



Two Elders on The Jesus Prayer

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Therefore God so highly exalted Him and gave Him the name, that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus that every knee shall bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

[Philippians 2:9](#)

Acknowledgments

It took five years to put this book together. We want to thank the following people for their invaluable help throughout these years: Vladimir, Ekaterina, Sergey, Valentina, Maria Ksenzovy; Fr. Christodoulos (Papadeas); Fr. Edward (Rommen), who contributed to the comparison of the lives of Elder Joseph and Archbishop Anthony and suggested that the work of Archbishop Anthony should be translated; George and Nancy Chescheir; Ioannis Margetis; Barbara Thorp; Vladimir Burchakov; Olga Timofeeva; Dmitri Fayuk; Valentin Zimnitskiy; Galina Gatsko and Hugo Fuentes; Fr. Peter (Perekrestov); Fr. Maximos (Read); Fr. Ambrose (Young); Fr. Gregory (Kyrrou); Fr. Michael (Ziebarth); Svetlana Harisova; Nikolai Novikov; Stefan, Valentina, Nadezhda Kosuha; Aleksandr Gramotnev; Igor Murashko; Natalia Smelova; Dimitra Tamarexis and Catalin Ilina; Peter Selinsky; Walter and Mary Ellis; Aleksandr Yalovitsky; Vassil and Ioanna Gotzev; Dr. Timotheos Patitsas; Svetlana Zavadskaya; Fr. Vasilios (Flegas); Daryl F. Walker; Fr. Gregory (Koo); Elena and Yuri Panovy; Aleksei Valyaev; Gabriel Hayman, Daniel Wilkey, Barbara Murray.

First English edition. Translated from: Novikov, N.M. “Podvig v miry.” Moscow; Otchiy Dom, 2006, (Series “Put' umnogo delaniya”). ISBN 5-87301-160-5. (pp. 14–94). Compiled based on cell notes of Archbishop Anthony (Golynsky-Mihailovsky). Compiler Novikov N.M. © Novikov N.M. - compilation, publication. Copy rights for publication of text and photographs belongs to the compiler of the text and are guarded by law. Reproduction of these materials or part of them in any form, or translation of this text to any language without written permission from the compiler is unlawful.

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Special note from compiler of the Russian text, Novikov, N.M.: Text of the manuscript of Archbishop Anthony was not preserved; it reached us in different notes, in incomplete, largely distorted shape. These were disjointed fragments of notes filled with omissions, later additions and mistakes of those who had recopied the notes. Such material could not be published in such shape; a lot of editorial work was needed that became, essentially, a reconstruction of the lost text. When possible omissions were filled, theme structure was created with the goal of maintaining the peculiar style of the author. The edited text was verified against the writing of the Holy Fathers and based on them the necessary additions and changes were introduced into the text. As a result the recreated text acquired the present shape.

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Translation of the Russian text into English, compilation of the lives of Archbishop Anthony and Elder Joseph, introduction, conclusion, comparative essays – © Igor V. Ksenzov.

English Language Editor – Fr. Ambrose (Young).

Publisher – Skete of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple, Hayesville, Ohio.

Front cover: The Blessing Christ, first half of the sixth century, Holy Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.

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Introduction

The purpose of this work is to introduce the reading audience to the two ascetics of the twentieth century: Elder Joseph the Hesychast of the Holy Mountain and Archbishop Anthony (Golynsky-Mihailovsky) of Russia. We will focus our attention on their lives and theological writings. Elder Joseph has become widely known in the English-speaking world after the Saint Anthony Monastery (Florence, Arizona) published a number of books about him and with his writings. We are going to summarize these publications here to present concisely his life and written legacy.

This text of Archbishop Anthony, on the other hand, has not been published in English before; therefore we will put more emphasis on him and his theological work. We attempted to preserve the style of Vladika Anthony in our translation. Archbishop Anthony wrote his notes to close disciples either living a strict monastic life in the world, or approaching this stage of life in their personal spiritual journeys. His cell notes were not written for publication originally. Vladika Anthony jotted them down in the atmosphere of increasing persecution of the church, for people who had no access to church, to the legacy of the Holy Fathers, to elders and monastics, to monasteries and tradition, who were forced to worry about their material and social matters in an environment that was exceedingly hostile to Christianity. Please, our most esteemed reader, remember these circumstances and use discernment when you encounter prayer practices that seem to exceed your capacity or situations that seem odd to you.

The leitmotif of this publication will be The Jesus Prayer and how it impacted the existence and works of both spiritual strugglers. A reader may ask the logical question: “Why one more book about, essentially, The Jesus Prayer?” The answer to this inquiry will be furnished in the pages that follow. It will suffice to state here that The Prayer serves as an overarching bridge, connecting not only two spiritual athletes described here, but also the entire cohort of the saints of the last two thousand years. It starts with the very first Christians, such as St. Ignatius the God Bearer, proceeds through St. Gregory Palamas, and ends with modern day hesychasts. Just as concrete binds inseparably the bricks, so does The Prayer connect together numerous facets of the life of an ascetic on the one hand, and all its doers anywhere in world on the other. Without it, any serious discussion of the monastic tradition and its two valiant representatives is not viable and misses the point.

This book will be most helpful for the average lay reader today, who does not have time or training to read the hesychast Fathers for himself. The text contains everything essential for the beginner, as well as for those who are more advanced. This makes this book unique.

Having stated this, we invite the reader to proceed to the heart of the matter.

Part I

1. The Life of Archbishop Anthony (Golynsky-Mihailovsky)

Vladika Anthony was born in 1889 in the Orel Region of Russia, into a peasant family. Little is known about his life until his release from a concentration camp in 1956. Archival sources indicate that St. Tikhon (Bellavin), Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, ordained the future Archbishop Anthony into the priesthood in the summer of 1922 in Moscow.

The KGB arrested him because of his priesthood seven times. In the 1930's he served a five-year term in Uhtpechlag in the northern Komi region, a concentration camp that was part of the Gulag. While there, he became close to St. Metropolitan Anatoly (Grisuk) and was elevated to the episcopal rank under conditions of high secrecy by Archbishop-confessor Vassian (Pyatnicky, 1879-1940), Archbishop Yuvenaly (Mashkovsky, 1883-194?) and Bishop Agafangel (Sadkovsky). He maintained illegal status for the rest of his life, on one hand not belonging to the catacomb church or the official church; on the other, encouraging his disciples to attend the official Russian Church.

In 1950, Vladika was arrested for the last time and sentenced to twenty-five years in the Pot'minsky camps in northern Mordovia.

From his letters to his spiritual children we have only two personal accounts of his life in the camps:

“In the heavy penalty camp many people died, and I also became sick. I could not walk and was thrown under the bunks, where snow substituted for a pillow. God's providence brought into our camp a foreign trade union; they entered the barrack and asked, 'Do you have complaints?' Criminals responded, 'The priest is lying under the bunk, dying.' They dragged me out and carried me in their hands to the car and took me to a far away hospital where free private doctors worked. Through the Lord's providence a doctor who was a grandmother and the daughter of a priest, a believer, brought me back to life and sent me to the projects for the handicapped. Thus, there was God's providence to preserve my life; very healthy people died there.”

“I was in the heavy penalty camp, and evil people decided to break my arm so that I could not perform the holy services any more, something they had done to others. Late at night, two camp officers came to the barrack, dragged me to a furrow, and started very painfully breaking my arm. The pain was atrocious. I started screaming with all my might: 'Lord, save me! You said, 'His bone shall not be crushed.'" During this time a doctor was passing by, heard my cry, and fired a shot in the air. They fled. Thus God preserved my arm for the Holy Services.”

His spiritual children preserved an account of him being thrown into a Russian sauna heated with the intention of freezing him as it cooled to sub-zero temperature. He spent three or four days there. Believers among the camp inmates secretly tried to warm the sauna from the basement to prevent his death from hypothermia. Vladika said that he was not freezing at all because he had the warmth of grace within him during this trial. While in a solitary prison cell his torturers deprived him of sleep for about a year. He learned to sleep while walking, incessantly repeated The Prayer. Archbishop Anthony had a heart ailment and he emphasized to his disciples that he cured his heart through The Jesus Prayer.

In some camps in the north the inmate population was mixed, which was unusual, having women and men, criminals and political prisoners together in the same quarters. Men and women were separated by a piece of cloth in the barracks. Every imaginable sin was committed under these circumstances because the criminals despised the political inmates and exploited the availability of the opposite sex. Archbishop Anthony, although exhausted after cutting trees, stood all night in a corner of the barrack and prayed quietly, ignoring Sodom and Gomorrah around him.

The camps left him with open wounds and blocked veins in his legs, black flesh from severe frostbite, poor health, yet with a strong spirit. The amnesty of 1956 liberated him at the age of sixty-seven.

The years from 1956 to 1976 mark the twenty-year period devoted exclusively to his spiritual children, whom Vladika Anthony had acquired in the camps and in the world. The first eight years involved non-stop wandering since he had no place to live and wanted to visit his students as well as those who had strayed from the Church. All this had to be done in secret to avoid further arrest for “religious propaganda.”

The last ten years, having settled in the village of Bucha in the house of a schema-nun who was his cell-attendant, Vladika led a semi-hermit existence, devoting all his time to prayer, services and counseling numerous pilgrims. A strict ascetic, he virtually did not sleep at night, devoting it to prayer. When he did fall asleep, exhausted, one could see his lips moving, repeating the words of The Prayer. Some curious people stayed awake on duty throughout the night at his door to verify that he was not asleep, and they heard him praying all night long. He was sad when he remembered how the priests in the camps did not pray, blaming the lack of appropriate environment and the necessary books. Vladika used to reply to such remarks, “Where you stand – there you pray.”

Bishop Anthony fasted greatly, admitting that when he was younger he would eat nothing for seven days during the strict fast periods. At the end of his life he did not allow himself to eat much, always consuming less than needed. A cell-attendant would pester him, “Vladika, please eat this, or this, or this,” and he would reply, “I will not.” Once she offered him fresh, specially selected, delicious tomatoes: “I will not eat.” “Why?” “I’ll develop malaria from them.” Archbishop Anthony dreamed up something to prevent

himself from taking pleasure in food. Yet the next day he would ask, “So, where are those tomatoes?” Therefore, when he had an appetite and craving for something tasty, he denied himself. That is how he fought this struggle until his last day.

The Elder served Liturgy virtually every day. All night before the service he listened to confessions and then, at dawn, there was a lengthy three to four hour proskomedi. Every note and letter that arrived by mail or courier with the names of the living and departed was read very attentively and one particle taken for each soul, unless it was a "black" one (people who committed suicide, those who were not baptized). During confession the long three-hour set of prayers, called "The Rule," was read according to the monastic Ustav (regulations). He served without abbreviations, following the monastic rule. After the Liturgy, the Starets preached inspired sermons lasting from two to four hours. In them, the questions, doubts, worries and spiritual needs of the flock gathered before him were addressed. Pilgrims came from all over the country. Those who spent time with him in the camps simply thirsted to meet him again. People came with grief, and departed as if flying on wings, full of joy. When Vladika was very sick, he cured himself by increasing his prayer. He could hardly stand because of a high temperature, had to hold on to the altar table in order not to collapse, and yet performed the services. Thus he conquered his ailment.

Starets never blamed anyone who had tortured him, indicating that it was through Divine Providence that trials had befallen the country and its people. Rather than chastising pilgrims who came to him, the bishop would give them a passage from the “Philokalia” to read. Having read it, visitors would think a little bit and say to themselves, “But this is written about me.” Alternatively, he used to tell an inquirer a “fictitious” story about somebody's trials, temptations, and life's path. Many years later that man would remember the Archbishop's words and realize that the story was about him. He also instructed his nuns and monks not to look at people sternly, but always with kindness and love.

In every day situations he showed an example of the right way to approach different circumstances. A passerby would see a drunk passed out on the ground and pronounce the verdict: “Well, he gulped too much; should not have done it.” But the Archbishop would say, “poor fellow, he came under the influence of the devil,” and would cross himself. If someone were saying bad things about others in his presence he would not listen and taught, very quietly and peacefully, “I do not need this information...We cannot condemn our closest ones – we need to pray for them.” Otherworldly humility, authentic humbleness, and exceptionally overflowing love struck all those around him. Some said that they felt an unexplainable presence of grace when they were with him. Many of his spiritual children sooner or later became monastics; some were highly educated people, involved in scientific work.

Most importantly, the Bishop taught that The Prayer was above all else, especially for monastics. “Break in your tongue and heart with The Jesus Prayer,” was his advice. He

taught that unless the monk read his entire rule every day he would not withstand, would not be able to pursue monastic life. No matter how long they had traveled, how tired, frozen and hungry they were, Vladika Anthony had everyone go to the chapel and complete all the required prayers. Only after that was a stove heated and a meal prepared. Those who were compelled to endure this thought that he had no compassion for them. In order to show his flock that he knew their thoughts the Bishop would bring them hot tea, oranges, and mandarins after the service, things they desired. The Rule of Prayer was above all worldly and bodily concerns.

His cell attendant reminisced that during a lengthy service in a packed room she could not stand at one spot peacefully, feeling pain in her limbs. He, with gangrenous legs, served without moving his feet a single iota. Suddenly he said without turning his head, “Antonia, get control of yourself; there's no need to dance.”

During the Elder's life people saw how he was encircled with a halo of light during prayer, and how he would levitate during intensive prayer in prison. In the latter case, he asked the eyewitness to put her hand on the New Testament and swear not to tell anyone until after his death.

Vladika relied on the patristic legacy and personal experience to bring those interested to understand the workings of Divine Grace. In response to the requests of his spiritual children, he wrote a practical guide for the pursuit of The Jesus Prayer, which follows this chapter.

Abbot Michael, a spiritual disciple of the Elder, remembered how the Starets visited him once, went to a room, fell on his knees, raised his arms, and prayed for four hours. The young man got tired of even looking at him, yet the Archbishop still stood on his knees and prayed. “What is he doing there? About what can he pray so long?” wondered the future abbot Michael. After some time Archbishop Anthony told him that the Lord had opened to him the sufferings of his spiritual children and that he prayed for them. By doing so, the Starets took their sins upon himself. Vladika Anthony prayed exceedingly long and forcefully for those who sinned much. As the future abbot learned, there were dimensions of inner and liturgical prayers of which he was not aware:

“Once we came to visit Vladika from afar. One o'clock in the morning. He, as always, did not sleep, praying. He suggested that we read the Rule. We read it. He gave us Akathists on top of this. My friend told me: 'I am dying, about to collapse, and you?' I replied, 'Endure.' Liturgy started at night and ended at eleven in the morning. We had to go to work that day - to walk twenty kilometers [more than twelve miles] back. But after Liturgy and the Eucharist we felt such joy that we could not describe it. On our way back we did not feel any fatigue. The sensation of blessedness was overflowing; we wanted to walk and walk until eternity. We were hiding in the bushes from cars going our way to avoid being picked up and given a ride, so that we could continue walking and not lose this blessed feeling.

“Once we all stood, praying. The Archbishop started a prayer about those who travel and mentioned specific names. We wondered why. After a short time we heard the very same people he prayed for knock at the door. It happened not once, although none of us knew of their arrival in advance. A spiritual daughter invited Vladika to spend a month with them in Drogobych, to which he replied, 'I will stay, if the Lord blesses.' Suddenly, he fell to his knees and prayed and then quickly told her, 'Run immediately and buy me a ticket.' The woman started weeping out of grief that her invitation would not be honored. 'Hurry, where is your obedience?' urged the Archbishop. The ticket was bought and Vladika left on a train. Everyone sat in the apartment, head down in sorrow. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. They saw a policeman when they opened it, who had come to inquire who was staying there without permission from the authorities.”

According to Soviet laws, anyone who did not have permission to reside in a given city could be arrested for violation of the law. This regulation was one of many used by the Soviet system to persecute believers, who essentially had to live like the Christians of catacomb times in the early Church. It must be noted here that for about ten years after Elder Anthony's release from the camps, the country was under the rule of Nikita Khrushchev. He conducted a ferocious anti-church policy, closing the churches that had been reopened in Stalin's last years. People had nowhere to go for confession and communion; there were no priests, no sermons and churches, except for very few. The authorities persecuted believers and the clergy, including those who gathered secretly in someone's apartment.

In case of arrest, everyone faced interrogations and time in a prison or camp, with priests facing harsher verdicts. It was within these circumstances that Vladika Anthony traveled secretly around the country, escaping, sometimes miraculously, apprehension by the police who followed him. But the faithful were gradually becoming used to the Archbishop's clairvoyance, and only those who were young and foolish sinfully tested it:

“Once I was returning from work,” said Abbot Michael, “and thought that if Vladika had spiritual vision he would know that I wanted to eat. As soon as I opened the door he gave me an apple with the words 'Since you are hungry, please take an apple.' Another time I was walking and thinking about whether he would know that I had to go to the sauna. I came, and he said immediately, 'And now to the sauna, to wash yourself.’”

Shortly before his repose the Starets visited a family in Moscow, having spent many hours in transit. After being offered a chair and some food, Vladika Anthony looked at them and uttered, "I cannot eat where carnal sin is." Immediately he proceeded to marry the couple, who by then had children yet had never been married in the Church. He brought two cardboard wedding crowns that he had made for them. Only after the wedding ceremony was over did he allow himself to sit down and partake of food.

As death approached, he calmed his weeping flock with these words:

“My people of flesh! Why are you weeping? We Christians are people of the Spirit. People of the spirit live together because Spirit does not die. We will always live together. And there, if the Lord deems me worthy, I will help you. My people of flesh, how can you not believe that we are people of the Spirit?”

He also prepared his flock for the future, no matter what it was going to be:

“And you, it may be, will have to suffer. And if this time comes, do not fear; go to the Cross bravely, with open heart, without doubts or regrets, accepting it with joy. The strength of God will overshadow and strengthen you, and you will withstand. But if in your thoughts you step back from the Cross, if you permit duplicity in your thoughts or hesitate, fearing for yourself and your relatives, then at that moment the demonic force will interfere and grace will withdraw and you will not be able to endure the sufferings. You have to understand that the time has come to justify our faith, our allegiance to God. Go, as the holy martyrs went. The Lord strengthened them, they even did not feel the tortures, and if they did, they understood that it was given to them for cleansing from their previous sins. Ask the Lord for help. Do not fear for your children, relatives – our sufferings will help them, and the Lord will have mercy on them.”

Two days before his death he began to suffer from unstoppable bleeding. The reason for this was as follows: a priest-monk he knew had died unrepentant. He had been a great faster, not allowing even oil except on Saturdays and Sundays, and was as thin as a skeleton. He was a man of prayer, too, making endless prostrations. Yet the devil got to him through carnal sin at the age of seventy. He asked the woman with whom he lived to repent for him, so she came, weeping and begging to Vladika Anthony. He replied: “How can I release her sins? I have to carry them myself. But how can I carry them since I am sick and dying?” Those around the Starets finally persuaded him and the woman flew away as if on wings after confession because her and the monk's sins were forgiven.

Immediately after this his temperature shot up to 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit), atrocious bleeding began, and he was in convulsions. His caregivers changed his linen non-stop, wondering when the bleeding would stop. Wet towels and cabbage leaves, placed on his forehead, immediately dried up. Vladika Anthony refused painkilling injections and any medicine. No one heard a single moan, only his whispering, “Glory to Thee, O God, glory to Thee.”

Bishop Anthony reposed peacefully from multiple complications, including cancer, on April 13, 1976, at the age of eighty-seven, in the arms of his cell-attendant, the nun Antonia, whom he had called my “partner in my repentance.” He was buried in the cemetery of Bucha, next to her parents. His last request was, “At the grave only put, if possible, a wooden oak cross.”

Protopriest Ioann (Chizhenok), who was blessed by Vladika Anthony to go to the Moscow Seminary, summed up his own experience of the Archbishop thus:

“In childhood my father read the 'Lives of the Saints' to us, and when Vladika came I saw an Elder who came alive from the books to which, holding my breath, I had listened.”

2. Writings of Archbishop Anthony (Golynsky-Mihailovsky)

About The Jesus Prayer and The Lord's Grace

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Prologue

"Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt., 26, 39). The two thoughts expressed here, "Lord, have mercy" and "Lord, let it be according to Your holy will," contain the essence of The Jesus Prayer. First and foremost, the reader needs to know that The Jesus Prayer is the efficacious quintessence of repentance as indicated by the Lord Jesus. It teaches the doer [of The Prayer] to cut off the desires of his own will, love God more than creatures, sincerely humble oneself, truly know oneself, not rely on oneself in any way, ascribing all good to God only and glorifying Him for all things.

The Jesus Prayer brings man closer to God, and restoration of peace with God gives birth to a true love for your neighbor. Prayer unites the soul with its bridegroom – the Lord – and becomes the conversation between God and the soul. The great work of The Jesus Prayer starts with verbal [or spoken] effort in the active stage, and proceeds to the contemplation stage, lifting man to a truly spiritual and chaste life, where the worthiest – those "which were not defiled with women" (Rev., 14,4), those who have achieved authentic spiritual virginity, attain the highest virtue – visionary prayer.

As the word, mind, heart and the Spirit of God work within prayer, it acquires corresponding names, which we can call:

1. verbal or oral prayer
2. mental active prayer (mind in the heart)
3. and mental-heart active prayer

These three types of prayer are accessible to the human during his time as the "old man", that is, before he completely surrenders his will to God. The next two kinds of prayer are achieved by the struggler only after cleansing the heart from passions and sin and are called

4. mental-heart self-moving (ceaseless inner prayer), because it is moved by the Holy Spirit, and
5. mental-heart pure prayer (ceaseless, self-acting), or undistracted

The latter is truly contemplative prayer because it takes all of the virtues, to which it is the mother, to the acme of spiritual chastity. The worthiest ones join their souls through prayer to the Divine Bridegroom, in one spirit. When this happens, the human is given the highest gift – visionary prayer. At that point, having united with the Lord, a man sees and understands the great mysteries of God and His wisdom, and glorifies the Holy Trinity with all his essence, having acquired God in his heart.

On the path to God, prayer is the ever needed spiritual weapon of the mind, because the battle rages with the spirits of darkness that act through passions, with passions themselves, and with flesh and the world; the last ones, belonging to clay, pull the soul back to earth. Prayer – the spiritual sword – cuts up all these hordes of evil, making them completely inactive, reveals the impotence of evil before the might of God, gives the understanding of human impotence in the struggle against evil, and changes the nature of a human being. Prayer invulnerably leads the mind, which is being cleansed – powerless by itself yet aided by God – and the soul, through all deadly temptations, glorifying God the Almighty Creator.

- **The Jesus Prayer**

The Main Weapon

"For out of heart proceed evil thoughts" (Matt., 15, 19) – thus spoke the lips of the sweetest Lord Jesus, the Establisher of Spiritual Struggle, the Head and the Founder of the activity of true repentance. After the fall, when man started loving his own imperfect and evil will more than the all-perfect will of God, evil entered his heart. Self-will distanced his soul from the Lord, and man remained only with his own anemic forces. He had to resist evil, which is impossible without God's help, and the human mind and soul, loving self-will, lost their brightness, and with it the capability to distinguish between good and evil, lost discernment that reveals the tricks of the devil. Ignorance – the child of a darkened mind that loved its own will – possessed our mind and soul. Ignorance gave birth to doubt, which produced confusion, which is both mother and daughter of all the passionate waves that trouble the heart of man. Thus the ship of mind and soul is increasingly immersed in a sea of confusion, being drowned by self-will.

All this happened with man because of the darkening of his mind. His heart became filled with unnatural habits – passions – and the latter, taking root in his heart, became one with the nature of man and drew man into an unworthy life of passions, against the desire of the mind and heart. Satan, the conceiver and the ruler of darkness, did not wait long to show up, powerfully working through our darkened mind to influence the passionate heart. Thus the heart's divine dwelling became unclean from passionate filth. Man remains in the fall; his mind and soul deviated from their natural state, and crossed over to a state that is below natural state.

It is impossible to abandon this difficult state with man's strength. Passions have acquired the potency of natural essence and, to add to this, Satan is much stronger and more wily than the inexperienced mind and intercepts every human predisposition to do good, which is why man, sometimes doing what he thinks is good, reaps the harvest of increased passions. It happens sometimes that man despairs of his salvation and abandons his works, and even, which is the worst of all things, kills himself. But you need to know

that a man finds himself in such despair only when he struggles not with the name of the Lord, but rather tries to fight with his own strength. But he who puts all his hope in the Lord wins with the strength of God, and if he is defeated, he stands up again and fights until the final victory.

Humanity was possessed by the darkness of ignorance until the first coming of Christ. People were weary, unceasingly confused and heavily grieved, appealing to God with all their essence, and the Lord carried out what had been predetermined when our First Parents were cast out of Eden – He brought forth the seed of woman, which would bruise the serpent's head (cf. Gen., 3, 15). Christ was conceived in the womb of the Virgin, was born, took upon Himself the weight of the sins of all mankind and fought with sin. The Establisher of Spiritual Struggle also taught humanity how to distinguish between good and evil and how to wage war with the devil. The Ever Victorious One, He Himself had the first victory over the power of evil, so that it would be clear to man how to fight with and defeat demons and personal evil, demon-like passions.

Since the time of the Forebearers' fall into sin the Prince of Darkness, with his demons, entered into the very heart of man, that heart which had been originally made pure by the Creator. Having taken man captive with the help of sin, Satan keeps him entirely in his power, so that only from outside can God's grace exercise influence over the enslaved heart. This happens with every soul until the moment of its rebirth in the Holy Baptism. The force of this Sacrament expels the devil, and at that same moment grace settles in the heart. From now on the Enemy can act only from outside, teasing and tempting, but does so not as a master or a ruler. Man is no longer a slave of sin after Baptism. With the help of the freedom he has acquired, man can resist the Enemy, but the result of this struggle depends on man's inclination. Whether the Enemy will be defeated by the power of God, appealed to in prayer, or man will surrender to sin – from now on this is determined by the reborn soul's free consent.

Satan, banished from the heart, advances as much as he can towards it, to tempt the souls of the faithful; he attacks through bodily sensations, and arouses us to sin through the poisonous arrows of thoughts – assaults that are sent to the heart. During this, the Enemy conceals himself diligently and, delighted at man's suffering, usually acts in such a way as to perplex him and remain unrecognized in order not to reveal his presence. The devil, that sly and perfidious murderer from the very beginning, whispers any type of spite in his assault-thought and then immediately hides, and the deceived man accepts this for his own thoughts and adopts the poison in his heart. The Lord pointed at this when He said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts" (Matt., 15:19), thoughts that defile the mind and soul, depriving them of the peaceful existence that's natural to their essence. The counteraction to evil must begin when evil first appears, while it is still, as it were, in a fetal stage. It is very easy to cut off evil when it has not taken root, as long as you discover it. Such cutting off is done with the sweetest Name of the Lord Jesus.

Evil that proceeds from the heart is born by the culprit of evil – the devil. He, the flatterer and deceiver, the epitome of every nasty thing, seduces man with assaults, promising everyone whatever a man has the most passionate craving for. The perfidious deceiver, the devil, approaches man very skillfully and always surpasses the human mind with his craftiness. Concealing his presence, he disguises the thoughts he gives birth to as thoughts that belong to the man himself. The deceived man then becomes fully the devil's captive, thus finding himself doomed to eternal death unless the Lord protects the man with His grace.

The cunning of the devil exceeds the human mind with his sophisticated refinement, and this is why it is impossible and useless for a man to fight with his own forces against the devil, who acts through the passions. It is impossible, until the moment when a man receives from God the power and strength to advance against the Enemy's power. To do this, one must, through temptations allowed by God, go through all kinds of temptations and acquire experience in struggling and defeating the devil. This is possible only when a man follows the Founder of Spiritual Struggle, Christ, in everything, fighting and defeating evil with the power of God's grace acting always through prayer. Grace guards the praying man, leads him, step by step, gives him what is useful, and protects him from harm.

All humankind, as has been said earlier, was covered by the darkness of ignorance prior to the coming of Christ on earth, and people died in that gloom without knowing the truth, under the yoke of the devil, who created evil in their hearts. Christ, destroying death by His death, demolished the dungeon of hell, granting to everyone who wished it the opportunity to be saved with His help and, as Pantocrator, He removed from Hell all the faithful who had been detained there. After this, all the Holy Fathers, realizing our human impotence, but seeing the omnipotent power of God which overcomes evil and its criminal leader, desiring to follow Christ in order to fulfill the will of our Heavenly Father, knowing, from the Lord's teaching, where evil begins, did not approach the work of salvation with their own strength. All of them worked on their salvation with the power of God's grace, rising against evil at the very moment of its birth, destroying it by the power of the Name of the sweetest Jesus Christ.

When we constantly call upon Him in prayer, the Lord Himself conquers evil, pacifies the spirit of man, restores internal stillness and inclines the mind to continue dwelling in prayer. Further, we will discuss how to act impeccably against every evil with the Name of Lord Jesus Christ, that Name with which all the Holy Fathers were victorious in their battle with the devil.

There are many prayers in the Holy Church, and all of them are powerful in driving away the Evil One. Yet the potency of prayer depends on strength of mind, on experience in discerning the cunning of the Enemy, and in distinguishing between good and evil; it also depends upon one's ability to not amuse oneself in prayer. A weak mind, such as ours, is virtually incapable of keeping its attention on the words of prayer because, having

become used to a sensual life, it dreams about sensual matters that are natural to it even during prayer time – which is how a man can be facing an icon with his body while his mind and heart are soaring elsewhere. When one is not attentively remaining in prayer, the mind is unable to control itself, and the tongue can't speak freely the words of prayer because they are so different and there is such a multitude of them. This work does not progress, and if it does progress, it does so too slowly.

Knowing all this, the Holy Fathers, those teachers and doers of true repentance, chose for their main weapon the concise Jesus Prayer, which was received from the Holy Spirit, giving it preference over all other prayers. All existing Orthodox Church prayers are efficient and saving, yet the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner", containing in itself the Name of Lord Christ and the entreaty of the repenting sinner, is always attractive to the minds of those who are working on their salvation. Some of the Holy Fathers continuously said other short prayers, yet the majority was engaged primarily in The Jesus Prayer. Everyone, wishing to work for the Lord in doing this Prayer can, because of its shortness, acquire through labor a free flight of prayer without forcing the tongue, and this free flow of prayer will gradually attract to itself both mind and sensations.

The Gist of Doing

The essence of doing this prayer is in driving away every thought that comes from the heart, and, along with this, not allowing penetration into the heart of the sinful assaults and desires that come from outside, in order to train the memory to stand always before the Everywhere-Existing God, and train the mind to constantly repeat The Prayer and attend to it alone instead of other thoughts natural to it. This brings a man, in the right time, to the point where "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man" (1 Cor., 2, 9). This makes it possible for the heart of man to begin dwelling in the Holy Trinity.

The work of The Jesus Prayer, called by Holy Fathers vigilance or spiritual sobriety, must be the inalienable essence of the monastic life. It is necessary also for all those living in the world, too, because it is impossible to save oneself without remembering God.

Such a simple thing as this, the repeating of a short prayer, is in reality not altogether simple. Prayer has different types, or degrees, that are called vocal or oral, mental-active, mental-heart active, mental-heart self moving, mental heart pure, visionary. For each degree, an experienced doer should be available to provide a good instruction. Knowledge is very important here because through this mental work the Lord arranges our salvation, giving man at the right time everything needed from His grace through prayer.

Great is the need for an experienced, knowing instructor, teacher-starets, who has gone through not only the first levels of prayer, but through the visionary one too, who can freely and successfully lead a disciple through all temptations. Skillfully, he knows from experience what temptations, and their timing, can visit the one who works on his salvation. He will forewarn his disciple against every temptation with instructions, will point what and how to do to avoid an error, explain how to discern the devil's cunning when demons attack from "the left" and when approaching under the disguise of good from "the right" side.

Yet alas! The first do not have time and desire to exercise their mind, word and heart worthily in this great deed; the second, having desire, do not know how to approach it. Others approach it, but act sensually, practicing it with their fleshly mind, living according to their own will, according to their own discretion, and think that they have spiritual life. Such do not know that true spiritual life starts through God's great mercy only when man fully surrenders himself to the will of God. And this becomes possible only after cleansing the mind from darkness and after purifying the soul from passions. Up to that point a man does not live spiritually, but rather by human wisdom – the knowledge of the carnal mind, even if he knows the entire theory of Christian theology and is great in the eyes of people. Such frequently get lost in the cob-webs of a seduced carnal mind and, what is even worse, think of the true carriers of spiritual wisdom as ones who do not think right. Such people, praying with the prayer book, perceive the doers of mental prayer as ignorant and fallen into demonic delusion, yet in their own essence they are in demonic deception and ignorance. They are headed not towards salvation, but away from it.

The ancient Holy Fathers, the great creators of this mental work, wrote a lot about The Jesus Prayer. But they began with a description of the high levels of theoria or visionary prayer; they wrote about mental-heart self-moving prayer, omitting the previous beginning levels. Only a few of them touched the mental-heart active prayer and the dreamy temptations that accompany it. All Fathers wrote with brevity and as if hiding the subject, and this is the reason why.

When the Holy Fathers wrote about The Jesus Prayer, there were many doers who knew it from experience, and there was no need to describe in detail the early stages because there were many instructors who could explain it. Besides, a beginner could read their writings too, although only the advanced ones could truly make use of these writings. This is why the Fathers wrote laconically and mystically. One who is prepared will understand, in a short description, what is needed, while the unprepared one will not harm himself. Not everyone understands that spiritual prayer starts working in a man only after he approaches the complete fulfillment of the will of God. Up to that point, prayer remains only active. He, who takes active prayer for spiritual, is bitterly mistaken. If the still unfinished act of the carnal mind is taken for spiritual, then this is demonic delusion and tragic loss.

These days, experienced doers are almost non-existent. Anybody desiring to do the prayer has doubts from the very beginning whether his work is correct and successful or not. Having worked a little bit and not seen the desired fruits, he abandons this sacred deed, and sometimes even blasphemes it. Thus the man departs from possession of the heavenly wisdom that was revealed to the world by Christ: "And the light of wisdom shone to the world." And this loss dooms a man to immersion in the same mental darkness in which humankind had existed prior to the coming of Christ. When the ability to wisely glorify God is lost, people praise Him only with their tongue, yet words without participation of the mind do not set the heart aflame, but rather extinguish the fire within it.

With all my infirmity, weeping and grieving about my powerlessness, I strongly desire for the wise glorification of the Lord to continue, so that the number of those who prepare their hearts as a dwelling for the Lord will increase, and not decrease. To all those who thirst after truly glorifying God I dare offer these words not as a teaching, for you are wiser than I am, but as brotherly advice, sharing with you what I have in my poverty. Not relying on my own forces but only hoping for the all-powerful strength of my Lord, rejecting my own wisdom and everything that is not supported by the Holy Scriptures or the God-inspired writing of the Holy Fathers who knew the life of repentance from experience, I give an account of everything that I myself greatly needed at one point, when I thirsted for virtually every word that is written here now.

Of course, we write here not everything, but only the most important things, those that are encountered by every doer of repentance; we give an account of the essence of the matter that is needed by everyone. And everything that happens outside of what is written here is of a secondary nature and does not threaten the soul with destruction. Accept, O Lord, this work for the glory of Thy Holy name and make me to be wise in this; help me do it worthily, for the salvation of those souls that crave Thy truth.

"When you start working for the Lord God, prepare your soul for temptation" (Book of Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirakh, 2, 1). Know, that if you follow the Lord and adhere to His divine teaching, then you will run into temptations on this path. The flesh, the world, and Satan are your enemies, yet you are your own enemy as much as they are. From now on, refusing to follow the desires of your will, you depart from the peaceful life and constant warfare becomes your destiny. Approaching the doing of The Jesus Prayer, prepare not for a peaceful existence, but for endurance of all imaginable sorrows, brought to you by the flesh, the world, Satan and your own self-love.

Sorrows come from outside and inside, yet their onslaught is restrained with the grace of God that does not allow the sufferer who works on his salvation to be grieved more than he can bear. Sorrows are allowed by grace according to the degree of the firmness of mind and soul of the one who is trying to save himself, and not according to the will of malicious demons. Under the guidance of grace man acquires patience, and learns devotion to the will of God in order not to become despondent in the subsequent battle.

He gains experience by learning to stick zealously to prayer and obtains knowledge and wisdom through temptation.

If you, brother and sister, want to acquire the unceasing remembrance of God and to converse with Him continuously in prayer, as with a friend, face to face, then pray for the Lord to send you an instructor who is not in demonic delusion, one who knows the great deed of repenting prayer from experience, and who has been tested in battles. Experienced instructors are very rare, yet are still preserved by Lord's grace, still exist even in our time. Search for an experienced teacher assiduously, ask God with tears so that He will point out to you one who knows the path of repentance without any errors that make people wander off the trail. Yet remember, brother and sister, that you must not search for a miracle worker. Do not look for the external attributes, but search for the one who truly knows spiritual life and spiritual battle, who has spiritual wisdom, who has peered into the mysteries of the heavenly Kingdom. Look for a man who can lead you to the Kingdom of God which is within you, who himself has gone through temptations and learned every flattery of Satan and trick of the devil. Such a spiritual man knows about heaviness of heart that comes because of passions which have been stirred up by the devil, knows and can help in any grief, can deliver you from any weight that is born by confusion. Only have firm faith in such a man, akin to faith in God, because God himself is leading such a person.

If God points you to such an instructor, then stick to him with all your heart and dare not betray him or ignore his words. Take him for Christ Himself and know that the Holy Fathers said the following about this: "If you see your teacher sleeping or reclining, eating or drinking, conversing or doing something, then do not be tempted because of the weakness of your little soul, since because of his work he is pleasing to God and such matters do not harm him." Know with all your strictness, that he is the judge of your affairs, and not you of his; you have the need of him and not he of you. He bears your infirmities and suffers your self-will, and you may be a burden to him that he carries because of love for you. In him, who has attained truly spiritual wisdom, acts God Himself, who dwells in his heart, and his will is pleasing to God because he lives according to the will of God. He, in the likeness of the Holy Apostles, does the work of saving people. What you do not like accept from him, fulfill it and preserve it as if it is an irreplaceable treasure. Open criticism, biting remarks and everything that hampers your will, accept from him willingly, because he cures the ulcers of your soul with this and puts your will to death, resurrecting your mind and soul from the death of sin.

Such a tutor has resurrected his mind and soul with the strength of God from the death of sin, has purified his heart from passions, and prepared it for the constant indwelling of the Triune God: "And We will come unto him and make our abode with him" (John, 14, 23). Such an instructor is the sage of sages, a great philosopher, even if he has not studied external sciences. He is a true theologian, unceasingly theologizing because he lives in God and by God. Such speak the Holy Fathers, who tell us that it is a blessing to be under

the guidance of an experienced teacher, not having any concerns about yourself, but unconditionally executing everything that is pointed out by him.

And you, instructor, father, leader in spiritual wisdom, first of all check yourself entirely, make sure you have a truly spiritual mind that is sanctified by the Holy Spirit, a mind that is affirmed by God, so that you can teach with benefit the spiritual children that are being shepherded by you, while you remain in full peace of soul in God as you lead them, without going astray, on the thorny path of repentance to the genuine wisdom of the Spirit.

If you, the teacher, do not have true wisdom, but have only true knowledge that remains in complete dedication to the will of God, you still can lead your children on the path of repentance. Yet in the matters of truly spiritual wisdom guide only yourself and abstain from directing others in this field, because you have not entered into true wisdom.

He who has neither true wisdom nor true knowledge cannot lead the others. This can be very dangerous because such a man still merely walks in repentance. He who is on the path of repentance has not reached salvation. He who himself is in transit makes mistakes and, not infrequently, he turns truth into a lie, and calls falsehood truth. He who has not achieved true knowledge can't teach others, even if he is externally educated as a theologian. He is under the influence of passions himself that possess him completely; how can he liberate anyone from the passions? He who does not understand the truth creates a great hindrance instead of bringing profit to his student. Such frequently perceive themselves worthy leaders, but in reality lead their flock to damnation, and, what is even worse, think of true teachers of God's truth as deluded, separating children from experienced tutors, while they themselves are fully destroyed by the demonic delusions of passions and sin.

Brother and sister! If you entreated God a multitude of times to grant you a teacher, and yet have not received one, if you searched and searched insistently everywhere and did not find such a man because they are so rare these days – do not despair, "with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt., 19, 26). Rely on God, with firm determination that you will not retreat from the chosen path of doing The Prayer, firmly believing that the Lord is near the ones that call Him, and act according to what is indicated here.

The Lord, having given you the wisdom to long for prayerful labor, thus acknowledges that you are called to this work. It is good before God. He Himself will help to lay the foundation. It is He Who helps every time a prayer is said, and even every separate word of a prayer is pronounced with His help. He wills to be with you during the entire time of prayer, and He beholds you. At all times and everywhere He will, with the grace that acts in prayer, support, teach and make you wise Himself, either punishing or having mercy on you. Punishing, He reveals His fatherly love for you. He will chastise you, yet

simultaneously accept you as a son so that you become skillful with Him. He will observe how you love Him, witnessing your love through prayerful remembrance of Him.

To the degree that there is self-compulsion in prayer – the compulsion to attentively keep the mind in prayer, and the compulsion to have a sympathetic attitude of the heart – the Lord will help you with His grace to become more familiar with prayer, and will help you to avoid sin. This is closely connected to the difficulties a son has in mastering his obedience to God, yet you should not be discouraged – the key thing is not reach the point of despair and inactivity, not to leave prayer. The Lord will help you and sorrow will pass.

If this prayerful work starts to seem useless to you, resolutely reject such thoughts because there cannot be a prayer that doesn't bring usefulness and fruits. Seeming fruitlessness is the result of ignorance. A man doesn't understand what the fruit of prayer is, yet the fruit grows, meanwhile, under the action of grace. Through the labor of prayer all the virtues grow in the soul, and this occurs unnoticed. Man's work is not to abandon prayer, ever, and attend to it according to the degree of his strength, forcing himself to this labor. In all things you must await God's mercy, submitting to His will. The Lord, acting in prayer with His grace, will give everything needed to the one who prays, according to the degree of his diligence.

Mother of All Virtues

In the work of prayer, great importance is attached to the frequency of prayer and constant remembrance of the beloved Lord. Gradually, attention of mind is strengthened, and this constitutes a fruit of prayer. With the intensification of attention a man starts seeing in himself more and more evil coming forth from the heart, and this happens in a variety of ways, with the conniving of the Enemy, who stirs the passions. Evil reveals itself in thoughts and desires, and the mind, thirsting for salvation, must pay no attention to these assaults but cut them off, attending to prayer, thus rendering these passions impotent. This is the essence of the battle.

A repenting man does not notice the fruits of prayer. The grace of God arranges this secretly for his benefit because man has a weakness for conceit. It seems to the one who prays that he is standing still, or it appears that he has become even worse. He prays again, and sees again his seeming failures. Assaults are driven away again and again with prayer; as a result the mind reveals them more and more, and man starts humbling himself in such warfare. He must learn to submit himself to the will of God; this is exactly what is required.

Everything that is salvific for man is arranged by the grace of God in response to a man's good desire for salvation, and to his forcing himself to prayer – which also gradually

brings success in prayer, as it does in general on the path to salvation. The great work of prayer fulfills the words of Christ: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John, 3, 3). Prayer can bring the total rebirth of an entire man by the force of grace; therefore man must never abandon prayer under any circumstances.

The devil, who secretly influences the heart, is, beyond all description, afraid of this attentive prayer because he knows that through it the human mind discovers all of the devil's tricks. When a man persistently sticks to prayer and does not let go of the name of Christ from himself, then such a man becomes convinced that he cannot live without prayer. Otherwise the enemy's thoughts immediately possess his mind and passions enslave him.

Man has nothing to be proud of, because every success is achieved not by him, but by grace. Frankly speaking, these achievements are not about reaching spiritual sophistication, but rather about cleansing the mind from darkness, purification of the soul from passions, and learning the skill of the warfare. Not understanding this simple fact, a man strives for self-glorification, without realizing that his mind is possessed by the night of ignorance. So you, brother or sister, take all of this into account when you approach this holy exercise which is going to sanctify and enlighten you. In the very beginning, determine to dedicate the rest of your life to this prayerful work, although it may seem to be very difficult. The path of ascetic struggle is hard, yet paradise is sweet, and beautiful is the bridegroom of your soul – Christ the Lord. The road of doing The Prayer is the path to Him.

Remember, brother or sister, that no matter how great the temptations are, no matter how horrifying they appear, never despair or become depressed, but instead dedicate all your attention to The Prayer that you recite. Prayer is called "the staff" because a man leans on it and stands firmly. If he gets drawn into thoughts and desires, becomes fascinated with what he saw in a dream or with something from everyday routine, then, having remembered The Prayer, he will return to it and obtain peace of mind, and will again make peace with grace and continue his march forward.

The Holy Fathers call prayer, including The Jesus Prayer, the mother of all virtues. This is because the degree of success in prayer corresponds to the degree of achievements in other virtues. Prayer, like a mother that feeds her children, feeds all of the virtues, which is why prayerful activity is, in its essence, a salvific life, which takes mind and soul to the highest wisdom of God.

When prayer is penetrated with the action of the Holy Spirit, then all virtues are driven by the Holy Spirit as well. Let us work towards this state. The man that is preoccupied with prayer remains in a state of remembering God, and remembrance of God is a witness of love for God. Man always repents of his sins when praying because he sees himself a sinner. Man fights with evil when doing The Prayer, yet does this not with his own infinitely weak strength, but with the name of God, admitting his own impotence and glorifying the almightiness of the Lord. Prayer opens in a man the eye of spiritual

wisdom, shows the sins that are hiding in his heart, and also his weaknesses, so that man may be truly humbled.

Man comes to know his powerlessness and impotence in the war with evil and starts attending more and more to The Prayer with his mind, surrendering himself completely to the will of God. Again and again he calls on the Lord for defense against his adversary – the devil – and again and again he remembers death, because the struggle with sin goes hand in hand with remembrance of death. “Sin is death,” and thoughts about sin lead to the thought of death, which places the body into the earth. Realizing gradually that sin is defeated by prayer, man learns courage through The Prayer.

The [Jesus] Prayer teaches tranquility in the soul during times of trouble and sorrow, showing us that temptations and sorrows become the reason for consequent knowledge and salvation. Thus, all other virtues, and even love itself, grow with the help of prayer. The Holy Fathers, those great creators of mental work, the seers of the Lord's mysteries, called The Prayer "the staff" and explained, convincingly, that he who leans upon the staff of prayer will not fall, and if he falls, will not die, but will arise and continue walking.

Such is the witness of the saints, and, while Satan seeks how to push the soul into temptation, let the man be with his mind in prayer and be calm, because while he attends to prayer he conquers the enemy, achieves success and peacefully marches forward, moved by The Prayer. In my poverty and with all my ever-possible impotence and feeble mindedness, I experienced this first hand many times.

- **Verbal prayer**

Acquisition of the Habit

One must begin The Jesus Prayer, as any other prayer, by doing it with the word. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner" – this is how a man appeals to God a couple of times while reading the morning and evening rule, or simply all the time and everywhere, in any condition and in any place, doing as he was told by his spiritual father. If one does not have an elder, then he must still try to be with prayer everywhere and at all times.

Up to five hundred Jesus Prayers may be added on top of the morning and evening prayers that are read from the prayer book. They must be said with all possible attention, following, according to strength, the following pattern: before the rule, thirty three prostrations, after each one hundred Jesus prayers three prostrations, after each ten prayers – a bow. At the end of the rule – again thirty-three prostrations. When you are

weak, it is permitted not to make prostrations. Or you can substitute them with bows, or simply cross yourself, and, attending to the words, without any confusion continue The Prayer. Before and during feasts prostrations may be replaced with the bows.

If the need arises to add to the five hundred prayers another one hundred, two, three, four, or five hundred – you can add these and then diminish what is read from the prayer book. You can do one thousand in the morning and the evening. If you feel the greater necessity to do The Prayer, then add more, and decrease what you read in the prayer book. If the strong desire and inner need appear to do The Jesus Prayer in lieu of the morning and evening Rule, then there is no need to suppress it. Keep the morning and evening prayers that you read from the prayer book, and the rest can be omitted, so that you can perfect the habit of The Jesus Prayer.

Thus your mind will gradually be collected together and drawn into the excitement of this prayerful feeling. Make sure to not abandon The Jesus Prayer between the morning and evening rules. Adjust your life to this, search for any opportunity to avoid talkativeness, and organize your external affairs and life accordingly.

This, it seems, sounds not difficult at all. What can be easier than to repeat the same simple words of this short prayer? But it turns out that in practice this is not that easy. The soul that has lost the habit of remembering God, that has spent its life in passions instead of standing before the Lord, continues to be attracted by the diversity of impressions preserved in its memory, which had been accepted through the senses of vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch. The mind follows the memory as if a slave, because everything in the internal man that must be under the management of the mind, including the five external senses, has overtaken the mind. External sensations serve as conductors of what is preserved in the memory, and these impressions take hostage and keep in their power the mind and heart, while mind and heart are the precious epicenter of the essence of the human entity, predetermined by the Lord to be His abode.

When a man submerges his mind and heart into impressions and starts using feelings as a guide, then his soul starts living a passionate life beyond its nature. When sensations dominate, then mind, enslaved by carnal desires, loses the freedom it received from God as a great gift, and brings about the complete turmoil of the inner man. Sensations that are not used for vigilance and for co-participation in prayer are excited by everything that can be accepted from inside and outside. Under such internal disorder a man is unable to be vigilant, to keep spiritual fast; in spite of his inclination he can curb neither his mind nor his feelings. Everything is in disarray because of a non-vigilant and non-attentive life. This is why the man who approaches the work of prayer must be ready from the very beginning to lead a fight against the entire framework of his previous life, to be reborn completely with the help of grace, to get rid of everything that is not natural in him.

As a person says The Prayer, he gets carried away, says it again and is distracted, remembers it again and repeats it. Over and over again the man loses The Prayer, excited either by previous notions that are preserved in the mind, or by new sensations coming from outside. Recollections that are kept in the heart arise and visit the mind in the way of thoughts, and there rushes in the devil, mixing in with these thoughts. But if a man is

determined to be very attentive to himself, then, at the very beginning, he starts discovering what is going on in his internal world. As man's attention increases, the prayerful act of the mind allows him to curb the sensations from distractions, enables the man to see more clearly the evil coming out of the heart through thoughts. This, somewhat, is a fruit of prayer.

In spite of these endless distractions, no matter how weak The Prayer is, there is no need to become idle and inactive. Man must not abandon prayer; on the contrary, one must increase the urge for prayer to cleanse the heart from the puss of sin. As many times as the mind forgets prayer, as many times it must remember it and do it again and again. To the extent that one forces oneself, the Lord will decrease your forgetfulness, and your attention will begin, although very slowly, to increase. The more time the human mind spends in prayer, the more it is taken by the Lord towards the work of the angels, towards partaking of prayerful food.

Occupy yourself with prayer always – day and night, evening, morning, at home and outside, in transit and at work, standing, walking, lying down and sitting, during the rule and apart from all rules. At all times do The Prayer. And here is why: passion, just like a virtue, takes its root in a man from habit. The same good deed, being repeated, becomes normal to the man from its repetition, becomes a habit and is done without coercion, as something natural. In the same way, repeated sin forms a passion. And passion, having gained strength, seduces one to sin out of habit, and, imitating the natural quality, forces a man to sin even against his will.

The Jesus Prayer, just like the other virtues, needs practice. Man must try through self-coercion always, in joys and sorrows, to be in prayer. An inclination is built up through self-compulsion with the help of Divine grace; a man is strengthened for the coming prayerful work. The habit of doing The Prayer is acquired by persistent repetition of the prayer words. Verbal prayer requires quantity – multitude. Say The Prayer as many times as possible during the full day. In the future, although not immediately, the number is going to increase, depending on attention and the diligence of the praying mind.

During verbal prayer the devil, the flesh and the world act inside and outside us, distracting the mind from prayer. Fight against this mental-visible evil with the help of The Prayer itself – attend to it and by this drive away any evil. The beginning of the struggle with evil and sin starts with the prayer; with it, the strength to fight in this war increases. It is impossible to battle the devil and sin only with your own strength.

External Life

The external life of a man during the verbal stage of The Prayer should be organized as follows: no matter what the circumstances are, what position you hold, what obedience

you do, in every situation strive for solitude and less opportunity for idle talk, thus guarding your tongue. Silent lips conveniently create a better environment for prayer. It is necessary to remember always that the Lord Himself looks at the struggler. Mistreatments and insults must be endured patiently and must be forgiven unconditionally. If insulted, do not keep it in your evil, damaged memory. From time to time breathe from the depth of your heart with the words of the publican: "Lord, have mercy upon me, the sinner!" and to the Mother of God: "Mother of God, do not abandon me, the sinful one!", and to the guardian angel, too, the same way – and continue unceasingly doing The Jesus Prayer.

During free time, when you are not involved in any work or obedience, you need to read soul-benefiting books to give rest to the mind that is tired from the tension of prayer. It is good to read the lives of the saints and strugglers for the pure life, who were saving themselves in the last times, the New Testament and the Acts and letters of the holy Apostles. The great books about the visionary stages of prayer should not be touched at this point as they may harm the reader; they will be read later in the struggle. The reading of these books can give birth to unbearable sorrows in the inexperienced mind. It would be weakened and would not be able to fulfill what is written there, and would be greatly confused and despondent, thus dissociating itself from the grace of God. Books that do not encourage the correction of morals, i.e. of secular nature, should not be read at all during this time. Occupy yourself exclusively with the correction of your morals and inclinations of the soul, hoping to receive help from the grace that is acting in prayer.

Sleep should be six to seven hours, if you have strength and health; if ill or weak you may sleep up to eight hours per day. Do so until the time when prayer itself will establish the length of sleep and you will rest as long as it will allow you. Such long rest (six to eight hours) is needed because praying The Jesus Prayer requires intensive mental work, and this is possible only if rest strengthens the mind. Otherwise the mind is unable to pray attentively.

Food requires moderation always. This means: leave the table feeling that you have not eaten enough, that you are not completely full. Teach yourself to use moderation in drinking too. Do not consume alcohol at all, in order not to excite the flesh and sinful passion. Eat little of that which contains a lot of fat, in order not to bring yourself down with sinful animal-like lust and heaviness in the stomach that predisposes the mind to sleepiness and idleness. Eat mostly fasting food that is easily digested, thanking God for His mercy and firmly believing that calories contained in Lenten food are sufficient to maintain the life of your organism and to do The Prayer. The preparation of food should be simple, avoid any refinement.

Business relations, and in general one's entire way of life, should be simplified to the greatest extent in order not to give any reason for useless cares about external matters, and to avoid distractions and wandering of the mind. Remember that man lives on this earth as a guest and a wanderer. We stay one night – and then hurry on to eternity, where we will answer for the life we have lived on earth. Do not be excited by anything earthly, even it is very important – earth is not a place to live, but rather a place of preparation for

life eternal. Firmly learn by heart that it is determined for man to suffer on this earth, and not to rejoice: "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John, 16, 33).

Teach yourself to be satisfied only with what is truly necessary. Everything unnecessary demands excessive care, takes away part of the time that is given to you to acquire good things for your soul and for the glorification of God. At all times and everywhere cling only to those things that assist salvation – this is why the Creator put us on this sorrowful earth. By all means avoid visiting the places where you can't avoid entertainment, and do not think about them. If you happen to find yourself in such a place out of necessity, hurry to leave it, remembering that your entire business is to approach God through prayer, and he who abandons this endeavor begins to withdraw from the battle. Never grant freedom to your desires, for this kills the soul and darkens the mind. As much as you suppress your desires, as much as you stay away from people and remain silent for the sake of God, to this same degree the Lord will be with you, while carelessness with prayer will take you further away from the Lord.

Love God. Love of God should be witnessed by the cutting away of your own will and executing the will of God. It is good for the Lord that our mind is occupied with unceasing prayer, so take care of this by all means. Stay away from public festivities, official receptions and all things of that nature. Appreciate every moment of time that is given to you for your salvation, for the illumination of your mind, remembering that it is impossible to receive more time to achieve salvation after death. You can live without public dinners, yet it is very difficult to stay away from the harm that they inflict. In general, try to avoid everything that carries you away from solitude; instead direct all your desire towards prayerful conversation with the Lord. Reveal by this your good intention.

Success in The Prayer should not be noticed at the verbal stage, because a man still lives in his passions in spite of his desire to live for God. A man lives according to his heart, and passions – these sinful habits – dwell there too. They are weakened by verbal prayer, yet do not abandon the heart. Any visions, gifts and revelations, no matter what shape they take, no matter how holy and graceful they appear to you, must be shunned; do not attach your mind to things like this; attend only to The Prayer that you recite.

Perceive yourself unworthy of any gifts, which is the way it is in reality. You started The Prayer not to receive gifts, but rather to seek The Prayer and commitment to the will of God. God gives this usually not to prideful ones, who desire gifts, visions and revelations, but to those who see themselves as unworthy not only of the gifts, but of the life itself that is so full of sorrows. Such people see their sinfulness – and the measure of understanding their own sinfulness is the degree of purification of one's heart from sin. This realization is the most precious thing in doing the repenting prayer. "Lord, King, grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother" – this is how Saint Ephraim the Syrian prayed, and did not seek gifts. One more: "He who sees his own sins is higher than the one who saw an angel," because the first has his spiritual eye opened, the second still sees with a passionate eye.

As has been said before, say The Jesus Prayer everywhere and all the time. When you are by yourself, whisper it, and when among people, then recite it within yourself. It is useful to say it within yourself even when you are alone; the more intimate it becomes for you, the better it is. Learning an internal prayerful disposition will help you to maintain prayer amidst a multitude of people, by attending to its words and secretly working on your salvation.

When you are in the temple of God, you may engage your mind with The Jesus Prayer during all services. During Liturgy, especially during the Great Entrance, when all who are praying ask from their hearts according to their needs, do the same as they do: ask the Lord, as you can, to forgive your sins. If The Jesus Prayer has attached itself to you entirely and is said without difficulty, then even during these sacred minutes say it. It contains the repenting appeal to the Lord to forgive your sins; the gist of all our prayers and struggles is in this matter. If in the church service, especially in liturgy, you can maintain great attention, when the mind is not being robbed by various thoughts, then pray as you wish. But I advise you not to neglect the all-powerful Jesus Prayer ever, because all virtues are acquired through it.

Force out all secular joys from yourself; arrange your room-cell in such a way as to avoid any amusement. When the need arises to reason or discuss something with people, then ponder death, hell, the destiny of sinners who do not repent. When great sadness overcomes you, then apart from the thoughts about hell, which can be avoided through the patient suffering of sorrows on this earth, reckon paradise, the blissfulness of being close to God that is received by fulfilling the holy will of God, by patient bearing of all things that are encountered throughout life, by the mental doing of The Jesus Prayer. "We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God" (Acts, 14, 22). Grievings, internal and external, which are patiently endured on earth, will substitute for us the torments of hell in eternity and will become, in imitation of Christ, the image of the Cross of Christ, that takes us to eternal life, that is to the Lord, and to eternal dwelling in Him.

To save oneself is to experience sorrow. Without grieving there is no salvation, just as there is no happiness on this earth for the follower of Christ: "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John, 16, 33). Followers of Christ lead their lives in sorrows, and suffering is their permanent companion and tyrant, but at the same time it is a teacher of true, heavenly, divine wisdom. The path of the Cross of Christ is full of stones and thorns, yet it grants a man true knowledge, understanding of the essence of things and phenomena, and makes an authentic theologian out of him, even if the man is quite simple and not skillful in any way in external sciences.

All things are to be done honestly, without hypocrisy, and pleasing to those around you, so that your soul will be pure and not reproach you. Learn to love all people – those closest to you, those sick and weak, forgive all abuses and insults that are caused by them. Treat those who wish you evil as benefactors. Thus, humbling yourself by all means and reproaching yourself, you can acquire love for all and have no enemies. Fulfill these requirements and continue the verbal Jesus prayer until it becomes a habit.

Salvific Addition to Your Life

This work is not determined by time and is different for various people. The young, if they try, succeed faster, while for the older it is slower because the memory of the elderly contains more passions than that of the young. Those who do not succeed at all are those who do not want to toil for their salvation. Thoughts appear in endless quantity during verbal prayer; almost all of them are born in the heart with the participation of the devil. The mind, attending to prayer, dashes passionate thoughts against the rock of the sweetest name of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are thoughts that are difficult to get rid of; they torment the man against his will for one or two days and longer. Such thoughts have to be confessed to an elder or gerondissa, or, if you do not have an elder, stand on your knees before God and ask Him to arrange retaliation against your contender, that is, the devil. Carry out with precision what the elder tells you, and the thought that was revealed and confessed to the observant elder, or before God, will depart from you. It is good if the elder is in the Truth, is above the temptations of his disciples, and is not possessed by the thought in the same form and image.

In case you don't have anyone to whom you can mention your temptation, determine not to agree with the thought all your life and fight without despondency. The Lord, seeing you striving and struggling for good, Himself will help you by preventing the thought, or, without taking the fight away from you, by giving you patience. God allows this so that you can acquire saving knowledge and patience through struggle, and in due time inflict a deep wound to the head of the devil. If possible, confess and commune frequently, but not too often, because you have to be properly prepared for it. If you do not have a chance to commune even once a year, then, putting all your hope on the Lord, remain in prayer, and the Lord, seeing your good disposition, will accept your desire as communion itself.

By doing The Prayer one acquires the remembrance of God, seeing one's sinfulness and helplessness, and one loses the vision of one's virtuousness and assurance of one's own strength. Man stops perceiving himself as worthy of anything special, because through attention to thoughts and desires he discovers that he is completely buried in sin. A sinner is not worthy of the visitation of the Lord; think of yourself as unworthy too. In the light of what has been just said, while doing The Prayer do not take into account anything unusual in or around yourself – any kind of light, warmth, faces of saints or something like this – because everything that is apart from prayer and attention to it is from the devil.

Grace is given to the doer of prayer in The Prayer itself, thus cleansing the mind from darkness and the soul from passions. The main value for the one who is repenting is in this, and in nothing else. Grace can be a part of the nous of the man only when the mind peacefully, without confusion, does The Prayer and wins over the thoughts with the name of God. It is a disaster for the mind to strive for anything else – it will reap bareness and sorrow, and will not avoid demonic delusion.

There are thoughts that are called natural; they come from the mind that does not want to sin. We are not going to dwell upon them because they are harmless and useless. It is the work of the mind to accept only one thought – that of prayer. The rest of the thoughts are the strangers passing by, that are needless for the mind, and he who starts conversing with them will not avoid harm. Endless numbers of assaults come to the mind, yet do not be afraid of this; they all will vanish without a trace if only the nous does not listen to them, being occupied with prayer. Nothing can conquer the mind when the name of God is with it.

One does not need any special wisdom and knowledge for doing this verbal prayer, all one needs is determination, and success will follow undoubtedly. There are no peculiar, hard to distinguish temptations during this time; the devil mainly fights against you with assaults through thoughts, yet one must depart from the external world for the sake of safety. Anyone can practice verbal prayer, only do not accept any visual and mental images, recite The Prayer and attend to it. The length of the verbal stage depends on the forcefulness and diligence of the doer and on the degree of the roughness of the heart prior to the beginning of the work of prayer.

The result of verbal prayer is the habit given by the Lord's grace. The witness to this acquired habit is the fact that after temporary distraction from prayer the tongue itself starts saying the prayer words, then attention is driven to these words, and mind conscientiously continues the verbal rendition of The Prayer.

- **Mental active prayer (mind in the heart)**

Active stage

The mental active Jesus Prayer is called "mental" because it is said in the mind, and "active" because, until there is a complete surrender to the will of God, and it is deliberately repeated by a man, his prayer is not yet self-moved by the Holy Spirit.

Having gotten used to verbal prayer, as has been said above, the mind starts, according to the phrase of the Holy Fathers, to more warmly and with greater effort attend to the words that are spoken by the tongue. Listening to them, it begins immersing itself in prayer gradually and with pleasure. Finally, having acquired love for this activity, and instead of getting drawn into the whirlpool of thoughts coming out of the heart, the mind starts doing The Prayer itself. From now on The Prayer, which is born in the secret depth of the nous rather than the lips, is no longer pronounced but is being thought in the mind. There are people whose minds are naturally developed so much prior to prayerful exercises, that they can directly approach mental prayer, bypassing the verbal stage altogether.

With greater clarity one distinguishes alien thoughts. Brought forth by mind, prayer is natural to the nous, and all incoming thoughts can be identified as foreign and cut off. It is more convenient for the nous to keep attention on the thought of The Prayer that is born in its depth. Strength of the mind increases; readiness of the mind to repel the devil's assaults from the thoughts becomes more potent. Attentively praying with its own thought, that is being born by itself, the mind becomes more refined than before, when it listened only to the words that were pronounced by the tongue.

From now on, the man starts following the path of angels in the framework of his mind. In its essence, mental prayer feeds from the spirit and is done by the spirit, and so is the food and permanent labor of the holy Angels.

Now such a man can be given the angelic image without doubt – that is being tonsured. One can be his sponsor in the monasticism without worries, witnessing the promises that he has given to God during the cutting of the hair. This man is an imitator of Angels already.

The tonsure of a man who does not have mental prayer should cause doubt. This is why monasticism in these times has become much weaker and the phenomenon of mental work is so rare. Gerondas and gerondissas themselves, with some exceptions, do not have the angelic work [of mental prayer], although they are dressed externally in the garments of angelic work, yet they wear them in condemnation of themselves. Those who are presented by them for tonsure have nothing to do with the angelic image either. Thus our monasteries have become filled up with monks who took a great interest in scientific knowledge and differed from the secular world in their clothing, yet were not different from it in terms of the internal essence of the man who is doing the angelic work of unceasing prayer. And what is even worse, many of them perceived mental work as a mistake and demonic delusion, because they thought that the dignity of monastic life was in the external rule of the monastic life. Yet God needs our heart. If you cleanse the internal, then the external is going to be clean, too. God needs our spirit, our mind and soul, and not the body, wrapped in garments.

A man who has acquired the habit of mental prayer witnesses, by this, God's mercy and the fact that the Lord accepts his repentance. This is God's message that if he continues to work further on purification of his heart, a man will receive the blessedness of complete forgiveness, and then all his passions will be destroyed and expelled. Mental prayer – this mercy of God – warms the mind of man by grace, and he becomes the hostage of this labor. He who has acquired mental prayer should not despair of his salvation, but rather with strengthened faith and with more zeal he should participate in further struggle with the devil, who continues to attack through the assaults of thoughts.

From now on the thoughts that come out of the heart are not as rough as before – they reveal themselves in more "sophisticated" forms. Refined forms of temptations are more difficult to distinguish, yet he who has attained mental prayer through grace receives also divine help against the tricks of the devil. Now the mind that has not previously noticed the fine temptations that act in the heart, starts discovering them and cuts them up by the sword of mental prayer. Every time, when the enemy's assault is discovered and repelled,

the devil is forced to invent more new traps, yet the nous that stubbornly attends only to prayer and rejects anything else, receives a blessed gift of increased refinement in discerning the devil's assaults.

This pertains to attention also. If, with every cutting off of the enemy's assault, attention continues to maintain prayer, then it becomes stronger and stronger. This is the order of the warfare. The mind is seduced by an increasingly sophisticated assault, yet by staying in prayerful attention it reveals its contempt for the devil and love of God, and every such victory strengthens attention and cleverness of the mind. The attentive mind is capable of fighting not only assaults, but also Satan's other temptations, which are allowed by grace.

The devil frequently approaches with ideas that seem good, in order to better distract us from prayer which is hated by him above all things. He gives the ability to discuss theological matters, reveals some mysteries, and offers an imitation of high gifts and some other lies. The mind, dreaming about these gifts instead of begging for mercy; the mind, diving into theology while forgetting about its unworthiness; the mind, involved in communication with spirits instead of repentant standing before God; the mind, accepting revelations from spirits and inclined to things like these – such mind has abandoned God and deviated into the realm of the assistants of Satan. Great is the demonic delusion of such a mind, and what is even worse – it does not accept advice from anyone, remaining in its darkness.

There is nothing higher for a man than to converse by means of mental prayer with the all-existing God, standing before Him with his nous, begging for forgiveness of his sins. Prayer is called the mother of virtues because only through prayer are all true virtues acquired and grace-filled gifts are granted. Attend and attend again to your prayer, and God will take care of everything that is great and mysterious when it is needed, when your heart will be cleansed completely from passions and when the will of God will be executed completely. The Lord Himself works in prayer and through prayer – and everything that is outside prayer, no matter how saving and good it appears, is incapable of victory over the devil because it does not have real force in itself.

Mental prayer, just like verbal prayer, needs quantity in the beginning. It is necessary to increase the amount so that your mind will become strong in mental creativity, so that, invariably committing itself completely to the will of God, mental work will become a mental habit. The sign of an acquired habit in mental prayer is when, upon waking, a man immediately feels a prayerful movement of the mind, and also, when something distracts him, prayer starts resonating in his thoughts itself, and his attention always inclines to prayer alone. Prayer does not leave a man during eating and other activities. Another sign is when a man, while listening to someone, continues to attend to prayer and does not hear temptations, because his mind itself is disposed towards prayer.

During this period, when temptations from the devil become more sophisticated and complex, it is quite difficult not to get lost in them. If you have an experienced instructor – elder, spiritual father, teacher – then there is no problem because he will show when and what to do, and will forewarn about temptations. If there are no experienced people, then do not be afraid – remain with prayer and attend only to it, drive away the rest. The

Lord allows temptation to every doer of The Prayer according to the measure of mental strength; the devil cannot do anything beyond what is allowed. Wage war with Satan only with the sword of prayer and temptations will be for your benefit; they will serve for understanding the wily tricks of the devil and strengthen the human mind.

The mind should not pay attention to any supernatural events – neither light, even when it comes from an icon, nor a voice, even if the angels sing – because the mind stands before and appeals in prayer to the Master of Angels Himself, who is present, unseen, everywhere. And what can be above this? Do not take note, no matter what, of the angels that appear before you and of the saints, because authentic experiences do not occur prior to a full cleansing from the passions, before the total execution of God's will. What does happen prior to this are demonic traps. If the mind, knowing this, is not seduced by these spirits, then they will pass by, and grace will not allow temptation above the strength of the one who is praying.

Grace always acts in prayer, and through prayer gives everything that the mind needs in due time. Becoming more refined, the nous acquires a vision of the sinfulness that fills to the brink the human heart, and then the mind weeps and appeals to God for mercy. The devil is afraid of a man who perseveres in this mental work and sees his sinfulness, and, with all his deceptions and delusions, he runs away from such a man, because he knows that he will be defeated, while the struggler will obtain experience in discerning temptations and spiritual growth in the struggle with them. Defeated over and over again by grace, the devil continues approaching the spiritual warrior with various ploys and frauds. Forced to offer more and more new cunning temptations, the evil one, against his will and by the fact of doing it, enriches the mind of the praying one with knowledge of the art of struggle. In temptations, which are permitted by grace, man becomes convinced of the impotence of the devil, and understands in practice how strong the name of Almighty Lord is.

It is impossible to describe everything that happens during mental prayer, and different things happen with various people. Much depends on the zeal of the soldier, some on the complexity of his external activity and on the surrounding circumstances. The main thing, so that mind will be cleansed from darkening and the soul liberated from passions, is to see your own sinfulness and weep over it. Do not allow anything except for the name of the Lord to enchant you, do not agree with anything else, and know only attentive prayer at all times and everywhere.

Upbringing by Grace

In the same measure that a man succeeds in prayer, in the same measure his achievement in all other virtues grows and he becomes more committed to surrendering to the will of God, in the execution of it. An understanding of one's own sinfulness destroys the image

of one's having any merits and good qualities. The constant remembrance of the Lord grants the mind the vision of God's right hand working with it, which defeats the enemies. Maintain the memory of the Lord, praying to Him with attention, and He Himself will retaliate for you, will destroy for you all enemies against whom you cannot fight because of your powerlessness. All that depends on man is a good predisposition, an unwillingness to agree with evil, and a determination to fight against evil, because all victories are achieved by Jesus Christ. You can undertake anything against the devil without God – anything you want against evil – yet everything will be stolen from you by one of the passions. Success is achieved only through the invisible grace of God.

Grace accepts a man's good predisposition and teaches him to rely not on himself, but on the saving God, instructs him to wage war with the name of God, opens to a man his own helplessness and nothingness, and humbles him. Grace educates a man to surrender himself to the will of God, finding everything in God, and relying in everything solely on God. Thus the activity of man is successfully organized by grace, and man, seeing such care for himself, acquires a natural trust and starts to fully surrender himself to God. Now he acts not only according to the beginning of the prayer in Gethsemane – "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me", begging for mercy – but also according to the end of it – "Nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou wilt" (Matt., 26, 39) – submitting himself to the will of the Heavenly Father, burning increasingly with greater love for Him. This is how we prepare for even greater accomplishments, for further battle with the devil.

A man becomes convinced that God does all warfare with the enemy for him; what is required from him is only the compulsion to prayer and attention to it. He becomes increasingly aware of the need for diligent attention to prayer, because demons are unimaginably creative and attack from completely unexpected angles. Even what has been understood up to this point as good turns out to be a cunningly knit web of the devil. Now man even more assiduously sticks to the Lord, taking shelter in prayer, seeking protection in God.

Just as the composite of passions forms one chain, so do the virtues form one inseparable sequence. One good act brings about the entire string; one good deed feeds and increases all the virtues. The same happens with the passions: victory over one makes all of them withdraw, because they are connected inseparably. According to this law, passions are exhausted in the process of cleansing of the mind, virtues are revived and strengthened, and this happens during the entire process of mental prayer. He who does not do The Prayer does not know anything about this.

The grace of God, forming the salvation of man, conceals from him its good deeds so that the devotee will not stop on his path. Grace suppresses the passions, shows the mind the insidiousness of the demons, restores virtues in his soul, while remaining concealed both from the praying one and from the devil. Acting secretly, grace punishes the spiritual fighter with sorrows at the right time, allows him to make small errors, then strictly demands correction and explains what has happened, tutoring him to put all hope on God Who saves, and not on himself. This continues during the entire process of mental prayer, from which the nous becomes more and more experienced, getting ready to accept in due time strength and power that are granted by God for victory over the devil, the flesh, the

world and every evil, so that from now on a man, in the likeness of the Lord, being highly skilled in the war with temptations, can help others whose minds that are not too experienced.

While doing mental prayer a man should cut any unnecessary personal ties and deal only with people with whom he is necessarily connected. It is better to live in solitude as much as possible, and guard your lips with silence that is stricter than during the verbal stage of prayer. Any rule from the prayer book should be substituted by the mental Jesus prayer. When you are among people and the rule is read by somebody else, then you can engage your mind with the habitual mental prayer. Moderation should be observed in everything and everywhere; it is quintessentially important for this prayer, but one needs to get used to moderation gradually. Eat with restraint and when leaving the table you should feel always that you might have eaten more if you could. Otherwise the heavy stomach will predispose you towards sleepiness, the watching eye of the mind will become darkened, and the mind will start convincing a man to get some rest.

It is natural for the mind to be free of everything that takes a man to inactivity and sleepiness, from what obstructs his attention to his prayer. Human society needs to be avoided to a higher degree than before, not because of contempt for others, but rather because of love for God, and because it is the most convenient way to pray. Worries about earthly matters should be decreased further and with strictness; one should be satisfied with what God gives, and not grieve over what is not given. Concerns about temporal things should be minimal, for those who worry do not know the goal and purpose of earthly life. The brother who wrongs you must be forgiven, and one must not return evil for evil. Pray for the brother – you are guilty before God, too. Understanding the sinfulness that acts in your own heart, do not fall into despair, simply weep about what you have done and repent, sigh and regret, destroying the passions with the prayer of repentance. Do not judge the deeds of others, because you yourself are endlessly sinful, and you have not seen the totality of the evil that is in your own heart, where a bird's nest of foul passions is hiding, about which it was said "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts" (Matt., 15, 19).

It is necessary to weep, so that the soul is washed with tears, bitterly grieving and worrying about the sinful heart that is rooted in proud selfishness. If one does not have tears running from his eyes then he should substitute for them heartfelt sorrow, by suppressing the activity of passions, not giving in to them, not executing their demands. Prostrations should be done according to one's strength and to resist the carnal passions. When you have vigor and health, or when passions fight hard, then make more prostrations, do not be lazy. When you are weak, condemn yourself, and be satisfied with a smaller number of prostrations. Do not indulge your body when it demands something; do not trust it even when it reveals its weakness to you. Attend to it very cautiously; otherwise you will never get rid of its requests. It is better not to listen to this enemy at all. Give it what is wisely necessary, and let it be satisfied with this. The Holy Fathers say that the purpose of the body in this life is to play the role of dumb and deaf servant who does what he is told. The saints were very strict with their bodies, listening to them very

little, knowing that this temple is attached to the soul only to work on repentance, and for nothing else.

Judge yourself honestly. Because you see your heart overflowing with passions, perceive yourself now as the worst of sinners – this is the correct judgment about yourself. You should think of yourself as the lowest in birth and totally useless, acknowledging yourself as the feeblest in mind out of all people. You must see that everybody fulfills what is destined to them by God, and only you do not fulfill the will of God; see that you sin even when Lord Himself helps you not to sin, and that, moreover, you enjoy the sin.

It is better to live in a cell or room by yourself, keeping it simple, with the modest number of things in it, so that you do not have unnecessary cares and excessive worries about the room's order. Apply the same approach to your clothing and the rest of the things that are necessary in life. If the Lord sends you a life that is poorer than the average, accept poverty from His hand with gratitude, believing that He knows what is best for you. If extreme poverty strikes you, do not be burdened by it, knowing that our wealth is the Lord, and all we have is in the Lord, and we should be ready to give up everything else in order to acquire God, Who is near us, because this is the purpose of earthly life. It is disastrous to live your earthly life in vain, therefore worry first and foremost about repentance, which reconciles you with the Lord.

The pallet on your bed should be firm yet warm; otherwise you may catch a cold and bring grief to yourself, thus obstructing the work of prayer.

Imagine people of the opposite sex, whose images are recalled from your memory by the devil, lying in a coffin, disintegrating with much stench and swarming with worms. Recall the unknown hour of your own death – maybe these are the last minutes of your life on earth, after which never ending torment awaits you for all your sins. In this way, all sinful thoughts and passionate desires will quickly vanish.

If the same obsessive thought worries you without stopping for two or three days, and you do not have an experienced person nearby with whom you can discuss this, and you are suffering much in your struggle – then stand in your cell before an icon, raise your arms and, aloud, tell the Lord Who is present the thought that is assaulting you. Believe firmly that God accepts your confession and the devil's tricks will leave you because they were exposed before the Lord. The devil is darkness and the mystery of lawlessness; he can act only secretly and in darkness until the time when he is revealed. When he is discovered, and light penetrates where he has been in darkness and craftiness, he runs away without looking back, burned by the light. Revelation of your thoughts during the time of confession to an elder renders the devil impotent too. He is forced to depart when he is revealed, especially in the presence of witnesses [such as a confessor].

If this struggle does not leave you even after confession of your thoughts before God, then attend more assiduously and attentively to prayer and know that the Lord wishes to teach you, through such warfare, even greater patience, and He prepares you, as a father prepares a son, for greater temptations, so that in this struggle and patience the work of your salvation is accomplished. The Lord, allowing a continuation of the battle, affirms and strengthens your virtues, while the passions of your heart become weaker in this

struggle. Under all circumstances God arranges what is the most useful for you. You must not despair or grieve exceedingly, but attend to prayer, and wage war with the thought that does not leave you, knowing that this assaulting idea is not yours, but that of the devil. This may serve as a kind of parallel to how demons will unceasingly torment sinners in hell by using their passions, stimulating one after another, with the complete inability of villains to get rid of the persistently insolent attacks of demons. So do not be burdened with this permitted fight, but rather thank God Who punishes us on earth for the sake of avoiding torments in eternity.

Appeal to the Lord, begging Him to end the battle and remove the assault, as has been described above, as seldom as possible and only in extreme cases of exhaustion and despair, because battle is the destiny of a warrior and you must wrestle and not run away from the contest. It is better not to be despondent, but rather attend to prayer, and fight and fight. Struggle brings victory; through warfare we attain virtue and draw closer to God, weaving a crown of glory for the head of wisdom. Do not be afraid of various disorderly thoughts, because in the struggle with them a man is prepared by grace for a successful battle with even greater temptations, understanding the strength and glory of God, receiving from the Lord help and patience in this struggle.

With or Without an Elder

If you have a spiritual father, an elder, then do not conceal anything from him, revealing all the secrets of your heart to him. Do not be troubled if he is not of high rank or even if he does not have any church rank, as long as he has true spiritual wisdom, which is the fruit of the whole battle and the crown of victory over passions. Choose a father-confessor according to the instructions of your elder and ask your geronda what and how you must confess to your father-confessor. Do what your starets tells you, without violating his single word. He knows better than you what is beneficial for you; all you need to do is reveal absolutely everything to him. It is better when the elder himself has a church rank [such as a priest, and is able to confess you himself].

If you do not have a geronda, who leads you on the path of prayer, then keep silence about your work amongst people. Prostrate yourself before the Lord, tell Him in prayer all your secrets and all your sorrows, with the firm faith that He hears and looks at you, that He will arrange what is useful for you according to your mournful prayer. And you just pray and pray, attending to the prayer, yet do not grumble over the temptations that are sent your way for your own good. All saints are called strugglers because all of them, while in the middle of their feats, struggled, bore temptations and triumphed with the help of grace, yet they had exceedingly more temptations than you have.

In the absence of an elder choose a father-confessor, if possible, from among the monastics. If your confessor knows nothing about The Jesus Prayer, then it is better not to discuss it with him; simply confess the sins that burden your soul, and through him

grace will forgive your sins and pacify your conscience. Otherwise, without knowing the doing of The Jesus Prayer, he may harm you with his instructions. It is very difficult to encounter these days those who know the work of The Jesus Prayer from their own experience.

When you are confessing struggles with carnal passions to an unfamiliar priest, take into account that some spiritual fathers do not know the ascetic life and the battle with passions, and frequently, due to the lack of discernment, advise one to abandon the struggle and go into the world to live a married life. They are being guided by the words of the Apostle in this: "For it is better to marry, than to burn" (1 Cor., 7, 9), without understanding that the Apostle says this to those single people who do not want to wage the war and are inflamed with passion. If you have chosen the life of battle with the passions, then reject such advice and do not visit that unwise confessor second time. He is sick in his soul even more than others. He agrees with the passions, not knowing that it is necessary to struggle with them all through life, fighting the assaults and also the desires that inflame the sensitive part of the soul. We know such confessors, which is why we have to write about it in order to prevent trouble.

Nuns are compelled to confess to their priest, and if, out of the blue, he advises a nun to go back to the world and live a married life, she should reveal this immediately to the gerondissa, from whom nothing should be concealed. It is impossible to conceal the unwise advice of the confessor, although it was given during confession, because a nun is connected with her soul to the soul of the gerondissa, and if the nun is in complete obedience to her, the gerondissa will be responsible for the destruction of the nun's soul. She must dismiss such a father-confessor from the monastery and report this to the bishop, because he destroys the souls of sisters, interfering in the feat of the struggle with passions.

It is possible also to follow an alternative path of the life of repentance – called by the Holy Fathers "the middle way" – and strongly approved by them. It is something between solitude and monastery coenobitic life, when two or three people thinking in the same manner gather together, who have the same ideas and desires regarding the path of life of repentance and the doing of The Prayer. It is very difficult to encounter such well-intentioned, simple people these days, who are one-in-mind. They must renounce self-will, cutting off their desires before each other. Bewilderments, temptations and doubts must be resolved at a common council according to the instructions of the Holy Fathers. Their leaders must be only God and Holy Fathers. Yet the safest path of repentance and prayer is living with an elder, a starets who will forewarn of every danger, instructing the disciple what to do in every case. It is imperative for the elder to truly understand spiritual life and to be known for the orthodoxy of his faith.

It is equally important in the mental work of The Jesus Prayer to know the place where the attention of the mind settles during The Prayer. Some Holy Fathers, men of prayer and the workers of holy vigilance, indicate, and the experience of those who do it authenticates, that it is convenient for novices to do The Prayer where it occurs naturally, that is, where the man has the organ of speech, i.e. in the throat where food is being swallowed. Here, at the foundation of the neck, and not in any other place, try to stand

with attention, diligently enveloping the mind in the words of The Prayer, while your mind has not been warmed up by the response of the heart, while The Prayer has not been colored yet by the compassion of the heart.

Do not direct your attention to your head, stomach, intestines, or the area of the sex organs, which is especially disastrous, but by all means maintain your mind with all your attention in the indicated place, stand there and do not deviate anywhere. Do not force yourself to move with your attention to the heart – it occurs naturally later, during the mental-heart stage of prayer, when the heart prays together with the mind. We will speak about the heart in the right time later; for now, until that certain time in the future, be vigilant with your mind within the words of prayer and stick to the upper part of the chest, near the foundation of the neck.

The impact of passions increases substantially during the mental stage of prayer. Satan stirs the passions, which he holds in his hands as a weapon against a man, but the mind, with its sharpened attention, increasingly clear, senses the turmoil of the induced passions. A man, seeing the attacks of the soul-destroying demons, sadly understands that if The Prayer leaves him, his soul will be taken alive to Hades, which is why he even more assiduously sticks to prayer, hides his mind in it against the adversaries, and with the Lord's help avoids the revolts of the passions, running away from the tricks that are set up by the devil.

The most important matters during the work of the mental prayer have been described here. Do not despair, do The Prayer. Stand with your attention before God, as indicated earlier, and be concerned only about it. Your heart is not cleansed from passions yet, and the mind is not free from darkness; you do not have the opportunity to get close to those who dwell in heaven, which is why neither angels, nor God's saints can appear visibly to you. No matter how pure and saintly something seems to you, drive it away from you and do not consent to it, then you will avoid any demonic deception with the help of grace. No matter what you encounter – do not accept it, but, as was stated earlier, remain in The Prayer and attend to The Prayer, driving away any evil with it. Keep prayer precious. The fruit of mental prayer may be cleansing of the mind, a vision of sins in your heart, repenting and weeping of the heart, and restoration of virtues.

Monasticism or life in the world – it does not matter in the work of prayer. It is not important whether you are a monk, a novice, or a simple man in the world – what is important is that your surroundings and environment do not interfere with the doing of The Prayer, do not obstruct the creation of inner monasticism.

- **Mental-heart active prayer**

Active Level

A man then ascends to the next level and acquires **mental-heart active** prayer. It is called **mental-heart** because the heart prays with the mind in it. That is, the entire inner man prays. It is called **active** because the will of man still works within him, as manifested by his desires and actions. A man has not yet entered the fullness of fulfillment of the will of God, and performs God's will only partially, while in other things he does what he wants, executing his own will. Purity of the mind has not been achieved yet.

Just as during the verbal or vocal stage of The Prayer, when the mind listens to the words and gradually immerses itself into The Prayer and acquires the habit of it, so it is during mental prayer. When it takes root in the mind, then in response to the mental work the heart starts to warm up. To put it differently, when the mind is constantly occupied with The Prayer and a man has committed his entire life to this work, then the inner senses start to become attuned to the Prayer and submerge themselves in it, co-participating with the mind in prayerful activity, and, being imprisoned by the name of God, do not distract the mind from praying any more. And the heart starts sympathetically responding to it, in unison with the mind.

Satan and his demons draw close to the soul, excite passions that dwell in the heart of the old, still self-willed man, and try to possess it, establishing themselves upon prideful human vanity. A great temple of passions is built in the depth of a self-righteous heart, yet this so-far indestructible fortress, starts crumbling now under the impact of mental prayer. Satan does not remain indifferent to seeing the destruction of this temple of sin. Every moment he comes up with more and more new methods of assault, and grace, for the sake of a man's instruction, allows him to be tempted. Passions lose their potency, and Satan in despair tries to frighten the doer of prayer by means of his imagination, appearing to him in monstrous visions, desiring to separate a man from prayer forever, or at least for some time, or at least for one minute.

When the heart of a man starts participating in The Prayer, Satan, understanding the limitations of his access to the soul, becomes furious and gnashes his teeth because he knows too well that a man can pray with his heart, and he fears this most of all. If the heart joins the mind in doing The Prayer, then the battle with a man through the passions becomes too difficult for Satan, because now the mind acts strongly and powerfully with the co-participation of the heart, destroying all the enemies' assaults with the help of grace. The attentive mind descends now into the foundations of sin, to the roots of evil, and through this a deadly wound is inflicted on the devil's head. Through the act of grace the roots of evil are pushed out of the heart. And if the heart has no more evil, then the devil with his demons becomes weaponless. But while passions are nested in the heart, the devil guides the mind and suppresses the soul with her virtues. The heart of man is called to be the dwelling of God, but while it is filthily enslaved by passions the Lord remains in it secretly, without being fully enthroned.

When the cleansing of the heart begins, the devil, losing his influence upon a man, becomes particularly sophisticated in all imaginable temptations. Although suffering a deadly wound, he still tries to struggle and throws the fiery arrows of passionate thoughts, attempting to wound the heart and inflame the fire in it. Becoming spiteful and rising up for even more atrocious warfare, the devil sends more and more new assaults, yet by

doing so he unwillingly and increasingly reveals, for his own defeat, the mysterious roots of the passions. An experienced and attentive nous, supported by grace, from now on enters into the most intricate cunning of the devil. Yet the roots of evil, discovered by the eye of the nous, do not disappear by themselves; a continuous feat of the work of repentance is required, affirmed by the graceful strengthening of the spirit by the communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ.

This is the time when grace sometimes grants the mind the ability to see not only the roots of the passions, but also of those who work through them – the devil himself and his demons. This period of time can be the most sorrowful on the entire road of repentance. The burden of suffering during this period can be compared with light torments of hell; here, the words "taken to heaven and thrown down to Hades" are relevant. A furious Satan, losing his access to the soul, can act through sensual images, approaching either from the left or from the right sides. The doer of mental-heart prayer can become the subject of an onslaught of various animal-like creatures and unimaginable monsters, which attack either alone or in multitude with the only goal – to paralyze with fear and distract from prayer. In order to survive this struggle, the praying one should fight these temptations, clinging with all his strength to his mental-heart work, and may grace help him. Thus the great experience of struggle is acquired.

Having failed in his attacks from the left side, when he appeared in terrifying images, the devil starts tempting from the right by presenting himself in visions of blessed beauty and saintliness. It is more difficult to distinguish these temptations. At this stage some strugglers, who have abandoned attentive prayer, receive deep wounds or suffer a complete debacle. Yet those who avoided this temptation successfully are the ones who did not take notice of any visible images, but conversed in mind with Christ and with firm faith in His presence, invisible and unimaginable. He who remembers that he cannot see the Lord, the Theotokos, the angels and saints with bodily vision that is stained with passions, remains in the fight; he remembers that heavenly manifestations are granted exclusively to those warriors who are pure in heart. Sanctity does not appear visibly to a sinner.

Satan can take on the image of Christ, imitating the way the Savior is depicted on the icons, and can portray the icon as coming alive, and the Pantocrator, Who is ready to bless, stepping down from it, or have the icon move towards you, increasing in size. One can see light from an icon or some saintly dwellers of heaven, hear voices or singing, as if from angels, or something along these lines. A man who is still dedicated to a passionate existence finds it difficult to distinguish the reality or falsehood of this. Satan does this so that the praying man, carried away by dreams, bowed to him, the devil, who has appeared in one of the images. Some men did so, and consequently their mind was damaged and they fell into mental imbecility. However, he who knows the high price of the forgiveness of sins, who knows his own unworthiness, that man attends only to The Prayer. Only he, who never trusts his feelings, survives temptations without a single disaster. Know, brother and sister, that doing this during your repentance, you can attain the grace of victory, comprehend the will of God, fulfill it completely, and save yourself.

A man, praying in his mind and heart, receives from the Lord a mercy that reveals itself in the fact that the action of the prayer becomes more refined, his mind frees itself from darkness, and his heart, repenting, cleanses itself more and more from the passions and sins. Nevertheless The Prayer still remains active, that is, although the man struggles with the devil, his demons and passions, surrendering himself to the will of God, this surrender to God still remains partial. This feeling [of surrender] has not yet conquered the heart completely, has not become part of the heart, and all this is because sin is still rooted in the soul, prideful selfishness – the root of all roots – is established in the foundation of the heart.

Man suffers and fights in this manner, and does not abandon the struggle day and night. Endless temptations bring the mind to a natural wrath against the passions. The mind, stirred up against evil, is filled to the brink with the strongest desire not to sin anymore, which is why it searches with special diligence wherever the passions come out and immediately kills them with The Prayer. Grace assists perpetually, remaining itself unnoticed and invisible to the mind. Finally, thanks to unceasing attentiveness, the mind reveals the very root of roots, the cause of all evils – pride.

As soon as the root of evil is revealed, with God's help, the whole battle is waged against pride, which can eventually be expelled from the soul with the strength of grace. Together with expulsion of this rooted passion, the heart finally gets rid of all the passions. In this great battle the dwelling place of evil, along with its foundation – self-respecting pride –, is annihilated. The devil is weaponless; he cannot deceive a man anymore, cannot cover up his own wiliness and lies. The devil cannot hide under the veil of passions; he can be seen from every angle and is under a bright light, yet he cannot bear the light, because the devil is darkness.

A furious devil prepares for a one-on-one fight, for the final battle. And he appears to the praying man in an entirely horrifying vision as he is seen in hell, with Judas the betrayer on his knees. This vision of hell is great and terrifying. Yet Satan, having come from the flames of Hades to the last fight, sees his impotence. The praying man this time, too, does not distract his mind from The Prayer, destroying the enemy with the sweetest name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Satan becomes frightened, starts trembling, wavering, and then departs and disappears, abandoning the battle field altogether, because he becomes nothing before the name of God on the lips of the spiritual athlete. This is how the mind is cleansed from darkening, the heart and soul from passions, sin and devilish dependence. This is when God's will completely begin to act in human life.

The last temptation was allowed by the Lord for Satan to be shamed to the end, and for the athlete to become skillful in all temptations that may come to the one who is praying. From now on grace has mostly taken over the purified heart. The mind descends into the heart fully, and Lord Himself, residing in the heart secretly up to this point, starts dwelling openly and with the full authority in this shelter that was destined for Him from the very beginning, and rests there on His throne.

After the Lord Himself brings the mind down to the depths of the heart, a man is prepared to ascend to the stage of **self-moving** prayer. He does not need instructors anymore, because the Lord is with him. Now human desires and actions coincide with the holy will

of God. With the entrance of the mind to the heart, a man is granted a vision of the truth: he has acquired authentic self-knowledge, the understanding of the essence of the Holy Scriptures has become accessible to him, and he feels the natural need to share with those close to him, out of love for them, what is revealed to him. Yet from now on he is obliged to preserve silence with special industry amidst people and with all his strength preserve the stillness that dwells in his heart. If one has an enlightened Elder or somebody experienced in mental work, then it is profitable to talk to him, keeping a respectful attitude. It is profitable to listen to people whose word is filled with the experience of spiritual wisdom, who are true theologians in their knowledge, and, therefore, are a light to the world.

Prayer at this stage of the struggle crosses over to the next stage and from active becomes self-moving. This is where the boundary between the two main periods in the life of the spiritual athlete lies. The active stage of cleansing is now ending and the new period of enlightenment of the mind begins – the contemplative stage. This is how the path of repentant labor, the way of the struggle of the fleshly mind, acquires the Holy Spirit. This is just the beginning of the truly spiritual life.

Henceforth, prayer penetrates the depths of the heart, and a man prays with his heart from now on, moved by the Holy Spirit, standing before God with his nous in his heart. The devil, weaponless and disgraced, no longer attacks the man himself, but starts acting through other people, starting up in them the fires of envy and hatred. Now people start persecuting the true follower of Christ, doing all kinds of repulsive things to him.

This is the general order of the struggle. Yet let us return back to **active** prayer.

Within Human Strength

And so a man, having discerned in the heart the dominant root of evil – pride – rises up against it with all his strength. Let us note that such a spiritual athlete cannot be a self-willed man, because his heart is cleansed by the Lord for keeping His will and for constant prayerful remembrance of Him. He, who has a clean heart, has learned to keep the will of God; he has fully understood it. The will of God has been received from the Lord by the man of great virtue, which cannot be compared with anything else – it is a prayerful sensation that dwells in the heart and is moved by the Holy Spirit.

Among the truly spiritual virtues acquired during purification of the heart, humility is the highest and is called humble wisdom. In its essence humility is true self-knowledge that is born in the bearing of sorrows amidst failures and powerlessness, when a man understands the true nothingness of his own "I" in the fight with evil. That, which has been called humility up to this point, has been just a prototype of it, some kind of imitation that did not have relation to self-knowledge and was relatively useless.

What distinguishes **mental-heart active** prayer from **mental** prayer, is the character of the previously described temptations that accompany the doing of The Prayer. The special attribute of mental-heart prayer is undisturbed attention and emotional empathy with the prayerful words. Now The Prayer does not need a number of repetitions as much as it requires a quality of attention to reveal more conveniently the hordes of demons and their cunning ways.

While going through the mental-heart active stage, the praying man starts experiencing the heart's participation in the work of the nous. The heart feels the prayerful words, and responds to them with sympathy. This sensual response appears naturally in the depth of the breast, in the region of the heart. Attention is being attracted to this place itself, and it is easier to keep it there. From now on the mind, heeding the prayer, should establish itself at the upper part of the heart, at the entrance to the heart. This has been received through experience, and all Fathers speak about this too. Regarding the graceful connection of the nous with the heart, as it has been already explained, grace itself takes the praying mind into the depth of the heart. This occurs only at the right time, and not before the heart is purified from passions.

You, the doer of this sacred Jesus Prayer, must take the following into account: with all your diligence stand with your attention only there, at the top of your heart, because if you allow your mind to wonder around other parts of your being, then you will create within yourself much grief, and will receive no profit. Acting according to this method, you will find the shortest path for graceful entrance of the nous into the depths of the heart, so that you can with all your soul glorify the Lord in unceasing praying, "worshiping the Lord in spirit and in truth" (John, 4, 24). Avoid by all means keeping your attention in your head, or in the depth of your belly or kidneys, as this is quite troublesome. Position your mind always as you have been instructed.

The Holy Fathers say nothing more about the place where the attention should be positioned. They wrote mostly mystically and concisely, because during their lives there were many toilers in the field of this sacred work and there was no need for detailed descriptions. The Fathers say that the gateway into the depths of the spirit is shown by Lord Himself and that this happens only after purification of the heart. He joins the heart with the mind and Himself dwells with prayer in the heart, because the name of the Lord is inseparable from the Lord Himself. Let no man dare invent self-assuredly the ways to enter the depth of the heart prior to purification or catharsis. He will be put to shame. There is no other way except for the one that has been described.

The worker of The Prayer, until he reaches purity of the heart, should not take into account physical sensations: warmth in the body and chest, burning or some excitement inside the body or under the skin. All this should be rejected, without attributing any importance to it. Such warmth has a sensual, created origin. These phenomena are predominantly organic-neurological, therefore innocent, but if you take them for grace-filled, then you will fall into demonic delusion.

If you feel sweetness in your throat, or some fragrant scent, or something along these lines, that is the action of one of the five external senses. Do not focus your attention on anything sensual; drive it away from you. Know only prayer; take care only of attention.

Prayer contains everything you need, and it takes you to that which "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love Him"(1 Cor. 2, 9). When the Lord purifies the heart, then God starts dwelling there and acting, and in the Lord grace, gifts and all possible things are abundant. The Lord, having given Himself to a man, grants him everything that is His.

God grants the man a renaissance of virtues, strengthening them in the heart – this is what the one who prays should admire, and not something else that captures his imagination. Until cleansing has occurred, even if grace impacts you, then it is only such grace that wakes you up from sinful hibernation, and then instructing and teaching grace begins to work. That is, such grace that leads the mind of a man in the work of salvation, teaches him, perfecting him in the attentive doing of The Prayer, in humble devotion to the will of God, in the intricacies of the struggle to obtain virtues, in knowing of his own worthlessness and sinfulness. And not any other way.

All people who deem themselves worthy of the gifts of grace, who expect rewards, visions and miracle working, wind up in the cob-web of the enemy. All those walking in the sincere understanding of their sins, their weaknesses, their nothingness and unworthiness, relying only on God, who because of His love has mercy on them because these unworthy ones are repenting, safely arrive at the harbor. They, learning to do the will of God, live according to it and fulfill the wishes of the Lord as if they are their own, because the former and the latter coincide completely.

So, you should not focus on everything that happens to you during the time of prayer, be it good or bad temptations or something that appears to be grace-filled. Put all your hope on the Lord Himself – He Himself works with His grace in your prayer. Dedicate yourself exclusively to prayer, because it conceals all possible gifts and working of miracles. Diligently attending to prayer, you walk with the Lord; but if you follow something else, even if it appears grace-filled, you abandon God. Yet all of you is in the Lord, and every minute spent outside of the memory of God is a loss to you.

Keep your lips silent during the mental-heart active prayer stage, even stricter than during the mental prayer. Abstain from food to such extent as to have enough only to stay alive. Sleep six to seven hours, if The Prayer itself does not demand less, and if you are exhausted, then sleep eight hours. Do not insult anyone, forgive everyone, and remember death and the torments of hell whenever you can. You must live with the barest need during this time, do everything yourself, and do not rely on anyone. Thank God for everything and exercise complete moderation in all things. Fight against despondency with prayer and manual labor.

[If you are a monastic:] It is more convenient to go through these three stages – verbal, mental and mental-heart active – while being in the lower rank, such as a novice. Although it is possible to tonsure the one who has mastered the mental prayer and elevate into the schema the one who has attained mental-heart prayer, yet, as has been said before, it is more peaceful to remain during this time in the rank of a novice.

It is better to confess and commune frequently, yet do not grieve if this happens seldom. Do not abandon attentive prayer, and your commitment will be perceived by the Lord as

the Eucharist itself. The Theotokos did not commune even a single time before she achieved the fullness of purity and became the Mother of the Son of God, by means of mental prayer. The Mystery of the Holy Eucharist had not been established yet. The preciousness of the Eucharist does not depend on frequency or rareness, but on trembling before the sanctity of it and on the comprehension of your own unworthiness. Those who left for the desert did not see a single human face, and, with rare exceptions, did not partake of the Holy Eucharist, yet it was precisely they "of whom world was not worthy" (Heb., 11, 38), who were great in the eyes of God, and not those who communed frequently. Remember the love of God for you and observe the Eucharist with dignity. Do not imitate Judas the traitor. Satan entered into him at the same time as Communion [at the Last Supper] and he communed unto personal never-ending damnation.

You may receive Communion only from an Orthodox priest. I do not recommend to commune too frequently, because a man loses piety before the Most Sacred Body and Blood of Christ.

Let the assaults of carnal passions not frighten you. They happen to a weak body, too, because passion works as a parasite, feeding off our natural essence, which is why it does not become weaker with age, and it is not surprising to fight this struggle till one's deathbed. If night pollution occurs with you, then discern if you have had any inclination towards it before sleep, if you enjoyed the defilement, or if you grieve because of it. If you find yourself guilty of love for the fleshly passion, then correct yourself immediately. And if you do not have agreement with the passion and you hate filth, then do not grieve – the Lord will perceive this insult that was caused by the devil and nature, as a heroic deed. Having polluted yourself in a dream, wake up and read "Rule against Defilement" (it is published in some Prayer Rules and Prayer Books), and, depending on your strength, make a number of prostrations, judging for yourself who is bogged down in passions and is captivated with passion even in his sleep.

When such sorrow happens with you, even frequently, yet without your predisposition, that is if you, while falling asleep, were in prayer and did not exercise your mind in passionate thoughts, then, having read the "Rule against Defilement", do not grieve – this happened to you from the envy of the devil, which aroused the passion. Do not think about this all day long in order not to defile the mind, and exercise yourself in The Prayer as usual.

Overall, wage war against all the passions by hiding with your mind in attentive prayer, and fight, and fight. Read the books pertinent to your work. The best are: "The Philokalia", John of the Ladder, "Unseen Warfare", Isaac of Syria, Paisius Velichkovsky and other holy noetic fathers, especially the fifth volume of "The Philokalia."

Do not ignore the instructions in this little work [which you are reading now] either. It contains the quintessence of the experience that was acquired along the path indicated by the Holy Fathers – it may serve you, in the absence of [other] books, as a quite sufficient instruction of doing The Jesus Prayer, mental and spiritual. Put aside and do not read other books and fiction, so that in your mind you will be only in prayer and in the things pertinent to it. Organize your life in such a way as to practice prayer according to everything mentioned above.

Everything that has been stated up to this point pertains to The Prayer within the boundaries of our human capabilities. Going through the verbal, mental and mental-heart active prayer is done by the "old man." This is the period of mental work when prayer is done by human exertion. Only at the next stage is the complete fulfillment of the will of God achieved and prayer becomes moved by the Holy Spirit.

Let us repeat that during this mental work, during the entire active period, man needs constant effort to acquire the habit and a permanent attention to prayer. It is better to spend time in solitude, guard your lips in silence, and if necessary talk only about useful matters – death, hell, torments and the suffering of unrepentant sinners. In moments of great sorrow you can recall heaven, the blissfulness of the righteous ones, why you suffer tribulations in a world that is full of sorrows. Bear with patience, for the sake of the Kingdom of God and life everlasting, reproaches and all kinds of abuse. Endure everything without complaint: hunger, cold, nakedness, waiting, temptations, illnesses, mistreatment, every sorrow and every burden. Be moderate in your food, or it will tire you with heaviness. Always thirst and hunger for the sake of the truth. To do this, leave the table when you have not had enough food and drink, when you still feel the need to eat and drink more. Then hunger and thirst between meals will be constant.

Begin everything with a good conscience and stay on the middle road, that is do not run ahead too far and do not lag behind. Read soul-benefiting books during your free time, or when the mind tires from the tension of prayer. Avoid by all means the places where you receive no profit for your salvation. Those living under a spiritual father or in a monastery must cut off their will and fulfill every obedience; it is "above fasting and prayer." Do not begin ascetic deeds to which you are not called by the Lord. Everything required at all the stages of prayer is described here. With zeal hold fast to prayer and to everything that has been said here.

Having started doing The Jesus Prayer, man submits to the guidance of the Lord, and God Himself leads such people. Walking the other way, on your own path, is completely fruitless, for repentance without the Lord is impossible. Do not despair of failures, abandon yourself to the will of God, and by doing this you will reap the fruit of success within your failures. Feed your imagination with the image of yourself being laid out in a coffin, and your body, the care of which has devoured so much time, swarming with worms. Forgive all the insults and offenses of those close to you. Judge only yourself, but not others. Only he, who has previously condemned properly himself, can judge the matters of others.

Do not pretend to be a wise man in prayer; read simply and with attention, and have the belief of a child that the Lord is near and hears the words of your prayer. Do not be fainthearted in failures. Do not entertain thoughts that you will achieve certain things at a given time. Such matters are in the hands of God. He gives gifts when we have become worthy, through the execution of His will, and when we can actually accept them, because otherwise new wine will be spilled from our old vessels. God grants gifts not before the achievement of the corresponding prayerful foundation, and He requires from us constant self-condemnation. Your work is to force yourself always, surrendering

yourself to the will of God who thinks about us, and, being in patient waiting, by all means not to abandon The Prayer.

Do not let loose your five external senses – seeing, hearing, taste, touch, smell – suppress them by all means, so that these conductors of evil into the heart, that take the nous away from prayer and tempt you to turn yourself to the external, do not become powerful masters over you, exciting you with what has been accepted due to their treacherous work. Thoughts that come from the heart should be shunned, shattering them against the stone of the name of God in your prayer. Be always attentive, sober and awake, guarding your senses. Organize everything in such a way that nothing in your cell entertains you, so that everything will be conducive for the mind to come to its senses. If you fall, that is if you forget The Prayer and entertain yourself with a thought, then arise. Recall The Prayer, recite and be attuned to it. And every time, when you recall The Prayer after falling, start again and listen, so that prayer will resonate in your mind and heart.

In the Secret Place of the Heart

Everything needed for guidance at these stages of prayer is described here sufficiently in detail and simply. It is not easy to find such a description, and this was the greatest sorrow for me in my own weakness in the work of prayer. The ancient Holy Fathers wrote about mental prayer, yet they, having revealed the necessary things, were hiding it immediately, speaking of it in an indirect manner, encouraging one by their hints to ask questions. Beginners appealed to their many Elders with inquiries, and they explained, helping to sort out any problems. The man who is occupied with mental work encounters numerous doubts and temptations. He cannot understand completely what is stated so briefly and mysteriously in the writings. The Holy Fathers had perfect minds, and that which causes bewilderment in us was quite clear for them, which is why they did not write at length about it. Since there were many doers, there was always somebody to explain the details to the ones who needed them.

Here I have given the teaching of the Fathers, in detail, without any concealment, for the sake of those who are praying. Experienced people are quite rare; almost non-existent are those who know the mental work which is salvation for a man through seeing his sinfulness and weakness, through weeping and cleansing of the heart. This is why it is very necessary now to resolve the questions of the searching mind, so that the grieving and despondent souls of seekers will not fall into despair.

The period of active prayer, the time of self-forcing, cannot be defined by years or decades. The length of time depends on the diligence of the man, on the way of life before The Prayer, on the degree of hardness of heart, stubbornness in self-love and passions, and on such causes as rapidness or sluggishness in breaking ties with the world, and on the zeal with which status, property and money are given up. But under all

conditions, the law for everyone is the same – do the Prayer over and over, sticking to what is said here. Never abandon it under any circumstances.

Do not ever brag about your doing, and do not speak of it to anyone except your Elder. It is done in the hiding place of your heart and not in order to deserve praise. It is needed, with the help of grace, to get rid of the passions, sin and the devil. You, the sinner, need to pray not for self-elevation, not for talking about it, not for praise, but for receiving purity of the heart through the help of grace.

Do not have a big rule, but have as a Rule the "never-ending Rule," that is constant prayer. Do the regular Rule as follows: read evening prayers in the evening, morning – in the morning, then akathists, canons, kathismas, and whatever else you can. It is necessary to read one chapter from the New Testament and from the Letters of the Apostles; after these do five hundred Jesus prayers in the evening and morning. And when you have things that cannot be postponed, then ask the Lord's forgiveness, condemn yourself, sigh from the depth of yourself, and without confusion run the errands with The Jesus Prayer, substituting the regular Rule with it. The Rule read from the books can be decreased, and the number of Jesus Prayers can be increased as you get used to it, because The Jesus Prayer gradually takes the mind hostage and does not abandon it easily. You should spend the time between the evening and morning rule in The Jesus Prayer.

Do not make any promises if nobody forces you, because failing to keep them brings confusion, and if you keep them, you would not avoid self-congratulation or even pride. This is a good way: do not promise, yet everything that is needed keep with the help of God. Do not accumulate Prayer Rules with the attitude of "I will certainly keep them". Many things happen in a man's life, and keeping the Rule is not always possible, yet the benefit is lost when the promise to keep the Rule is broken. It is better to stick to the following in this matter: determine for yourself a rule of one and a half, or two to three or more hours, depending on the opportunities, and keep it without any special promises, without breaking it, with the exception of the most unavoidable circumstances.

Do not become much despondent because you are bewildered; pray, and the Lord will show the way either through the voice of the conscience, or through the writings of the Fathers who were inspired by God, or through the Holy Scripture. Do everything in such a way as not to go against the will of God, which is evident in God's law, which was given to guide us.

Regarding the writings of the noetic Holy Fathers about the art of The Jesus Prayer: their directions about entering the heart with the mind through breathing, bowing down of the head and sitting on a low chair, on the tension of the muscles in order to aid in attention were given for the purpose of helping to search for the place of the heart. Do what has been described in this book repeatedly, simply and briefly. Do so, and you will not make a mistake. The feelings of the heart will themselves draw the mind's attention to the place of the heart.

Do not worry about entering into the depths of the heart; just do The Prayer, fighting with the passions. The Lord Himself takes the mind and prayer into the purified heart, because the heart is the dwelling of God, and only the Lord knows the path to it. While the heart

is boiling with passions, the mind cannot be taken down there and it is useless for The Prayer to be there. Yet when the old man is destroyed, the mind and prayer dwell in the heart, and the Lord Himself too, because The Prayer contains the name of God, and where His holy name is, there the Lord Himself is with His grace. Make sure you understand this about the heart and the path to the heart.

You, the doer of prayer, remain in simplicity, and do not be tricked by overconfidence. The Lord hears your prayer; believe this and pray. Do not let astray thoughts distract you, avoid everything sinful, and perceive yourself the most sinful of all and unworthy of the Lord by any measure. Weep, grieve, and attend to The Prayer.

- **Mental-heart self-moving prayer**

After everything that is being experienced on the path to repentance, after days of great sorrow, a man comes to complete loyalty to the will of God and becomes the son of God through grace. Now the mind is brought down by God into the heart to do mental-heart self-moving prayer. From now on, a man approaches true knowledge and complete execution of the will of the Lord, entering truly spiritual life. His mind acquires authentic virginity, reaching, yet hardly getting close to, one of the dwellings of the mind, about which it is said by the Lord: "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John, 14, 2).

The mind, entering the heart, does not stand there idly. It starts doing The Prayer along with the heart, not with the word or thought, but with the heartfelt feeling that does not pause or stop even during sleep or at any time, because this sensation is virtually without end. Man prays uninterruptedly with all the essence of his mental-heartfelt nature to the Lord, committing himself to Him and emptying himself before Him with the gratitude of the heart. All the virtues have now entered the heart with prayer, and amongst them a feeling of genuine gratitude of the heart. Truly spiritual, virtuous life begins now, when virtues are practiced, not to show off before people, but from the whole heart and in the heart itself.

The mind, having entered the heart, never leaves to go outside, unless it voluntarily chooses to return to the external world. Dwelling within, the mind may touch the external out of necessity, when and where needed, but does so by barely scratching the surface, without the participation of the entire heart. Entering the dwellings of the heart, the mind merges with the spiritual faculty, and a man, now approaching God with all his soul, continuously converses with Him – such is the prayerful work of the man who lives a life that is truly spiritual and virtuous.

The activity of The Prayer revives the virtues; they increase, strengthen, perfect, "they go from strength to strength." (Russian Psalter, 83, 8, English Psalter 84, 7). All follow the first one. The growth of one virtue to its fullest degree brings about an increase to the same extent in the others, because all virtues are of the same nature and constitute one unified soul. The virtues are not complete if one is missing, and one virtue cannot exist

by itself without the others; they dwell in the heart and are called the true virtues, because the Truth is one and undivided.

The first of the true virtues that reveals itself after the mind enters the heart is the virtue of humility. True humility is nothing else but true knowledge of oneself, leading to wisdom in humility. Man understands fully the worthlessness of his own "I", which was created out of nothing by the will of God, and now he becomes conscious of this nothingness. He realizes that his own self is dust, and the spirit of life, which was blown into him by the Creator – his soul – is the breath of the Lord. Everything priceless in him is from the Lord. He himself is nothing, but dust of the earth.

When the Lord, guiding humans in all affairs, grants a man the knowledge of himself as the most worthless of all existing things, then, in unison with this self-knowledge, the man is given the knowledge of God, what the Holy Fathers call a "knowing of the Truth." Knowing the Truth – God – is, in its essence, a wise seeing of God with truly spiritual eyes. The Lord allows Himself to be known, to be tasted, and this constitutes the search for the essence of a human life. This is a great gift, which cannot be compared with anything else. It is something that can be seen and tasted exclusively through truly spiritual attention. This is why it cannot be granted earlier, in the active period, when a man still exists in the "old man" state.

Wherever the gifts are, there is the Giver of gifts – God. To the same man to whom He gave true virtue, the Lord gives Himself, because true virtue is the virtue of God. That is why a man who has completely surrendered to the Lord's will and received from God what he searched for – knowledge of the Truth – starts living a godly life, a truly spiritual life, what is called "life according to the Lord," and this is forever, from now on. Until this point man has lived with fleshly wisdom. He might have been called a spiritual man and might have enjoyed the reputation of a spiritual guru in the secular society, but it was not the case.

In his essence a man is different when he is natural and when he is spiritual, as the Apostle Paul teaches (see 1 Cor. 2, 14-15). Strictly speaking, spiritual life in the man begins only after acquisition of the Holy Spirit, Who gives life eternal to the spirit of the man.

- **Mental-heart pure prayer**

It has been mentioned above that, after complete surrender to the will of God, the first degree of truly spiritual prayer is called mental-heart self-moving. Although we have said only a little about it, it is quite enough. Then follows a more perfect degree of prayer – pure prayer, or the one that does not soar into the thoughts but stays put in itself. Such mental-heart prayer is done with mind and heart that are completely cleansed from darkness and passions. The heart dispassionately and purely prays, and thoughts no

longer come from it, which is why such purity is accompanied by a lack of soaring into various ideas, when the mind is liberated from thoughts and sinful desires.

Such prayer is truly contemplative, and a man lives now the truly spiritual, virtuous, and contemplative life. Conducting such a life, man prays in the Truth by the Holy Spirit. The virtues of the true pure mind are cultivated by the Lord into the higher degrees; God blesses the man to the extent his mind can receive it and to the extent that his soul can perceive the sent blessedness. God gives all of Himself to the man, and the man cries out to the Lord, melting from the Lord's good will in love to him: "Diminish the waves of Your blessedness, Holy Father, because I am melting like wax."

During contemplative life, in pure prayer, a man receives access to foresee the next stages of perfection, which are possible to acquire at the highest levels of spiritual life after entering visionary prayer. The mind rises during contemplative life from perfection to perfection, and all of the virtues increase to their fullness, illumined by the kindness of the Lord, fed by the spiritual food of the Spirit of God from the table of the Heavenly Father. A man starts dwelling with his mind in the abodes of Heaven, going through different degrees of true knowledge, visiting, one after another, the increasingly brighter rooms of the house of the Heavenly Father.

In contemplation, a man can be a knight bearing the cross, in imitation of Christ the Cross-Bearer, doing in everything the will of his Heavenly Father. It is impossible to be a cross-bearing knight without sorrows, just as Christ, Son of God in his essence, spent all His earthly life in sorrows. Adversities in the contemplative life cover all of a spiritual man, but these afflictions are not the ones that people in the "active" level have. These hardships are of a spiritual nature. Any move higher is associated with difficulties, and the contemplator is subjected to misfortunes, in spite of the fact that he has been freed from passions. And sorrows can be so exceedingly great that to bear them is possible only to the one who is driven by the son's love for his Heavenly Father. Higher and higher our Heavenly Father takes this new man; in His love, He reveals a mysterious knowledge about the man and about Himself, Who cannot be known.

Sleep flees from a man during contemplative life, his body forgets about food, his mind is overflowing with the fullness of revelations. All this is accessible, of course, only to those whose spiritual powers are strong. Love for God and those close to us reaches the degree where it cannot be contained and the mind is burning with the fire of love.

- **Visionary prayer**

Everything that has been written here about the truly spiritual mind, starting with complete surrender to the will of God and ending with visionary prayer, can be rightly understood only when a man himself comes to the truly spiritual condition of purity of the mind and soul. Otherwise all attempts to understand the essence of the spiritual phenomena through reading will bring false knowledge, because the mind that reasons in

a fleshly manner can not comprehend what is given by the Holy Spirit. That, which is truly spiritual, is a mystery.

This is why we cannot say much about visionary prayer, because we enter the region where "all flesh remains silent." The one who is brought up into these dwellings by the Lord becomes the seer of mysteries.

Contemplation is a predecessor of the true vision of the mind. Pure contemplative prayer is a forerunner of the highest degree of all virtues – visionary prayer. This virtue is also called purity of the spirit. In visionary prayer the nous sees God directly, comprehends all works in the Lord's *oikonomia*, starting with the Divine council about the creation of man and ending with the Second Coming of Christ and the Last Judgment, and reaches over to cognizance of the great God's mysteries.

The Father brings the worthiest contemplative minds into the highest heavenly dwellings, to the chambers of spiritual virginity, because it is necessary for the strength of human nature to act in its fullness at least in some people. In such people, spiritual virtue is transformed into spiritual purity, and contemplative life and pure prayer become visionary prayer. This is organized by the Lord Pantocrator, Who feeds such a heavenly man with heavenly mysteries, a man who lives spiritually, yet still wanders on the earth in the flesh. God takes such a man up into visionary prayer, into seeing the most inner mysteries of God. This is the highest enlightenment of mind and soul in the purity of the spirit, the acquisition of all possible perfections, the closest proximity to God, and ascension to the apocalyptic city of the "New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God" (Rev., 3, 12).

The Lord takes rare people up to true purity of the spirit. From here a man glorifies God with all his heart; inside him, that word resonates which is sung by the Church with great fanfare: "Illumined by the unity of the Trinity, the holy mystery." The soul that is cleansed as much as it is ever possible "is Spirit Itself" according to the words of Saint Makarios the Great. This soul is loved exceedingly by the Lord. God rejoices with the joy of the Spirit about such a soul – His bride. The Holy Fathers compare such souls to the sun, because they live, having the mind of God; they received Light from the Light eternal.

True spiritual life begins with man's understanding that he becomes the son of God by grace. Since he becomes a son, then he becomes, in imitation of Christ, a spiritual inheritor of the Heavenly Father. He grants him, the son by grace, the Mind of Christ. Such a human, who became a son of the Lord, lives now for the glory of God.



Father Anthony in 1920s



Father Anthony, 1930s



Vladika Anthony in Pot'minsky concentration camp, 1950s



Starets Anthony



Vladika in the last years of his life



Archbishop Anthony in 1976



Monk Joseph



Elder Joseph

PART II

1. The Life of Elder Joseph the Athonite (1898-1959)

Francis was born in 1898 on the island of Paros. His parents were simple and not well off. His father passed away early. Maria, the boy's mother, was a real woman of God, who saw an angel come to her shortly after the boy was born. He took the newly born away for some time, giving her a precious piece of jewelry in the form of the cross. From that moment on, she believed that one day her son would follow Christ. Until he was in his teens Francis stayed in the village helping the family. Having grown up, he left for Piraeus and worked until he was drafted into the navy. After he was discharged from the navy, he started working on his own as a salesman and a merchant with much success. He never compromised, abhorring deceitful practice. Francis was twenty-three when he began studying books on the fathers of the Church, fascinated especially with the strict ascetics. The real impetus towards monasticism came to him from the following dream:

“One night, I dreamt that I was passing by the palace, and all at once two officers of the palace guard seized me and took me up into the palace. I did not understand why and protested, and they answered kindly not to be afraid but to go up, since it was the king's wish. We went up into a quiet exceptional palace, beyond any palace on earth, and they dressed me in priceless clothing of pure white and told me, ‘From now on you will serve here’; and they took me to do obeisance to the king.”

“I woke up at once, and the things I had seen and heard made such a deep impression on me that I couldn't do or think about anything. I stopped work and remained deep in thought. Inside me I kept hearing that command constantly as if it were being endlessly repeated ‘From now on you will serve here.’ My whole inner and outward state changed. Nothing of the things on earth interested me, but I didn't understand what my dream meant or what I ought to do. Two spiritual women who lived nearby understood my state, and lent me a book about the fathers, The Summer Book, containing the Lives of great saints whose feast days fall in the summer.”

“While I was avidly reading that book, it had such an effect on my existing state of mind that I stopped thinking about anything worldly. I could no longer stay amidst the noise of the city. I would go out into the surrounding countryside, which at that time was uninhabited; I went to a number of places, but mostly to Penteli. There I lived as an ascetic with much fasting and vigil, as much as I could with my meager knowledge. At night, I would sometimes climb up a tree and spend the whole night like a stylite, and I tried to imitate the various other kinds of hardships I had read about in the lives of the Fathers. Then I began to think about the deserts where the Fathers had lived a spiritual life. I also thought about Mount Athos, where I believed I would find fathers of the stature of those I had read about in the Lives.”

Francis disposed of all his savings in alms and left other things to his family. He followed an Athonite monk to Mount Athos, where he stayed in the most remote parts. After the initial trials he became desperate, thinking that God had forsaken him. He wept profusely, asking God and the Theotokos for mercy and courage. In his own words,

“As I was looking toward the summit of Athos where the Church of the Mother of God is, I seemed to feel a thrill of joy within me, and all at once I saw a ray of light come out of the church, and like a rainbow it came and rested on me. At once I was completely changed, and forgot myself. I was filled with light in my heart and outside and everywhere, not being aware that I even had a body. The prayer began to say itself within me, so rhythmically that I was amazed, since I myself was not making any effort. It was as if I had two selves, because I could see my inner state, full of light and spiritual fragrance and joy, with the prayer going on constantly, but I was also wholly covered with light and was marveling at the greatness of God’s mercy. I don’t know how long this state lasted; then that pure white light withdrew to where it had come from. I came to myself and saw that I was still in the place where I started to pray. However, I concluded that quite a time must have passed because it was nearly sunset. From that time prayer never left me. Without effort it repeated itself in my heart, but it did not have the same extraordinary energy as when it first came.”

After that, he tried to spend all his time in quiet, remote places, suitable for stillness and prayer. Elder Joseph pursued prayer under the guidance of wise spiritual elders and in the company of his lifelong companion and fellow struggler Father Arsenios. While in the beginning of the struggle at Katounakia, Joseph was given the Great Schema. He fasted intensely and kept vigil even more because, as he emphasized, no other hardship subdued the body and made the passions wither so much as this. Each day Elder ate 75 grams (3 ounces) of rusks three hours before sunset. After much assiduous labor at stillness and prayer, the light increased again. On one occasion, contemplation of his mind in the depths of his heart was interrupted as he was turned towards the supra natural light that was spread all around. Suddenly, a great host of monks in battle formation appeared before him. Opposite them, a little way off, a large number of ferocious black figures, hideous in appearance and ugly in temperament were also standing in readiness for battle.

“Then I saw a tall, illustrious general coming towards me, and he said,”Do you want to go and fight in the front line?” I was delighted because I did want to, and I asked him, if possible, to put me there; and I felt in my soul a great hatred and fury against those adversaries, who I understood were demons. Then this general did indeed take me out of the line where I was standing with the other fathers. We went past three or four lines, which seemed like battalion positions. He brought me to the front line, where there were only one or two people. He looked at me, smiled and said, ‘If anyone wants to fight bravely against these dark enemies, I do not hinder him but help him.’ When I came to myself after this vision, I soon realized its meaning and said to myself, ‘Lowly Joseph, prepare to make good your promises.’”

And indeed, it was not long before the trials increased. Elder Joseph had a strict upbringing and knew nothing of carnal things. He was a virgin, as his close relatives and

he himself assured. It was typical, as seen in the history of the desert fathers, that the spirit of fornication attacked such people, although they had no concept of fleshly sin. He stood upright for long periods of time and employed extended vigil, increased thirst, and a passion-repelling stick, with which he severely beat himself to drive out a nail by a nail. He gave up his bed and constructed a wooden armchair so that he could rest his arms. On this he sat and slept for eight whole years, as long as the war lasted, without turning his side at all.

“The war would quieten down for a bit so that I could draw my breath, and then start up intensely once again. But my body started to get worn out and my courage wavered, because my weapons were losing their force. I found relief in prayer, and that was what comforted me.”

The discovery of Elder Daniel the Hesychast, who became his spiritual father, and rare visions of the Divine world brought some solace, yet the fight intensified even more. After an edifying vision, peace would last a few days, and then the war of the flesh would redouble.

“I wept, I fasted to excess, I kept awake for ever longer, but the situation did not change... I would beat my body with sticks until I was black and blue from the waist down, but the war continued twice as fierce... I was angry with myself, with Satan, and with whatever else was prolonging this war for me. I constantly besought Christ and our most pure Lady. “Lady, our Lady,” I would cry out in pain, “you that are the nurturer of virgins, know that I have never inclined to carnal sin and, with the full knowledge of your Son, have vowed complete chastity as far as humanly possible. Why such violence and persistence? Is this going to overcome my will?”

“So sore and burdened I was, I went to my hut, shut the door and sat down on my stool in order to concentrate on prayer, and gradually I began to calm down. Suddenly I heard a sound like the door opening. At once I felt in my lower members someone arousing me; I opened my eyes, and what should I see? The unclean spirit of fornication! He was just as our fathers describe, with a bald, filthy head and little horns sticking up, a pale face, round red eyes full of wickedness, and his body filthy and covered with bristles like a wild boar’s! At once I flung myself on him with all my strength, but naturally it was impossible to get a hold of him. There was only the feel on my hands of the roughness of his skin, and his stench, like sulfur and slime, was on my hands and all around... and then he vanished. From that moment, by the grace of Christ and our most Holy Lady, the burden of that war left me; the troubling thoughts ceased altogether and I felt like a small child, with no feeling of that passion.”

“Around dawn, when I sat down to sleep, God showed me the meaning of the struggle and war and in particular of the passions, which fight against humans and enslave them. I dreamed I was on a quite high point of ground, and opposite me I could see immense plain, like a sea. A great throng of people, for the most part monks, was going across it from west to east. In front of them, over the whole extent of the plain, there were traps

set. As they walked carelessly, they were getting caught in the traps; not all of them by the same part of the body, but some by the feet, some by the hands, some by the belly, some by the underbelly and, generally, the traps would catch them by all different parts of the body, without exception. Once trapped, they seemed to wake up and began to weep so woefully that I was weeping for sorrow. Then I saw this plain split down the middle, and as if from a crater there appeared a vile black ogre, very tall and full of fury, with his tongue hanging out, and he laughed in sarcastic satisfaction at the unfortunates who had been captured by his sorcery. Then I understood who he was and what he symbolized, and I groaned with pain: alas for our race because of this infernal serpent, who wars against us with such fury and persistence.”

If anybody did him and his disciples’ kindness, Elder would never forget it, but would look for ways and opportunities to repay it, if at all possible, with something more. He expressed his gratitude with prayer. For hours on end he would pray with tears for the world and he truly shared in the pain of all mankind, especially of people known to him who asked him to pray for them. When asked how he knew of the happenings in the near and far distances, Joseph replied thus to the inquirers:

“It would be better for me to pray for you to experience it, rather than to learn how it happens as a mere piece of knowledge. But since you insist, listen. I was kneeling here at the window on my rags, saying the prayer. At one moment, as I was holding my mind in the operation of prayer – which divine grace brings about with its divine illumination – the light increased and my mind began to broaden out and overflow so that everything became luminous for me and I saw the whole of the surrounding area, from Katounakia to the monasteries down below as far as Daphne, and behind me as well, and nothing was invisible or unknown to me. The light was not as much as this natural light from the sun or the artificial, man-made light, but it was a wonderful light, white and immaterial, which is not only external, like this natural light which allows those who have sight to see externally. This light is also within man and he experiences it like his own breath, and it fills him like nourishment and breathing and relieves him of his natural weight and transfigures him so that he would not know that he had a body or weight or any restriction. Then I saw Athanasios coming towards us on the road from St Paul’s, carrying his big bag, and I remained observing him until he arrived here. I saw all his movements, where he sat down to rest or put down his load, the spring of St Anne at the mill where he stopped for a drink of water, up to the point when he reached our door and took the key and opened it and came in and came up to me and made a reverence. But what is it that amazed you? When man’s mind is purified and illumined (apart from the fact that even without the addition of divine grace it has its own illuminations, with which it sees further than the demons, as the Fathers say), it then receives in addition the illumination of divine grace, so that grace can reside in it permanently, and grace then takes it up into contemplation and visions, in a manner and to a degree known to itself. But it is also possible for the person himself to ask in his prayer when he wants to see or find out something that interests him, and grace will operate to fulfill his request, because he asked it. But I think that devout people avoid asking such a thing except in great need.

However, the Lord 'will do the will of them that fear Him and will hearken to their prayer.'”

Elder Joseph’s disciples were eager to learn the manner and form of the operation of grace. One night he told one of his brethren by the name Joseph, “Tonight I’m going to send you a parcel, and you must take care not to lose it.” This is how Joseph, the author of the book about the life of the Elder, from which we have been quoting all our material, described what transpired:

“I did not understand what he meant and did not think about it at all, and I went off. After our rest, as always, we began our vigil and I prepared to begin my prayer as he had shown me, keeping hold of my mind as best as I could, and I forgot all about the parcel. I do not remember how I started off, but I know very well that I had just begun and had not pronounced the Name of our Christ many times before my heart was filled with love for God. Suddenly it increased so much that I was no longer praying, but wondering in amazement at this outpouring of love. I wanted to embrace and kiss all people and the whole of creation and at the same time I was so humble in my thoughts that I felt I was the lowest of all creatures. But the fullness and the flame of love was for our Christ, whom I experienced as present, although I could not see Him to fall at His spotless feet and ask Him how He could set hearts on fire like this and remain hidden and unknown. Then I had a subtle assurance that this was the Grace of the Holy Spirit and that this was the Kingdom of Heaven, which our Lord says is within us (Lk. 17:21), and I said, “Let me stay like this, my Lord, and I won’t need anything else.” This went on for quite a time, and gradually I came back again to my former state and waited in agony of impatience for the time to come when I could go to the Elder and ask him what this was all about and how it had happened. I ran down and found him outside his cell, walking in his little courtyard. As soon as he saw me he began to smile, and before I could make a reverence he said, “You see how sweet our Christ is? Do you understand in practice what it is that you keep asking me about? Now exert yourself forcibly to make this grace your possession, and don’t let negligence steal it away from you.” At once I fell at his feet and said with tears, “I have seen it, Elder; unworthy as I am of all creation, I have seen the grace and love of our Christ, and now I understand the boldness of the Fathers and the power of prayers.” When I told him exactly what happened and asked for details about how this had come about, he refused, out of humility, to tell me; so he said, “God had compassion and mercy upon you, showing you His grace by anticipation, so that you won’t doubt the counsels of the fathers and lose heart.” I then understood the meaning of the common custom of asking other people to pray for us, with faith and trust: ‘Pray for me, Father. Say a prayer for me, Father. Remember me in your prayers, Father.’”

Bitter struggles caused Elder Joseph’s health to deteriorate and make him look like a worn-out old man. He could hardly walk at all, suffered from intermittent swelling throughout his body, had difficulty breathing, and could not sleep from exhaustion. When he cut his hands, water came out instead of blood. He did not change his fasting no matter what happened. Two serious illnesses, one after another, brought an end to his earthly life. Benign anthrax completely wore Joseph out, causing suffering from a weak heart,

which brought an end to his earthly life. “The day for me to leave is getting near. The way I am now, I’m not good for anything, and I can’t struggle any more either,” he told his brethren. Being unable to move or to lie down, Elder sat in a makeshift armchair – a folding one – and wept constantly for the vanity of life. He awaited his release from this life as the greatest happiness that could befall him and murmured troparia for the departed, when he was not having too much difficulty breathing. “Arsenios,” he said jokingly to his life-long struggler-monk, “when are we leaving? You are not praying, it seems, and we are delayed.” For almost forty days, his last days, Elder Joseph ate nothing: he just received Communion every day and took a little watermelon. On the feast of Dormition he went to the Liturgy, recited the Trisagion with difficulty, and received Communion for the last time, saying, “Provision for the journey of eternal life.”

Seated in a chair and battling with continuous difficulty breathing, he kept Father Arsenios by him, as always, when he had given all the others his blessing. When Arsenios wanted to rub his feet for a moment to give him a little relief, he did not let him, and told him, “Stop, Father Arsenios, don’t do anything. Everything is finished. I’m going.” He took the hand of his inseparable comrade in ascetic life as if to say good-bye for the last time, looked up for a moment, and peacefully gave up his blessed soul. In the last days before he fell asleep he said to one of the monks, “When I leave, I will visit you where you are staying.” Indeed, on the fortieth day after his death the Elder visited the monk in his cell, and the whole room was filled with fragrance. A devout old lady from Thessaloníki had Elder Joseph appear visibly to her on August 15, 1959 and she asked him in bewilderment, “How do you come to be here, Elder? Have you died, by any chance?” And he replied “Yes, and I came by to say good-bye to you.”

2. The Teaching of Elder Joseph the Hesychast

The Elder's letters were published posthumously and have been widely read in the old and new worlds. What follows is a thematically organized summary of the selections from the book "Monastic Wisdom. The Letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast."

On Learning the Prayer

Beginnings: Engaging the Nous

To begin mastering noetic prayer one must constantly say The Prayer. At first we should say it quickly so that the nous doesn't have time to form any distracting thoughts. Pay attention only to the words, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me."

After The Prayer has been said out loud for some time, the nous becomes accustomed to it and actually takes up saying it itself: "Then it becomes sweet to you as if you had honey in your mouth, and you want to keep saying it at all times. If you stop it, you feel greatly distressed."

Next Steps: Bringing the Nous Down to the Heart

When the nous has become accustomed to it and has taken its fill – that, is, when it has learned it well – then it sends it to the heart. Since the nous supplies food for the soul, the task of the nous is to send whatever good or evil it sees or hears down into the heart. Thus, if a person is able to say The Prayer and at the same time keep his nous from imagining anything, that is, paying attention only to the words of The Prayer, then he actually brings his nous down to his heart, using the rhythm of his own breathing: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!" In the beginning one says The Prayer a few times and takes a breath. Later, when the nous has become accustomed to remaining in the heart, one says one Prayer with each breath, thus: "Lord Jesus Christ" (breathing in), "Have mercy on me," (breathing out).

Continuing on to Theoria

As the recitation of The Prayer continues, grace comes to overshadow the soul, to act within it and move it on to theoria (the non-sensible operation of the Holy Spirit which opens the nous to heavenly mysteries). The Prayer should be said everywhere: while seated, in bed, while walking, and standing. It requires a struggle: standing and sitting. When one tires, then sit, but stand up again so as not to be overcome by sleep.

Praxis

Taken as a whole, these activities are called praxis, putting theory into practice. Even though one demonstrates intention and discipline it must not be forgotten that everything depends on Him, on whether or not He gives it to you. God is the beginning and the end. His grace is the driving force that activates all things: love, the desire to find God, and compunction.

Keeping the commandments activates love. It is love that motivates one to arise at night and pray; when one sympathizes with the sick; when one is charitable to a widow, orphans, and the elderly. When we love God in these ways, He pours out His grace.

If a person wishes to find God only through The Prayer, he must not let a single breath pass without it and must be careful not to accept any fantasies because the Divine is formless, unimaginable, and colorless. He is supremely perfect, not subject to syllogisms. He acts as a subtle breeze in our minds.

Compunction – a sting of conscience, remorse, sorrow for our sins – comes when we consider how much we have grieved God, who is so good, so sweet, so merciful, so kind, and so entirely full of love; Who was crucified and suffered everything for us. When you meditate on this and other things the Lord has suffered, this brings compunction.

Finally, if one is able, say The Prayer out loud without ceasing until grace overshadows and refreshes one. Say it out loud, without a break, until the nous takes it up. Then one may stop saying it orally. But if the nous loses its grip on The Prayer, one can resume saying it out loud. The forcefulness of the tongue is needed until one gets used to it. Afterwards, all the years of one's life, the nous will repeat it without exertion.

The Ascetic Struggle: On the Three States of Nature

Man's Natural State

The natural state of man is the result of his having transgressed the commandments of the Lord and having fallen out of Paradise. Into this context the Divine Law is given to us in written form. It provides a practical help to every man desiring salvation and victory over the passions. This is achieved by struggling to stay within these Divine Laws. Elder Joseph described it this way: 'When we abide by the Divine Law given to us in the Bible – (i.e.,) we are not fornicators, murderers, thieves, liars, gossipers, and are not unjust, proud, vainglorious, gluttonous, greedy, avaricious, envious, taunting, blaspheming, irascible, peevish, complaining, hypocritical, and so on – then we are in the state natural for us after the Fall.'

The State Against Nature

The state contrary to or against nature is when one is outside of the Divine Law and behaves like irrational animals that do not have a law. The Prophet says, regarding such people, "Man, being in honor, did not understand; he is compared to the mindless cattle, and is like them." So, whoever lives like this, outside of the Divine law, wallowing in the sins we have mentioned, is in the state contrary to nature.

The State Above Nature

The state above nature is that of dispassion, which is what Adam possessed before he transgressed the commandment of God and fell out of divine grace and innocence.

The following is a paraphrase of the original text and is the Elder's explanation of the three states of nature:

“So these, my child, are the three states through which, if we make progress, we ascend from the contra-natural to the supernatural state. To put it another way, the three modes of divine grace that the nature of man is likely to receive when he has good intentions and exerts himself are: **purifying, illuminating, and perfecting.**”

“Once a man comes to repentance, he forces himself to stay within the Divine Law, yet, due to his passionate habits, he undergoes great struggles and suffers sharp pains. Then divine grace secretly gives him comfort and joy, mourning, delight, and sweetness from the divine words he reads, as well as strength and boldness in his spiritual struggle. This is called **purifying grace**, which mystically helps the struggling penitent to be purified from sins and to remain in the state according to nature.”

“If he remains in the state according to nature and does not stop struggling, does not turn back, is not negligent, and does not fall from his post, but endures and forces himself to bear good fruits, being patient and accepting the continuous changes of nature, and awaiting the mercy of God, then his nous receives divine illumination and becomes entirely divine light, by which he noetically perceives the truth and discerns how he must proceed until he reaches love, which is our sweet Jesus.”

“Here, too, one must be very cautious, for there are any number of delusions. When you hear me saying 'light', do not think that it is fire or light from a lamp or lightning or some other kind of colors. Away with such absurdity! For there were many who did not understand and accepted some kind of lightning as something divine, and thus were deluded and miserably ruined. But the noetic light of divine grace is immaterial, formless, colorless, gladsome, and peaceful. This is, and is called **illuminating grace**, which illuminates the nous and knows the safe roads of the spiritual journey, so that the traveler will not get lost and fall.”

“But this light comes and goes, since the body changes. Light is followed by darkness, and then darkness is followed by light.”

“Now listen carefully and understand: our natural state is darkness in comparison to divine grace. How much more so when the gloomy demons approach us, which are dark by nature! So when the light of grace comes, everything evil disappears – just as when the sun rises the darkness leaves and we can clearly see even the smallest details that escaped notice before dawn. But once the sun sets, the darkness overtakes us naturally once more, and whoever walks in the darkness suffers great damage and grievous incidents.”

“Likewise, the same thing happens to us in our spiritual journey. When we have divine light, we can see everything clearly, and the demons flee far away, as they are unable to stand before divine grace. But once divine grace leaves again, the darkness remains, that is, our natural state. Then the thieving demons come and fight us. And so, since our nature is subject to so many changes, and since, in a time of darkness, we, without the discernment of divine grace, work many deeds that harm us, we are mortally wounded by our enemies, because it is dark and we cannot see the enemies that are hiding.”

“If, then, we remain in this state and are not harmed by the continuous wars and turmoil from the passions, then we are given the gift of God, **perfecting grace**, which perfects us. It is called supernatural because he who has it walks above nature. In the first two stages of grace, a person forces himself with good thoughts and spiritual recollections to keep the virtues: love, humility, abstinence, and so on. Thus, by thinking pious thoughts and by opposing demonic thoughts, he destroys the passions' malice and keeps the virtues. But when the perfecting, supernatural grace comes, all the passions are wiped out. Then all the virtues are kept as though they belonged to his own nature, without needing to use his own devices and methods, because he has been given that dispassionate state that existed before the Fall. For the passions entered the nature of man after Adam's disobedience, whereas the natural state in which man was created by God was passionless. For this reason, when the nous is freed from the passions, it walks above nature like a king by means of divine knowledge.”

Part III

1. A Comparison of the Lives of Archbishop Anthony and Elder Joseph

It would be difficult to find two lives more different than Vladika Anthony and Elder Joseph. Yet, as it applies to their understanding of the spiritual life, we find some remarkable similarities. It seems that anyone who honestly seeks life in and communion with Christ is drawn, by the grace of God, to the unceasing Prayer of the Heart. The diversity of the journey does not appear to affect the ultimate outcome. Consider first of all the differences in the lives of Vladika Anthony and Elder Joseph:

Place of Birth: The Elder Joseph was born in the moderate climate of a Mediterranean island while Bishop Anthony was born somewhere in the more severe climate of the Orel region of Russia. Although we don't wish to overestimate the effect of climate, it's reasonable to assume that a harsh climate would involve hardship. Thus, Archbishop Anthony may have been prepared for a hard life by means of his place of birth.

Childhood and family: The Elder Joseph was born into a simple family and, although his father died early in his life, his mother seems to have had a profound effect on his spiritual journey. Having seen an angel shortly after his birth she was convinced that her son would follow Christ; it is safe to assume that she developed his character in such a way that a monastic vocation would naturally occur. As for Bishop Anthony, we know little of his early family life, except that it was an extremely poor family and that out of necessity his parents would send him to a monastery during summers to spend time there.

Education: The Elder Joseph had only completed the second grade education. He began to read books about the Church Fathers on his own at the age of twenty-three. Of Archbishop Anthony's education, however, we know very little, the only known data that we have is that he attended six months of educational courses. Thus, both men received a menial education.

Relative wealth: The Elder Joseph was a successful merchant prior to Mount Athos, and must, therefore, have enjoyed some material wealth. Starets Anthony, on the other hand, served the Church, which was beginning to experience persecution from the state; in all likelihood he remained poor.

Relationship to secular authorities: The Elder Joseph always lived in a nation where the government supported the church, whereas after 1917, this was no longer the case for Archbishop Anthony. As a result, Vladika Anthony seems to have been at odds with the government, having been arrested several times and having served several long prison terms.

Ascetic suffering: This may be the most pronounced difference between these two men – for one voluntarily chose the ascetic life while for the other it was imposed from the

outside. Archbishop Anthony was no doubt willing to suffer, but his ascetic suffering came as the result of arrest and imprisonment – a special kind of suffering of its own. By contrast, the Elder Joseph voluntarily disposed of his savings and left friends and family in order to become an ascetic on Mount Athos.

Prayer as a common tool: Both ascetics used Prayer as a tool of survival in the harsh physical “prisons of the senses” that they were in. Even though one put himself in isolation from the world voluntarily, and the other was forced to prison, both had to willingly confine their senses. Father Anthony had to ignore the carnal sin around him, and Elder Joseph had to battle the demon of fornication that visited him in the wilderness. They both succeeded in their struggles with prayer.

However different these two lives may have been, the fundamental spiritual outcome is strikingly similar. Both men were drawn to and became representatives of the hesychast idea of inner stillness. Both experienced the profound benefits of this spiritual state and both made use of the same fundamental practices. Central to this spiritual state is The Jesus Prayer – The Prayer of the Heart – which leads to theoria, the vision of the Uncreated Light and the energies of God. It is The Jesus Prayer, its basic characteristics and practical benefits, which are evident in both lives:

Constant desire: Both men emphasized their desire to fulfill the command of Scripture to pray without ceasing. That desire seems to have accompanied them throughout their lives, in times of blessing as well as times of suffering. When the body was weak, when tortures and deprivations were at their most intense, the desire of the heart still remained constant. When material wealth, recognition, peace and security seemed to prevail, even then, the urge to pray without ceasing broke through.

Sustained prayer: Once prayer was begun it became a constant activity, something done all night long in prison camps, something done for six hours at a time in a monastery, while sitting, standing, walking, even lying in a bed. The desire, then, was translated into practical action for both men.

All-encompassing: It may well be an understatement to say that this practice began to overwhelm the rest of both men's lives. Nothing was more important or of a higher priority. The Prayer became a life-integrating center of activity, a focal point for the flow of divine energy.

Healing: Given the flow of divine energy, which saturates life, it is only to be expected that healings will take place – the healing of soul and body – and this happened in the case of both men.

A life of its own: Both of these ascetics said that The Prayer took on a life of its own. This is not to imply that there was always success – in fact, there were times of failure or frustration, seasons of weakness and fading strength. Yet The Prayer seemed to have taken on a life of its own – a kind of independent existence, born of desire, formed in rigorous practice, established by the Spirit of God, and allowed to occupy the very center of life.

2. Theological Comparison of Their Written Legacy

Our esteemed reader is wiser than we are, and beyond doubt has reaped a harvest of knowledge from the preceding pages. To theologize on the works of Archbishop Anthony and Elder Joseph without living their existence and praying the way they did would reveal our complete foolishness. We will simply state here that the writings of these two ascetics of the twentieth century follow the pattern established by the Holy Fathers throughout centuries.

St. John Climacus	Archbishop Anthony	Elder Joseph
Obedience	Verbal / Oral Prayer	Constantly Say The Prayer
Humility	Mental Active Prayer (Mind in Heart)	Nous Says Prayer by Itself
Discernment	Mental-Heart Active Prayer	Nous Enters the Heart
Clairvoyance	Mental-Heart Self Moving & Pure Prayer	Theoria
Prophecy	Visionary Prayer	Theoria

The trend is quite simple – the path to salvation is paved with The Jesus Prayer. You either live The Prayer, or you do not. The end result of the former is purification and deification. The grand finale of the latter is too well known. Vladika Anthony and Elder Joseph, pray for us.

Conclusion

Contemporary monastics of Athos, Sinai, Jerusalem, Valaam, Optina, Platina, and Saint Anthony's Monastery in Arizona have one thing in common, apart from the daily obediences and endless services that are visible to an outside observer. When all errands and jobs are finished, and the long day is over, monks transfer their unceasing prayerful energy into their cells. In solitude they begin the most important part of their daily life that is not visible to the external eye – repenting and appealing to God with the prayer of the publican.

Archbishop Anthony and Elder Joseph did the same thing, quite boring and senseless to the outside secular world, yet quintessential to their lives and to any Orthodox Christian. They prayed The Jesus Prayer striving for their own salvation. We have been blessed to have surviving records of their writings on this subject, teaching others to do the same. They were modern day ascetics who proved that the wisdom of the Church Fathers is not confined to the past.

Let us repeat after them, and after all those ascetics that have struggled in the deserts, mountains, valleys and cities the last two millennia – Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us.