

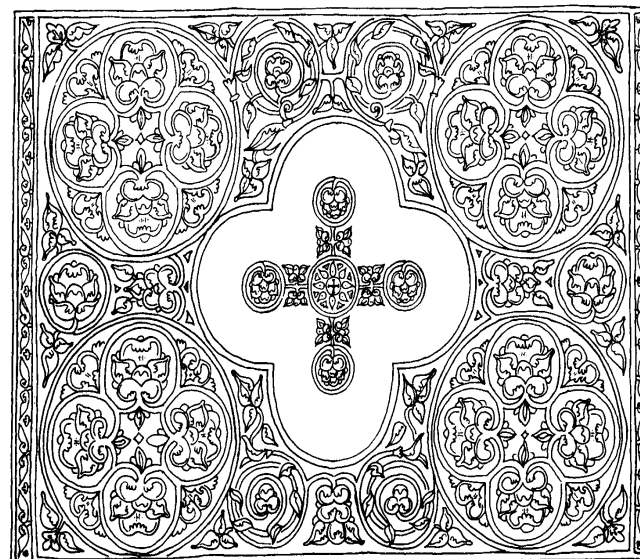


# THE SECRET OF SALVATION:

## UNCEASING PRAYER

From:

*The Way of the Pilgrim*



THE FOLLOWING EXCERPT IS FROM THE BOOK THE WAY OF A  
PILGRIM. THOSE INVOLVED IN THE DISCUSSION ARE:

- the Pilgrim
- the starets (a spiritual elder)
- the skhimmik {a monk of the great schema}
- the priest
- the professor

THE SECRET OF SALVATION, REVEALED BY  
UNCEASING PRAYER [FROM THE WAY OF A PILGRIM]

*The Skhimnik:*

How is one saved? This godly question naturally arises in the mind of every Christian who realizes the injured and enfeebled nature of man, and what is left of its original urge towards truth and righteousness. Everyone who has even some degree of faith in immortality and recompense in the life to come is involuntarily faced by the thought, " How am I to be saved? " when he turns his eyes towards heaven. When he tries to find a solution of this problem, he enquires of the wise and learned. Then under their guidance he reads edifying books by spiritual writers on this subject, and sets himself unswervingly to follow out the truths and the rules he has heard and read. In all these instructions he finds constantly put before him as necessary conditions of salvation a devout life, and heroic struggles with himself which are to issue in decisive denial of self. This is to lead him on to the performance of good works, to the constant fulfilment of God's laws, and thus witness to the unshakableness and firmness of his faith. Further, they preach to him that all these conditions of salvation must necessarily be fulfilled with the deepest humility and in combination with one another. For as all good works depend one upon another, so they should support one another, complete and encourage one another, just as the rays of the sun only reveal their

strength and kindle a flame when they are focused through a glass on to one point. Otherwise, *He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.*

In addition to this, to implant in him the strongest conviction of the necessity of this complex and unified virtue, he hears the highest praise bestowed upon the beauty of virtue, he listens to censure of the baseness and misery of vice. All this is imprinted upon his mind by truthful promises either of majestic rewards and happiness or of tormenting punishment and misery in the life to come. Such is the special character of preaching in modern times. Guided in this way, one who ardently wishes for salvation sets off in all joy to carry out what he has learned and to apply to experience all he has heard and read. But alas ! even at the first step he finds it impossible to achieve his purpose. He foresees and even finds out by trial that his damaged and enfeebled nature will have the upper hand of the convictions of his mind, that his freewill is bound, that his propensities are perverted, that his spiritual strength is but weakness. He naturally goes on to the thought: Is there not to be found some kind of means which will enable him to fulfil that which the law of God requires of him, which Christian devotion demands, and which all those who have found salvation and holiness have carried out? As the result of this and in order to reconcile in himself the demands of reason and conscience with the inadequacy of his strength to fulfil them, he applies once more to the preachers of

salvation with the question: How am I to be saved? How is this inability to carry out the conditions of salvation to be justified; and are those who have preached all this that he has learned themselves strong enough to carry it out unswervingly?

Ask God. Pray to God. Pray for His help.

"So would it not have been more fruitful," the enquirer concludes, is if I had, to begin with and always in every circumstance, made a study of prayer as the power to fulfil all that Christian devotion demands and by which salvation is attained? " And so he goes on to the study of prayer: he reads; he meditates; he studies the teaching of those who have written on that subject. Truly he finds in them many luminous thoughts, much deep knowledge and words of great power. One reasons beautifully about the necessity of prayer ; another writes of its power, its beneficial effect-of prayer as a duty, or of the fact that it calls for zeal, attention, warmth of heart, purity of mind, reconciliation with one's enemies, humility, contrition, and the rest of the necessary conditions of prayer. But what is prayer in itself? How does one actually pray? A precise answer which can be understood by everybody to these questions, primary and most urgent as they are, is very rarely to be found, and so the ardent enquirer about prayer is again left before a veil of mystery. As a result of his general reading there is rooted in his memory an aspect of prayer which, although devout, is

only external, and he arrives at the conclusion that prayer is going to church, crossing oneself, bowing, kneeling, reading psalms, *canons* and *akathists*. Generally speaking, this is the view of prayer taken by those who do not know the writings of the holy Fathers about inward prayer and contemplative action. At length, the seeker comes across the book called *Philokalia*, in which twenty-five holy Fathers set forth in an understandable way the scientific knowledge of the truth and of the essence of prayer of the heart. This begins to draw aside the veil from before the secret of salvation and of prayer. He sees that truly to pray means to direct the thought and the memory, without relaxing, to the recollection of God, to walk in His divine Presence, to awaken oneself to His love by thinking about Him, and to link the Name of God with one's breathing and the beating of one's heart. He is guided in all this by the invocation with the lips of the most Holy Name of Jesus Christ, or by saying the Jesus Prayer at all times and in all places and during every occupation, unceasingly. These luminous truths, by enlightening the mind of the seeker and by opening up before him the way to the study and achievement of prayer, help him to go on at once to put these wise teachings into practice. Nevertheless, when he makes his attempts he is still not free from difficulty until an experienced teacher shows him (from the same book) the whole truth-that is to say, that it is prayer which is incessant which is the only effective means, alike for perfecting interior prayer and for

the saving of the soul. It is frequency of prayer which is the basis, which holds together the whole system of saving activity. As Simeon the New Theologian says, " He who prays without ceasing unites all good in this one thing." So in order to set forth the truth of this revelation in all its fullness the teacher develops it in the following way:

For the salvation of the soul, first of all true faith is necessary. Holy Scripture says, *Without faith it is impossible to please God* (Heb. xi. 6). He who has not faith will be judged. But from the same Holy Scriptures one can see that man cannot himself bring to birth in him faith even as a grain of mustard seed; that faith does not come from us, since it is the gift of God ; that faith is a spiritual gift. It is given by the Holy Spirit. That being so, what is to be done? How is one to reconcile man's need of faith with the impossibility of producing it from the human side? The way to do this is revealed in the same Holy Scriptures : *Ask, and it shall be given you*. The Apostles could not of themselves arouse the perfection of faith within them, but they prayed to Jesus Christ, *Lord, increase our faith*. There you have an example of obtaining faith. It shows that faith is attained by prayer. For the salvation of the soul, beside true faith, good works are also required, for *Faith, if it hath not works, is dead*. For man is judged by his works and not by faith alone. *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments : Do not kill ; do not commit adultery ; do not steal ; do not bear false witness ; honour thy father and mother ; love thy*

*neighbor as Thy self*. And all these commandments are required to be kept together. *For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all* (Jas. 2:10). So the Apostle James teaches. And the Apostle Paul, describing human weakness, says : *By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified* (Rom. iii. 20). *For we know that the law is spiritual ; but I am carnal, sold under sin. . . . For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. . . . But the evil which I would not, that I do. . . . With the mind I myself serve the law of God ; but with the flesh the law of sin* (Rom. vii.). How are the required works of the law of God to be fulfilled when man is without strength, and has no power to keep the commandments? He has no possibility of doing this until he asks for it, until he prays about it. *Ye have not because ye ask not* (Jas. 4:2) the Apostle says is the cause. And Jesus Christ Himself says : *Without Me ye can do nothing*. And on the subject of doing it with Him, He gives this teaching: *Abide in Me and I in you. He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit*. But to be in Him means continually to feel His presence, continually to pray in His Name. *If ye shall ask Me anything in My Name, that will I do*. Thus the possibility of doing good works is reached by prayer itself. An example of this is seen in the Apostle Paul himself: three times he prayed for victory over temptation, bowing the knee before God the Father, that He would give him strength in the inner man, and was at last

bidden above all things to pray, and to pray continually about everything.

From what has been said above, it follows that the whole salvation of man depends upon prayer, and, therefore, it is primary and necessary, for by it faith is quickened and through it all good works are performed. In a word, with prayer everything goes forward successfully; without it, no act of Christian piety can be done. Thus, the condition that it should be offered unceasingly and always belongs exclusively to prayer. For the other Christian virtues, each of them has its own time. But in the case of prayer, uninterrupted, continuous action is commanded. *Pray without ceasing*. It is right and fitting to pray always, to pray everywhere. True prayer has its conditions. It should be offered with a pure mind and heart, with burning zeal, with close attention, with fear and reverence, and with the deepest humility. But what conscientious person would not admit that he is far from fulfilling those conditions, that he offers his prayer more from necessity, more by constraint upon himself than by inclination, enjoyment and love of it? About this, too, Holy Scripture says that it is not in the power of man to keep his mind steadfast, to cleanse it from unseemly thoughts, for *the thoughts of man are evil from his youth*, and that God alone gives us another heart and a new spirit, for *both to will and to do are of God*. The Apostle Paul himself says : My spirit (that is, my voice) prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful (I Cor. xiv. 14)- *We know*

*not what we should pray for as we ought* (Rom. 7:26), the same writer asserts. From this it follows that we in ourselves are unable to offer true prayer. We cannot in our prayers display its essential properties.

Such being the powerlessness of every human being, what remains possible for the salvation of the soul from the side of human will and strength? Man cannot acquire faith without prayer; the same applies to good works. And, finally, even to pray purely is not within his power. What, then, is left for him to do? What scope remains for the exercise of his freedom and his strength, so that he may not perish but be saved?

Every action has its quality, and this quality God has reserved to His own will and gift. In order that the dependence of man upon God, the will of God, may be shown the more clearly, and that he may be plunged more deeply into humility, God has assigned to the will and strength of man only the quantity of prayer. He has commanded unceasing prayer, always to pray, at all times and in every place. By this the secret method of achieving true prayer, and at the same time faith, and the fulfilment of God's commandments, and salvation, are revealed. Thus, it is quantity which is assigned to man, as his share; frequency of prayer is *his* own, and within the province of his will. This is exactly what the Fathers of the Church teach. St. Macarius the Great says truly to pray is the gift of grace.

Isikhi says that frequency of prayer becomes a habit and turns into second nature, and without frequent calling upon the Name of Jesus Christ it is impossible to cleanse the heart. The Venerable Callistus and Ignatius counsel frequent, continuous prayer in the Name of Jesus Christ before all ascetic exercises and good works, because frequency brings even the imperfect prayer to perfection. Blessed Diadoch asserts that if a man calls upon the Name of God as often as possible, then he will not fall into sin. What experience and wisdom there are here, and how near to the heart these practical instructions of the Fathers are. In their experience and simplicity they throw much light upon the means of bringing the soul to perfection. What a sharp contrast with the moral instructions of the theoretical reason! Reason argues thus: Do such and such good actions, arm yourself with courage, use the strength of your will, persuade yourself by considering the happy results of virtue--e.g., cleanse the mind and the heart from worldly dreams, fill their place with instructive meditations ; do good and you will be respected and be at peace; live in the way that your reason and conscience require. But alas! with all its strength, all that does not attain its purpose without frequent prayer, without summoning the help of God.

Now let us go on to some further teaching of the Fathers, and we shall see what they say, e.g., about purifying the soul. St. John of the Ladder writes: " When the spirit is darkened by unclean thoughts, put the enemy to flight by

the Name of Jesus repeated frequently. A more powerful and effective weapon than this you will not find, in heaven or on earth." St. Gregory the Sinaite teaches thus : " Know this, that no one can control his mind by himself, and, therefore, at a time of unclean thoughts call upon the Name of Jesus Christ often and at frequent intervals, and the thoughts will quieten down." How simple and easy a method ! Yet it is tested by experience. What a contrast with the counsel of the theoretical reason, which presumptuously strives to attain to purity by its own efforts.

Noting these instructions based upon the experience of the holy Fathers we pass on to the real conclusion : that the principal, the only, and a very easy method of reaching the goal of salvation and spiritual perfection is the frequency and the uninterruptedness of prayer, however feeble it may be. Christian soul, if you do not find within yourself the power to worship God in spirit and in truth, if your heart still feels no warmth and sweet satisfaction in mental and interior prayer, then bring to the sacrifice of prayer what you can, what lies within the scope of your will, what is within your power. Let the humble instrument of your lips first of all grow familiar with frequent persistent prayerful invocation. Let them call upon the mighty Name of Jesus Christ often and without interruption. This is not a great labour and is within the power of everyone. This, too, is what the precept of the Holy Apostle enjoins: *By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God*

*continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name (Heb. xiii. 15).*

Frequency of prayer certainly forms a habit and becomes second nature. It brings the mind and the heart into a proper state from time to time. Suppose a man continually fulfils this one commandment of God about ceaseless prayer, then in that one thing he would have fulfilled all; for if he uninterruptedly, at all times, and in all circumstances, offers the Prayer, calling in secret upon the most holy Name of Jesus (although at first he may do so without spiritual ardour and zeal and even forcing himself), then he will have no time for vain conversation, for judging his neighbours, for useless waste of time in sinful pleasures of the senses. Every evil thought of his would meet opposition to its growth. Every sinful act he contemplated would not come to fruition so readily as with an empty mind. Much talking and vain talking would be checked or entirely done away with, and every fault at once cleansed from the soul by the gracious power of so frequently calling upon the divine Name. The frequent exercise of prayer would often recall the soul from sinful action and summon it to what is the essential exercise of its skill, to union with God. Now do you see how important and necessary quantity is in prayer? Frequency in prayer is the one method of attaining pure and true prayer. It is the very best and most effective preparation for prayer, and the surest way of reaching the goal of prayer, and salvation.

To convince yourself finally about the necessity and fruitfulness of frequent prayer, note (1 ) that every impulse and every thought of prayer is the work of the Holy Spirit and the voice of your guardian angel; (2) that the Name of Jesus Christ invoked in prayer contains in itself self-existent and self-acting salutary power, and, therefore, (3) do not be disturbed by the imperfection or dryness of your prayer, and await with patience the fruit of frequently calling upon the divine Name. Do not listen to the inexperienced, thoughtless insinuation of the vain world that lukewarm invocation, even if it be importunate, is useless repetition. No; the power of the divine Name and the frequent calling upon it will reveal its fruit in its season. A certain spiritual writer has spoken very beautifully about this. " I know," he says, that to many so-called spiritual and wise philosophers, who search everywhere for sham greatness and practices that are noble in the eyes of reason and pride, the simple, vocal, but frequent exercise of prayer appears of little significance, as a lowly occupation, even a mere trifle. But, unhappy ones, they deceive themselves, and they forget the teaching of Jesus Christ : *Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven* (St. Matt. xviii. 3). They work out for themselves a sort of science of prayer, on the unstable foundations of the natural reason. Do we require much learning or thought or knowledge to say with a pure heart, " Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me "? Does not our

Divine Teacher Himself praise such frequent prayer? Have not wonderful answers been received and wonderful works done by this same brief but frequent prayer? Ah, Christian soul, pluck up your courage and do not silence the unbroken invocations of your prayer, although it may be that this cry of yours comes from a heart which is still at war with itself and half filled by the world. Never mind! Only go on with it and don't let it be silenced and don't be disturbed. It will itself purify itself by repetition. Never let your memory lose hold of this: *Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world (I John iv- 4). God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things*, says the Apostle.

And so, after all these convincing arguments that frequent prayer, so powerful in all human weakness, is certainly attainable by man and lies fully within his own will, make up your mind to try, even if only for a single day at first. Maintain a watch over yourself and make the frequency of your prayer such that far more time is occupied in the twenty-four hours with the prayerful calling upon the Name of Jesus Christ than with other matters. And this triumph of prayer over worldly affairs will in time certainly show you that this day has not been lost, but has been secured for salvation ; that in the scales of the divine judgment frequent prayer outweighs your weaknesses and evil-doing and blots out the sins of that day in the memorial book of conscience; that it sets your feet upon the ladder of righteousness and gives you hope of sanctification in the

life to come.

The Pilgrim: With all my heart I thank you, holy Father. With that reading of yours you have given pleasure to my sinful soul. For the love of God, be so kind as to allow me to copy out for myself what you have read. I can do it in an hour or two. Everything you read was so beautiful and comforting and is so understandable and clear to my stupid mind, like *The Philokalia*, in which the holy Fathers treat the same subject. Here, for instance, John Karpathisky in the fourth part of *The Philokalia* also says that if you have not the strength for self-control and ascetic achievements, then know that God is willing to save you by prayer. But how beautifully and understandably all that is drawn out in your notebook. I thank God first of all, and then you, that I have been allowed to hear it.

*The Professor:* I also listened with great attention and pleasure to your reading, Reverend Father. All arguments, when they rest upon strict logic, are a delight to me. But at the same time it seems to me that they make the possibility of continual prayer in a high degree dependent on circumstances which are favourable to it and upon entirely quiet solitude. For I agree that frequent and ceaseless prayer is a powerful and unique means of obtaining the help of divine grace in all acts of devotion for the sanctifying of the soul, and that it is within the power of man. But this method can be used only when man avails himself of the possibility



of solitude and quiet. In getting away from business and worries and distractions he can pray frequently or even continually. He then has to contend only with sloth or with the tedium of his own thoughts. But if he is bound by duties and by constant business, if he necessarily finds himself in a noisy company of people, and has an earnest desire to pray often, he cannot carry out this desire because of the inevitable distractions. Consequently the one method of frequent prayer, since it is dependent upon favourable circumstances, cannot be used by everybody, nor belong to all.

*The Skhimnik:* It is no use drawing a conclusion of that kind. Not to mention the fact that the heart which has been taught interior prayer can always pray and call upon the Name of God unhindered during any occupation, whether of the body or of the mind, and in any noise (those who know this know it from experience, and those who do not know it must be taught by gradual training) one can confidently say that no outward distraction can interrupt prayer in one who wishes to pray, for the secret thought of man does not depend upon any link with external environment and is entirely free in itself. It can at all times be perceived and directed towards prayer; even the very tongue can secretly without outward sound express prayer in the presence of many people and during external occupations. Besides, our business is surely not so important and our conversation so interesting that it is impossible during them to find a way at times of frequently calling upon the Name of Jesus Christ,

even if the mind has not yet been trained to continuous prayer. Although, of course, solitude and escape from distracting things does constitute the chief condition for attentive and continuous prayer, still we ought to feel ourselves to blame for the rarity of our prayer, because the amount and frequency is under the control of everybody, both the healthy and the sick. It does lie within the scope of his will. Instances which prove this are to be found in those who, although burdened by obligations, distracting duties, cares, worries and work, have not only always called upon the divine name of Jesus Christ, but even in this way learned and attained the ceaseless inward prayer of the heart. Thus the Patriarch Photius, who was called to the patriarchal dignity from among the ranks of the senators, while governing the vast diocese of Constantinople, persevered continually in the invocation of the Name of God, and thus attained even the self-acting prayer of the heart. Thus Caristus on the holy Mount Athos learned ceaseless prayer while carrying on his busy life as a cook. So the simple-hearted Lazarus, burdened with continual work for the brotherhood, uninterruptedly, in the midst of all his noisy occupations, repeated the Jesus Prayer and was at peace. And many others similarly have practiced the continuous invocation of the Name of God.

If it were an impossible thing to pray amidst distracting business or in the society of other people, then, of course, it would not have been bidden us. St. John Chrysostom, in his

teaching about prayer, speaks as follows: " No one should give the answer that it is impossible for a man occupied with worldly cares, and who is unable to go to church, to pray always. Everywhere, wherever you may find yourself, you can set up an altar to God in your mind by means of prayer. And so it is fitting to pray at your trade, on a journey, standing at the counter or sitting at your handicraft. Everywhere and in every place it is possible to pray, and, indeed, if a man diligently turns his attention upon himself, then everywhere he will find convenient circumstances for prayer, if only he is convinced of the fact that prayer should constitute his chief occupation and come before every other duty. And in that case he would, of course, order his affairs with greater decision ; in necessary conversation with other people he would maintain brevity, a tendency to silence, and a disinclination for useless words ; he would not be unduly anxious about worrissome things. And in all these ways he would find more time for quiet prayer. In such an order of life all his actions, by the power of the invocation of the Name of God, would be signalized by success, and finally he would train himself to the uninterrupted prayerful invocation of the Name of Jesus Christ. He would come to know from experience that frequency of prayer, this sole means of salvation, is a possibility for the will of man, that it is possible to pray at all times, in all circumstances and in every place, and easily to rise from frequent vocal prayer to prayer of the mind and from that to prayer of the heart,

which opens up the Kingdom of God within us."

*The Professor:* I agree that during mechanical occupations it is possible and even easy to pray frequently, even continuously; for mechanical bodily work does not require profound exercise of the mind or great consideration, and, therefore, while it is going on my mind can be immersed in continuous prayer and my lips follow in the same way. But if I have to be occupied with something exclusively intellectual, as, for instance, attentive reading, or thinking out some deep matter, or literary composition, how can I pray with my mind and my lips in such a case? And since prayer is above all things an action of the mind, how, at one and the same time, can I give one and the same mind different sorts of things to do?

*The Skhimnik:* The solution of your problem is not at all difficult, if we take into consideration that people who pray continuously are divided into three classes. First, the beginners ; secondly, those who have made some progress; and, thirdly, the fully trained. Now, the beginners are frequently capable of experiencing at times an impulse of the mind and heart towards God and of repeating short prayers with the lips, even while engaged in mental work. Those who have made some progress and reached a certain stability of mind are able to occupy themselves with meditation or writing in the uninterrupted presence of God as the basis of prayer. The following example will illustrate

this. Imagine that a severe and exacting monarch ordered you to compose a treatise on some abstruse subject in his presence, at the steps of his throne. Although you might be absolutely occupied by your work, the presence of the king who has power over you and who holds your life in his hands would still not allow you to forget for a single moment that you are thinking, considering and writing, not in solitude, but in a place which demands of you particular reverence, respect and decorum. This lively feeling of the nearness of the king very clearly expresses the possibility of being occupied in ceaseless inward prayer even during intellectual work. So far as the others are concerned, those who by long custom or by the mercy of God have progressed from prayer of the mind and reached prayer of the heart, they do not break off their continuous prayer during profound mental exercises, nor even during sleep itself. As the All Wise has told us, *I sleep, but my heart waketh* (Cant. v. 2). Many, that is, who have achieved this mechanism of the heart acquire such an aptitude for calling upon the divine Name, that it will of itself arouse itself to prayer, incline the mind and the whole spirit to a flood of ceaseless prayer in whatever condition the one who prays finds himself, and however abstract and intellectual his occupation at the time.

*The Priest:* Allow me, reverend Father, to say what is in my mind. Let me have a turn and say a word or two. It was admirably put in the article you read that the one means

of salvation and of reaching perfection is frequency of prayer, of whatever sort. Now, I do not very easily understand that, and it appears to me like this. What would be the use if I pray and invoke the Name of God continually with my tongue only and pay no attention to, and do not understand, what I am saying? That would be nothing but vain repetition. The result of it will only be that the tongue will go chattering on, and the mind, hindered in its meditations by this, will have its activity impaired. God does not ask for words, but for an attentive mind and a pure heart. Would it not be better to offer a prayer, be it only a short one, even rarely may be, or only at stated times, but with attention, with zeal and warmth of heart, and with due understanding? Otherwise, although you may say the prayer day and night, yet you have not got purity of mind, you are not performing a work of devotion, not achieving anything for your salvation. You are relying upon nothing but outward chatter, and you get tired and bored, and in the end the result is that your faith in prayer is completely chilled, and you throw over altogether this fruitless proceeding. Further, the uselessness of prayer with the lips only can be seen from what is revealed to us in Holy Scripture, as, for instance, *This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth and honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me* (St. Matt. xv. 8). *Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven* (St. Matt. Vii. 21 ). *I had rather speak five words with my*

*understanding . . . than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue (I Cor. xiv.19).* All this shows the fruitlessness of outward inattentive prayer with the mouth..

*The Skhimnik:* There might be something in your point of view if with the advice to pray with the mouth there were not added the need for it to be continuous, if prayer in the Name of Jesus Christ did not possess self-acting power and did not win for itself attention and zeal as a result of continuity in the exercise. But as the matter now in question is frequency, length of time, and uninterruptedness of prayer (although it may be carried on at first inattentively or with dryness), then, on account of this very fact, the conclusions that you mistakenly draw come to nothing. Let us look into the matter a little more closely. One spiritual writer, after arguing the very great value and fruitfulness of frequent prayer expressed in one form of words, says finally, "Many so-called enlightened people regard this frequent offering of one and the same prayer as useless and even trifling, calling it mechanical and a thoughtless occupation of simple people. But unfortunately they do not know the secret which is revealed as a result of this mechanical exercise, they do not know how this frequent service of the lips imperceptibly becomes a genuine appeal of the heart, sinks down into the inward life, becomes a delight, becomes, as it were, natural to the soul, bringing it light and nourishment and leading it on to union with God." It seems to me that these censorious people are like those little children who

were being taught the alphabet and how to read. When they got tired of it they cried out: " Would it not be a hundred times better to go fishing, like father, than to spend the whole day in ceaselessly repeating a, b, c, or scrawling on a sheet of paper with a pen? " The value of being able to read and the enlightenment which it brings, which they could have only as a result of this wearisome learning the letters by heart, was a hidden secret to them. In the same way the simple and frequent calling upon the Name of God is a hidden secret to those people who are not persuaded of its results and its very great value. They, estimating the act of faith by the strength of their own inexperienced and short-sighted reason, forget, in so doing, that man has two natures, in direct influence one upon another, that man is made of body and soul. Why, for example, when you desire to purify your soul, do you first of all deal with your body, make it fast, deprive it of nourishment and stimulating food? It is, of course, in order that it may not hinder, or, to put it better, so that it may be the means of promoting, purity of soul and enlightenment of mind, so that the continual feeling of bodily hunger may remind you of your resolution to seek for inward perfection and the things pleasing to God, which you so easily forget. And you find by experience that through the outward fast of your body you achieve the inward refining of your mind, the peace of your heart, an instrument for the taming of your passions and a reminder of spiritual effort. And thus, by means of

outward and material things, you receive inward and spiritual profit and help. You must understand the same thing about frequent prayer with the lips, which by its long duration draws out the inward prayer of the heart, and promotes union of the mind with God. It is vain to imagine that the tongue, wearied by this frequency and barren lack of understanding, will be obliged to give up entirely this outward effort of prayer as useless. No ; experience here shows us exactly the opposite. Those who have practiced ceaseless prayer assure us that what happens is this : One who has made up his mind to call without ceasing upon the Name of Jesus Christ or, what is the same thing, to say the Jesus Prayer continuously, at first, of course, finds difficulty and has to struggle against sloth. But the longer and the harder he works at it, the more he grows familiar with the task imperceptibly, so that in the end the lips and the tongue acquire such capacity for moving themselves that even without any effort on his part they themselves act irresistibly and say the prayer voicelessly. At the same time the mechanism of the throat muscles is so trained that in praying he begins to feel that the saying of the prayer is a perpetual and essential property of himself, and even feels every time he stops as though something were missing in him. And so it results from this that his mind in its turn begins to yield, to listen to this involuntary action of the lips, and is aroused by it to attention which in the end becomes a source of delight to the heart, and true prayer.”

There you see the true and beneficent effect of continuous or frequent vocal prayer, exactly the opposite of what people who have neither tried nor understood it suppose. Concerning those passages in Holy Scripture which you brought forward in support of your objection, these are to be explained, if we make a proper examination of them. Hypocritical worship of God with the mouth, ostentation about it, or insincere praise in the cry, " Lord, Lord," Jesus Christ exposed for this reason, that the faith of the proud Pharisees was a matter of the mouth only, and in no degree did their conscience justify their faith, nor did they acknowledge it in their heart. It was to them that these things were said, and they do not refer to saying prayers, about which Jesus Christ gave direct, explicit and definite instructions. *Men ought always to pray and not to faint.* Similarly, when the Apostle Paul says he prefers five words spoken with the understanding to a multitude of words without thought or in an unknown tongue in the Church, he is speaking about preaching in general, not about prayer in particular, on which subject he firmly says, *I will therefore that men pray everywhere (I Tim. ii. 8)*, and his is the general precept, *Pray without ceasing (I Thess. v. 17)*. Do you now see how fruitful frequent prayer is for all its simplicity, and what serious consideration the proper understanding of Holy Scripture requires?

*The Pilgrim:* Truly it is so, reverend Father. I have seen many who quite simply, without the light of any

education whatever and not even knowing what attention is, offer the Prayer of Jesus with their mouths unceasingly. I have known them reach a stage when their lips and tongue could not be restrained from saying the prayer. It brought them such happiness and enlightenment, and changed them from weak and negligent people into *podvizhniki* and champions of virtue.

*The Skhimnik:* Prayer brings a man to a new birth, as it were. Its power is so great that nothing, no degree of suffering will stand against it. If you like, by way of saying good-bye, brothers, I will read you a short but interesting article which I have with me.

*All of them:* We shall listen with the greatest pleasure.

*The Skhimnik:* ON THE POWER OF PRAYER

Prayer is so powerful, so mighty, that "pray, and do what you like." Prayer will guide you to right and just action. In order to please God nothing more is needed than love. "Love, and do what you will," says the blessed Augustine, "for he who truly loves cannot wish to do anything which is not pleasing to the one he loves. "Since prayer is the outpouring and the activity of love, then one can truly say of it similarly, "Nothing more is needed for salvation than continuous prayer." "Pray, and do what you will," and you will reach the goal of prayer. You will gain enlightenment by it.

To draw out our understanding of this matter in more detail, let us take some examples :

(1) "Pray, and think what you will," your thoughts will be purified by prayer. Prayer will give you enlightenment of mind; it will remove and drive away all ill judged thoughts. This is asserted by St. Gregory the Sinaite. If you wish to drive away thoughts and purify the mind his counsel is "drive them away by prayer." For nothing can control thoughts as prayer can. St. John of the Ladder also says about this : "Overcome the foes in your mind by the Name of Jesus. You will find no other weapon than this."

(2) "Pray, and do what you will." Your acts will be pleasing to God and useful and salutary to yourself. Frequent prayer, whatever it may be about, does not remain fruitless, because in it is the power of grace, *for whosoever shall call on the Name of the Lord shall be saved* (Acts ii. 21). For example: a man who had prayed without success and without devotion was granted through this prayer clearness of understanding and a call to repentance. A pleasure-loving girl prayed on her return home, and the prayer showed her the way to the virgin life and obedience to the teaching of Jesus Christ.

(3) "Pray, and do not labour much to conquer your passions by your own strength." Prayer will destroy them in you. For *greater is He that is in you than be that is in the world* (I John iv. 4), says Holy Scripture. And St. John

Karpathisky teaches that if you have not the gift of self-control, do not be cast down, but know that God requires of you diligence in prayer and the prayer will save you. The *starets* about whom we are told in the *Otechnik* that, when he fell into sin, did not give way to depression, but betook himself to prayer and by it recovered his balance, is a case in point.

(4) " Pray, and fear nothing." Fear no misfortunes, fear no disasters. Prayer will protect you and ward them off. Remember St. Peter, who had little faith and was sinking; St. Paul, who prayed in prison; the monk who was delivered by prayer from the onset of temptation; the girl who was saved from the evil purpose of a soldier as the result of prayer; and similar cases, which illustrate the power, the might, the universality of prayer in the Name of Jesus Christ.

(5) Pray somehow or other, only pray always and be disturbed by nothing. Be gay in spirit and peaceful. Prayer will arrange everything and reach you. Remember what the saints-John Chrysostom and Mark the Podvizhnik-say about the power of prayer. The first declares that prayer, even though it be offered by us who are full of sin, yet cleanses us at once. The latter says: " To pray somehow is within our power, but to pray purely is the gift of grace." So offer to God what it is within your power to offer. Bring to Him at first just quantity (which is within your power) and God

will pour upon you strength in your weakness. " Prayer, dry and distracted as it may be, but continuous, will establish a habit and become second nature and turn itself into prayer which is pure, luminous, flaming and worthy."

(6) It is to be noted, finally, that if the time of your vigilance in prayer is prolonged, then naturally no time will be left not only for doing sinful actions but even for thinking of them.

Now, do you see what profound thoughts are focused in that wise saying: " Love, and do what you will " ; " Pray, and do what you will "? How comforting and consoling is all this for the sinner overwhelmed by his weaknesses, groaning under the burden of his warring passions.

*Prayer*-there you have the whole of what is given to us as the universal means of salvation and of the growth of the soul into perfection... just that. But when prayer is named, a condition is added. *Pray without ceasing* is the command of God's Word. Consequently prayer shows its most effective power and fruit when it is offered often, ceaselessly; for frequency of prayer undoubtedly belongs to our will, just as purity, zeal and perfection in prayer are the gift of grace.

And so we will pray as often as we can; we will consecrate our whole life to prayer, even if it be subject to distractions to begin with. Frequent practice of it will teach us attentiveness. Quantity will certainly lead on to quality. "

If you want to learn to do anything whatever well you must do it as often as possible," said an experienced spiritual writer.

*The Professor:* Truly prayer is a great matter, and ardent frequency of it is the key to open the treasury of its grace. But how often I find a conflict in myself between ardour and sloth. How glad I should be to find the way to gain the victory and to convince myself and arouse myself to continuous application to prayer.

*The Skhimnik:* Many spiritual writers offer a number of ways based upon sound reasoning for stimulating diligence in prayer. For example, (1) they advise you to steep your mind in thoughts of the necessity, the excellence, and the fruitfulness of prayer for saving the Soul; (2) make yourself firmly convinced that God absolutely requires prayer of us and that His Word everywhere commands it; (3) always remember that if you are slothful and careless about prayer you can make no progress in acts of devotion nor in attaining peace and salvation, and, therefore, will inevitably suffer both punishment on earth and torment in the life to come ; (4) enhearten your resolution by the example of the saints who all attained holiness and salvation by the way of continuous prayer.

Although all these methods have their value and arise from genuine understanding, yet the pleasure-loving soul which is sick with listlessness, even when it has accepted

and used them, rarely sees the fruit of them, for this reason ; that these medicines are bitter to its impaired sense of taste and too weak for its deeply injured nature. For what Christian is there who does not know that he ought to pray often and diligently, that God requires it of him, that we are punished for sloth in prayer, that all the saints have ardently and constantly prayed? Nevertheless, how rarely does all this knowledge show good results. Every observer of himself sees that he justifies but little, and but rarely, these promptings of reason and conscience, and through infrequent remembrance of them lives all the while in the same bad and slothful way. And so, in their experience and godly wisdom, the holy Fathers, knowing the weakness of will and the exaggerated love of pleasure in the heart of man, take a special line about it, and in this respect put jam with the powder and smear the edge of the medicine-cup with honey. They show the easiest and most effective means of doing away with sloth and indifference in prayer, in the hope, with God's help, of attaining by prayer to perfection and the sweet expectation of love for God.

They advise you to meditate as often as possible about the state of your soul and to read attentively what the Fathers have written on the subject. They give encouraging assurance that these enjoyable inward feelings may be readily and easily attained in prayer, and say how much they are to be desired. Heartfelt delight, a flood of inward warmth and light, ineffable enthusiasm, joy, lightness of



heart, profound peace and the very essence of blessedness and happy content, are all results of prayer in the heart. By steeping itself in such reflections as these, the weak cold soul is kindled and strengthened, it is encouraged by ardour for prayer, and is, as it were, enticed to put the practice of prayer to the test. As St. Isaac the Syrian says Joy is an enticement to the soul, joy which is the outcome of hope blossoming in the heart, and meditation upon its hope is the well-being of the heart."

The same writer continues: "At the outset of this activity and right to the end there is presupposed some sort of method and hope for its completion, and this both arouses the mind to lay a foundation for the task and from the vision of its goal the mind borrows consolation during the labour of reaching it." In the same way St. Isikhi, after describing the hindrance that sloth is to prayer and clearing away misconceptions about the renewal of ardour for it, finally says outright: "If we are not ready to desire the silence of the heart for any other reason, then let it be for the delightful feeling of it in the soul and for the gladness that it brings." It follows from this that this Father gives the enjoyable feeling of gladness as an incitement to assiduity in prayer, and in the same way Macarius the Great teaches that our spiritual efforts (prayer) should be carried out with the purpose and in the hope of producing fruit-that is, enjoyment in our hearts. Clear instances of the potency of this method are to be seen in very many passages of *The*

*Philokalia*, which contains detailed descriptions of the delights of prayer. One who is struggling with the infirmity of sloth or dryness in prayer ought to read them over as often as possible, considering himself, however, unworthy of these enjoyments and ever reproaching himself for negligence in prayer.

*The Priest.* Will not such meditation lead the inexperienced person to spiritual voluptuousness, as the theologians call that tendency of the soul which is greedy of excessive consolation and, sweetness of grace, and is not content to fulfil the work of devotion from a sense of obligation and duty without dreaming about reward?

*The Professor:* I think that the theologians in this case are warning men against excess or greed of spiritual happiness, and are not entirely rejecting enjoyment and consolation in virtue. For if the desire for reward is not perfection, nevertheless God has not forbidden man to think about rewards and consolation, and even Himself uses the idea of reward to incite men to fulfil His commandments and to attain perfection. *Honour thy father and thy mother.* There is the command and you see the reward follows as a spur to its fulfilment, *and it shall be well with thee. If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all that thou hast and come and follow Me.* There is the demand for perfection, and immediately upon it comes the reward as an inducement to attain perfection, *and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.*

*Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake* (St. Luke vi. 22). There is a great demand for a spiritual achievement which needs unusual strength of soul and unshakable patience. And so for that there is a great reward and consolation, which are able to arouse and maintain this unusual strength of soul-*For your reward is great in heaven*. For this reason I think that a certain desire for enjoyment in prayer of the heart is necessary and probably constitutes the means of attaining both diligence and success in it. And so all this undoubtedly supports the practical teaching on this subject which we have just heard from the Father Skhimnik.

*The Skhimnik*: One of the great theologians-that is to say, St. Macarius of Egypt-speaks in the clearest possible way about this matter. He says: "As when you are planting a vine you bestow Your thought and labour with the purpose of gathering the vintage, and if you do not, all your labour will be useless, so also in prayer, if you do not look for spiritual fruit-that is, love, peace, joy and the rest-your labour will be useless. And, therefore, we ought to fulfil our spiritual duties (prayer) with the purpose and hope of gathering fruit-that is to say, comfort and enjoyment in our hearts." Do you see how clearly the holy Father answers this question about the need for enjoyment in prayer? And, as a matter of fact, there has just come into my mind a point of

view which I read not long ago of a writer on spiritual things, to this effect : that the naturalness of prayer to man is the chief cause of his inclination towards it. So the examination of this naturalness, in my opinion, may also serve as a potent means of arousing diligence in prayer, the means which the Professor is so eagerly looking for.

Let me now sum up shortly some points I drew attention to in that notebook. For instance, the writer says that reason and nature lead man to the knowledge of God. The first investigates the fact that there cannot be action without cause, and ascending the ladder of tangible things from the lower to the higher, at last reaches the first Cause, God. The second displays at every step its marvelous wisdom, harmony, order, gradation, gives the basic material for the ladder which leads from finite causes to the infinite. Thus, the natural man arrives naturally at the knowledge of God. And, therefore, there is not, and never has been, any people, any barbarous tribe, without some knowledge of God. As a result of this knowledge the most savage islander, without any impulse from outside, as it were involuntarily raises his gaze to heaven, falls on his knees, breathes out a sigh which he does not understand, necessary as it is, and has a direct feeling that there is something which draws him upwards, something urging him towards the unknown. From this foundation all natural religions arise. And in this connection it is very remarkable that universally the essence or the soul of every religion consists

in secret prayer, which shows itself in some form of movement of the spirit and what is clearly an oblation, though more or less distorted by the darkness of the coarse and wild understanding of heathen people. The more surprising this fact is in the eyes of reason, the greater is the demand upon us to discover the hidden cause of this wonderful thing which finds expression in a natural movement towards prayer. The psychological answer to this is not difficult to find. The root, the head and the strength of all passions and actions in man is his innate love of self. The deep-rooted and universal idea of self-preservation clearly confirms this. Every human wish, every undertaking, every action has as its purpose the satisfaction of self-love, the seeking of the man's own happiness. The satisfaction of this demand accompanies the natural man all through his life. But the human spirit is not satisfied with anything that belongs to the senses, and the innate love of self never abates its urgency. And so desires develop more and more, the endeavour to attain happiness grows stronger, fills the imagination and incites the feelings to this same end. The flood of this inward feeling and desire as it develops is the natural arousing to prayer. It is a requirement of self-love which attains its purpose with difficulty. The less the natural man succeeds in attaining happiness and the more he has it in view, the more his longing grows and the more he finds an outlet for it in prayer. He betakes himself in petition for what he desires to the unknown Cause of all

being. So it is that innate self-love, the principal element in life, is a deep-seated stimulus to prayer in the natural man. The all-wise Creator of all things has imbued the nature of man with a capacity for self-love precisely as an "enticement," to use the expression of the Fathers, which will draw the fallen being of man upwards into touch with celestial things. Oh! if man had not spoilt this capacity, if only he had kept it in its excellence, in touch with his spiritual nature! Then he would have had a powerful incentive and an effective means of bringing him along the road to moral perfection. But, alas how often he makes of this noble capacity a base passion of self-love when he turns it into an instrument of his animal nature.

*The Starets: I thank you from my heart, all my dear visitors. Your Salutory conversation has been a great consolation to me and taught me, in my inexperience, many profitable things. May God give you His grace in return for your edifying love.[They all separate]*