, but perceives the feelings which form the words".

St. Isaac said "The grace of God stands always far away and watches man during prayer. If lowly thoughts move in him, at once it comes to him with countless helps. This occurs at the time of prayer more than any other time. Hence the devil wages attacks against man so that he does not come near God by his thoughts". The Lord said on the tongue of the Prophet Isaiah "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2).

Contrition in front of God in prayer does not mean repeating the familiar phrases "we are sinners and do not deserve God's grace ..." but contrition is feeling it in our inner selves ... It is to realise our sins, insults and trespasses against our Holy God, and relate all what is good in us to Him. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of light" (James 1:17). When we approach God in prayer we should fill our hearts and thoughts with such feelings. **St. Isaac says** "When you stand to pray in front of God, become like an ant in your thoughts, and like the flies on earth. Be like a talking child of God in order to be worthy of the fatherly care which is from the fathers to the male children ...".

(B) FASTING:

We have written a special chapter about fasting in the second part of this book (has been translated to the English language by St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Chicago, U.S.A.), and spoke about the togetherness of fasting and prayer. We read about fasting with prayer in many parts of the Holy Bible. It is enough what the Lord of Glory said "**This kind (the devil) can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting**" (Mark 9:29). No doubt, fasting is an important means of humility, and if accompanied with prayer it gains more power. **St. Isaac said** "If the body is weakened by fasting and humility, the soul is encouraged by prayer and by the Spirit".

(C) WORSHIP (PROSTRATION)

It is among the strongest means by which we show our lowliness in front of God. The word "Matania" (prostration) used in the Coptic Church is of Greek origin and means penitence. **Prostration is a true expression of submission and contrition, in which body and soul together worship God.** If our prostration is with the spirit and with contrition, it is well accepted by God. The Lord Jesus said "For the Father is seeking such to worship Him" (John 4:23) and St. Paul said "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth" (Philippians 2:10). This is expressed by St. Cyril the Great in his Liturgy "God to whom every knee bows of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth. Unto whom every man is subjected and is in bond of servitude, bowed to the sceptre of Your Kingdom".

Doing Matanias (Prostrations) is a superb means of worship and prayer. However, bowing down the body to the ground by itself is not sufficient; as it should be accompanied by short prayers and supplications in which one presents the feelings of his heart, every time the body bows down to the ground.

For example, a person who is in certain difficulty, or a man overpowered by a certain sin, or in need of help, each of them prostrates with a feeling full of humility. Each time one bows down, he crosses himself by the sign of the cross then presents his short supplication. He might repeat it by the same words or by another expression. As an example, a young man who is defeated in his body says "My Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me, help me and give me quietness in my body... My Lord Jesus Christ stop the unrest of the body... My Lord Jesus Christ purify my heart, and my thought and secure my members... **I sinned against You my Lord Jesus Christ,** have mercy on me and break the power of the enemy for me ... etc", and he bows down to the ground quietly without rushing.

St. Isaac said about the "Matania" bows "There is nothing loved by God, honored in the eyes of the angels, weakens Satan, feared by the devils, defeats sin, overflows knowledge, attracts mercy, eliminates sins, attains humility, controls the heart, brings about comfort, and by which the mind is renewed, as to find a believer always kneeling to the ground praying".

St. John Saba (The Spiritual Elder) said "Endeavour to prostrate in front of God because it is He Who moves the spirit of prayer in you. Do not think that bowing down in front of God is an easy matter. There is no good deed which parallels the regular ending of the prayer service by the "Matanias" (prostrations). If thoughts trouble us during prayer and we feel bored, let us bow down to the ground with the book of prayer in our hands and ask God as we are bowing down to give us enthusiasm to finish the service of prayer".

John Cassian described the monks of Egypt saying "In their prayers as they finish reciting each psalm, they do not rush in their prostration, not as a duty they wish to finish, as many of us do now. On the contrary, after reciting the psalm they wait for a while in which they say a short prayer, and bow down to the ground, in reverence with much homage and great piety. Then they gently and actively stand up again with all their thoughts concentrated in the prayer".

Also St. Basil the Great said "Each time we bow down to the ground we remember how sin pulled us down to the ground, and when we stand up again, we confess the grace of God and His mercy which lifted us up from the ground and gave us inheritance in heaven".

At the end of this point we should not forget to remind the person who prays not to practice the "Matanias" in any way he likes and not to decide upon the number of "matanias", but he should do that with the advice of his spiritual father.

(D) TEARS:

Finally we come to the mighty weapon which could not be defeated; "tears", the Strong Mighty God is overcome with tears. The groom said to the bride in the Book of Songs "Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me" (Songs 6:5). The eyes lifted to God are never defeated. For this reason we read many phrases by David in the Psalms signifying that he used this weapon.

David the man of prayer experienced the tears and knew their power, as he often spoke about the tears in the psalms ... "I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears" (Psalm 6:6), "The Lord has heard the voice of my weeping" (Psalm 6:8), "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears" (Psalm 39:12), "Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those

who reproach You have fallen on me. When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, ... I also made sackcloth my garment; I became a byword to them" (Psalm 69:9-11). No wonder that David knew the power of the tears and how he used them. We hear him in another psalm saying "**Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book?**" (Psalm 56:8).

Men of God in every generation, used their tears as a means of humility to get what they wanted from God. This is what **Job the pious did** "I have sewn sackcloth over my skin, and laid my head in the dust. My face is flushed from weeping" (Job 16:15, 16). **The Prophet Ezra** prayed and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly (Ezra 10:1).

Jeremiah the weeping prophet, the author of "The Lamentations" had a wish; "Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night" (Jeremiah 9:1). **Hezekiah the king of the Jews** wept bitterly when he was sick. The Lord answered his tears on the tongue of Isaiah saying "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you" (2 Kings 20:1-5). **There are many of such examples to the extent that the Psalmist made from it a general rule for joy and delight "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy"** (Psalm 126:5). Even the Lord Himself calls us on the tongue of the Prophet Joel saying "Now, therefore, says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning"" (Joel 2:12).

For this reason the Lord blessed the weeping eyes "Blessed are you who weep now" (Luke 6:21). He had compassion on the widow of Nain and said to her "Do not weep" (Luke 7:13). Also the sinful woman who stood at His feet behind Him weeping deserved forgiveness of her sins (Luke 7:38, 47). Again Peter, the Disciple who denied his Master and Teacher obtained forgiveness as he wept bitterly (Matthew 26:69-75, John 21:15-19).

The relation between tears and prayer is described by St. John El-Dargy "Tears are the mother and daughter of prayer"!!! Tears lead us to the fountains of prayer where we are entrusted on the live fountains of tears. It is also one of the gifts of the contrite prayer.

However, we should beware of pride in this case. The saint Anba Oghreese says "If you have a fountain of tears in your prayer, beware not to become proud in your heart as if you were better than the rest of the people. Tears are help which you took from God so that you can actively confess your sins in front of Him, and through them, your heart convinces you that they are forgiven. Do not exchange the help you took by pains (sins), else you anger He Who gave you this gift". **How much did the saints say about tears, from their own personal experiences.**

St. Aphram El-Soriany said "Pour tears in front of God so that your prayers become like incense in front of Him. Current of water is needed for fire and current of tears for the time of temptation. Water quenches the flames of fire and tears put off evil desires".

St. John El-Dargy says "The weeping eye is a constant font for the baptism of repentance and renewal". **St Isaac said** "Blessed are those who weep for righteousness sake, because by their tears they always see the face of God". **The saint Anba Oghreese says** "Use tears when you ask for what you desire, because the Lord is exceedingly joyous with the prayer with tears, rejoices for it and quickly answers it".

So much for what tears do. They turn back God's wrath, deliver from difficulties, save from death, and attract astray souls from the core of destruction. **Among the best examples about that is St. Augustine,** whose mother Monica kept shedding tears for him. St. Ambrose Bishop of Milan who once saw her weeping bitterly was right when he said to her "Woman, trust that the son of these tears can never perish"!!. For this reason the Church urges her children to be diligent to ask for tears from God. This is expressed in the second part of the Midnight Prayer where one prays saying "Give me Lord fountains of tears as You did in the past to the sinful woman. Make me worthy to shed my tears on Your feet which took me to the right path ...".

(Second) PERSISTENCE AND PERSEVERANCE:

There is no contradiction between God's words and His promises. God has promised us to answer our requests if we ask them with faith, but on the other side He is sometimes slow in answering them. He wants us to be persistent in asking, and persevere in demanding them, so that He beautifies us and makes us among the men of prayer. No doubt, persistence and perseverance are expressions of faith, and nothing pleases the heart of God more than faith. In the story of the Canaanite woman the Lord Jesus appears as if He is dismissing this woman with a kind of contempt, and in spite of that she did not leave but continued asking with persistence and perseverance. Christ did not fail her persistence and perseverance. On the contrary He praised her behaviour telling her "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire" (Matthew 15:28) and her daughter was healed from that very hour.

The Lord Jesus teaches us this lesson clearly in two parables: The first is of the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5-8) and the second is of the persistent widow and the unjust city judge (Luke 18:1-8). It is useful to write down these parables as were told by the Lord, for what they have from deep meanings. **In the parable of the friend at midnight He said:**

"Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, "Friend, lend

me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him" and he will answer from within and say, "Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you?" I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet **because of his persistence** he will rise and give him as many as he needs" (Luke 11:5-8).

In this parable, the Lord explains that the giver did not give because of the friendship but because of the persistence!! The Lord continued openly, definitely and clearly saying "**So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you**" (Luke 11:9).

He spoke these words with their power and spirit in the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 7:7). Unfortunately, the translation of these words do not carry the same meaning as in the Greek text. In Greek they read "Continue asking, continue demanding, continue knocking"!! clearly meaning that the Lord wants us to ask with persistence and perseverance.

The second parable about persistence, is the parable of the persistent widow and the unjust judge. It is introduced by St. Luke the Evangelist by saying "Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). Then St. Luke says "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, "Get justice for me from my adversary". And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, "Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me". Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily"" (Luke 18:2-8).

Numerous are the comforts and blessings which the Lord reveal by this parable. When God compares Himself with the unjust judge who avenged the widow because of her persistence He explains to us in a lucid way how He must answer he who persists and perseveres in demanding. God puts Himself on one side of the scale and the unjust judge on the other side. If the unjust judge responded to the persistence of the woman, would God not?! The Lord Jesus answers this query by saying "He will avenge them speedily" (Luke 18:8). How beautiful are these words for those who wait on the Lord.

St. Augustine comments on the parable of the unjust judge and says "The Lord Jesus Who is with us, would not urge us in this way unless he is willing to give. He is willing to give more than we are ready to take. If the Lord Jesus is not willing to give He would not have said this parable about persistence and showed its importance. What encourages us to pray more than the

parable of the unjust judge? This unjust judge did not fear God nor regard man, and in spite of that listened to a widow who pleaded with him and he was overcome because of her persistence not because of his compassion! If he who does not want to be asked listened to her pleading, how much more God who urges us to ask, listens to us!!".

To pass judgement on a certain job, needs to wait until the job is finished. A good start is not good enough for passing judgement, but the finish is. If Apostle James said that patience has its perfect work (James 1:4), that teaches us that persistence is a necessary virtue, without which no other virtue bears fruits.

St. Basil the Great said "If your request is according to the will and the pleasure of God, do not stop asking until you get it. In order to attract our attention to that, the Lord Himself told us the parable of the man who got bread at midnight from his friend by persistence. He said that we ought not lose heart in our prayer (Luke 18:1) even for many years, and even when our request seems impossible in the eyes of all men, because the things which are impossible with men are possible with God (Luke 18:27)".

He also said "God knows what we need and He gives us all the bodily needs without asking, as He shines His sun on the righteous and the wicked. But faith, righteousness, virtue and the kingdom, because of His goodness, He is slow to give so that man does not get them except by demanding, asking, striving, different pains and great patience. Because He wants us to love goodness and search for it eagerly and earnestly so that we become the cause for the giving and that after we get it we hold it and guard it because of the toil and big striving which we spent in getting it".

St. Isaac says "**If you do not have the virtue of persistence, do not expect to receive real comfort in your prayer, because persistence is equivalent to work. Every striving such as praying, fasting, or toil without persistence does not bring forth fruit,** and at the end of your striving, you are as if you just started. The possibility of falling is always expected, and thus God urges us to pray regularly and to be persistent in asking and demanding".

He also said "Sometimes we ask from God and do not receive. This is fitting because we do not ask regularly and with patience in prayers and without dare and trust, and we do not practice His clear saying "Who cry for Him day and night", but wait for Him to give us by Himself. However, He Himself waits for us to give Him a cause and a means by which He gives us what we desire Him to grant us. For this He leaves us tormented and waits for us to knock His door and continue asking with persistence".

E) ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PRAYER

(1) QUIETNESS

Is in the forefront among the means which encourage praying; quietness internally and externally. What is meant is quietness from all angles, inside and outside one's self. We shall not speak about the life of quietness on higher level in the understanding of the saints such as the quietness of senses, quietness of the soul, quietness of the thoughts and quietness of the spirit. **But we consider the quietness as related to the subject of prayer.**

The person who lives in continuous noise does not know how to pray well, and he whose heart wavers with thoughts and different desires cannot pray as he ought to. We thus need quietness. We wrote a separate chapter about "Retreat" in part 2 of this book "Paradise of the Spirit", in the Arabic language (has been translated to the English language by St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Chicago, U.S.A.).

About external quietness, because man is formed from spirit and body, and not from spirit only, he is affected to a great extent by the surrounding atmosphere. We thus read about Christ that He often went alone to a desolate place. **St. John Chrysostom** comments on the verse of St. Matthew "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there" (Matthew 14:23): **"Why did He go up on the mountain? To teach us that being apart and alone are good when we pray to God. Likewise we often see Him retreat to the wilderness and there He spends all night long in prayer, teaching us to eagerly search for quietness for our prayer** whether in time or in space. The wilderness is the mother of stillness (quietness). It is a quiet haven which relieves us from all our burdens".

There is an vivid story in the book "Paradise of the monks" about a disciple who went to his teacher complaining about his scattered thoughts in prayer and the lack of feeling of any comfort. The experienced elder brought some water in a container and dropped a pebble in it which created waves in the water. The teacher asked his disciple to see his face in the water, and the disciple answered that he saw shadows. The teacher waited until the water calmed down and asked him again to see his face. The disciple replied "I see my face as in a mirror". The teacher advised him saying "Likewise my son go and quieten yourself down and you find comfort in prayer".

For this reason the saints loved the life of quietness and knew that the spiritual life is fruitful within it. Perhaps this is what Christ meant by His saying "When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, ... " (Matthew 6:6). **St. Augustine** comments on this verse by saying "These rooms are none other than our hearts themselves as is mentioned in the Psalms "Meditate within your heart on your bed" (Psalm 4:4). It is easy to enter into the rooms of our senses, but what is meant here are the spiritual rooms in our inner self".

John Cassian said "Before every thing we have to carefully observe the principles of the Bible which guide us to proper prayer: we enter our room, close the door and pray. But how do we realize that matter practically? Is it not by isolating the worldly thoughts and the vain concerns and enter into a close fellowship with the Lord? **And what is the meaning of the closed door in prayer? Is it not stillness, the complete holy quietness, and the humble closed worshipping lips in front of Him Who tests the hearts?!"** (Psalm 7:9).

If prayer blends with quietness it produces many spiritual fruits. **St. Isaac said** "As we advance everyday, we not only find God's hope but also find true faith and real love, not remembering evil, brethren love, piety and patience, inner enlightenment, deliverance from temptations, spiritual gifts, hearty thanksgivings, sorrowful tears, bearing accidental difficulties, true forgiveness to our relative, recognition of spiritual commands and presence of God's justice, descent of the Holy Spirit, gifts and spiritual treasures. **God donates us all that through quietness. For obtaining these, one desires quietness!"**.

(2) SPIRITUAL READINGS:

There is a strong link between spiritual readings and prayer, that the Fathers said their famous expression "Reading is the source of fragrant (pure) prayer". Spiritual readings help to straighten prayer. For this reason Apostle Paul commanded his disciple Timothy "Give attention to reading" (1 Timothy 4:13). Spiritual readings are in two parts: reading the books of the

Holy Bible and reading spiritual books in general.

The life of the Lord Jesus gives us an idea about the value of the "Word" in our lives. In the temptation on the mountain, and in every situation He was subjected to, until He cried out on the cross "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34) (these words are the beginning of psalm 22), He taught us how much we should keep the word of God in our hearts and with it reinforce ourselves against our enemies. **For this reason St. Eronimos** advices a woman disciple of his called Yostikhion saying "Do not fall asleep without your hand holding the Book for reading and if you sleep and your face falls down, let it fall over the Holy Bible".

We may find out the effect of spiritual readings on prayer from what **St. Isaac wrote** according to his experience in this area. He said:

+ **"Thoughts are formed from readings, yet what is gained; chastity, modesty and purity are but from prayer"**.

+ **"Reading makes the inner self a new creation.** And from prayer, a new life is breathed in it, and divine heat inflames the mind at all times to fly away from earthly matters and dwell in the house of life".

+ "Keep this inside your conscience always and understand the reason all the time when the heat in your heart lessens. If you read the books, your thoughts will no more be scattered. Then return back to prayer by which the mind soars high".

+ **"Reading opens the mind to understanding,** and by understanding the desire for prayer is awakened".

+ **"If conscience is engaged in reading and prayer with piety, evil thoughts are not planted and one avoids all the traps of the devils"**.

+ "When your thought is scattered, engage yourself in reading more than in prayer".

+ "Engage in reading if you can, because it is the source and helper of pure prayer".

+ "The heat of the soul is created from continuous reading, and from quietness accompanied by work and frequent prayer".

+ "Good prayers if mixed with continuous discernible reading, deliver us to the deep meditation of the mind".

+ "When man approaches prayer, remembering what he read inflames him by the proper understanding of the words said about the Almighty ...".

(3) TOIL AND STRIVING:

St. Aghathon was once asked "Which virtue is greater than striving?" He answered "There is no better striving than to always pray to God. Because if man wants to pray all the time, **the devils try to prevent him because they know that nothing cancels their force except prayer to God. Every effort one spends and toils in life, he must finally reap comfort from it, except prayer. He who prays needs always to strive to the last breath in his life**".

St. Macarius the Great said "He who accompanies prayer needs more striving than in other works. He should always be watchful, patient, and toils regularly, because the evil one carries on his animosity, brings him sleep, laziness, heaviness of body, looseness and boredom, different thoughts, scattered mind, and many devices, trying by that to stop the prayer. For this reason one needs to strive till the blood against those who try to keep the soul far from God".

St. Nelles of Sinai said "Every war between us and the evil spirits is because of spiritual prayer. For them, it is the most harmful spiritual weapons and for us the most useful".

The sayings of those saints clearly picture for us the nature of prayer and the necessity for continuous striving. As prayer has many blessings, it requires striving. The road of worship is hard and difficult, described by Christ as narrow is its gate and difficult is its way!! (Matthew 7:14). This fact is stressed by the saying of St. Paul "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ... Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:12, 18).

There is an important principle in the spiritual life known by the Fathers as the "striving" principle. It is not an easy principle to implement as some imagine. We do not get any thing in life without effort, toil, and sweat, specially if it is a valuable thing and difficult to obtain.

The student, the merchant, and the farmer, all of them do not get what they want without striving and toil. Likewise, we do not deserve the kingdom unless we strive for it according to the

law.

We do not try to make the road difficult nor we portray God in an image which is not His. **The best example which explains to us the striving in prayer, is that of our Lord Jesus Christ** who often spent whole nights in prayer, and Who prayed more fervently in the garden of Gethsemane until His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground (Luke 22:44). How much we read about the striving of the saints in prayer and how much are the blessings and gifts they deserved.

Here are some sayings by St. Isaac about striving in prayer and its blessings:

+ "When you have the desire to work, is it for the bodily food only, or do you strive, even if you do not have the desire to work? Realise that striving to work is a very important rule in both worldly and spiritual lives. It is necessary for prayer, for reading the holy and the spiritual books and for attending the divine services in the church. **Do not give way to the lazy body which is full of sin.** The body desires to rest always, not aware of the eternal destruction which is the alternate for its small vanishing rest".

+ "Every prayer for which the body does not toil, and in which the heart did not grieve, is like lifeless afterbirth".

+ "Adam have been working and toiling on earth for five thousand years until the time of the saints arrived as the Apostle said. The Lord came with His grace in the last days and commanded our nature to substitute sweat for sweat, but did not command it to stop working. Because of His compassion upon us and of our toil on earth, He showed us to change this to that. If you reduce the sweat in prayer, necessarily you will reap thorns and pains (sins), for idleness in the toil in prayer".

Yet if prayer is accompanied with toil alone and stops there, man cannot continue his ways in prayer. But thanks be to God, **the more we toil and the more we intend to toil, the more the Divine Help comes to support us.**

There are many experiences by St. Isaac in this matter; He said:

+ "By the same measure one labours, struggles and strives for the sake of God, Divine help is sent to him, surrounds him, facilitates his struggle and paves the road for him. If you ask to what extent I strive? I tell you till death for the sake of God. It is more suitable for us

to die striving than to live falling"!!

+ "If you read the Divine Word and pray and bear no fruit as a result, but feel wondering about, know that there is a great darkness inside you. The remedy to this situation comes from the work of prayer. If one strives and continues to strive, soon in a short time he will feel the help which comes from prayer".

+ "**Reflect on the benefits of striving.** How great it is to find a person kneeling in prayer with his hands stretched to heaven, his face looking to the cross of Christ, and his movements and thought concentrated in God in prayer. Since he is pleading to God, a sweet source of life will suddenly move in his heart, and his members will relax. As his eyes close and he turns his face to the ground, his thoughts change and he is unable to bow down from the joy in all his body".

+ "Think man! Did you not read that unless you strive you do not find, and if you do not always knock on the door fervently and watchfully you are not heard. Be patient upon the darkness of pains and be regular in reading the Holy Books. Continue your striving prayer, and as you push yourself to it, the Grace will come to you without you realising it.

+ "As one strives for the sake of Almighty God, his heart would be earnest in prayer".

+ "**From the striving prayer presented with sorrow, submission and lowliness in heart, is created the prayer of the willing grace accompanied with sadness and comfort"**.

+ "**If in the beginning, one does not feel help in prayer due to his ignorance, he should not be weary and bored"**. The farmer does not expect the fruits as soon as he sows the seeds. **Yet the farmer is pleased when he eats the fruits of his sweat"**.

Striving in prayer, as we said, is hard and tiring. But the believer does it because of the blessings accompanied with it. It is comforting to know that the effort of striving is not required to the end; since what you do with effort now, you will be able to do later with comfort and without much effort. **St. Macarius the Great said "The person who desires to come to the Lord should be regular in pray and strive to be humble. As one toils for His sake and does that with unwilling tired heart, one day he will be able to do it easily, willingly and with comfort.** This is how one trains himself for the life of goodness and caring for the Lord".

F) DELAY IN ANSWERING PRAYER

It is useful for us to understand well all God's promises, not just some of them and ignore the rest, else we become doubtful and helpless. As an example, someone who focuses on the promises of God to answer prayers without realising that there are factors which delay answering them and may be for our benefit. In spite of that he becomes distressed and doubtful because he focused on the idea of answering prayer by itself.

Let us appreciate the fatherhood of God to us, which is loving, wise and giver of all goods. Let us know that all what happens to us is for our good because it is from Him "The Beneficial".

St. John Chrysostom said "Prayer is a great blessing if we realise it fittingly, thanking God whether we get what we ask for or not. **For when God gives or does not give, He does that for your good.** When you are granted your request, it is obvious that you took. And when you do not obtain your request, you have also taken, as undoubtedly you did not take what is harmful to you. Not obtaining what is harmful signifies that you are granted what is good. Therefore whether you get what you ask for or not, give thanks to God trusting Him that He always gives us what we ask for, unless it is better for us not to get it".

From what St. Isaac said, there are more than one reason for the delay in answering

prayer:

+ **"If God does not answer you for sometimes, as you ask and do not shortly get, do not be distressed. You are not wiser than God.** It may be because your deeds are not worthy of your request, or because the capacity of your heart is not up to the greatness of what you pray for. You may be in fact like a child beside the great matters your request". God may delay answering you for a wise reason He sees. **As an example:** Zacharias and Elizabeth prayed God to give them children. Although they were righteous before God (Luke 6:1), but God delayed his answer until He honored them by the birth of John the Baptist who deserved to be the angel who went before the face of the Lord to prepare the ways for the Lord of Glory (Luke 1:76) and deserved the title "The greatest among those born of women" (Matthew 11:11)!!

+ **Both St. Basil the Great and St. Isaac agree** that the delay in answering prayer may sometimes be due the fact **that what we easily receive we do not properly value and we soon lose.** Yet what does not come easily and quickly, but with toil and effort and after sometimes, we guard. St. Isaac says "It is not proper that great and lofty things descend easily in our hands, else the gift of God be abused because of the ease of obtaining it. Everything which is easily found, easily it disappears, and everything obtained with toil, is carefully guarded and kept".

+ **Granting our request may not be for our benefit,** and thus we do not receive it from God, the Lover of mankind. **In that St. Isaac says** "Not every desire which appears good for man, is useful for him. This desire may be from the devil and it appears useful!! Thus we should pray continuously about this desire which moves inside us and appears good".

+ **The Love of God may decide to delay answering the prayer and request so that we come closer to Him and be diligent and persist in our request. St. Isaac said** "For this reason (feeling of one's weakness), the kind God holds His gift from man, so that he comes nearer to Him and because man's need makes him attends his Giver. If we are just waiting for God's help in a certain matter and we do not get it, it would be because we do not come near enough to Him in prayer and do not cry to him painfully and bitterly day and night. Yet for Him, He looks intently for a reason by which we approach Him, and so He leaves us suffering. His delay in answering is to make us persistent in knocking on His door to benefit us by asking. On the other hand, when we receive, we stop and defer asking and become weary, bored and colder than water".

This is stressed by John Cassian on the tongue of father Isaac when he says "We know from blessed Daniel - that he was heard the first day he was praying, but he did not receive his request for twenty one days. The angel said to him, "Do not fear, Daniel, **for from the first day** that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words"" (Daniel 10:1).

We also, should not be lax in our prayers which we began. The delay in answering could be because of God's wisdom, or that the angel who brings us God's blessings have been delayed by the evil one - as what happened in the case of Daniel. The angel cannot deliver God's grace if he finds us slack in asking diligently. This was going to be in the case of Daniel, had he not been continuous in his prayer for twenty one days.

+ **St. Isaac explains the secret of the delay in answering prayer that it is for our spiritual benefit in general.** He says "God, the Master of all does not see our request as too much in relation to the bottomless sea of His mercies. It would be hypocritical and sinful to think that. But by continuous asking and the sorrow of our heart, we become enlightened and obtain comfort in the necessary matters from the continuous bargaining".

G) HOW DO WE PRAYER?

(1) BODY POSTURE AND PRAYER:

It is wrong to think that there is no relation between body posture and prayer. Body posture does much for keeping the mind attentive during prayer. We often hear about the power of the mind on matter, but not much about the effect of matter on the mind, and this is wrong!! Man is not made of mere spirit, but of spirit and body, and each affects the other. Added to that, **the body posture during prayer signifies how much we honor, revere and humble ourselves in front of God,** which would be a cause for answering our prayers and receiving divine blessings and spiritual gifts.

St. Isaac explains this matter and calls it "The good dress during prayer". He said "According to the reverence man shows during prayer by his body and conscience, he finds pure feelings and illumination in prayer and becomes worthy of great grace from above".

+ "By caring for "the good dress"; modesty during prayer, extending the two hands towards heaven, quiet standing and falling down by one's face to the ground worshipping, which beautify the prayers by these means always, one would soon be worthy of the work of the Holy Spirit".

+ "Know dear brothers that God - in all what is done for His sake - desires that we appear

well dressed and show respect, modesty and care, not only for His own sake but also for our benefit. Such matters neither benefit nor harm Him, but are for our good".

+ **"Many make mistake by thinking that it is enough to pray from the heart only and that God does not want anything else from us. They may be laying on their backs or sitting disrespectfully, praying from inside only. They do not care to beautify their outside action, stand well according to the strength of the body, prepare their senses and worship to the ground like somebody who approaches a flame of fire.** They should prepare themselves well respectfully from both inside and outside, by all body members, with solemn faces showing honor and respect for God. Else they deliver themselves to iniquity and sin as they do not realise the slyness of the devil".

Showing such respect by standing, kneeling, or raising hands is not obligatory for all such as the weak and the sick who form a special case. St. Isaac says "God is merciful, compassionate and good. He does not judge us according to what we cannot do because of our weaknesses, though blamed for, but according to what we can do and we neglect to do".

He also said **"I do not mean to offend the sick and the feeble in body that they should be under this law,** and that man should do what he cannot do, but I say that all we do should be in fear, trembling and reverence. What is because of necessity - even outside the limit of the law - and against the custom, is like the chosen Corban (sacrifice) which God accepts. One should not be blamed, but even the trivial things one does with good intention for His sake, God accepts as great things. If one does that in a way contrary to the essential, he is mercifully treated by God Who knew the liability of our nature before He created us".

In this respect, we should not forget to mention some of the deceits of the devil by which he intrudes into the lives of the children of God concerning prayer. We mentioned above, that the weak and the sick have a special rule in their labour in prayer. From personal experience and from the sayings of the saintly fathers and their lives we know that each of the body and the devil has its own deceit. The flesh which lusts against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17) does not want except rest and relaxation.

Sometimes, one feels weakness in his body, heavy members and headache if he decides to pray. This may be deceit from the lazy body, or a war from the devil. **There is an impressive story in the book "Paradise of the monks"** about a monk who when he attempted to pray, felt a fever, shivering accompanied with acute pains in the his head. But he used to tell himself "You miserable, you may die this moment, profit from your prayer before your death", and that is how he fulfilled his prayers. As soon as he finished his prayer the fever departed and the pains and shivering stopped. He suffered from this war for a long time, realising the means and deceits of the devil, but

he was faithful in finishing his prayers until finally the Lord delivered him from this war.

For this reason we should be diligent in our striving when we feel tired. We should discern the reason by discussing the matter with our spiritual fathers in the light of the lives of the saintly men of God.

There are different body postures for prayer. It is not possible to generalise them for everyone, but each exercises what is suitable for his heart's feelings during prayer.

+ **Standing in prayer is the common posture.** The Lord Jesus said "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, ... " (Mark 11:25). When standing, it is common **to lift up the hands.** Prophet David said "Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You, **when I lift up my hands** toward Your holy sanctuary" (Psalm 28:2). St. Paul said "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Timothy 2:8).

+ **Kneeling and bowing down is suitable for confessing sins in front of God asking for His pardon and forgiveness, for those who wish to humble themselves,** as St. Paul says "For this reason **I bow my knees** to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Ephesians 3:14, 15). The Psalmist also said "**Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker**" (Psalm 95:6). **The Lord Jesus Himself in the garden of Gethsemane knelt down and prayed** (Luke 22:41).

+ **There is a case of humility, contrition and spiritual striving, when one lies down on his face.** The Bible writes about **Moses and Aaron** - when God was very angry because of the sin of Korah, Dathan and Abiram - that "they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?" (Numbers 16:22). **The Lord Jesus Himself in the night of His suffering in the garden "fell on His face, and prayed"** (Matthew 26:39).

Also the eyes lifted up to God in prayer - even closed - have their relevance and effect. Prophet David says "Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens" (Psalm 123:1). Lifting up the eyes of one's soul follows lifting up of one's eyes also "To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul" (Psalm 25:1). The eyes of the soul are lifted up to God when they stop looking to the earthly matters or material things, and start to despise man-made objects, and think in God alone. The eyes lifted up to God never fail "Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me" (Song 6:5).

(2) PREPARING FOR PRAYER:

A person needs a period before prayer in which he prepares himself to the mood of prayer. A period of preparation is essential whether it is in the morning when the soul is still heavy from the effect of sleep and from thinking about the cares of a new day, or at the end of the day with its engagements.

St. Isaac says "Before you desire Him praying, prepare yourself with what is necessary". Before you start your prayer calm yourself down even for a little while, in order to prepare yourself for the mood of prayer, and to stir your emotions and feelings towards it. **It is not suitable to move directly from what you are busy with to prayer. Else you will not enjoy the prayer and you will have a dispersed mind, as it is still occupied with what you were doing few moments before.**

Reporting father Isaac, John Cassian said "Whatever occupies the mind before the hour of prayer, will necessarily come back to us during prayer via our active memory. Hence, the state we wish to be at the time of prayer should be the one we prepare ourselves for before the time of prayer. At the time of prayer, the mind is set in the state it was before prayer. When we pray, we see in front of our eyes the earlier scenes, words and thoughts which cause for us anger or depression or bring back our prior desires and activities. We may shiver from some imprudent laughs (which I would be ashamed to mention) as a result of an ugly joke. We again may laugh from a certain incident, or revisit our previous conversation. **Therefore if we do not want to be trapped by such things during prayer, we should be careful and take them out of our hearts".**

In this short period of quietness - five or ten minutes, or more according to your personal circumstance - **try to raise up your spiritual temperature, by reading a chapter from the Bible - for comfort and not for study.** For comfort means not to encounter certain difficulties during reading, but to postpone that to the time of your Bible study.

You may instead chant a comforting tune or hymn, or lift up your heart with a special meditation such as in the love of God to man and His graces to us, or meditate in the triviality of one's self, or in one's transgressions and sins, and how you offended God and still offend and anger Him.

In reality, one cannot follow one method. A person cannot always be in one spiritual and emotional state. Sometimes he is cheerful and happy and inclines to chant hymns, and sometimes he feels a particular comfort in keeping calm and quiet while the feelings of the heart are lifted up from inside. Some other times one longs for hope in God, and in this case it is not suitable to remember one's past sins, in order not to fall into depression, gloom and despair. He rather

meditates in the greatness of the mercies of God, ... etc.

There is one more nice feeling which we wish your heart to be filled with immediately before prayer. Make yourself feel that you are in the presence of God, that God sees and hears you, and that He is near you and looks to you with loving kindness. Let your heart be filled with this hope so that your prayer has wings with which you fly to the Master of all. Before you lift up your hands lift up your soul and say with the Prophet David "I lift up my soul to You" (Psalm 143:8), and before you lift up your hands lift up your heart.

There is another advice which St. Isaac gives saying "Before you pray draw the sign of the living cross on your heart and on your members. Stand still for a moment to let your feelings and motions calm down. After that lift up your inner eyes to the Lord and ask Him with anguish to strengthen your weakness by His grace". It is even better to accompany all what we said by bowing down, many times before prayer asking for the mercy of the Lord.

(3) CONTROLLING THE THOUGHTS DURING PRAYER:

"These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Matthew 15:8). The Lord Jesus rebuked the hypocrite Scribes and Pharisees by these words. They clarify an important rule in prayer; what is important is not the prayer of the lips, but the words of the lips which are controlled and followed by the mind and heart. When you pray try to follow with your mind every word which comes out of your tongue.

St. John Al-Tabaisy says "If you say the written words of prayer, do not only care for saying the words but also let yourself be the words you say, because without that saying the words does not profit. Rather let the word be shaped in you and becomes genuine and you will appear in the world that you are a man of God".

He also says **"Do not think dear brother that prayer is just words, or prayer is learned by saying the words. Hear from me the truth: the spiritual prayer is not formed from mere words and sayings, because you do not pray to a man to whom you repeat complex words, but to the Spirit of God. So pray to Him with spirit"**.

Hence both the mind and heart should join the tongue in prayer. The mind understands what is said, the heart feels with what the mind thinks of and the lips speak with the words of spirit and understanding. It often happens that the tongue says the holy words of prayer while the heart wonders in other things, or that the mind understands the words of prayer while the heart does not feel them nor their meanings. True prayer has the thoughts of prayer combined with the feelings of

the heart.

Related to the subject of controlling the thought during prayer not being occupied in any other matter during prayer. When the Lord Jesus said "When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father ... " (Matthew 6:6), He means not to occupy yourself by anything in prayer. The room of the spirit is the body and its doors are the body five senses. It is known that the senses are the intakes of knowledge, and is supposed that we close these intakes so that nothing enters from them which disperses our thoughts during prayer. **St. Oughrees says** "Forget about the necessities of the body when you stand to pray. If a flea, mosquito, a fly or an insect bit you, do not bother with it in order not to lose your award in prayer".

The two saints Nelles of Sinai and Oughrees report a vivid story about not being occupied at the time of prayer. Once a brother was waking praying in the desert when two angels appeared to him and walked with him, one on each side. He did not try to give them any attention in the least, so that he would not lose the fruit of prayer which is better than anything else. He used to remember the words of the Apostle "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Romans 8:35).

The stories about the desert fathers are full of colorful pictures of heroism and toil in prayer. They did not stop the prayer nor were carried away from it in spite of the fact that the devil used to appear to them in the form of wild animals and wild reptiles!!

As we talk about controlling the thought during prayer, we should talk about the opposite side, meaning the wandering of the thought.

(4) WANDERING OF THOUGHTS DURING PRAYER:

This is the expression used by the saintly fathers by which they meant distraction of the thought during prayer. It is accepted that a person can rarely keep his full attention in a certain subject for a long time, whether in reading, studying, discussion or prayer. Few fathers, after long toil were able to overcome this side and walk in the economy of "**Crucifying the mind**"!! That is because of the inability of the mind at the beginning, by its nature, to concentrate on one subject for a long time.

We do not forget to state that it is common for a person attached to certain desires to have a stray mind. Also he who weighs his stomach with plenty of food, his mind may not be able in this state to control and direct his thoughts. The Lord Jesus pointed out to this by saying "But take heed to yourselves, **lest your hearts be weighed down** with carousing, drunkenness, and

cares of this life" (Luke 21:34). **St. Isaac said "Let not your stomach be weighed down lest your mind will be wandering,** and you will be totally distracted when you stand to pray. Your joints will relax and you will be full of laziness and slackness. Not only that, but also your soul will darken and your movements will be mixed up and you will not be able to gather the words because of the darkness. You will have bad taste in everything and will not enjoy the words of the psalms".

It is thus impossible for our thoughts as beginners, in the life of the spirit, not to wander. Yet the saints separate between two kinds of wandering: wandering of the thought to matters not suitable in prayer and wandering in matters which are beyond this world. The thought may try to ignore what comes to it, and this is not in its nature. Again there are good and bad wandering. If you do not pray unless the thought ascends above this world, and only pray when you see what is above, then you will never pray. If the thought ignores every kind of wandering in the matters above this world, one is not in need to pray, as the mind is in a perfect state and is in union with God and God is in it!!

If wandering of the thought - as pictured above - cannot be prevented, God is not offended if it occurs. He is offended if we submit to it and do not resist it. St. Isaac says "We are not condemned because of thoughts and shapes moving in us, but we find grace if we do not concede to them and resist them. We are condemned if we go along with them and give them place in us".

Accordingly, pure prayer is not the one which lacks wandering of the thought, but is the one in which the thought does not wander in vain matters. St. Isaac says "Pure prayer without wandering, is not the one in which mind is completely without thought or vision in any thing, but in which there is no wandering in vain matters during the prayer. If one wanders in the meaning of righteousness and in good matters, he does not deviate from the purity of prayer, but cares of necessary matters suitable of a conscience which pleases God in prayer".

He also says "Bad wandering is to wander in vain thoughts, wrong meditation, or unsuitable reflections during prayer in front of God. During prayer, good wandering occurs when the conscience reflects on the glory and greatness of God. That is remembering the books and understanding the divine words and holy sayings which are of the Spirit. It is not proper to consider this wandering as strange to the purity of prayer and as nullifying to the control of the mind".

St. Isaac goes further than that by saying "It is very good to control the mind. Yet if the mind frees itself and projects on divine matters or on something noble in explaining the books about God, this wandering is better than pure prayer. It is the limit in controlling the mind and good prayer. But if the conscience is totally clear from all concerns, it is hushing of the thought and not pure prayer".

Some are uneasy about the state of wandering during prayer and feel that it offends God. As a result, they gradually stop praying until - as they say - this war ends. The first remedy to wandering in prayer is prayer itself, meditation, spiritual readings, being by one's self, lack of care about earthly matters, toil, fear of God and escaping from the wandering itself and lack of concern about it. St. Isaac mentioned the following in this respect:

+ If you do not desire to pray until you get rid of wandering in prayer, realise that frequent prayer and much toil eliminate the wandering and it will disappear from the heart. **Getting rid of wandering of thoughts is achieved by prayer.** We never hear that anybody achieves that without continuing to pray. One cannot ask for perfection without toiling for perfection".

+ "There is no better means for arresting the mind from the world and delivering it from sin than meditating in God".

+ **"At the time when your thought is wandering, adhere to reading more than praying.** Yet not every book is useful".

+ "Prayer improves when it is mixed with continuous reading with understanding. This delivers us to meditation of the mind. Spiritual meditation of the mind creates in us concentration of the thought, and concentration of the thought eliminates wandering, and the disappearance of wandering creates in us inner prayer with understanding".

+ "This is the meaning of what is written that the soul benefits from the reading if it is represented in prayer and also gets enlightened in prayer from reading. I mean, instead of outside wandering, the soul finds material for changing the kinds of prayers and for real understanding by the thoughts remembering the marvels from the readings".

+ "The vision of a person is not clear when he stands beside smoke, unless he leaves that place. Likewise we cannot acquire purity of heart and stillness of the thought without being alone far from the smoke of this world which veils the eyes of the soul".

+ **"If you wish to get rid of wandering of the thought and find space for prayer by your mind, avoid caring for material things and the stray of senses"**.

+ "If you do not tire your body as much as you can and care for yourself always in everything, in every subject, you will not be granted the prayer without wandering".

+ **"Where there is fear of God, there is pure prayer without wandering"**.

+ "It is not expected that one has no wandering of thought during prayer, but that he should not go along with it and should resist it".

One more point which St. Isaac mentioned as a remedy of wandering of thought. It is hymns, particularly sad hymns.

(5) HEAT OF PRAYER:

Thus if we adhere in our striving to control the thought and resist its wandering during prayer - which results from the desires of the soul - we arrive to the pure prayer of the heart without wandering. **This kind of prayer creates in the heart a state of spiritual warmth**, about which David the Prophet sang in his psalm "My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned. Then I spoke with my tongue" (Psalm 39:3).

This is the fire which our Lord Jesus Christ came to kindle on the earth of our hearts where the tares of desires grew previously and now by the grace give spiritual fruits as our Saviour said "I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49). This is the fire which kindled the hearts of the Disciples of Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion and made them cry joyfully and say to one another "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).

St. Isaac says "Strong work creates in the heart an immeasurable amount of heat, gets enforced by the inflamed thoughts which ascend back to the mind. This work, guarded by the thought purify the mind by their heat, and grant it vision. This heat which is given by the grace of meditation creates tears, and continuous tears calm down the thought and purify the mind. Again, man with the pure thought sees the Divine mysteries. After that the mind arrives to seeing revelations and signs".

(6) TALKING PRAYER:

Let your prayer be a normal talk with God without formalities, a talk of a son with to his Heavenly Father, or a talk of a lover to his beloved, even to his worshipped!! St. Augustine says "In the beginning of our prayer we say "Our Father Who art in heaven ...", and by this call, love moves in our hearts - as there is no dearer to the father than the sons - and in us also moves a begging inclination, a trust from our behalf to receive what we shall ask for, since we

already - before we asked for anything - received such a great gift; it is granted to us to call God our Father. What is it which He will not give to His children when they ask, since He already granted them the grace of sonship!!".

Do not think that prayer is collection of sayings lined one after the other, or a collection of recited verses, added to them some well selected words. This is not the case, but real prayer is a simple talk. Do not be obliged to use the classical language in your prayer, else the word ties the meaning and prevents you from a nice talk with Whom your soul loves... God understands all languages and dialects.

In short, do not be formal in your prayer to God. Take off the robe of formalities, since our relation with God is the relation of sons not slaves, for God did not give us the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). You will be alone with Him. Free yourself from the ties of the society. Talk to Him about your troubles, your pains, your love and your desires.

Tell Him "Lord, I am defeated in such and such matters, and I wish to live for you in purity and righteousness. Support me and help me ...". **Enter with God in a talk of familiarity and dialogue**, such as David used to do "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3). Remind Him of His mercies with your fathers and His kindness to them from generation to generation, "But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared" (Psalm 130:4) and ask Him to deal with you in the same way. He is yesterday, today and for ever...

We advice you to use the singular expression in your prayer. Do not say "We are sinners and we often offended, angered You and broke Your commands ...". Rather say "I am a sinner and often offended and angered You my Lord and broke Your command ...". Do not tell Him "The world and the desire battle us strongly and often defeat us ...". Rather say "The world and the desire fight me fiercely my Lord and often overcome me ...". **As such, the singular expressions put you face to face in front of God, and you feel the actual talk with Him ...**

We find that clear in the Liturgy of St. Gregory, which is a collection of wonderful meditations. In spite of the fact that it is used in the church and is prayed for all people, yet, its author, St. Gregory the Theologian, preferred it to be a marvellous meditating talk with the Son of God the Word.

He says for example "As a lover of Mankind **You have created me** a man, for You have no need of my servitude **rather I have need** of Your Lordship. According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, **You have brought me into being where I was not. For my sake** You have shut up the sea. **For my sake** You have manifested the nature of animals. You have put all things **under**

my feet. You wrought me in the image of Your Dominion. **And granted me** the gift of speech; and **opened to me** the Paradise **to enjoy. And gave me** the learning of Your knowledge ... You have O My Master **turned my punishment** into salvation ... You are Who **has sent me** the prophets for **my sake; I who am sick. You gave me** the Law for help. You are He who has **ministered salvation to me when I** disobeyed Your Law ...".

How remarkable are these expressions. They make man sail with his spirit in divinities and desire the heavenly.

(7) ELEMENTS OF PRAYER:

Prayers to God do not consist of petitions only, else our relationship with Him would be to benefit from Him only. Yet not all petitions are for our benefit, **as there are petitions for the sake of others** presented with love and service. The petition for others could be for spiritual reasons for saving their souls, or for the welfare of their physical life, such as to heal their illnesses or ease their difficulties. **There are other elements which we should include in prayer,** which we gather from the words of the Apostle "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made **for all men ...**" (1 Timothy 2:1). **Each of St. Basil the Great and the Scholar Origen cite four elements which we should observe in our prayers:**

- **First we should glorify God by all our power and capability.** We see an example of that in psalms 103 and 104.

- **Then we thank Him for His benefits to all men in general and to us in particular.** See the thanksgivings of David in (2 Samuel, Chapter 22).

- **Then follows the confession of ons's sins and transgressions, and one's petition to God to forgive his past sins** and heal him from all spiritual illnesses which overcome him.

- Finally one enumerates all the spiritual, psychological and physical needs, for himself and **for all.**

- **The prayer ends by glorifying God.**

H) SOME PROBLEMS WITH PRAYER

(1) LUKEWARMNESS OF PRAYER

It indicates the state in which a person has no desire to pray as a result of not getting comforts in it. If he prays, he becomes anxious and wants to finish his prayer by any means, and as quickly as he can. In this state he feels that his prayer does not proceed beyond his lips!! This state is call by some "**Dryness in prayer**".

The cause is either from the self or from the devil. The former cause could be related to certain desires, or from certain psychological or physical states such as fatigue, poor health or lack of physical activities which result in dullness of the mind. Obviously, this soul does not find comfort in prayer. **The second cause are** the attacks which the devil wages, such as boredom,

restlessness and wandering of the thought which impede the comforts in prayer. Though, sometimes, God stops His comforts from coming to us for some wisdom He sees for our good and our spiritual benefit, or to test our love and faithfulness to him.

Concerning the first cause (our selves): If lukewarm prayer results from special desires in the heart, one cures that by penitence and purifying the heart. We came across this point when we spoke about the conditions of accepted prayers. We mentioned that prayer has to come out from a pure heart. Yet, if the cause is physical exhaustion, one should select the times when the body is sufficiently rested and has energy. For this, first hours of the day are most suited for prayer. There is a common error done by many; they pray evening prayer after they are very tired. Such persons could not feel the comforts of prayer.

Concerning the second cause (attacks of the devil): We overcome them by toil, perseverance and remedies for wandering of the thoughts, which we dealt with previously. We realise that comfort in prayer is a gift from God to encourage the beginners in their spiritual striving. But we cannot always use these comforts as motivation in our spiritual striving. A soldier who is going to war, is paraded by musical bands which create in him enthusiasm for the battle. This state does not continue on the battle ground. The initial charge of enthusiasm ceases and the quality of the soldier is tested on the battle ground. The saintly fathers were exposed to this state in all its forms and thus every one who toils in his spiritual striving suffers from it.

Many go through a mood of questioning when they suffer from a state of spiritual dryness. As they search themselves concerning sins, they find that they are careful and continuing steadfastly on their spiritual practices. Still, the state of dryness persists, and the devil comes and tries to confuse them that they are total failure in their spiritual lives and God has entirely rejected them. Hence there is no spiritual joy or comfort in their heart!! Yet this might be according to some Divine economy and wisdom, so that to either double our striving or not to become haughty due to much comfort in prayers. This is what happened to St. Paul as he was given a thorn in the flesh lest he should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations. A thorn in the flesh was given to him, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he be exalted above measure (2 Corinthians 12:7).

A most needed treatment to the state of lukewarmness or boredom in prayer, is the grace of abiding in God. He seems very far from us when we pray; the heart is hard like dust and the words of prayer appear not to travel beyond our lips. This state is described by some as the Divine Revelation says "And your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron" (Deuteronomy 28:23). **The treatment is summarised in the persistence of the will by not submitting even for a second to the pressures of the dryness and the lukewarmness. Let us advance courageously towards God, even when we do not see Him.**

Moreover, our relationship with God should not depend on feelings. The comforts which arrive to us in prayers are like smiles of approval from another person. He who needs these smiles is the slave who waits for the approval of his master. But we are sons. This does not mean that if God does not smile to our faces one day, that we have lost our sonship to Him!! **We have to separate between the feelings of the slaves and those of the sons.**

God Himself - as we mentioned earlier - permits in many cases to deny us the comforts in prayer for many reasons. That is for our teaching and discipline. We may imagine - if we always have comforts in prayer - that we became saints and become conceited. This means that God gave us a grace not a curse. When God gives a grace, He always gives with it the means to reserve it. **Denying us the comforts does not mean that God is angry with us.** A mother who teaches her infant walking, does not hold his hand every time he walks step by step, but sometimes leaves his hand. He feels scared, cries and holds her hand. **Similarly, the grace of God lets us feel that it is with us. It leaves us for some instants so that we feel the need of it, rush towards God and fall into His bosom.**

There is no indication that our prayer - when we suffer from such spiritual dryness - is rejected from God. On the contrary, God may accept it with a better degree than the prayers in which we feel comforted. The reason is that the latter are concluded in comfort, but the former are performed with toil, labour and difficulty. **The value of prayer is not measured by the degree of comfort but by the amount of toil.**

It seems that not a single soul who seeks God and walks behind Him in his ways, does not encounter this difficulty. Perhaps the Prophet David describes this state in its worst form in Psalm 23: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4), and in Psalm 63 he says "O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. **So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory**" (Psalm 63:1, 2). That is, in the dry and thirsty land he has looked for Him in the sanctuary. While in the midst of this pain, he is seeking comfort or even just a feeling of approval.

But with a crushed heart David was satisfied with waiting upon God, and what all God allots. Why? Because he was repeating "O God, You are my God" (Psalm 63:1). Then comes after that the shout of victory "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips" (Psalm 63:5). This joy does not originate from inner comfort he received, but from God Himself, Whom David was sure of His presence and love, whether that was in the darkness or in the light.

Other psalms expressed the suffering from spiritual dryness. Among them are psalms 10, 13, 22, 88, 102, 130, 140, ... In psalm 13 for example, David says "How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1) and in its end he says "But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me" (Psalm 13:5, 6). In the beginning of psalm 22, David says "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent" (Psalm 22:1, 2). Near its end he says "I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard" (Psalm 22:22-24).

Mistaken is he who expects continuous joy in his prayer, and is saddened and depressed when he loses and does not find it. Our aim in our spiritual life is not the joy but God Himself. Joy is an accidental event and it is not correct to deviate from the principle to the accidental. **We should come to the spiritual dryness and carry it as a cross for Christ.** We should always ask ourselves, carefully and honestly "What is the aim and the subject of our spiritual striving, is it to receive comfort and joy, or to be close with God?".

(2) THE PROBLEM OF TIME:

The factor of time started to appear as a problem for prayer in our present era, as many people are busy in their work and with numerous responsibilities. We wish to divide business into two kinds: The necessary business which is out of one's hand and the many other business which a person carries out by his own will. There is no excuse for a person to neglect his religious duties because of the latter.

Actually, the problem requires the person to organise his time in order to coordinate between one's duties towards God and the rest of his duties. For this, a person should avoid times wasted in meetings, vain discussions and useless business. One should also regard prayer as an important matter, for which he reserves time. He should not leave it to the end of his work, and prays if he finds time for prayer and if he does not find time he excuses himself that he is busy.

When the Church assigned the law of the seven prayers "Prayers of the Agbia", she did not do that for the monks only, but for all believers. The role of the monks is for continuous prayer. The seven daily prayers were mentioned among the laws of the Ecumenical Council of

Nicea in the year 325 A.D. Yet these laws go back to the time of the Disciples and were reported among their canons. They were also among the laws of Hippolytus in the beginning of the third century.

We are asked, as much as we can - without favouring ourselves - to say these prayers, and benefit from their blessings and their work in our lives. Yet if we cannot fulfil all of them, let us fulfil what we can according to the economy of God for our time. **We will be blamed in front of our conscience if we favour a secondary free-will business to prayer, which is essential to our spiritual lives and our relations to God and to people.**

We realise that some people have obligatory responsibilities which fill their times. Yet they try with good intention and with all their longing to put aside longer times for prayer, but cannot achieve the desire of their hearts towards God. **Those people are not condemned since God is well aware of their circumstances and possibilities. The desire of their hearts towards God is by itself pure and acceptable prayer in front of God, without them raising their eyes and hands upwards, and without uttering the words of prayer.**

There are other people who neglect their prayers, and lack of time is their excuse. In fact it is due to not preparing particular times for prayer, that they find it difficult to pray, or they imagine that prayer with the psalms is only for the monks and the clergy.

As a treatment to all that, we say, that one should convince himself well about the importance of prayer for his life, and to make an effort to save time for it. One should set a short program if his time is not sufficient for the whole prayers. However, the majority of people, no matter how busy they are, have plenty of time for prayer in the early morning and in the evening.

Hence people are to be blamed for neglecting morning prayers. In particular because this prayer carries a spiritual program for a good plan for the believer to follow concerning his duties towards God and his dealings with people. **He who starts his day with God can complete the day well with the help of the Grace.**

Similar blessings are reserved for the evening prayers, which we advise not to be immediately before sleeping, when one is tired and drowsy. The most suitable time for evening prayer is before supper or before going out in the evening. Yet if it should be immediately before sleeping, one may pray any special prayer from his heart and deliver himself in the hands of God, ask for His blessings and guard in this night. He then sleeps leaning on the bosom of Jesus, the Lover Who comforts all the tired people.

Again if one is not tired before sleeping, and is able to pray more than that, he may recite the absolution of the sunset hour or that of the compline or both, together with other prayers which he learned by heart.

However, during the day, we advice that one lifts up his heart towards God by any means. **Memorising is a very useful factor. He who memorises a good number of psalms, parts of the "Agbia", its absolutions and prayers, can say from his memory what suits the daily hours and its holy occasions from his memory.** He does that without any body posture constraints. He may pray in the road, in the place of work or in the means of communications, whether he is sitting, standing or walking. **We cite some example:**

Someone to whom God gave some spare time at noon and he was able to say the complete "Sext prayer", should thank God from his heart for this co-ordination and should complete his prayer by the help of God. If he does not find time, except few minutes, and he says the absolution of the prayer or its parts, that is enough. If he does not find even few minutes, let him say one out of the six parts of this prayer "O thou who on the sixth day at the sixth hour ...", for example. What is important is that he did not let this holy chance to go without praying and receiving its blessings. If he does not find even one minute, except few seconds, let him say "Take away the handwriting of our sins O Christ, as You did on the Cross on the sixth hour". Can we say about this person that he did not remember the Lord in the sixth hour? No, but he remembered Him according to his ability. We say the same about prayers of the other hours.

However, we here caution the person who has sufficient time and is careless by shortening and simplifying the prayer as we have outlined, while he has enough time for its completion.

(3) THE PROBLEM OF SPACE:

Because of the increase in the number of people on the small inhabited area of land, living areas are both small and expensive. Hence families live in crowded flats and as a result, small space created a problem for prayer.

Private prayer should be said by the person as he is by himself, and it is rare to keep a special place for prayer in the flat. The room in which one prays may be shared by other members of his family. Such members may not be religious and do not welcome prayers. They may even behave in a sarcastic way about prayer, particularly when the praying person is a youth or a young man. The room may be shared by everybody, and the problem becomes more complex if the whole

family is not religious.

We admit that a person who is not praying does not give a praying person sufficient liberty, and does not help him to be candid in his prayer. In any case, it is a problem to be overcome. One should be firm in his ways and in his prayers. This firmness may be the best rebuke to those who do not pray, and a means for winning them to Christ. I know a pious young man in one of the military colleges who used to stand beside his bed in the sleeping hall and pray the prayers of the psalms without being embarrassed. When the authorities knew about him, they respected and valued him more.

To solve this problem, some people wake up early before those who share the room with them, and also wait at night until all are asleep. Then they stand for prayer. **It is a problem, and it is a struggle which has its crown and its blessings.**

There is another point we wish to mention concerning the space for prayer. Rarely, a family keeps a place for prayer in the home "Prayer corner". We wish that every Christian family cares and keeps any place in the home and beautifies it with religious pictures. Even more if the family may put a light in front of the picture of one or more saints. Beside the special blessing of this matter, it creates an atmosphere of worship and prayer in the house. Let our care for this corner be more than our care for any other area of the house, as being the place where we meet the Lord and in which we throw away all our loads and troubles and find help and power.

(4) THE PROBLEM OF SHYNESS:

Shyness may form a problem for some people, not only in public prayers but also in their private prayers. They are very embarrassed not only from praying in front of others or in their presence, but also from just knowing that others - who share the dwelling with them - know that they pray, even members of the same family!! This mere knowledge is a cause of unease and discomfort for them. This problem follows them in the private and general prayer meetings. For such a person who suffers from this shyness, he should gradually train himself not to be shy, by focusing his energy towards God and not the people. Let him have a special petition in his prayer for this problem of shyness.

(5) THE SUBJECT OF PRAYING IN SECRET:

Prayer in secret is a command from the Lord Jesus to all believers (Matthew 6:6). But some

people understand this command in a crooked way far away from its meaning. **When the Lord Jesus commanded us to pray in secret, He did not mean that nobody sees us or that nobody at all knows that we pray. But He meant elimination of hypocrisy, love of appearance and asking glory from the people.** These diseases filled the society at that time, and the Lord Jesus - not only concerning prayer - commanded us in all we do, we do from the heart to Him and He alone will reward each person according to his deeds. If Christ has meant that nobody at all should see us (praying), how can we explain His saying "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16)?!

The devil attacks some people as he hides behind this command, so that they do not enter one of the rooms in the home and close the door, else others know that they went to pray. In the evening when they want to pray the psalm prayer - they do not want to put the light on, else others outside the room know that they are praying. If someone enters the room while they are praying, they change the position of praying so that this person does not know that they are praying. The source of all that is their misunderstanding of the command about praying in secret. The Lord Jesus, by this command, means that our prayers should not be for the purpose of hypocrisy, appearance and asking the glory of people, if someone sees us praying. The Lord Jesus rewards us according to the feeling of our hearts.

(6) FAMILY OBSTRUCTIONS:

This point refer more to the youth and young people who come from secular families. The families may give them hard time from sarcasm about their piety and prayers trying to convince them that they are treading the wrong road, to preventing them from going to spiritual and prayer meetings. The families may even interfere by force in their personal freedom and stop them from praying using their authority, or not consider their feelings trying to annoy them by the loud voice of the radio or TV, if they realise that they are praying.

In our view, that standing steadfastly of the youth against such current and annoyances, going to God, behaving wisely and prudently, are sufficient to make them victorious against such annoyances. But this may lead them to win those resisting people by the power of prayer which cannot be defeated "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5)!!

I) THE CEASELESS PRAYER

Not only those who live the life of quietness in the deserts and the wilderness are qualified for high levels of prayer, but even those who are living among the different endeavours of life, if they make use of every opportunity they encounter. The Lord Jesus teaches us that "men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1) and the Apostle commands the believers saying "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). **David the great, a**

king of Israel, very busy with his kingdom, used to say "I have set the Lord always before me" (Psalm 16:8). "Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:164). "At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:62).

What is the meaning of the above verses? Does it mean that one stops working completely in order to fulfil the command "Pray without ceasing"? Of course not. Is it possible to combine work and prayer, though it is known that the mind cannot concentrate on two matters at the same time?! Was the last command written for a particular group of Christians such as for example the monks who are dedicated to worship, or was it to all the people? It is clear that the Apostle was commanding all the believers. Some say that to pray without ceasing which the Apostle commanded is a symbolic and not a literal command.

The ceaseless prayer does not comprise the continuous work of the mind. It does not require the outside attributes of prayer, but normally the ceaseless hidden prayer. In order to realise this we have to understand the meaning of the word "normal". It indicates an inclination or a secured preparation, which drives the person to automatically, easily and with increasing cleverness to perform what he normally does, until work - after a while - is practically related to the will. In other words, when we say, we acquire a certain habit, we mean that our mental, literal, and spiritual powers are arranged in a certain way, and ready by a special force, trained and prepared, so that under certain circumstances, continuously and regularly do consistent work.

There is another factor; the state of ceaseless prayer results from love. For example, we say that the husband loves his wife and children and thinks about them always. This does not mean that he is not engaged with their love when his mind is totally occupied in his work. **According to this measure, the ceaseless prayer is to live the life of love with God.** The love which lifts up the heart to Him always.

The duties which hold us from thinking directly about God - if presented as services for our love - are by themselves considered work of prayer. Prayer does not constitute thoughts and words but works also. **St. Clement of Alexandria says in his book "Varieties" about the true Christian "He prays everywhere, walking, talking and reading. All mental works are considered different works of prayer".**

FEELING THE PRESENCE OF GOD:

The more I talk with God, the more I converse with Him, and the more I continually

feel His real presence with me. When we return from saying farewell to a person who passed away, who used to live with us in the same house, we say and feel that this house is empty without this person. We used to always feel the presence of this person with us. The continuous communication with him created this feeling in us.

The feeling of the presence of God resembles - to a certain extent - the feeling of the presence of a dear friend. The loving dealing with him and talking to him, gain a constant feeling of the presence of this beloved person, whom we now miss after his departure. Let us direct ourselves to God with the same effort we spend in our relations with people, **knowing that wherever love is, no effort is required!!** The point is that our relation with a friend concerns the sight, while in the case of God it concerns faith.

Someone says "God is present everywhere". That is true, but for us there is one place in the whole universe where we contact God - in the depth of our hearts "You are the temple of God" (1 Corinthians 3:16). There He waits for us, there He meets us and there He talks to us. In order to find Him and meet Him we need to enter inside ourselves. Thus if we want to feel the presence of God, we have to look for Him inside, not outside. We should not leave our thoughts to search for Him here and there outside us. Even if He were there, we do not contact Him in that place but inside ourselves only. This was the misconception of St. Augustine before his repentance, as he was searching for God until he found Him after he wasted a long valuable time. He says in the tenth book of his confession **"I loved you very late, O very old beauty, yet very new"**. Then he cries **"I loved You very late!! You were inside and I was outside, and I was searching for You in a different way"**.

SHORT REPETITIVE PRAYERS:

As a result of the love of God which overwhelms the soul, and its feelings of His presence inside her, the spirit sails expressing her love, happiness and her needs by saying short repetitive prayers which do not need rational concentration or mental effort. These prayers do not require a specific time, place or atmosphere, as they are the words of man to the Holy Spirit dwelling inside him.

We can express our feelings by these short prayers in crowded roads, in the tramway, in the bus, when we are alone, or in a gathering and in general in all circumstances and conditions. **How beautiful are the words contained in the Saturday (Ebsolmody) prayers in the Church annual praises "Every breath of mine praises Your Holy Name"**. It is true O Lord that every breath praises You. Every breath coming from inside me brings out with it praises to You my beloved. It carries the feelings of my love, loyalty, submission and the desire of myself to be always with You.

We ask you dear brother to practice this beautiful wonderful exercise. It is not mere theoretical talk, but actual experience by many who live in it. There is nothing which prevents you from practising and enjoying it. It needs the feeling and awareness of the presence of the Beloved within you. The moment you are aware of His presence you will shout with the groom "I found the one I love. I held him and would not let him go" (Song 3:4). This exercise - like any other one - its perfection requires practice and patience. In the beginning, it needs some effort and perseverance, but keeping at it with patience carries us to the state when we do it without toil or effort.

EXAMPLES:

(1) Prayer of My Lord Jesus Christ: The believer repeats the beautiful name of Christ accompanied with a short petition as he says for example "Lord Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on me ... My Lord Jesus Christ help me ... My Lord Jesus Christ cast away this evil thought from me ... My Lord Jesus Christ give me quietness in my body ... My Lord Jesus Christ evict all evil power away from me ... My Lord Jesus Christ grant me to love you ... My Lord Jesus Christ ... and so on ...".

This prayer was used since the early centuries of Christianity. It is mentioned in the writings of Saints Aphraam, John Chrysostom, Isaac, Barsonophes and John El-Dargy.

It is a petition which needs no effort nor control of thought, but requires love and determination. It is a short prayer, yet it keeps for the heart its devout heat and it is a ceaseless tongue which converses with the creator.

The name of the Lord has great power and might and is a haven to all who come to Him. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10). The name of the Lord terrifies the devils. "But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you **in the name of Jesus Christ** to come out of her" And he came out that very hour" (Acts 16:18).

If you were bothered by thoughts or devilish attacks, or because of any other difficulties, or if you were captive of evil habits, we advice you to experience the power and might of this prayer.

(2) Repeating the first verse of psalm 70 "Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to help me, O Lord!" (Psalm 70:1). John Cassian mentioned that all ascetic people in Egypt used to say this prayer. He also adds his experiences about this prayer and this nice exercise. **He**

says in his book "The meetings":

"This part was not chosen haphazardly from among the Holy Books. It includes all human feelings, which may be expressed in all cases, because it is the calling of God against every danger, and contains a modest pious confession, with continuous fear as man remembers his weakness and his trust in the answer and assurance of help. The person who keeps calling Him Who defends him, is surely in His hand always. This phrase is a safe wall for all who are under the devils' attacks, beside being an undefeated cover and a strong shield.

This phrase is a help and is useful for each one of us in all the circumstances which we encounter. We ought to recite it ceaselessly until we learn it. May you always remember it. Whatever you are doing on the journey you are making, do not stop chanting it. When you go to bed, or when you are eating, and in general, think of it and say it repeatedly in every occasion. This thought is not only saving and keeping you from the devils' attacks, but it also purifies you from all earthly errs and mistakes, and this hidden heavenly meditation leads you to unexpressed prayer heat. **Let sleep creep on you while you are citing it. Let it be the first thing you think of when you wake up. When you get up, kneel down on your knees and repeat it. Let it follow you all day long".**

J) PRAYER ACCORDING TO RULES

Is it more suitable and agreeable for prayer to have a rule, regulation or a canon in

our worship?

The objection is known, that the read prayer becomes routine, while it should be free coming from inside. It is wrong to ignore such considerations when it happens that we say the written prayer by the tongue, without the thought and heart sharing it. **On the other hand**, if we do not have a certain discipline or a special rule in our prayers, and that we pray only when we have the desire, we are in danger of securing a loss equal to the previous one. We will then grow up with no desire to pray, as the phenomena of discontinuity will mostly lead to complete negligence.

(1) Having rules for prayer does not offend God

Two matters interest God most: to have our wills move towards Him and to have a goal for what we do. **Having a definite rule for prayer is by itself a determination to pray and to talk to God regularly regardless of the states of our feelings.** The rule for prayer is like a covenant for man to keep praying, and to be faithful till death. It is obvious that tying ourselves with such rule is a kind of work of the will which has long effect. This is better than leaving ourselves to pray only when we encounter an accidental feeling. However strong this feeling is at that time, it will weaken and vanish after a while with no purpose or goal.

(2) Following rules of prayer is a help to us

Most of us are in need of a kind of drive to pray, and this is realised by this discipline, as we meet obstacles and barriers to prayer such as states of spiritual dryness and the like. **We should not necessarily count such combats as resulting from prayer according to rules, as they may result from some inner spiritual weakness.**

Prayer is not only fellowship with God but also struggle against our spiritual foes. Following rules of prayer helps us to overcome such difficulties and obstacles which we meet.

Christianity is not a call to absolute liberty, getting rid of all ties and rejection of duties. Liberty in this understanding is not for the glory of the children of God which the Lord Jesus moved us to after we were burdened under the slavery of corruption. This looseness uses liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, which the Apostle warned us against (Galatians 5:13).

The saintly fathers were unanimous on the necessity of following a law for worship, laid down by the spiritual fathers. This matter is suitable for all, specially the beginners in

spiritual lives. **St. Eronimos** says in his message to a woman disciple called Yostichom "The Apostle commands us to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and for the saints, sleeping is considered prayer. But we should designate times for prayer so that if we are busy doing anything, time itself reminds us of our duty ...". **There is nothing wrong in ceremonial worship, not in the least. What is wrong is to perform it in a mechanical way which diminishes its value and its effect.**

PRAYER OF THE PSALMS:

Why did the Church choose the psalms of the Prophet David and arrange them in a special book "The Agbia" for the believers to use in their personal, and also in public prayer?

I do not want to answer this question using my own words, **but I wish that you earnestly listen to the splendid words of St. John Chrysostom. He says:**

"We hardly read the books of the Old Testament once a year. The Holy Gospels which are for our Saviour with what they contain from teachings, and writings about miracles, we read in the church once or twice a week. The same is for the sayings of our teacher Paul. Yet concerning the book of blessed David, I do not know how did the Grace of the Holy Spirit arrange that we use it in prayer day and night. It is used by everyone like very expensive perfume. In the churches and in public meetings, David is at the start, the middle and the end. In the funerals for the dead and in the houses of virgins and those who work with their hands, David is the first, the last and in between.

Even those who cannot read, when they start learning, they begin with the sayings of David and learn them. In the houses of virgin who imitate Mary, or in the caves of pious men in the deserts who pray hard talking to God, David is in the start, the middle and the end. He who is sleeping deeply by his natural body, and wakes up not in the proper time, David receives him at once.

How many angelic praises raised for God by His worshippers. David makes heaven from earth, makes angels from the human, beautifies all our lives and prepares everything for us: raises up children by chastising them, calls the youth to understanding, offers chastity to virgins, grants protection to the elderly. He invites sinners to repentance by saying: confess to the Lord for He is good!

David encourages those who walk in the road of repentance by saying: "Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; O Lord" (Psalm 25:7). He lifts up those to whom God

is gracious and urges them saying: "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" (Psalm 116:12). He calls those who sinned to confess many times saying: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness (Psalm 51:1). He affirms those who are called for priesthood by saying: "O Lord, do not hide Your face from me" (Psalm 143:7). He teaches those who are taken to court saying: "O God, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man!" (Psalm 43:1). He calms those who fear the enemies saying: "Deliver me from my enemies, O my God" (Psalm 59:1). He encourages the patient and thankful to praise God by his saying: "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1).

How great and noble is this harp which gathers the voices of the world as its strings sound in their ears exaltation and praises to God".

(1) David accumulated in his personality marvellous experiences:

He was a shepherd, a great prophet and a king and was the saint who sailed in the sky of the spirit. He was also whom God permitted to fall into two horrible sins which humiliated him and for which he kept weeping and drenching his couch with his tears (Psalm 6:6) saying "My sin is always before me" (Psalm 51:3). Thus, in the psalms we find various experiences which certainly suit all our needs.

(2) The psalms came out from the heart of a man who was cleansed by repentance, and who toiled greatly for the life of the spirit. We ought to look at David in order not to feel haughty.

St. John Chrysostom says "Know your limits man. Did you achieve what David did? Hear him when he says "My knees are weak from fasting, and my flesh is feeble from lack of fatness" (Psalm 109:24) and "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting" (Psalm 35:13). He said about being watchful "At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:62), "Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments" (Psalm 119:164) and "I give myself to prayer" (Psalm 109:4). About piety he said "For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping" (Psalm 102:9).

Why do we enumerate the merits of David when God gave testimony and said about him, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart" (Acts 13:22). In spite of all these supports he fell. Hence do not be lax dear brother because "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:18). Hence be watchful.

(3) The psalms are referred to and were recited by the Prophet David. Nevertheless they are the words of God which David said by the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus said "For David himself said by the Holy Spirit ... " (Mark 12:36), and when you recite the psalms you talk to God by His words. Is there anything greater than that.

It is more assuring for a lawyer who is defending an accused person to speak to the judge by the terms of the law, rather than by the words of the accused. The judge is obliged to pass his sentence on the accused by the terms of the law. Is this not what we realise from the psalms of David which include portrays of the love of God, His mercies, graces, goodness, kindness, compassion, justice and fatherhood to mankind? All we hope is that God deals with us according to these attributes.

(4) Our free prayers are mostly petitions which consist of requests for our own benefit and they mostly lack an important element in prayer; the element of praise. This element is clearly present in the psalms.

(5) Above all, the psalms are amazing material for meditation. For those who recite the psalms by the Spirit and attentively, the psalms give them true and wonderful meditations. They could not have originated except from the Spirit of God. This was the experience of the fathers and is the same for us. What is the reason for that? It could be the multiplicity of thoughts, the profundity of feelings of their authors, the purity of hearts which presented them and the evident prophecies which they contain. All that and more could be the reason. In any case, I have told you a sure phenomena which you should experience.

After all that, do you ask for a proof about the power of the psalms and their great value in prayer? Listen to what St. Isaac says "You should have an endless desire to recite the psalms because they are the food of the spirit".

We do not mean from what we said that you pray by only reciting the psalms. Following each prayer by the psalms, you should continue by your personal prayer which expresses your feeling towards God and asks for your personal petitions. **The saintly fathers consider reciting the psalms as an introduction to the prayer by the heart.**

HOW DO WE RECITE THE PSALMS?

+ **Present you prayer with awe and reverence.** Lift up your hands towards heaven in humility and bow down respectfully. St. Isaac says "The more you care for that, the more is the visitation of the Grace, as it is great in the eyes of the Lord the reverence which man presents during the sacrifice of his prayer". Comprehend the meaning of the prayer and say the words of the psalms slowly and thoughtfully, as if they are yours and not others.

+ **If you do not have time to recite all the psalms of the hour, read what by the spirit what you can.** St. Isaac says "If you want to enjoy the sweetness of reciting the psalms and appreciate the taste of the Holy Spirit in them, disregard the quantity and do not care about the number of psalms you recite. It is sufficient that you understand the meaning of the prayer and the feeling of glorifying God will move inside you".

+ **For every time in the psalms, the word bowing down is mentioned, bow down, or in the least bow down your head slightly.** It would be better if you bow down after each psalm asking a petition from God. If you felt you offended God by a certain sin, bow down after the word "Alleluia" and say to the Lord "I sinned against you my Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me". If you were tormented from a certain sin, bow down also after each psalm and ask God to deliver you from it, and so on. If someone is in a particular difficulty and asks you to pray for him, you may pray for him in this way.

+ **John Cassian reports for us about the monks of Egypt at the end of the fourth century and says** "I saw them in their prayer, when they finish reciting each psalm they do not hurry in bowing down, as if it is a duty they wish to finish - as most of us now do - on the contrary, after each psalm, they wait for a while in which they raise up a short prayer. They bow down to the ground respectfully and with great piety. Then they gently stand up attentively with all their thoughts concentrated in prayer".

+ **The expression "Kirilayson" or "Lord have mercy" which we say as we recite the psalms, should be said slowly.** Every time you say "Lord have mercy", realise that a whip or a lash has fallen on the back of the Lord Jesus, and say inside yourself "This is for my sake". Take from the suffering of the Saviour a means to ask mercy for your miserable soul.