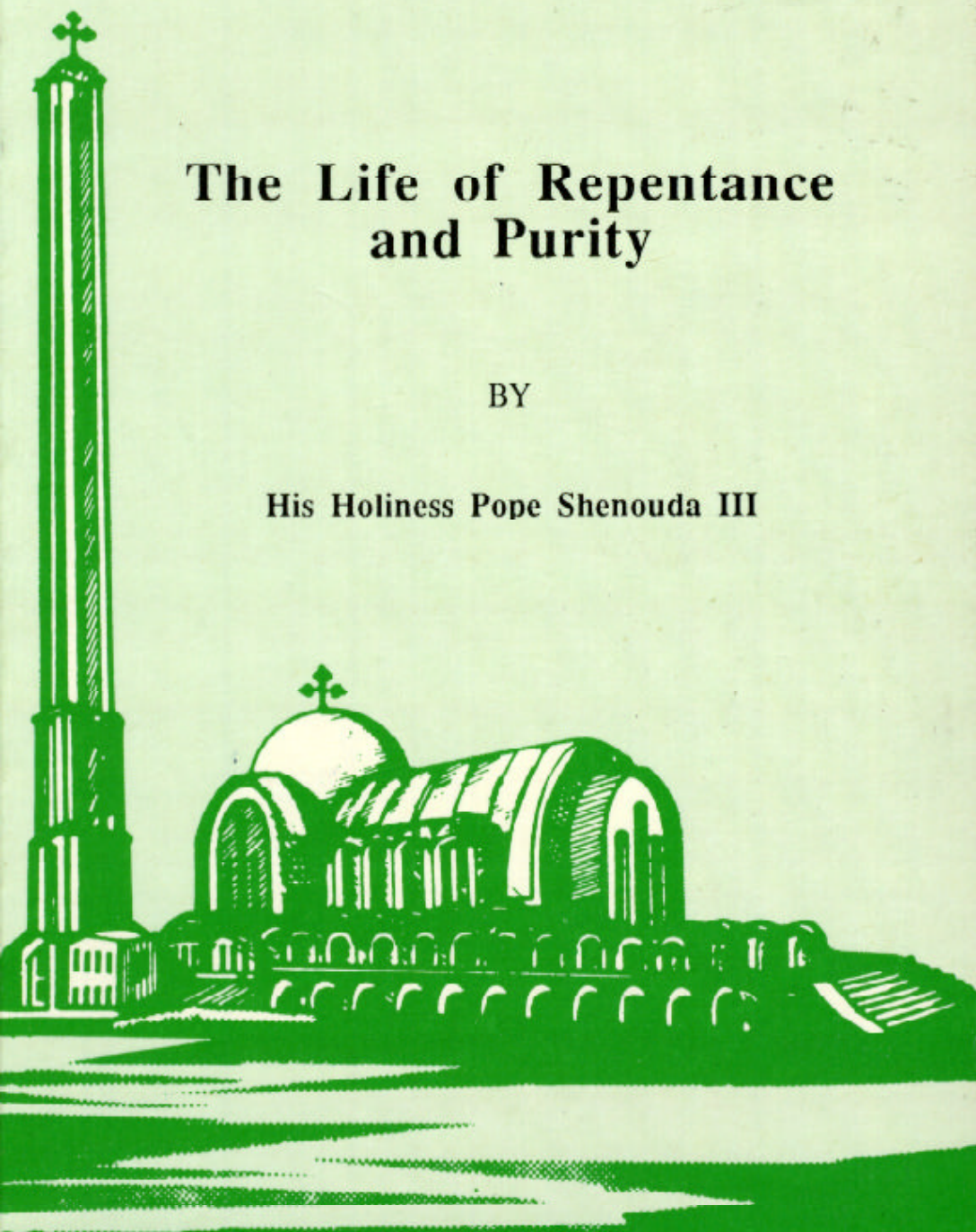


Pope Shenouda III

The Life of Repentance and Purity

BY

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III



The Life of Repentance and Purity

BY

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III

Published by

C.O.P.T

Copyright © 1990 by. C.O.P.T.
Coptic Orthodox Publication and Translation
Postal Address.
P.O. Box 63
BEXLEY N.S.W. 2207
SYDNEY AUSTRALIA

ISBN 0 908000 09 X

All rights reserved.

Translated by.
Mr Nabil Guirgis
St Mary's & St Mina's Church
SYDENHAM N.S.W.
SYDNEY AUSTRALIA

First Edition 1990



This book was printed on the occasion of
**The 19th Anniversary of the Enthronement of
His Holiness Pope Shenouda III**
14 November 1990

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

PART ONE

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

- 1. What is Repentance?**
- 2. Repentance: Its Progression and Perfection.**
- 3. An Invitation to Repentance.**
- 4. Do Not Despair.**
- 5. Repentance between struggle and grace.**
- 6. The importance of repentance.**
- 7. The obstacles of repentance.**
- 8. Repentance and the church.**

PART TWO

THE INCENTIVES FOR REPENTANCE

CHAPTER ONE

**If you know who you are, you will rise above sin.
You are a holy breath which proceeded from the mouth of God.
You are the son of God, you are His Image and likeness.
You are the dwelling of God, and a temple for the Holy Spirit.
You are a brother to the Messiah, a companion to Christ, and an inheritor with Him.
You are a partner to the Holy Spirit, a partner in the Divine nature.
You are a member in the body of Christ, of His body and bones.
You are the one who partakes of the Lord's body and blood.**

CHAPTER TWO

**If you know what is sin, you will escape from sin.
Sin is Death.**

**Sin is delusion and loss.
Sin is defeat and not victory.
Sin is separation from God.
What a great difference between favour and animosity.
Sin is deprivation from God.
Sin is opposition to the Holy Spirit.
Sin is corruption of the human nature.
Sin is impurity, fornication and disgrace.**

CHAPTER THREE

**If you know the results of sin, you will flee from sin.
Fear and Unrest.
Torment of the Conscience.
Other results of sin.**

CHAPTER FOUR

**If you know the punishment for sin, you would be afraid of sin.
God's goodness and severity.
God's Fearful Punishments.
The terrifying torture of eternity.
Two punishments for sin: Earthly and Eternal.
Punishments for God's beloved saints.**

CHAPTER FIVE

Other incentives for repentance.

PART THREE

MEANS OF REPENTANCE

(HOW TO REPENT)

- 1. Be with yourself.**
- 2. Avoid justifications and excuses.**
- 3. Do not delay repentance and do not lose the chance.**
- 4. Do not harden your heart ***
- 5. Avoid the first step, and beware of the small foxes.***

6. Avoid stumbling blocks, and escape from the sources of sin.*
7. Do not be tolerant with sin.*
8. Reassess your behaviour and beware of those disguised as lambs*
9. Flee from your beloved sins and treat your points of weakness.*
10. Be concerned with your eternity and calculate the cost.*
11. Keep God's love in order to cast out the love of sin.*
12. Wrestle with God and obtain help from Him.*

PART FOUR

THE SIGNS OF REPENTANCE

FRUITS WORTHY OF REPENTANCE

1. Confessing the fault.*
2. Embarrassment and Shame.*
3. The regret, the suffering and the tears.*
4. The Tears.
4. Contrition and humility.
5. Repairing the results of the fault.
6. Compassion for the sinners.
7. Other feelings.
8. Spiritual fervour.
9. Proceeding in the virtuous life.
10. Purity.

PART FIVE

THE PURITY OF HEART

Purity from sin.
 Testing purity.
 Purity from thoughts and dreams.
 Purity from vain glory.

**The positive side of purity.
The purity of heart from knowing sin.
The Poem: 'I drenched my couch with my bitter tears'.**

PART SIX

PROTECTING REPENTANCE

**The ability to return.
They started in the Spirit and completed in the flesh.*
The Canaanites on earth.*
Do not falter between the two opinions.*
The separation between light and darkness.*
Some Questions on Repentance**

BIBLE REFERENCES

FINAL MESSAGE

FOREWORD

Repentance, my brethren, is not only for those beginning their life with God, but is for everyone, even the saints. It is part of our daily prayers. Every person needs repentance, no matter how great his position or his spiritual level. We are all in need of repentance, in need of it everyday, since we sin everyday. For there is no person without sin, even if his life was one day on earth. With repentance, we prepare our hearts for the dwelling of God, and with purity, we will see God (Matt 5:8). Repentance is the beginning of the path towards God, it is a friend along the path till the end.

Repentance was therefore one of the fundamental topics, on which I lectured frequently since the beginning of my work as a Bishop of Christian Education approximately twenty years ago. I delivered many lectures on repentance in St. Mark's Hall in the Monastery of Anba Rewais, in the youth meetings and in university groups. Also, I presented other concentrated lectures at the Angel Church in Damanhour, at St. George's Church in Al-Mahala Al-Kobra and in other cities, especially between the years 1965 and 1969.

It was my wish for many years to publish a book on the life of repentance. I actually collated the lectures for it and presented them to the printers in August 1971 and three parts of it were published. But responsibilities of the Patriarchate preoccupied me from the book and from publishing any other book for a long time, in which the workload was great and did not give me a chance to write during these years. The time then

came finally after 12 years when God willed for the book to be published.

Because of the delay of publishing the book (The Life of Repentance), many of my beloved friends hastened me gently saying: *‘Our repentance has been delayed by the delay in publishing the book, shall we assume you will take this responsibility for the delay in front of God?’* I would answer them with this phrase which I repeated regularly: *‘Pray so that the Lord may give me time’*. The Lord then gave me time and I presented the book for printing and here it is finally in your hands. Its delay was an opportunity to add to it other lectures that I presented later in the great Cathedral during the seventies.

After all, do you think I had collected all of what was said about repentance? This is undoubtedly not the case. The topic of repentance is huge and has many branches, it mingles with many other topics from the spiritual life, it mingles with contemplations on the psalms and the sections of the Agbia, the book of Revelation, the book of the Song of Solomon, Romans 12, the characters of the Bible and into the lectures on salvation.

We have published other small books, other than this book under the heading: ‘A Series on the Life of Repentance and Purity’. From this series came the books: *‘The Spiritual Awakening’*, *‘The Spiritual Vigil’*, *‘Returning to God’* and the book *‘The Fear of God’*, which is on the way to be printed.

To complete this on the life of repentance, I will shortly publish a book called: ‘*The Spiritual Wars*’. This will probably first appear as a series of small books to be collected later in general into a large book. It will cover spiritual wars and then the war of each sin that delays repentance individually. It remains to say that the topic of repentance and purity is open.... It is a whole life....

SHENOUDA III

PART ONE

What is Repentance?

1. What is repentance?
2. Repentance: Its progression and perfection.
3. An invitation to repentance.
4. Do not despair.
5. Repentance between struggle and grace.
6. The importance of repentance.
7. The obstacles of repentance.
8. Repentance and the Church.

1. What is Repentance?

- As sin is separation from God, **repentance then is returning to God.*** God says: *“Return to me, and I will return to you” (Mal 3:7).* When the prodigal son repented, he returned to his father (Luke 15:18-20). True repentance is a human longing to the origin from which it was taken. It is the desire of a heart that stayed away from God, and felt that it cannot go any further away.

- For as sin is disputing with God, **so repentance is reconciliation with God.** * This is what our teacher Saint Paul stated about his apostolic work, saying: *“Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading by us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God”* but through it God returns and dwells in the human heart transforming it to a heaven. As for those non-repentant, how can God dwell in their hearts while the sin is dwelling therein? The Bible says, *“What communion has light with darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14).*

- **Repentance is also a spiritual awakening.** *

The sinful person is unaware of his state. The Bible says to him: *“that now it is high time to awake out of sleep” (Rom 13:11).* By this context, repentance is **the return of a person**

* See the books “Return to God” and the “Spiritual Awakening” all of their topics are concentrated on these points only.

to himself. Or the return of ones self to its original sensitivity, the return of the heart to its fervour and the return of the conscience to its work. It is justly said about the prodigal son in his repentance: *“He came to himself”* (Luke 15:17). He then came back to his alertness, to his correct thinking and to his spiritual understanding.

- For as sin is regarded as spiritual death, just as the Bible says about sinners that they are: *“dead in trespasses”* (Eph 2:5), **then repentance is transfer from death to life** according to the expression of St. John the Evangelist (1 John 3:14). St. Paul the apostle says about this: *“Awake, you who sleep; **Arise from the dead**, and Christ will give you light”* (Eph 5:14). St. James the apostle confirms the same meaning by saying: *“he who turns a sinner from the ‘error’ of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins”* (James 5:20). Repentance is resurrection for the spirit, because the death of the spirit is separation of the spirit from God, just as St. Augustine said:

- **‘Repentance is a new pure heart, which God gives to the sinners to love Him with’.** It is a divine act performed by God inside the person, according to His divine promise which says, *“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, I will cleanse you from all your filthiness.... I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.... and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgements and do them”* (Ezek 36:25-27).

- **Repentance is freedom from the slavery of sin and the devil.**

It is also from the most sinful habits and from running after lusts. It is impossible for us to partake of this freedom without the work of the Lord in us. Therefore the Bible says: *“If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36)*. It is true freedom because: *“whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” (John 8:34)*. We receive this freedom if by repentance, we stand firm in the truth - and not through vanity. *“And the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32)*.

- **Repentance then, is forsaking sin because of the love of God and the love of righteousness.**

Not all forsaking of sin is considered repentance. Other reasons are fear, embarrassment, inability, preoccupation (with the remainder of its love in the heart) or as a result of unsuitable situations are not considered repentance. As for true repentance, it is the discarding of sin practically, mentally and from the heart, out of love for God, His commandments and His kingdom and the repentant's care for his eternity.

- **True repentance is forsaking sin without return.**

Thus have been the stories of the saints whom have repented, for example: St. Augustine, St. Moses the Black, St. Mary the Egyptian, Pelagia, Thais and Sarah. Repentance was in the lives of all of these and others, it is a turning point towards God, continued throughout life without return to sin. This reminds us of the sayings of St. Shishoy: *‘I do not remember that the devil*

has tempted me into the same sin twice’. It is possible that the first sin was as a result of ignorance, negligence, weakness and unawareness of the tricks of the devil or a lack of cautiousness. But, after repentance and awakening, there is precision in life and caution of sin. As for the one who discards sin and returns to it, therefore sometimes leaving it and sometimes returning.... he has not yet repented. This is only an attempt towards repentance.... every time the sinner arises, sin drags him lower. If his freedom is struck down, he will not repent.

- **Repentance is a cry from the conscience and a revolution against the past.**

It is repulsion from sin, great regret and rejection of the old state with embarrassment and shame. It is therefore said about repentance that it is *‘a daring judge’*.

- **Repentance is a complete change in the person’s life, not a temporary emotion.**

It is a real and fundamental change felt by the person, as well as everyone that deals with him. His thoughts change, so also do his principles and values, his outlook on life and his manner of speech, his habits and dealings with people, and most importantly, his dealings with God. The person also changes from within with a heart refusing the former loved sins. The love of God enters his heart and he becomes spiritually revived, a state of spiritual ecstasy which makes it very true to say that.

- **Repentance is the exchange of one lust for another.**

It is the lust to live with God, instead of sinful and bodily lust. Apart from the negative side which is forsaking sin and its love, repentance has also a positive side which leads the person to the love of God, His kingdom and His ways. It is a warm feeling, making the person desire a pure life.

- **Repentance is renewal for the mind.**

The renewal of the nature occurs in baptism (Rom 6:4). But the renewal of the mind occurs in repentance, practically as the apostle says: *“be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”* (Rom 12:2).

- **Repentance is the golden key that opens the door of the kingdom of heaven.**

Or it is the true door that leads to heaven because without repentance, God does not reign in our hearts. Repentance is the oil in the lamp stands of the virgins, granting them the right to enter into the wedding feast (Matt 25).

- **Repentance is the canal which delivers the worthiness of the blood from the cross.**

This is the only way for our sins to be removed after baptism, and so some have called it: *‘a second baptism’*. It is a strong rebuke to Satan. It is a dissolution of the communion between

the sinner and the devil, so as to enter into communion with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14).

- **Repentance is a fire, picked by the Seraphim from the top of the altar.**

With it He eliminates the iniquity of the sinner, while saying to him: *“Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged”* (Is 6:7). It is the only way for eliminating our sins from the book of our judgement. How beautiful are the Lord's words: *“their sin I will remember no more”* (Jer 31:34). The importance of repentance for receiving forgiveness shows in the Lord's saying: *“Unless you repent you will all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3).

- **Repentance is the way of escaping from the coming anger.**

This is under the condition that it is true repentance and is appropriate to the seriousness of the sin. The repentance of the people of Ninevah, made God relent from the disaster that He had said, He would bring upon them and He did not do so (Jonah 3:10). Similarly for other judgements of God, (Jer 26:13, Ex 18:21,22). The lovely saying of one of the saints is: *‘God will not ask you why did you sin? But He will ask you, why did you not repent?’*.

- **Repentance is then, God's preservation of you and His pardon of your sin.**

God, from the depth of His love, gave everyone the chance for salvation, no matter how great his sins were, God does not take

anyone while in sin, before giving him a chance to repent. Repentance is a divine privilege which God has given to the sinners, to purify them, and to rest their consciousness giving them the inner peace, and ensuring their return to their original nature before the first sin.

- **It is God's outstretched hand, asking to be reconciled with you.**

It is a chance for starting a new page, which God opens in His relationship with you and forgives you for the past and He shall wash you and you shall be whiter than snow (Ps 50). It is a chance for building up your hope, and ridding yourself of despair. It has been said about repentance that it is the door of mercy, forgiveness and life and it is a bridge linking heaven and earth.

The previous points showed God's role in forgiveness, the following is the human role.

- **Repentance is a reply from mankind to God's invitation to him.**

It is the reply of the conscience, to God's voice in him. It is a reply from the will, to the work of grace with it. It is a stop to the Spirit which works in us for our salvation (Acts 7:51), it is non-grievance of the spirit (Eph 4:30), it is non-quenching of the spirit (1 Thess 5:19).

- **When St. Isaac was asked about repentance, he said: *'It is a contrite heart'*.** It is the contrite heart returning to

God. It is the bent knees, weeping eyes, and the broken hearts. It is the mother of tears, contrition and humbleness, because repentance gives birth to all of these.... It breaks the sinner's pride softening his hard heart and leading him into the life of humbleness. St. Isaac also said: *'The sacrifice of repentance that we present to God, is the heart which has repented and contrited, and has been broken by the tears of prayer in front of God, asking his forgiveness for his weak nature'*.

As said in Psalm 50, the psalm of repentance: *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart - these, O God, you will not despise"*.

- **Saint John Saba said: 'Repentance is a great torment to the devil who tries to stop it'**. For it saves and releases those whom the devil captured with his evil. Many years of the devils hard work are lost in one hour of repentance. All the thorns he has planted in our land and grown with great care over many years, gets burnt in one day and our land is purified. **Repentance makes virgins out of adulterers**. Who does not love you O repentance, O you who carries all the blessings, except the devil, whom you have captured all his riches and wasted all his possessions.

O mother of forgiveness, the Father who is filled with mercy, will not be angered by your pleadings.... since He granted you to be a **intercessor for the sinners** and He gave you the key to His kingdom.

After Youhanna El Daragy visited the repentant's monastery and saw the contrition of their souls by repentance,

the intensity of their struggle and the fervour of their prayers, he said, ***‘I blessed those who sinned, and repented weeping, more than those who did not fall and did not weep for their souls’.*** **Repentance is joy in heaven and on earth.** It is written: *“There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents”* (Luke 15:7,10). So if you wish to make heaven joyous, repent. It is joy on earth also. it is joy for the repentant, the pastor and for all the church. Repentance is joy since it is an invitation to the captives, to liberty (Is 61:1). It is joy for the freedom from the slavery of Satan and sin, a joy in the new pure life and a joy in forgiveness.

- **It is a joy, for repentance is the life of victory or the song of the victorious.**

The repentant praises with David: *“Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped”* (Ps 124:6-7). But repentance is not the objective of the spiritual life, but:

- **Repentance is the beginning of a long journey towards the life of purity.**

Repentance is the beginning of the relationship with God. It is the beginning of a long path whose aim is holiness and perfection so the person who has not started repentance till now, how can he reach the end? How will the person who delays the first step until his elderly years or until the hour of death reach the Lord's saying. *“You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect”* (Matt 5:48).

2. Repentance: Its Progression and Perfection.

A person progresses in repentance and advances in it, like in any other virtue.

He keeps progressing until he reaches its perfection. So then, what is the starting point in repentance? Is it leaving sin for the fear of God?

There is a point before leaving sin, and that is the desire for repentance.

Since many do not want to repent because they enjoy sin, and want to remain in it, their character is beautiful in their own eyes and they do not wish to change. So just the desire to repent is a good point, which is taken by His grace that asks: *“Do you wish to be made well?”* and this starts its work in the person. The next step is then actually leaving sin.

More importantly than leaving sin, is to remove it from the heart and mind.

There is a person who leaves sin practically, but its love is still in his heart, he yearns for it and he regrets certain opportunities in which he could have sinned and did not. Such a person for example, has left sin for the sake of God's commandments and not because he hates sin. He should progress in repentance until sin is removed from his heart.

The perfection of repentance is the hatred of sin.

That means a person reaches the stage that he hates sin from all his heart, is disgusted by it and does not need any effort to overcome it, since it no longer agrees with his nature. Here the person reaches the edge of purity. The purity of heart is a long topic and so we will set aside Chapter Four (The Signs of Repentance), to deal with it, or maybe even Chapter Five as well.

But leaving the most prominent sin in one's life comes after the next step up which is: **Leaving the sins which are revealed through spiritual progression.** Through God's compassion for us, He does not reveal to us all of our sins and weaknesses at once so that we don't feel worthless. Every time we have spiritual sermons, read God's book and other spiritual books, our weaknesses and shortcomings which need treatment, struggle and repentance, are revealed to us. Here we enter into an operation of cleansing and purifying which continues throughout life.

For the devil leaves one battleground and fights in another.

We should be ready for him in all battlefields. Even from the sin in which we were relieved from for a period, we may be tempted by it again. In this way repentance will remain with us throughout life. Also repentance is not only for resisting negative things which is sin, but:

There is repentance for shortcomings in spiritual progression.

The repentant should bear fruits worthy of repentance (Matt 3:8). With this he will enter into the fruits of the spirit (Gal 5:22). If he does not bear fruits, then he needs repentance for the sin of not bearing fruits, because the Bible says: *“To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin”* (James 4:17).

Repentance then is not just a stage which passes, but remains with us.

There is no one without sin, not even if his life was only one day on earth. For we all sin and need repentance. Therefore, repentance becomes a daily work, since we sin everyday. *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8).

There is a difference between the repentance of sinners and the repentance of saints.

Sinners repent from sins which are an obvious breach of the commandments, which shows their lack of love to God. As for the saints, they repent from minor shortcomings which are caused by human weakness. Because of their desires towards the life of perfection, they see in front of them stages to be overcome before they are perfected and during all of this their hearts are protected in the love of God.

The Church laid down for us daily prayers in which we can ask for repentance. In the segments and psalms of the Agbia (daily prayer book) we note the following prayers :

- I.** The confessing of sin and the worthiness of punishment as in (Ps 6,50) and in the segments of the sunset prayer.
- II.** The asking for forgiveness, as in the segments and Absolution of the sixth hour and in the rest of the prayers.
- III.** Asking the Lord to save the person who is praying from sin itself, as in the Absolution of the third hour.
- IV.** Asking for guidance for forgiveness along the path as in (Ps 119) and the segment (Lord by Your grace.....)
- V.** Blaming oneself and rebuking it for its falling and carelessness as in the segments of the prayer before sleeping.
- VI.** Awakenning the soul to repentance, reminding it about death, the Judgement and Christ's Second Coming as in the segments of the prayer before sleeping and in the Gospels and segments of the midnight prayer.

This demonstrates that we ask for repentance every day and every hour.

As an example of this the person praying says in the segments of the prayer **before sleeping**: *‘behold, I am about to stand before the Just Judge in fear because of my numerous sins.... Repent therefore, O my soul, so long as you dwell on earth’, ‘What answer would you then give? You are lying on the bed of sin and slow to control the body’.* **In the sunset prayer**: *‘If the righteous through toil are saved, where shall I, a sinner, appear?’.* **In the midnight prayer**: *‘Give me, Lord, fountains of tears as You did in the past to the sinful woman’.* **In the sixth hour prayer**: *‘Break the bonds of our sins, Lord Christ, and save us’.* **In the third hour prayer**: *‘Purify us from the iniquities of the body and soul, lead us to a spiritual life so that we may proceed in the spirit and not to complete the desire of the flesh’.* More time is required if we were to enter into the details about repentance in the prayers of the Agbia and this would require a separate book. After all of this, does anyone have the courage to say that repentance is a stage we have passed and completed and have now entered into the heavenliness and can ask for virtues and miracles?

He who thinks that he has passed the stage of repentance, has not examined himself well.

In other words, he has not examined himself in the light of the commandments and with the spirit of humility. For example, who among us has reached loving his enemies? (Matt 5:44), or enjoying reading the law of the Lord day and night? (Ps 1), or praying at all times and not losing heart? (Luke 18:1). The

commandments are many and we have not fulfilled any of them. I'm embarrassed to talk about the details, since some people might fall into humiliation, and so silence is better.

So repentance is a must for all of us, in everyday of our lives.

If only everyone of us reads and contemplates in the spiritual stages that were reached by the saints, then we would know that we are sinners! Amazingly, the saints who reached these stages, used to say that they were sinners and required repentance and wept over their sins.... Then what should we do?

3. An Invitation to Repentance.

The Lord who loves mankind, with a push from His love to His children, calls them to repentance.

This is because: *“He desires all men to be saved”* (1 Tim 2:4). It is not His will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9), for the sake of their salvation, He is prepared to overlook their times of ignorance (Acts 17:30). He says in His amazing love:

“Happiness does not occur at the death of the wicked but at his return .his return to life” (Ezek 18:3). He loves us and through repentance He wants us to enjoy His love.

He wants through repentance to share His kingdom with us and to satisfy us with His love.

It is not just simply orders which God gives through the tongues of His prophets and saints, but it is an invitation of love for salvation: *“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out”* (Acts 3:19).

“He who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20). So this commandment is for our sake and for our salvation, which made Him incarnate and suffer for us and we cannot partake of this without repentance.

So we can see in His invitation to us to repent feelings of love.

He said: *“Return to Me and I will return to you”* (Mal 3:7), *“Repent and return”* (Ezek 14:6), *“Turn to Me with all your heart....return to the Lord your God”* (Joel 2:12-13). He also says in His love on the tongue of Jeremiah the prophet: *“I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people....For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more”* (Jer 31:33-34).

In His invitation to us to repentance, He promised our purification and washing.

He said: *“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean: Put away the evil of your doings....Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like*

scarlet, they shall be as white as snow....” (Is 1:16-18). He also said: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart....” (Ezek 36:25-26).

He calls us to repentance, because we are in need of it.

He said: *“For I did not come to judge the world but to save the world” (John 12:47), “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Mark 2:17). Indeed that: “The Son of Man has come to save that which was lost” (Matt 18:11).*

Repentance then, is for our own good and it is not an order forced upon us.

We have the complete freedom to choose. God calls us to repentance and says: *“If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword”* (Is 1:19-20). So it is better for us to listen and do, for the sake of our purity, eternity and to be happy with God. The apostle calls His invitation to us: *“a service of reconciliation”* and says: *“be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:18,20).* So do we then refuse to be reconciled to God? Is it for our own good to refuse reconciliation?

Repentance is useful, whatever its method, whether by leniency or harshness.

Saint Jude the apostle says: *“On some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save the garment defiled by the flesh”* (Jude 22,23). Saint John the Baptist was strong in his call to repentance (Matt 3:8-10). Saint Paul the apostle says to the people of Corinth: *“Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance”* (2 Cor 7:9). That is why the sermons of some of the saints made the people weep and this was useful to them. Also the church's punishments were useful for repentance and salvation.

Therefore the invitation to repentance was the most important topic in the Bible.

So that the people could be purified and saved. When repentance became necessary for salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ sent before him, John the Baptist, to prepare the path in front of him to repentance, and he called for repentance saying: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matt 3:2). This kingdom cannot be gained, except through repentance. He then presented the baptism of repentance to the people.

So the work of repentance preceded the work of redemption and the baptist preceded the Messiah.

The Lord Jesus Himself called the people to repentance: *“From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matt 4:17). He said: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15). When He sent out the

twelve: “So they went out and preached that people should repent” (Mark 6:12). Before His Ascension He commanded: “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in

His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

The first to preach repentance was Noah and many other prophets joined him in this.

For example, Isaiah (Is 1), Ezekiel (Ezek 18), Jonah (Jonah 3), Joel (Joel 2) and Jeremiah (Jer 31), it is completely clear in the books of the New Testament. The invitation to repentance is the work of all the shepherds, teachers, preachers, priests and all spiritual advisers. It is also clear in the sayings of the fathers.

The fathers were very concerned with the invitation to repentance.

Saint Anthony said: ‘Ask for repentance during every moment’. Saint Basil the great said: ‘It is good that you do not sin. If you do sin, then it is good that you do not delay repentance. If you repent, then it is good that you do not return to sin. If you do not return, then it is good that you know this is with God's help. If you know, then it is good that you thank Him for the state that you are in’. Saint Isaac said: ‘All the time during the twenty four hours of the day, we are in need of repentance’. He also said: ‘Everyday that you do not sit for one hour with yourself and think about the day's sins and your shortcomings and to help yourself up again, then do not count the day as part of your life’. So the invitation to repentance is a must for every person. Our attention is directed also:

That the invitation to repentance was directed to the angels of the seven churches.

The Lord says to the angel of the church of Ephesus: *“Remember therefore from where you have fallen and repent”* (Rev 2:5). The word “repent”, He also said to the angel of the church of Pergamos (Rev 2:16), Sardis (Rev 3:3), Laodicea (Rev 3:19) and He also sent Nathan the prophet to call to repentance, David the prophet the anointed one of the Lord.

God's invitation to repentance carries His feelings of compassion towards His children.

He wishes that all who have strayed, to return to Him, so that they may share in the kingdom, in the inheritance of the saints and in the fellowship of the church. Walking in darkness, prevents us from the fellowship with God (1 John 1:6), and prevents our fellowship with one another: *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7).

God accepts the sinners. There are many examples of this in the Bible.

The prodigal son was accepted in his poor state (Luke 15). The Samaritan woman who had more than five husbands, was accepted (John 4). The right thief was accepted on the cross (Luke 23:43). Jesus prayed for the sake of His crucifiers for the forgiveness of their sins (Luke 23:34). Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector was accepted (Luke 19:9), and the Lord gave him and his household, salvation. Also Matthew the tax collector was

accepted and Jesus made him one of the twelve apostles (Matt 10:3). The following Lord's saying is enough:

“ The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37). But even more so, it is the Lord who stands at the door knocking, waiting for whoever opens. (Rev 3:20). So if Jesus does this, then He would hurriedly open to whoever knocks on the doors of His divine mercy. With regards to God's mercy towards sinners, it is true what is said that:

God's mercy is mightier than all blemishes of sin.

The worst and greatest sin, in comparison to God's mercy, is like a fragment of dirt which you throw into the sea. It does not discolour the sea, but the sea takes it and spreads it into its depth and gives you pure water. God's acceptance of repentance shows the depth of His divine love.

We should not then think that our numerous sins are too much for the effect of his blood.

We should not then over value our sins over His great love and mercy. One of the elderly saints said: ‘There is no sin which defeats God's love to mankind’. It is He who justifies the ungodly (Rom 4:5). I say this so that if the sinners look at their sins, they would not lose hope.

4. Do Not Despair.

At this point, I remember a letter which I received from a youth 22 years ago.

When I read it I was deeply affected by it to the stage that I wept. I replied to his letter, in which I said to him: *‘I have received your letter, O beloved brother, and I imagined that I had read it many times before I had actually seen it, it is the picture of a life that I know, and the story of many hearts’*. Yes, it is a war which tires many. Its thoughts are known, and repeated in the people's confessions and in their spiritual questions. Here we will try to deal and answer each of these thoughts about despair.

A. The first complaint: I have lost hope. I am useless.

Know my brother, that every thought of despair, is warfare from the devil. He wants you to despair from repentance, either from its capabilities or its acceptance, so that you feel that there is no use in struggling and you give in to sin and remain in it until your soul perishes. So do not listen to the devil, no matter what he says to you. When you are struggling with one of the thoughts of despair, answer it with the saying of Micah the prophet:

“Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise” (Mic7:8).

Know that if you despair from repentance, that this is more dangerous than falling into sin. Through despair Judas perished

and died. Despair leads into deeper involvement in sin and the sinner progresses from bad to worse. In despair the devil battles with the sinner to keep him away from his Confession Father, from every spiritual advice and from all of the church, so that he will be alone with him, leaving the sinner without any help. The prophets and saints were in warfare with the battle of despair, and so the prophet David said:

“Many are they who say of me, there is no help for him in God” (Ps 3). He answers this saying: *“But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head” (Ps 3:3).* David did not despair at his falling but he wept for it and repented. So God returned him to his original rank. God performed many good things for numerous people and He said: *“For the sake of My servant David” (1 Kin 11:32,34,36).* So do not despair but remember those who previously repented.

If you have lost hope in yourself, the Lord has not lost hope in your salvation.

He has saved many and you are not more difficult than all of them. When grace works in you, there is no room for despair. Enter into repentance with a courageous heart and do not belittle yourself.

B. He says: *‘How can I repent while I am completely unable to arise from my fall?’*

Do not be afraid. God will fight for you, for the battle is the Lord's (1 Sam 17:47). Your resistance, whether it is weak or strong is not important. God can save with much or with little.

God is more powerful than the devil who fights with you and He can drive the devil away. So do not look at your power, but at the power of God. Cry and say if you allow me, I will repent for you are the Lord my God (Jer 31:18).

C. You will say: *‘My state has deteriorated immensely and has lost hope’.*

Can you see that it has lost hope, more than the barren woman to whom the Lord said: “*Sing, O barren, You who have not borne...*” (Is 54:1)? He gave her more than the other that had children. Your state seems to have lost hope from your point of view, but as for God, He has hope in you.

Do not place your hope according to your state, but to the richness of God, who gives in abundance, and in His love and ability.

D. You will say: *‘But I do not want repentance or strive for it’.*

Of course, this is the worst part of your state, but still do not despair. It is enough that God is striving for your salvation. He wishes for your salvation. The prayers of many saints are raised for your sake along with the pleadings of angels. God can make you want this repentance. Remember the saying of the apostle: “*for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*” (Phil 2:13). Just pray and say, ‘*Please God, give me the desire to repent*’. The lost sheep was not searching for the way back, but it was its owner who searched for it and returned it to himself. A similar situation occurred with the lost coin (Luke 15).

E. You may say: ‘*Is it possible for me to live the rest of my life away from sin, even though my heart loves it? If I were to repent from it, I will return back to it*’.

The error is that the devil makes you think in despair that you will live in repentance with the same heart that loves sin. On the contrary, the Lord will give you a new heart (Ezek 36:25). He will remove from you the love of sin, and you will not think about returning to it. But on the contrary, in your repentance, God will make you hate sin and be disgusted with it. Your present feelings will change.

F. You will say: ‘*Even if I repent, my thoughts will remain stained by old visions*’.

Do not be afraid. In repentance, God will purify your thoughts. You will reach “*the renewal of mind*”, in which the apostle spoke about (Rom 12:2). How many bad visions were in the memories of Augustine and Mary the Egyptian? The Lord erased these visions so that their minds would be sanctified by His love. Be certain that those who returned to repentance, were in a more powerful state. Many of them received from the Lord virtues and miracles. For example, Jacob the struggler, Mary the Niece of Abraham and Mary the Egyptian. The love of the repentant is greater, just as the sinner woman who loved much, because He forgave her for much (Luke 7:47). David also in his repentance was deeper in his love and humbleness.

G. You will say: ‘Will God forgive me? Will He accept me?’.

Be at ease, for He says, “*the one who comes to Me, I will by no means cast out*” (John 6:37).

David the prophet said: “*He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities....As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us....For He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust*” (Ps 103). He doesn't only accept us, but He washes us and we become whiter than snow (Ps 50).

He does not again remember our sins (Jer 31:34), (Ezek 33:16, Heb 8:12). Remember that your soul is precious to God, for its sake, He incarnated and was crucified.

H. You will say: ‘But my sins are very disgusting’.

I will answer you with the saying of the Bible: “**every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men**” (Matt 12:31). Even those who left the faith and then returned to it, God forgave them. Similarly those who fell into heresies and then repented, were forgiven. Peter who denied Christ, swearing and cursing, saying “*I do not know the man*”, was also forgiven. Not only this, but he was returned to his rank of pastoral care and apostleship.

Even those who were in a position of leadership, for example, Aaron the chief priest, who shared with the people of Israel, in making the golden calf to worship (Ex 32:2-5), was forgiven when he repented. The Lord rebuked the devil for the

sake of Joshua the great priest and clothed him with a new garment (Zech 3:1-4).

I. You will say: ‘*But I have delayed too long and so is there still a chance?*’

Augustine said in his confessions: ‘*I have delayed too long in your love*’, but the Lord accepted him. He accepted those of the eleventh hour, and gave them the same reward (Matt 20:9). He accepted the right hand thief on the cross, during the last hours of his life. As long as we are in the flesh, then there is a chance for repentance. We say in the prayer before sleeping: ‘*Repent therefore, O my soul, so long as you dwell on earth*’, because hope in repentance will not be eliminated except in the abyss (hell), just as our father Abraham said to the rich man, **“between us and you there is a great gulf fixed” (Luke 16:26)**. So long as you are in the flesh, there is an opportunity for repentance, so take it.

J. You will say: ‘*I am frightened that my sin could be a blasphemy to the Holy Spirit*’.

I say to you, that blasphemy to the Holy Spirit is a continual complete refusal, throughout life, of all the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, and so there will be no repentance or forgiveness. If you repent, then you have responded to the work of the Spirit in you, and your sin will not be a blasphemy to the Spirit *

* See our Book (Years with the People’s Questions).

5. Repentance between struggle and grace.

Our words about the work of God in repentance and the assistance of grace, does not mean that the person becomes lazy and relaxed, waiting for God to raise him, and so the apostle reprimands such people saying: ***“You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Heb 12:4).*** It is necessary then for a person to resist until bloodshed, all thoughts of sin, its lusts, its paths and to keep away from stumbling blocks and to use all the spiritual means that strengthen the love of God in his heart.

Also he enters into a spiritual war against the hosts of wickedness (Eph 6).

In this war he fights and endures and does not give in to the enemy. He puts on the complete armour of God, so that he may overpower the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:11). In all of this he is also watchful for his own salvation (Eph 6:18). The apostle says: *“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”*.

So resist him, steadfast in the faith (1 Pet 5:8-9).

God wants you to resist, and in your resistance, grace will support you with power. So show your love to God by your resistance to sin. Pray so that the Lord will grant you power to resist it.

In this way you will share with God in the work.

The prodigal son did not wait for his father to come to him in the far country, to take him back, but he came to himself, felt his terrible condition, knew the solution, he carried it out and returned to his father who accepted him (Luke 15). The people of Ninevah fasted, were humiliated, sat in the ashes, cried mightily to the Lord and turned from their evil, so God accepted them (Jonah 3). God reminds us of our duty in repentance, saying:

“Return to Me, and I will return to you” (Mal 3:7).

He says, in the words of Isaiah the prophet: *“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings....Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord....” (Is 1:16)*. He also says in the book of Joel the prophet: *“Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments” (Joel 2:12-13)*.

Therefore there is a duty to be done by each person in the work of repentance.

He should not be satisfied by casting himself at the feet of the Lord, without inner and outer struggle. Or as some say: *‘Your work is, to simply accept the work of grace in you’*. Does this opinion agree with the reprimand of the apostles: *“You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Heb 12:4)?* Therefore we should struggle. However we should not rely on ourselves, but we should ask for God's working hand to help us.

With our struggle we then, confirm our wish for repentance and the seriousness of it.

6. The importance of repentance.

The most important thing in repentance, is that, without it, there is no salvation.

The Lord says: *“unless you repent you will all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3). He: *“has given to the Gentiles the opportunity to repent and live”* (Acts 11:18). Some say that the Lord gave us His blood for salvation and forgiveness, and so what is the need for repentance? Isn't the blood of Jesus enough? We answer them saying:

Repentance is what transfers the merits of the blood of Christ in forgiveness.

Salvation is presented to everyone, and the blood of Christ is sufficient for all, but only the repentants can receive it. Truly, the blood of Christ: *‘purifies us from every sin’*. But it only purifies the sins from which we repent. The apostle stressed two conditions for this purity to occur, and they are: *“if we walk in the light”* (1 John 1:7), and also *“if we confess our sins”* (1 John 1:9). These two conditions are connected to the life of repentance.

Therefore repentance precedes baptism, for in it there is forgiveness of sins.

Saint Peter the apostle said to the Jews about this on the Fiftieth day: *“Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins”* (Acts 2:38). The church also, when baptizing grown-ups, stipulates faith, repentance and Confession. The canons of the church prohibit the baptism of non-repentants. With respect to children however, the rite of (renouncing the devil) is sufficient instead of repentance.

One of the important points about repentance is that, it accompanies faith or precedes it.

Saint Mark the Evangelist said that the Lord used to preach saying: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15). Faith without repentance will not save anyone, because a person will perish without repentance (Luke 13:3).

Repentance precedes partaking of the holy sacraments.

In the Old Testament, Samuel the prophet said: *“Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice”* (1 Sam 16:5). As for the New Testament, Saint Paul the apostle said: *“.... let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgement to himself, not discerning*

the Lord's body.... For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged” (1 Cor 11:27-31).

Repentance precedes all of the holy sacraments of the church.

This is so that the person will be worthy of the work of the Holy Spirit in him. The person receives forgiveness with repentance, which will qualify him for the grace of the Holy Spirit which works in the sacraments. The repentance of the prodigal son, preceded his entry into his father's house (Luke 15).

Repentance is a necessary condition for the remission of sins.

Saint Peter the apostle says about this: *“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19).* Saint Isaac has a nice saying: *“There is no sin without forgiveness except the one without repentance”*. Repentance is then necessary before and after baptism. Before baptism to qualify for baptism, and after baptism for the remission of sins that occur after baptism.

7. The obstacles of repentance.

There is nothing which the devil fights more, than repentance, because it wastes all of his previous labor. Therefore it seems to be difficult, for when the person wants to repent, the devil places in front of him every stumbling block

and obstruction that prohibits or delays his repentance. These are:

A. The stumbling blocks, whether they were temptations or chances which did not previously exist, where a person's will weakens in front of them. It is also possible that the person's surroundings delay his repentance by stumbling blocks and wrong concepts.

B. The sinner compares himself with weak levels. With these levels he thinks that he is in a good state which does not need repentance, as if he says: *'all people are like this....should I be different?'*. Of course this is not an excuse, that the majority are sinners. Noah protected his righteousness in a world full of evil. Similarly were, the righteous Joseph, Moses the prophet in the land of Egypt and Lot in Sodom.

C. The weak personality allows the person to be led by the surrounding environment. A person should have a firm personality which is not swept away with the direction of the world. For a little fish is capable of resisting the current and swimming against it because it has life. Whereas a great block of timber, which is hundreds of times bigger than this fish can be washed away with the current, since it has no will. So, have a strong personality, that will help you to repent. The apostle says: *"do not be conformed to this world"* (Rom 12:2).

D. Delaying: For the devil will not fight an open war, prohibiting you from repentance, but he will tell you to delay, by presenting certain temptations. Delaying has dangers. One of them is, losing the chances of repentance. If sin continues, it

takes authority and establishes its feet. For with delaying, even the desire for repentance will not be present and spiritual influences will lose their effects.

E. Despair: It is a feeling that repentance is difficult and impossible. Youhanna El Daragy says: *‘The devils, before the fall say to you that God is kind and merciful, but after the fall they say that He is the Just Judge and they will frighten you to lose hope in the forgiveness of God and not repent’*. We have already discussed in the previous pages the obstacle of despair and its cure.

F. Self-righteousness, in which the person does not feel that he is a sinner. Repentance is the change from one life to another. How can a person whose life is beautiful in his own eyes, change it ? For if he cannot feel his bad state, then he cannot repent and change his life.

Therefore he who does not reproach himself and refuses the reproach of others towards him, cannot repent.

Who can continuously think that he is right and that the words (repent and return) are directed towards another ? Also who can leave his ears to hear the words of praise and believe them, and explain God's commandments as he likes and refuse the reproach of his conscience because of it ?

Repentance is easy for the meek, but is difficult for those who are righteous in their own eyes.

It is easy for the humble tax collector who feels his sins, but is difficult for the Pharisee who boasts in his prayer saying: *“God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers....”*. Repentance is easy for the sinful woman who wet the feet of Jesus with her tears, but is difficult for Simon the Pharisee who thought that he was not a sinner like her. Therefore it is good that the Lord revealed to him that both of them were in debt. He does not have the same love as her, as he sees his debt to be much less (Luke 7). Repentance is easy for those who know and confess that they are sinners. As for those who are righteous in their own eyes, what will they repent from, as long as they do not confess that they have sinned in anything ? Truly, those who are (well) have no need for a physician, that is those who think to themselves that they are well. These people, even if someone accused them of a sin would either deny it, or would explain it in a distorted manner, or give it's responsibility to someone else, or argue and justify themselves. They will not confess their sin, and therefore they will not repent.

It could be difficult for those who stand in front of people as a good example to say that they are in need of repentance.

It would be good if these people are a good example also, in confessing their wrong doings, and in their need for repentance.

We can also say that repentance is easy for the catechumen, but difficult for the preacher, servant, adviser and for whoever is at this level.

G. From the obstacles of repentance also is the lack of fear of God in the heart.

As Saint Isaac said: *'If there is no fear, then there is no repentance also'*. Some avoid fear in the name of love. Their remoteness from fear, makes them fall into carelessness and they fall into sin. With this sin, they prove that they do not have the love which casts out fear (1 John 4:18). The fear of God makes a person realise his sin and pushes him to repent. We will present a separate book to you on this topic, God willing.

8. Repentance and the church.

The church plays an important role in the repentance of every person. This involves the work of teaching, giving advice, pastoral care, visiting and searching, transferring the work and gifts of the Holy Spirit for the sake of the salvation of every person and transferring the worthiness of the honoured blood.

So the church invites the sinners to repentance.

It performs what Saint Paul calls: *"the ministry of reconciliation"* and *"the word of reconciliation"* calls sinners to *"be reconciled to God"* (2 Cor 5:18-20). This occurs through preaching, the word of God to the people. Without the church's efforts, there may have been no repentance.

The church calls for repentance in all of its pastoral ministries.

By visiting people, solving their different problems, both spiritual and social. As a compassionate father who cares for his children, bringing them closer to the fatherhood of God.

The church in the spiritual surrounding which assists in the life of repentance.

Segregated from the world full with stumbling blocks, every repentant finds, that the church is the proper surrounding where he can live a spiritual life. It is possible that if it wasn't for the church that every spiritual feeling which grows inside a person would be choked by the thorns of the world, wither away and dry.

The church offers to the repentant the sacrament of Confession and grants him the Absolution and forgiveness.

In the sacrament of Confession the repentant opens his heart and is comforted from his suppressed secrets in front of God he presents all of his weaknesses and falling in the presence of the priest, in order to receive Absolution from God from the mouth of the priest. This is through the command of authority, in which the Lord said: *“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:23)*. Also by the command of His saying. *“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matt 18:18)*.

In this way, the repentant goes away after Confession with a clear conscience.

He has heard the word of Absolution and forgiveness from the priest, who has the authority to say it, according to the authority given to him by God. Therefore he feels peace in his heart and starts a new beginning.

The church in the sacrament of Confession offers spiritual advice.

As it says in the Bible: *“Ask the priests concerning the law”* (Hag 2:11), in this way the father explains to his son in confession, the right spiritual path which he should pursue, for there is no one who does not need advice, and the Bible says: *“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”* (Prov 14:12), as it says: *“lean not on your own understanding”* (Prov 3:5).

In the church the repentant finds a heart to trust personal secrets relating to one's spiritual life as well as weaknesses which cannot be trusted to just anybody. Suppressing secrets completely, on the other hand, can be very tiring and sometimes impossible. But with the priest one finds trust, spiritual solutions to problems and a sincere helping hand which guides with sincere love.

The church offers to the repentant, all the blessings of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The Lord said about this great sacrament: *“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him”* and

“will live because of Me” (John 6:56-57). Outside the church, he will not find the blessing of this great sacrament which strengthens him in his repentance, fills him spiritually, as it is said: “To be given for our salvation and for the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life for those who partake of them” (John 6:54). Just in case someone says. ‘Since repentance grants forgiveness, then why do I need the church, Confession, Holy Communion and the Absolution’? My answer is:

With repentance you are worthy of forgiveness, and with Confession and Holy Communion you receive it.

There is a difference between worthiness of forgiveness and receiving grace. For repentance also contains within it, Confession. The Absolution is a part of the sacrament of repentance. Holy Communion is an extension of the effectiveness of the sacrifice of Christ. He says: *‘If I repent and die before the reading of the Absolution, what will happen to me’ ?* If you die in this way, God will have mercy upon you. The Absolution will be read on you during the funeral prayers.



PART TWO

The Incentives for Repentance.

Chapter 1: If you know who you are, you will rise above sin.

Chapter 2: If you know what is sin, you will escape from sin.

Chapter 3: If you know the results of sin, you will hate sin.

Chapter 4: If you know the punishment for sin, you would be
afraid of sin.

Chapter 5: Other incentives for repentance.

CHAPTER ONE

Our repentance needs to be built on a sound foundation, and on a true understanding of the spiritual life and the relationship with God. The most important incentive for us to repent is to know the worth of ourselves and for each one of us to know his capabilities and who he is. So my brother, know yourself. Who are you?

If you know who you are, you will rise above sin.

For if you know your great capability and your great position, then you would not allow your exalted self to come down to the level of sin. Therefore, you would not fall. So, who are you?

- **You are a holy breath which proceeded from the mouth of God.**

You, my brother, are not a scoop of dust as some think. You are a holy breath which proceeded from the mouth of God and descended into the dust. So you became: “*a living being*” (Gen 2:7). You are not just dust or dirt. You should then sing with joy saying:

I am not dirt but, In dirt I live.
I am not dirt, But a spirit.
From the mouth of God, I proceeded.

I will return to God,
To live, where I originally came from.

Your presence in this dust - O blessed brother - is just a short period of alienation, in which after it you will return to God and be confirmed in Him to eternity. So know your alienation and live as a spirit, rising above matter, the world and the works of the body.

- **You are the son of God, you are His Image and likeness.**

You, my brother, are the image of God. The Bible said in the story of Creation: *“Then God said, Let us make man in Our image, according to Our Likeness....So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him”* (Gen 1:26-27). For if you are the image of God and His likeness, then how can you sin? If you are defiled by sin, will you still keep your divine image? Of course not. For **it is not possible for a person to see you in impurity and falling and say: ‘this is the image of God’.**

Saint Athanasious the apostolic, in his book ‘The Incarnation of the Word’, said when man ‘fell’ disfigurement occurred and he lost his divine image. Jesus Christ came to give us back our original image. If you know my brother that you are the image of God, you could not sin.

For if you know that you are the son of God, then you will not sin, for the son should be like His father.

Or there is nothing easier than to wrongly boast saying: ‘we are the children of God’, whereas our deeds do not show this. Just as the Jews boasted in vain, that they were the children of Abraham and the Lord embarrassed their proudness by saying: *“If you were Abraham's children, you would do as Abraham did”* (John 8:39). For if Abraham's children are required to do the work of Abraham, then what about the duties of God's children, who are in His image and likeness?

Do we live as children of God in order to be called His children?

How easy for us to call the Lord in our prayers saying: *“Our Father who art in Heaven”*, whilst we do not behave as children of this heavenly Father.

Remember always my brother, that you are the son of God and walk in the life of righteousness to become worthy to be called the son of the Righteous, placing in front of your eyes the saying of the Bible: *“If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of him”* (1 John 2:29). For if you do not perform righteousness, then you are not worthy to be called a son of God.

I am afraid that the words ‘*children of God*’ could be a reproach for us, here and in the last day....Saint John the apostle, explains this matter to us saying: *“Children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as God is righteous. He who sins is a child of the Devil, for the Devil has*

*sinned from the beginning” (1 John 3:7-8). He who practices sin, is a son of the Devil, he is of Satan and not of God....how frightening! The apostle records for us a fundamental principle in which he says. **“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9).***

By this standard my brother, you can measure yourself when you say that you are the son of God. Here the apostle concludes his words by saying: *“In this, the children of God and the children of the Devil are manifest” (1 John 3:10).* Your feelings of being the son of God, reminds you of the heavenly nature which God placed in you and in which the apostle laboured by his saying about the one born of God that. *“His divine seed remains in him”*. He also said: *“he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him” (1 John 5:18).*

For every time you sin, you must feel humiliated in the depth of your soul and unworthy to be the son of God.

Therefore, the Holy Church makes the person say to God everyday in the sunset prayer, *‘I have sinned against You and against Heaven, I am no longer fit to be called Your son’*. Why *‘am I no longer fit to be called Your son?’*. Because I have sinned, and whoever has been born of God does not sin.

We must understand very well the practical meaning of being sons of God.

We enter into the depth of this title. We ask ourselves in every work we do, in every word we say and in every thought we

accept, do we work, talk and think in a way suitable for the children of God? Being sons to God is not a mere title. We should possess the true likeness of the son to His father.

For: “*God is Spirit*” (John 4:24). “*And that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*” (John 3:6).

For if my brother, you are living according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit, then how can you be a son of God, who is Spirit? Also, how can you be born of the Spirit? He who lives in sin, can by no means say that he is the son of God, nor can he say that he knows God as a mere acquaintance. This becomes clear by the frightening words of the apostle, in which he says:

“Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him”
(1 John 3:6).

For: “*He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*” (1 John 2:4). Can you in the life of sin say: ‘*I know God*’? Certainly not, for He will answer you and say: ‘*Depart from Me, I do not know you, and you do not know Me*’.

So my brother, if you remember that you are the son of God, then live a life that measures up to the standards God set when He called you (Eph 4:1). Walk like Him, in His path. “*He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked*” (1 John 2:6). Just as Christ lived on earth, you should live. In complete holiness, purity and blessing, for He has given you an example to follow (John 13:15). If you live in sin, be sure within yourself that you are not worthy to be sons of God because this is not the image of God's children.

Every time you say to Him: “Our Father who art in Heaven”, your conscience should reprimand you and you should be contrited within yourself, and you will say to Him: ‘It is because of your humbleness O Lord and your love, that you called me to be your son. For with my works I have demonstrated that I am not worthy to be called your son....treat me as one of your hired servants....Your fatherhood, even though it honours me greatly, but also reproaches me greatly, making me feel the great difference between what I am and what I should be....’

- **You are the dwelling of God, and a temple for the Holy Spirit.**

You my brother, are not only the son of God and a holy breath which proceeded from the mouth of God, but you are also a temple for God and God dwells in you. The apostle says to us: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are” (1 Cor 3:16-17). “For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them and walk among them” (2 Cor 6:16).

God's desire from the beginning is to dwell in you and to look at your heart and say: “This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it” (Ps 132:14) You will say to Him: ‘O Lord you have the churches, temples and altars. You dwell in Heaven and the Heaven of Heavens is Your throne’. He will say to you: ‘I prefer to live in your heart, rather than in any of these’. “My son, give me your heart” (Prov 23:26).

You O blessed brother, are more important to God than a built church.

If one of the churches is destroyed, it can easily be rebuilt by people, through the collection of money it can be built....But if a person like you is destroyed, he cannot be rebuilt except through the blood of Christ. No angel or archangel or Patriarch or prophet, can return you to your original rank, nothing but the blood of Christ, for without it there is no salvation for you....You my brother, are more important to God than a built church. You are a living church, more important than bricks and stones, you are a temple for the Holy Spirit.

God permitted the destruction of the temple of Solomon and did not leave one stone without demolition. But for your sake, God sent the apostles, prophets and angels and appointed pastors, priests and teachers and organised all the means of grace and presented the worthiness of the great redemption so: *“that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).*

If you are then a house for God and God dwells in you, then remember the saying of the Bible: *“Holiness adorns Your house” (Ps 93:5).* Know that by sin you defile the house of God, which is you.

Remember also the saying of the apostle: *“You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5).* Jesus Christ searches for a place to live in, and that place is you. When the Lord said about Himself that

He: *“has nowhere to lay His head”* (Luke 9:58), He did not just mean materialistic houses, but even more so, the hearts of the people.

Your heart is the place which the Lord seeks to lay His head.

Truly, His delight is with the sons of men (Prov 8:31). He remains knocking at your door and waiting for you to open. In His yearning for your heart, He says: *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him”* (John 14:23). In this way, the Father and the Son will come and live in your heart, and you from before are a temple for the Holy Spirit.

In this way, your heart becomes a dwelling for the Holy Trinity.

Here I loose my speech in awe and reverence in front of this holy heart. *“How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven!”* (Gen 27:17). This is the amazing divine dwelling, which God comes to from afar. *“Leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills”* (Song 2:8), calling your precious soul in love: *“Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; For my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night”* (Song 5:2). So, till when, my brother, will you wait and not open?

Imagine my brother, that God whom the heavens cannot contain, or the universe, God about whom David said: *“The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who*

dwell therein” (Ps 24:1), this God knocks on your door and desires you as dwelling for Himself. He wants to live in your heart, and for you to live in His heart, to be confirmed in you and you in Him and for you to become a holy church for Him.

I remember one day sending a letter to one of the blessed brethren, saying to him: *‘Greet the holy church which is in your heart’*. For I knew that in his heart was a church from which ascends the smell of incense, and from it proceeds hymns and praises and in it, spiritual sacrifices are raised. Doesn't the psalmist say: *“Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Ps 141:2)?* If you know this my brother, that you are a temple for the Holy Spirit, then do not sin, in case you grieve the Spirit of God which is in you and extinguish it's fervour.

If the devil comes to you one day with a sin, say to him:

- Go far away from me, I am not for you.
 - I am the house of God, I am a dwelling for God, I am a holy place for the Lord.
 - I am the one whom God knocks on his door, for me to open unto Him.
 - I am a temple for the Holy Spirit, I am a holy church.
 - I am the one to whom the Father and the Son come to make a dwelling place.
 - I am a dwelling for the Holy Trinity.
 - Am I so insignificant that the devil can defile? No, I am a second heaven, a throne for God to reign on.
- You my brother, are not just all of these only, but also:

- **You are a brother to the Messiah, a companion to Christ, and an inheritor with Him.**

It is an amazing humbleness from the Lord to call us His brothers. We do not dare to call Him by this title, because we have not reached the level of the unprofitable servants who did all of those things of which they were commanded (Luke 17:10). But as He honours us we should measure up to the standards God set when he called us.

It is amazing what is said about the Lord God, that He is: *“the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29)*. Many brethren? How amazing! It is also amazing that: *“He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb 2:11)*. More amazing than all of this, is what is said about Him that: *“in all things He had to be made like His brethren” (Heb 2:17)*. We also see the Lord saying to the two Mary's: *“Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me” (Matt 28:10)*. He repeats the same expression to the Magdalene: *“go to My brethren and say to them” (John 20:17)*.

He did not say this expression about the apostles only, but He said it about everyone.

“For whoever does the will of My Father in Heaven is My brother and sister and mother” (Matt 12:50). He said about the good that is done for the poor and needy: *“Assuredly, I say to you, in as much as you did it to one to the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matt 25:40)*.

So my brother, you are a brother to Christ and you are also an inheritor with Him....in the promises and eternal glory. It was said about Him in the parable of the evil earthly vineyard tenants that He is the Inheritor (Matt 21:38). It was therefore said: *“then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”* (Rom 8:17).

So my brother, get to know the importance of who you are. you are a brother to Christ and a heir with Him, not only that, but you are also a partner with Him.

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him” (1 John 1:6). He partook with us in flesh and blood (Heb 2:14). We need to be chastened: *“that we may be partakers of His holiness”* (Heb 12:10). We partake with Him in His sufferings, in order to partake in the joy of the revelation of His coming (1 Pet 4:13). We were buried with Him (in Baptism) in order to be raised with Him (Rom 6:4-5). We will live our lives working with Him (1 Cor 3:9). We will suffer with Him in order to be glorified with Him (Rom 8:17). We will come with Him on the cloud (Jude 14). We will be with Him at all times (1 Thessalonians 4:17), for wherever He is, we will be there also (John 17:24). It is a partnership for you with Christ, in which you start now, O blessed brother, and continue in it till eternity. So protect this holy partnership, for with sin you will lose it.

You will not be able to remain as a partner to Christ if you walk in sin.

For the Bible will reproach you with its saying: “*What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial?*” (2 Cor 6:14-15). When you do sin, it is just like saying to the Lord: ‘*the partnership between me and You has been dissolved. I have searched for another partner other than you. I am now a partner with the devil and I will not return to be Your partner again!*’ Look at the glory we would have when we walk in the path of God, and the decline and falling when we are far from Him. Then how can you commit sin, you who are a partner with Christ, His partner in work, sufferings and glory? You who put on Christ in baptism (Gal 3:27), and live, not you, but Christ who lives in you (Gal 2:20). You are not just only a partner with Christ, but also:

- **You are a partner to the Holy Spirit, a partner in the Divine nature.**

In this way the blessing that Saint Paul the apostle gives us is that: “*the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all*” (2 Cor 13:14). This blessing we receive from the church at the end of every meeting and at the beginning of the Liturgy also.

You are a partner to the Holy Spirit, not in essence, but in the work.

He works in you, with you and through you, for the sake of your salvation and the salvation of the people, in spreading the kingdom of God and in building the body of Christ. You do not work alone, otherwise you would be relying on your human capabilities: *“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Ps 127:1)*. The Holy Spirit partakes with you in the work. He does not work alone, but partakes you with Him, so that you may receive blessing. So you are a partner to the Holy Spirit, a partner in the Divine nature, in work.

The Holy Spirit works with you always for the good. When you do evil or sin, then you work alone refusing the partnership with the Holy Spirit.

The Bible says then about the state of sin: *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed” (Eph 4:30)*, it also says: *“Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess 5:19)*. If the person continues in the state of sin, he might be exposed to what David the prophet was afraid of when he said: *“Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (Ps 50:11)*.

My brother, what is more amazing than to be said of you that you are a: *“partaker of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4)*. More amazing is that the Lord rebukes us with His saying: *“I said, You are gods”^{*}, and all of you are the children of the High” (Ps*

^{*} It does not mean that we are gods, of His nature, but in that we are in His image and likeness. Gods here, mean masters, just as God said to Moses: “I

82:6). O what a great position and witness this is! Can we sin after all this? Is it proper for a god to sin? And indulge in filth and dirt.

When you sin, are you a partner in the divine nature?

Certainly not, but a partner to Satan, for the Bible says: *“He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning....In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest”* (1 John 3:8-10). When we sin, we forget our great glory and lose our positions. For when God said to us. *“I said, You are gods”*, continued saying: *“But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes”* (Ps 82:7). Who is this prince who fell? It is Satan, who previously was an archangel!

The person who sins, is a person who does not know his capabilities.

As it has been said about the sinner that he is ignorant, it is amazing that after he ate from the tree of knowledge, he became ignorant! For he sought knowledge far away from God, or sought knowledge which separated him from God. So he did not know himself, or God, or the relationship between them. My brother, get to know yourself, who you are, so that you would not sin.

have made you as God to Pharaoh” (Exodus 7:1). Not as his creator, God forbid, but as his master.

- **You are a member in the body of Christ, of His body and bones.**

The church is the body of Christ, and Christ is its head, and we the congregation of believers, are the church. So then, we are the body of Christ (Eph 4:11). We are: *“members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones”* (Eph 5:30).

Every organ in you, is a member of Christ.

Therefore, the apostle said about the sin of adultery: *“Do you not know that your bodies are organs of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not!”* (1 Cor 6:15). Then how can we sin, when we are the body of Christ? How can we sin to the Lord who considers us exactly as Himself, whoever touches us, touches Him? When rebuking Saul of Tarsus, He did not say to him *‘Why are you persecuting the faithful?’*, but He said to him: *“Why are you persecuting Me?”* (Acts 9:4), for He considers us as Himself exactly. When He blesses the merciful on the last day, He will not say to them: *‘You fed the hungry and gave the thirsty to drink’*, but He will say to them. *“I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink”* (Matt 25:35). Our beloved Lord, who considers us as Himself exactly, how can we sin against him and hurt His sensitive and compassionate heart? For the sinful person cuts himself from the body of Christ, because all of the body of Christ is holy.

Our membership in the body of Christ, is made clear by His saying: “I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5), for the juice of the vine ascends and flows to the branches, giving them life. Every branch in the vine will have the image of the vine itself, since the branch and the vine are one thing.

Are you then a true branch in this divine vine? Do you produce fruits as live branch would?

The branches of the vine should give fruits representing the vine, producing a vine joyful to the Lord in which He can drink it new in the Father's kingdom (Matt 26:29). What do you think He meant when He said to the Samaritan woman: “*Give Me a drink*” (John 4:7)? Do you think He wanted water from her, or did He want to give her to drink? He was thirsty for her soul, to unite it to His kingdom. He wished to drink of the produce of the vine, from the juice which He poured into the heart of this woman.

So does the juice of the vine flow in you O blessed brother? Does its juice flow in all of your veins, making you produce and bring forth leaves and fruit? Do you produce a vine or a thorn? For if you bring forth a thorn, then you are not a member of the vine, and surely the juice which flows in you, is not of the vine. You should know then that the branch which does not produce fruit, is worthless and useless and is cut off and thrown into the fire (John 15:6). If he is cut off, he can no more be a member of the vine, for it's all over for him.

So the person who walks in sin, is a stubborn branch, who has refused the juice of the vine, he has refused the flow of the juice in his veins and so withered away and fell, or was cut and thrown into the fire. On the contrary, the righteous opens wide his veins for the juice of the vine to enter and in this way produces fruits and the Lord purifies him to produce more fruits.

What is the produce of the vine that You wish to drink from us O lord?

It is your fruits, I wish to be nourished with, by the fruits of the Spirit in you (Gal 5:22). This fruit is the work of God in you. It is the result of the flow of My juice in your veins. If you then, remember always that you are branches in My vine and members in My body, then you will never sin and even more so, you will be fruitful and I will be happy with your fruits. Do you now know my brother, your great position. You are not just a member in the body of Christ, but also:

- **You are the one who partakes of the Lord's body and blood.**

You eat the body of Christ and drink His blood and are confirmed in Him and the pure holy blood of Christ will run in your veins. Who is exalted and purified like you? One person wrote in his memoirs, after receiving Holy Communion:

‘This holy mouth which received the body and blood of Christ.

**An unnecessary word will not come out of
And no more than enough will enter into it...'**

Remember always my brother, that your mouth receives the body and blood of Jesus Christ, therefore no abuses can come out of it, or worldly songs, or rude jokes, or lies, or swearing or anger, or the remainder of the sins of the tongue. Remember also that in your body dwells the body of Christ, therefore you will be afraid to defile this body or to make it a tool for sin.

My blessed brother, do not forget yourself, remember who you are and what is suitable for you, so that you will not sin. One of the saints said: *'Every sin is preceded by either negligence or lust or forgetfulness'*. Truly forgetfulness precedes sin. For we forget that we are the image of God, His resemblance and likeness, His children, His dwelling and a temple for the Holy Spirit. We forget that we are the brothers of Christ, the partners of the Holy Spirit, the partners of the divine nature, the blood. This is why we sin, and if we remember our true state, we would not have sinned. You would have forgotten your glories, or you would have lost them, and lost yourself.



CHAPTER TWO

For a person to repent, it is not enough for
For a person to repent, it is not enough for
him to know who he is, but he must also
know what is sin. Its wrong nature, its
punishment, its results and its harms.
Therefore we say to you:

If you know what is sin, you will escape from sin.

- **Sin is Death**

It is true that: *“The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23), “and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death”(James 1:15).* In addition to the punishment of sin being death, we can say that sin itself is a state of death, a moral and spiritual death.

The references to this are many:

In the parable of the prodigal son, the father said: *“for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:24).* He described him in his state of sin as *“was dead”*. He was not alive until after his return. Saint Paul the apostle says about the widow who lived in pleasure that she: *“is dead while she lives” (1 Tim 5:6).* As he also says about all of us: *“you were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1).* *“We were dead in trespasses” (Eph 2:5).* When the angel (pastor) of

the church of Sardis sinned, the Lord sent him a letter through the mouth of Saint John the revealer, saying to him: *“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead”* (Rev 3:1).

The sinful person is a dead person, because he has been separated from the true life by his separation from God, and God is life.

Didn't the Lord Jesus say: *“I am the resurrection and the life”* (John 11:25). *“I am the way, the truth, and the life”* (John 14:6). Truly: *“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men”* (John 1:4). For whoever is separated from Christ by sin, is separated from life and is considered dead, even though he is still breathing. Saint Augustine was right in saying that:

‘The death of the body is the separation of the spirit from the body, and the death of the spirit is the separation of the spirit from God’.

So the sinner then is a dead person, no matter how much he thinks that he is alive and enjoying life. Sinners do not understand the proper meaning of life. They think that it is merely enjoying the world and its pleasures. When you discuss repentance with a sinner, he will reply saying: *‘Leave me to enjoy life’*. He thinks that this worldly pleasure, is life, when it is death! Just as was said about the widow who lived in pleasure, that she was dead while she was still alive. So if sin is death, then it is appropriate to ask ourselves:

Are we truly alive? and what is our age on earth?

More than likely we will answer this question with the same answer that our father Jacob gave when he said to Pharaoh: *“The days of the years of my earthly sojourn.... are few and evil.... and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers” (Gen 47:9).*

Our lives are measured only by the days in which we spent with God, confirmed in His love. For the periods of sin in our lives, are periods of death. Do not say then: *‘I am forty years old!’* For all of your life may not be more than ten years with God. My brother ask yourself. Are you alive or dead?

It alarms me that the phrase which the Lord said to the angel of the church of Sardis, could be applied to one of us: **“that you have a name that you are alive, but your are dead” (Rev 3:1).** Imagine if an angel was to descend now from heaven to count the living which are present in the church, which of us will he find alive and which of us will he find dead? What a shame at knowing our reality, truly are we alive or dead by sin? In this each one of us can judge himself:

Every fruitful day in which you are confirmed in Christ, is a day of living, and everyday you spend in sin, is a day of death.

In this way you can know your age and how old you are. So my brother, do not allow one day of your life to be lost, dead and buried forever. For the days that have passed cannot return, but the counted days are eternal. There are moments in the life of a person which are very valuable. One moment could be worth

years or even generations. Therefore, live your life completely, abundantly, richly and fruitfully. Imagine one hour in the life of Paul the apostle, it has undoubtedly its worth and power and it could be longer than the complete life of another person.

My brother, do not boast in vain, and do not say without truth. *'I am the son of God, I am His image and likeness. I am a temple for the Holy Spirit, I am a partner to the divine nature, I am a member in the body of Christ....!'* This is not so, for if you have sinned then you are dead and you are none of these. You will say to God: *'I am your son'* and He will say to you: *'Depart from Me, I do not know you'*. For sin is death and also delusion, loss and straying.

- **Sin is delusion and loss.**

In the fifteenth chapter from the Gospel of our teacher Luke the Evangelist, are three parables explaining to us how *'sin is delusion, loss and straying'*. They are the parables of the prodigal son, the lost sheep and the lost coin. The prodigal son was lost as a result of his heart's lusts, intentionally with knowledge and planning. The lost sheep, strayed due to ignorance and lack of knowledge and experience. As for the lost coin it was lost by another person, or it fell and remained down without moving.

It is a regrettable matter, that God looks into His purse and does not find you.

It is regrettable that God counts His coins and does not find you among them. God then remains looking for you in His purse

and everywhere, to see where you have fallen, but He does not find you. Finally He declares the painful truth: *'I had a coin, but now it is lost'*. Truly it is lost and missing and no longer exists. It would embarrass me, if God were to count His people and not find any names written in the book of life, because sin has lost them.

Do you know my brother, that if you walk in the path of sin, that you are lost and no longer in the hand of God?

Yes, sin is loss, it is delusion and straying. The sinner is a lost person, whether he was lost by his will, or ignorance, or by someone else. When the prodigal son left his father's house, he thought that he had found himself and had found freedom, wealth, enjoyment and friends. In actual fact, he did not find himself, but lost it. The lost sheep might have felt that he left the small closed field for the empty wide open space. Finally, though, he found that he was lost and had departed from his shepherd and from his beloved. The sinner understands freedom and enjoyment in a wrong way. In the same way in which he thinks that sin is victory, it becomes a defeat for him.



- **Sin is defeat and not victory.**

Let us assume that a person insulted you and you insulted him, and you argued with him and won, silenced and quietened him, he assaulted you so you assaulted him for example, or perhaps it got worse, so do you think that you won?

No, you were defeated because you were stirred up not able to control yourself and sin defeated you.

You might say: *‘I defended my honour, I will not leave this person to dominate me, but I stopped him at his limit and defeated him’*. In this way you are victorious in your own eyes, but actually you are defeated: The sins of anger, vain glory, judgement and fighting back have defeated you and also lack of love and perseverance. The Bible therefore says in (Rom 12:21):

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”.

The sinful person, is a person defeated by sin, which could be one of many kinds, there is a person who is defeated by the flesh, another by honour, a third by the lust of food, a fourth by money, another in front of anger and another in front of malice....etc. One person looks at a woman and lusts for her and commits adultery with her in his heart. In all of this he thinks that he has enjoyed himself by this vision. Whereas actually he has been defeated in front of sin and fallen. One look defeated

him and made him fall into lust and makes the angels look from heaven at him, saying:

‘This person is poor and weak, and cannot withstand just one look and fell....He sold the kingdom and lost it for the sake of one worthless look’.

So the sinful person is a defeated person, no matter how he surrounds himself with appearances of fake power. The righteous person in his nobleness and exaltation, seems to be defeated in front of the people, whilst he is at the peak of his victory. There are many examples of this....

Cain for example, when he arose and killed Abel, was he in killing his brother, victorious or defeated?

He might have thought to himself at the beginning of the matter that he was victorious over his brother, for he was able to hit him, throw him to the ground and kill him. But in actual fact, he was defeated. He was defeated in front of jealousy and zeal. He was defeated in front of anger and malice and lost his love, and the devil of harshness defeated him as also the sin of killing. This person who thought that he was strong, when he stood in front of God, he became shaken and afraid, and Cain then said to God: *“My punishment is greater than I can bear. Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me”* (Gen 4.13-14).

Poor Cain....a weak person defeated by sin. Herod the king, was in a similar position, when he arrested John the Baptist, and put him in prison, he wanted to silence this voice crying in the wilderness but couldn't and so he cut his head off. Was Herod then powerful when killing John, or was he weak in front of his lust, boastfulness, honour and submittance to women? The biggest indication to his weakness was that he remained frightened from John, even after his death. When Jesus appeared, Herod thought that He was John, risen from the dead (Matt 14:2).

It is similar for you, when you try to dominate another, insulting, abusing, hurting and overruling him, and it seems that he is weak and despicable in front of you, not able to stand up to you. I guess you think that you have won? No, but you have been defeated by all of those sins and by evil also.

The sinner imagines victory when it is defeat, pleasure when it is loss and power when it is weakness.

For the Bible said: *“because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand”* (Matt 13:13). Some looked at the cross of Christ, to whom is the glory, with this same wrong measure. Those who did not understand, thought that His crucifixion was an indication of His weakness, defeat and the victory of His enemies over Him, whereas actually it was the complete opposite.

The crucifiers of Christ were in a situation of defeat and not victory. They were defeated because of their jealousy and envy of Him. They were defeated in front of the devils of lying, harshness, cowardice and the denial of favours. As for the Lord

Jesus Christ, He was victorious in His love and efforts, and He presented salvation to us, and demolished the devil's kingdom and for those waiting, He opened the Paradise and completed the great work of redemption. He was victorious all along the way, in contrast to His crucifiers, some of whom returned and regretted what they had done. The judgements of the people were incorrect and so sin is weakness and defeat. What else can we say about sin?

- **Sin is separation from God.**

Sin is separation from God: *“For what fellowship has light with darkness, and what accord has Christ with Belial”* (2 Cor 6:14-15). It can be seen that the prodigal son in his sin, left his father's house and was separated from him.

Sin is not just separation from God, but also animosity with Him.

When the world sinned, it fell into animosity with God, which was expressed ritually by the middle veil which separated the believers from the Holy of Holies. When Christ came however, He made reconciliation between us and God, and removed the middle veil and in the liturgy it is said about Him: *‘You reconciled the earthly with the heavenly’*. He reconciled them, because sin had caused animosity between them and God. For this reason, we pray the prayer of reconciliation before we start the Liturgy. Before we receive Holy Communion, we are first reconciled with God.

Between the sinful person and God is animosity. He has angered God and grieved him and was separated from Him: He left His house and priests, His Bible and commandments, His body and blood and also left conversing with Him, and so animosity is present.

When sin increases animosity increases and the separation from God increases. This animosity between God and man reached a fearful state in the days of Jeremiah the prophet, to the stage that God said to His prophet: *“Do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them.... for I will not hear you”* (Jer 7:16). The animosity reached the stage in which God said. *“Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My heart would not be favourable toward this people”* (Jer 15:1).

The animosity reached the stage in which God said to the foolish virgins: “Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you” (Matt 25:12).

He said to others: *“I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness”* (Matt 7:23). *“I tell you I do not know, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity”* (Luke 13:27) *“I do not know you”*, how shameful and terrifying ...? God denies knowing man and His relation with him, and exonerates Himself from man and his company, and moves him away. What a great pain and disgrace this is !

In animosity, sin reaches the disgusting stage of enmity with God.

Saint James the apostle says: *“Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God ? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God”* (James 4:4). Saint John the apostle agrees with this meaning by saying. *“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”* (1 John 2:15).

Contrary to this, the lovers of God show their love by their friendship and familiarity with God.

- **What a great difference between favour and animosity.**

If we know the effect of favour between God and his beloved, we would be overcome with zeal and our hearts would be inflamed and we would wish to be like them. Here we will try to show some examples:

It has been said about our father Abraham that he is the lover of God and we ask of him in our prayers, saying to God in the ninth hour prayer: ‘for the sake of your beloved Abraham ...’. He is the lover of God, His friend, between him and God there is favour. When God was going to burn Sodom, He said: *“Shall I hide from Abraham, what I am doing?”* (Gen 18:17). How amazing, that God did not burn Sodom before telling Abraham first and discussing the situation with him! Who is this Abraham, O lord? Isn't he a scoop of

“dust and ashes” (Gen 18:27) ? No, answers the Lord: ‘he is My beloved and My friend, I must tell him first and take his opinion, it is not right for him to be surprised by the situation like the rest of the people’.

So God told Abraham, and Abraham discussed it with God with favour: *“Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? ... far be it from You to do such a thing... far be it from You. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?”* **It was a method which we would not use to talk with some people, for fear of them, but Abraham used it to talk with God , with all courage and favour.** He continued to discuss: *“suppose there were fifty righteous within the city ... suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous ... suppose there should be forty found there ... thirty ... ten”.* God answers saying: *“I will not destroy it for the sake of ten” (Gen 18:32).* **It is a friendship with God ... It is amazing to find people with such a friendship with God, who can communicate with God, and God can communicate with them.**

- **The same situation which occurred to Abraham with God, occurred to Moses also.**

The Jews made a calf out of gold and worshipped it. The Lord was very angry with this betrayal which they betrayed Him with, after a series of miracles He performed with them, and after a series of good deeds which He presented to them. God thought of destroying these people, but He sought to tell Moses first. After God explained to Moses how the people have become stiff-necked, He said: *“let Me alone... that I may put an end to them” (Ex 32:10).*

We stand in awe in front of the words: “let Me alone”. What is the meaning of these words, O Lord our God who is capable of all things. Do you require Moses to leave You, to be able to do? Is he holding You back from doing? Is he capable of that?

Our amazement increases, not just from God's words, but more from Moses' answer. Just as Jacob said to the Lord whilst pleading with Him: *“I will not let you go”* (Gen 32:26), Moses also said to the Lord in courage and loving favour. *“Turn from your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm”* (Ex 32:12). These amazing courageous words, who can say them to one of the leaders of the world, let alone to God? Moses makes an excuse for his protest. that they might say, he brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains.

The amazing thing is that God was not upset with Moses, but agreed with him, and carried out for him what he wanted. The Bible says about this: *“So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do”* (Ex 32:14). What is this Lord? He answers, that they are my friends, they have favour with Me. It is amazing! Who is this Moses? What is this favour between God and His beloved? If a sinner reads about it, he will feel the fervour of jealousy inflames his heart, to change himself and follow these examples.

- **Another example we read about Moses :**

The Bible says that he was on the mountain with God: *“Forty days and forty nights”* (Ex 34:28), do you think that the writing of the ten commandments on the two tablets, took all of that

time from God? Does its writing require a day from God, an hour or a few minutes, or an instant?

But God left Moses forty days on the mountain because he is His friend, beloved and His speaker.

God was happy with the presence of Moses with Him because he is His son, and Moses was happy and was enjoying the presence of the Lord. Just tell me, what mission would have taken forty days? All of the commandments that Moses took from God, would not have taken more than one day. As for the rest, it was a period of favour, friendship and love.

God has friends and loved ones, He said to them openly: *“No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends”* (John 15:15). It is said that He: *“loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus”* (John 11:5). When He wept for Lazarus the people said: *“See how He loved him”* (John 11:36). It was said repeatedly about Saint John the Evangelist: *“The disciple whom Jesus loved”*.

- **God has loved ones, who have a great favour with Him and in their hands He places the keys of heaven, and they can open heaven and close it as they like.**

An amazing word we hear from Elijah the prophet who said: *“there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word”* (1 Kin 17:1). The phrase, (except at my word), is an amazing and powerful phrase. Elijah did not say: *‘When God wills’* or *‘when God permits’*, but said confidently and firmly: *“except at my word”*. Indeed, the heavens were closed according to his word, and remained closed three years and six

months. This caused hunger and toil for all the people, however the heavens remained closed awaiting the word of Elijah, and when he spoke, the heavens rained.

These keys of heaven which are in the hands of the saints, were talked about by Saint John Saba in his conversation about their prayers and its effect and he said about them that they are: ***‘Not like those who pray, but like those who accept prayer, just like a son who was entrusted with his fathers' treasures, to open and give to the people’***. As an example of this we hear about the reposed Saint, Anba Abraam the bishop of Fayoum, who when someone came to him with a problem would say: *‘Go my son, you will find it has been solved’*, and to the childless woman he would say: *‘next year you will have a child’*, he would say this even without praying, and what he would say would happen. These are blessings which he distributes to the people, gifts he received from the heavenly Father, which He gives with compassion to whoever asks. Aren't we taken by jealousy when we hear of such examples and their closeness to God?

- **These loved ones of God, He is not satisfied by giving them gifts only, but He defends them and He does not accept any bad word spoken against them.**

An example of this is Moses the prophet. He married a Cushite woman, whilst this was against the law, for the Lord did not allow marriage to woman strangers. Aaron, Moses' brother and Miriam his sister were upset by this marriage, and they talked about Moses. Moses kept quiet for he was very patient. The Lord however did not keep quiet and He did not accept bad

words against His beloved Moses, even if the speaker was Aaron the high priest and Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Moses and Aaron.

The Lord then called all three of them, and rebuked Miriam and Aaron with a great rebuke and said to them: *“If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision, and I speak to him in a dream. **Not so with my servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face ...** Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?”* (Num 12:1-8). Then God struck Miriam with leprosy and she became leprous, as white as snow and He shut her out of the camp seven days. What is this Lord that you do? He says: *‘This is Moses My servant, My beloved whom I entrusted over all of My house, I speak with him face to face. **How can I allow these to insult him and I remain quiet? They must receive a punishment in order to respect him, and everyone that hears will respect him also**’.* Perhaps now people such as these will understand the word of God to our father Abraham: *“I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you”* (Gen 12:3). It is an amazing honour which God gives to his beloved. Not only to be blessed but even more to be themselves a blessing (Gen 12:2). Just as Elijah was a blessing in the house of the widow, Joseph in the house of Potiphar and in the land of Egypt and Elisha in the house of the Shunamite.

- **One of the amazing honours which God gives to His children, is performing miracles through their hands. Miracles which God would have performed Himself, but instead He bestows them to His beloved, to honour them in the eyes of the people.**

For example, a sick person prays to God, to heal him. Instead of God healing him, he sends to him one of His saints to heal him. He sends our Lady the Virgin or Saint George or Saint Demiana. The people then praise the Virgin, Saint George and Saint Demiana, and the Lord is joyous, reciting in the ears of these saints: *“whoever honours you, honours Me... I honour those who honour Me”*.

We ask the Lord: To what limit will You honour them? He says: They will sit on twelve thrones around Me, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28). We say to Him, O Lord how can they sit with You in Your glory, You whom stand in front of You the angels and archangels? He says: *“I honour those who honour Me”*. We ask Him: How can they sit on the thrones of the judges in the Day of Judgement, whilst You are the only Judge, the Judge of all the earth, judging the living and the dead, all judgement being given to You from the Father (John 5:22)? He answers, My delight is with the sons of men, for I love them and will honour them more.....

If I am the Judge of all the earth, they will judge the earth.... If I am the King of kings, they will rule with Me.... If I am coming in My glory on the cloud, they will come on the cloud with Me, they will be with Me at all times, where I am, they will be there also...

God honours all of these people by loving them, by living with them, by defending them, by giving them the keys of heaven and earth, by announcing their honour to the people, so that they can honour them also and by the favour which He gives them in order to talk to Him with respect to His judgements. This is a concise idea about the favour which the righteous find with God, and about the honour which He gives them.

On the other hand, we find that sin is contrary to this...Sin is deprivation from God, the angels, and from the council of saints.

- **Sin is deprivation from God.**

The sinful person deprives himself from God by separating himself and his heart from God. **So sin, before all things, is lack of love to God.** For the Lord's saying is clear: *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word"* (John 14:23-24). The saying of the apostle is also clear: *"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"* (1 John 2:15). Whoever loves God, clings to Him and to whatever makes him closer to God. As for whoever leans towards sin, he removes himself from the love of God, for he cannot love God and sin at the same time.

Sin is also disobedience to God, a revolution against God and defiance of Him:

It is a lack of fear of God, which stops the person from taking God's commandments seriously and is breaking them in front of

God, who sees the person whilst committing the sin with such ease. This is then lack of shame from God.

The righteous however are not like this. The righteous Joseph for example, when he was offered sin, he said with strength and fear: *“How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”* (Gen 39:9). God was in front of him, when sin was offered to him. He regarded sin to be against God Himself, and not just against the woman and her husband. With this same meaning, David the prophet said to God: *“Against You, have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight”* (Ps 50:4).

As long as sin is directed towards God and in front of God, then it is defiance of God. It is a revolution against His kingdom, His Holiness and Righteousness, and an attempt to remove Him from the heart, so that another could rule in His place. **As God is unlimited, the sin directed towards Him is unlimited, and its punishment is unlimited like it.** If an atonement is to be offered for it, it had to be an unlimited atonement. Its forgiveness then cannot occur without the sacrifice of Christ, where He takes this sin on His shoulders and carries it from us, with all of its impurity and shame. So sin is defiance of God, and it is also opposition to His Holy Spirit.

- **Sin is opposition to the Holy Spirit**

The Spirit of God which is in you, wants you to live in holiness which is appropriate to the sons of God and He works in you for good and righteousness. If you walk in sin then you are opposing the Spirit. **The Bible says: “And do not grieve the**

Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed” (Eph 4:30).

Therefore, everyone who commits a sin, grieves the Spirit of God. The Bible says also: *“Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess 5:19).* **When the Spirit of God works in the heart of a person, He inflames him with love, enthusiasm towards doing good, and holy zeal in spreading the kingdom of God... For our God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29).** Everyone who keeps God inside of him, keeps an inflamed fire. Therefore it has been said about God: *“Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire” (Ps 104:4).* The apostle commanded us to be *“fervent in spirit” (Rom 12:11).* For everyone in whom the Spirit of God works, must be inflamed by spiritual fervour. Did not the Spirit of God when descending on the pure disciples, descend on them with tongues: *“as of fire” (Acts 2:3)?*

In all of this, we say that whoever commits sin quenches the Spirit according to the saying of the Bible. The quenching of this fervour, leads the person to laxity. If he remains in laxity he will reach spiritual coolness, and spiritual means that inflame other people, will have no influence on him. Through all this, the Spirit of God still remains in him, even though He is grieved and His fervour is quenched. The greatest fear we hold for the sinner, is the departure of the Spirit of God from him. Just as He left King Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him (1 Sam 16:14). It is this grievous state which made David cry out in his prayers saying: *“Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (Ps 51:11).*

This dangerous state is what is called. ‘*Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit*’.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the complete, continual refusal of the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. From the intensity of evil, the person reaches a stage of harshness of heart which refuses every work of the Spirit, till death. Therefore he cannot repent, because repentance only comes to him as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in him, for the Spirit convicts a person of sin (John 16:8). If he does not repent, he cannot gain forgiveness. For the saints said: *‘there is no sin without forgiveness, except that which is without repentance’*. It has been said that there is no forgiveness for the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

We have not yet reached the stage which is filled with despair...The Spirit of God still works in us towards repentance, and we should submit to the work of the Spirit without refusal or stubbornness.

If we have previously grieved the Spirit of God, let us not continue to grieve Him. If we have quenched His fervour in us, let us not continue to quench it. It is not right for us to continue in our stubbornness, in case the Spirit leaves us and we become like those who have fallen in the pit. I wish that we would hate sin, that resists the work of the Spirit of God in us. So sin is very dangerous, for it is corruption of the human nature.

- **Sin is corruption of the human nature.**

It is said about sinners that: “*They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt*” (Ps 14:3).

For a person is, God's image and likeness, except when he is in the state of sin, in which he is corrupted and has lost God's image. I do not agree with the one who falls and defends his fall by saying: ‘*This is the human nature...I should be excused, this is my nature!*’ No, this is not the human nature which the good Lord created, who after creating everything saw that it was very good (Gen 1:31).

Your human nature, my brother, in its original state is very good, but you complain from your present nature after it has been corrupted by sin.

This is the corruption which the apostle complained about saying: “*But I am carnal, sold under sin... O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*” (Rom 7:14, 24). Sin ruins our nature and puts it down from its heavenly level.

Sin is degradation... Imagine a person in his position as a son to God, degrading himself to the level in which he becomes a son to Satan.

By this degradation, the light which is in him becomes darkness. He forgets his high position and does as one of the children of people. The sinner is degraded in his own eyes and his level is

lowered or destroyed in his own eyes. I will give you an example: Can a son of a king sit on a heap of rubbish? Certainly not...How much more is, the son of God?

The sinner also is not only degraded in his own eyes, but also in his look towards people.

An example of this is a youth who looks at a young woman with a lustful look. No doubt, if he was heavenly in his thoughts, he would have said to himself: *‘This young woman is a temple for the Holy Spirit, how can I touch or defile Him? I cannot at all destroy the temple of God’*. For *“if anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy”* (1 Cor 3:17). But the youth looks at the young woman with lust because her level has been degraded in his sight. This is the sin which corrupts human nature and changes it from being a temple for God to a tool for corruption.

It does not only corrupt human nature, but all of the earth.

Therefore it was said in the book of Revelation about the great harlot that she: *“corrupted the earth with her fornication”* (Rev 19:2). What else of sin?

- **Sin is impurity, fornication and disgrace.**
- **Sin is impurity:**

That is why the angels who fell were given the title of unclean spirits (Mark 6:7). The diseases which symbolised sin such as leprosy, were considered an impurity and also the impure animals.

We see the examples in the Holy Bible about the impurity of sin, the divine inspiration says through Ezekiel the prophet: *“When the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own ways and deeds; **to Me their way was like the uncleanness of a woman in her customary impurity**”* (Ezek 36:17), and on breaking the Sabbath He says. *“they greatly defiled My Sabbaths”* (Ezek 20:13). About the sins of the priests, He says in the book of Nehemiah: *“they have defiled the priesthood”* (Neh 13:29). With respect to murder, the Bible says: *“For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity”* (Is 59:3). About fornication it says: *“and you have polluted the land with your harlotries... therefore the showers have been withheld”* (Jer 3:2).

The description of sin as impurity does not only apply to the sins of fornication and murder, but also the sins of the mouth and tongue.

About the sins of the tongue, the Lord Jesus Himself says: *“Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man”* (Matt 15:11). **The Lord used**

the word defilement to represent sin generally. He said about the righteous: *“You have a few names...who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy”* (Rev 3:4). About the sinners He says: *“But when you entered you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination”* (Jer 2:7).

If you know all this my brother, that sin is defilement, then no doubt you would flee from it. You will feel in the state of sin that you are a ‘defiled person!’ You will feel that every sinful word which proceeds from your mouth, defiles you. For whatever comes out of the mouth is what defiles a man.

- **As fornication was the outstanding feature of defilement, then sin was regarded as fornication.**

The Bible says about the sins of the sons of Israel: *“Judah has fornicated”, “Israel has fornicated”* (Ezek 16). That is, all who are in these two kingdoms have sinned.

- **What else was said about sin ?**

It was said that it is disgrace: *“Sin is a reproach to any people”* (Prov 14:34). **It is also a sickness.** Isaiah the prophet said about this: *“They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel... The whole land is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment”* (Is 1:5-6).

Sin is also ignorance. Ignorance of God, faith, goodness and of whatever should be. The Lord said: *“The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider”* (Is 1:3).

What is sin also? Sin is also deficiency, a defect, delusion, blindness, darkness and forgetting God. It is darkness because it has departed from the light which is God. It is right what was said about sinners that they: *“loved darkness rather than light”* (John 3:19), it was said also: *“But the fool walks in darkness”* (Eccl 2:14). Two things will make us flee from sin, which are. the disgusting nature of sin and the frightful results of sin. - So what are the results of sin?



CHAPTER THREE

If you know the results of sin, you will flee from sin.

For the results of sin are fear and unrest:

- **Fear and Unrest**

Sin makes you lose your inner peace and fills the heart with fear and anxiety. The saint does not fear. David the prophet said: *“though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident”* (Ps 26). As for the sinner, he is continuously fearful, losing his peace: *“There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked”* (Is 48:22). He also said: *“the wicked are like the troubled sea”* (Is 57:20).

Fear started with the first sin, the sin of Adam and Eve.

We did not hear about Adam that he feared God before sin. On the contrary, when God used to come down to the Paradise, Adam and Eve greeted Him with joy, and enjoyed talking with Him. As for after the sin, we read that Adam hid because of fear from the face of God in the midst of the trees of the Paradise. When the Lord called him, Adam cried with fear saying: *“I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself”* (Gen 3:10).

Imagine that the beloved God, who everyone desires to see, becomes fearful to the sinner, who escapes from His vision!

God who is *“fairer than the sons of men”*, *“His mouth is most sweet, yes, he is altogether lovely”*, becomes fearful to the sinner! When the sinner sees Him, he fears, or escapes from Him and hides in order not to see Him. The soul which loves God says with the bride of the Song: *“I will rise now, I said, and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares, I will seek the one I love”*. If she finds Him, she says: *“I held him and would not let him go”* (Song 3:2-4). As for the sinful soul, it does not put in front of it other than the verse which says: *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb 10:31).

So God is fearful with regard to the wicked. As for the righteous, they are the friends of God, who rejoice with Him.

Saint Anthony the Great said to his disciples: *‘My sons, I do not fear God’*, they were amazed at this statement, and answered: *‘Our father, these are difficult words’*, he then said to them. *“This is because I love Him, and there is no fear in love, for love casts out fear”* (1 John 4:18).

Imagine with me, my brothers, if God has now come amidst us. How many of us do you think would rejoice at His coming, and embrace Him? And how many would be afraid and escape? Sinners fear meeting God, therefore they are afraid of death and tremble from it. They

fear the great hour of judgement in which they will be exposed in front of everyone.

In front of the enemies who become malicious towards them and in front of their friends who thought that they were pure and righteous. When this hour comes then: *“they shall say to the mountains, cover us, and to the hills, fall on us”* (Luke 23:30, Hos 10:8). These people will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them (Rev 9:6).

Truly, when Adam sinned he began to fear. A new frightful thing crept into him, which was not present before. It was fear, alarm and loss of peace. This fear which Adam feared from God, was the beginning of the psychological diseases which were inflicted on humanity as a result of sin, for it is with this fear that the soul began to be sick. The righteous person keeps his peace in quietness and joy. The sinner however, loses his inner and outer peace. **From the inside, his conscience revolts against him and the Holy Spirit rebukes him. From the outside he is afraid that his sin will be revealed, just as he fears from its results and punishments.** We have never seen a sinful person living continuously in peace of mind, no matter how asleep his conscience is. There is no doubt that this conscience will wake up after a while and will revolt against him and trouble him.

- **Torment of the Conscience**

An example of torment of the conscience is a story told about Pilate:

Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, therefore he said: *“And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him”* (Luke 23:14). While he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent to him, saying: *“Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him”*. In spite of this, he passed the sentence of death, against his conscience. But to satisfy his conscience falsely, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying: *“I am innocent of the blood of this just person”* (Matt 27:24).

The story says that when Pilate was alone in his house, he found his hands stained with blood, so he washed them a second time, but the blood did not leave them. So he washed them for the third time, while saying: *“I am innocent of the blood of this just person”*. He still however, found the blood staining his hands. He continued to wash his hands repeatedly, crying with fear: *“I am innocent of the blood of this just person”*. It is a story that demonstrates to us the degree of fear and loss of peace which is inflicted on the sinner as a result of his sin.

Sin is tiresome. The person does not feel its danger until he falls in it, or perhaps a while after, when his conscience wakes up by itself or by an outside influence.

As an example of the torment due to the late awakening of the conscience, is the story of Judas Iscariot.

Judas did not feel the enormity of his betrayal at first. He was busy with consultations, meetings and agreements. He was busy with money and the method of receiving it, and with the time and place of handing over his master. He did not feel the Lord's warning to him. Finally when the Lord Jesus was judged and sentenced to be crucified, Judas' conscience awakened and kept tormenting him and so he found himself in front of a repugnant and fearful sin. He then began to remember the words of the Lord to the disciples: *“You are clean, but not all of you”, “one of you will betray Me” ...“The son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed”* (Luke 22:22). Judas also remembered the saying of the Lord to him: *“What you do, do quickly”*. Also, the last word of Jesus to him. *“Friend, why have you come?”* (Matt 26:50), *“Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”* (Luke 22:48).

Judas could not bear all of this and his conscience troubled him greatly, so he got up and went to the chief priests. and gave back the thirty pieces of silver saying: *“I have sinned by betraying innocent blood”*. And they said: *“what is that to us? You see to it!”* Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed (Matt 27:3).

Through all this, Judas' conscience continued to trouble him without easing. The vision of his sin was nailed with all of its

ugliness, in front of his eyes and finally he: “*went and hanged himself*” (Matt 27:5).

My brethren how repugnant sin is and how great is its fright, when the conscience wakes up the person may not feel its bitterness if he is still in a whirlpool of sins or preoccupations. However, as soon as he becomes aware or returns to himself, he becomes troubled and tortured by the vision of his sin.

That is why some criminals give themselves in, to justice, confessing their crimes.

For they cannot bear the rebuke of the conscience or the inner unrest which troubles them, and the loss of peace which results from their feelings of sin. The Bible is correct in saying: “*There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked*” (Is 48:22).

The psychologists have a principle which says that the criminal keeps hovering around the place of the crime during the first couple of days after its occurrence because he is uneasy and afraid of its discovery. He says to himself: ‘I wonder if I left any traces or not, and has the police found out or not?’ Therefore, when the detectives and police discover a crime, they surround the area secretly in order to discover all the suspects who revolve around the area of the crime.

An example of fear, unrest and loss of peace, is what occurred to Cain after his sin:

He lived as a lost man and a fugitive on earth, frightened that someone might kill him, just as he killed his brother. He felt that

God had banished him from the face of the earth and from in front of His face (Gen 4:13-14). With this unrest, Cain spent his life in fear. He did not gain anything from his sin, he was continuously reminded of his sin and of the voice of his brother crying from the ground. This is how psychological diseases are inflicted on the sinner as a result of unrest, fear, confusion, disturbance and the continual expectancy of evil.

In contrast to this, the righteous live in joy and peace.

They are continuously joyful, not disturbed or uneasy or confused from within. The Holy Bible says: “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace*” (Gal 5:22). Therefore, the person who does not live in peace, does not have the fruits of the Holy Spirit in him. It was said about Saint Anthony, in the story written about him by Saint Athanasious, the apostolic: ‘*anybody with a disturbed soul or a confused heart, after seeing the face of Saint Anthony, was filled with peace*’. Just the vision of the face of Saint Anthony, in his quietness and joy, filled the heart with peace. The sinners are not like this, for they are in grief and torment, especially when their conscience wakes up and inflames them with its whips. We have taken an idea about the torment of the wicked, such as Judas and Cain.

We would like to take an example of the torment of the conscience of the saints, of which the best example is the story of David the prophet:

During sin, David the prophet was elated by fleshly pleasure. So he did not feel the danger of what he was doing, to the extent that he followed the sin of fornication by the sin of murder,

without his conscience moving or being embarrassed. But when Nathan faced him with his sin and David started to feel the danger of what he had done, then his conscience woke up and started to trouble him, even though the prophet said to him: *“the Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die”* (2 Sam 12:13).

When his conscience was awakened, David wet his couch with his tears. His tears became his food, day and night, and his soul clung to the dust, he lived in humiliation from himself and cried out to the Lord saying: *“for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled”* (Ps 6). He accepted humiliation for the sake of the salvation of his soul and he said about this: *“It is good for me that I have been humiliated, that I may learn Your statutes”* (Ps 118). Truly when a person's sins are revealed to him, his tormented soul makes him feel as if he is in hell.

Do you think that there will only be: “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in the lake of fire, burning with brimstone? No, but there will be on earth also, when man will be tormented in his heart from the horror of his sin.

This happens at the times of repentance, when the repentant feels the extent of the ugliness of his sin and weeps for it with tears and burning of heart and he blames himself saying: *‘where were my mind and thoughts when I did this?’* His conscience keeps reprehending him, and his teeth shudder from the pain, regret, shame, disgrace and the feeling of contempt of self.

Actually it is good for the sinner to suffer: “weeping and gnashing of teeth” here on earth, rather than to suffer it there in eternity without hope.

We saw some of the results of sin which were fear, loss of peace, bitterness and torment of the conscience. There are also other results of sin.

- **Other results of sin.**

Sin changes a person completely. Some of its results are:

- 1. Loss of the Divine image.**

Man was created on God's image and likeness. In the state of sin, man does not preserve this divine image, but loses it. He loses it from within and from the outside also, where sin leaves its impression on his face and features, on his voice, gestures, appearance and attire. Even his words, his manner and language express the sin which is concealed in him, just as was said: *“Your speech shows it” (Mark 14:70)*. Therefore, our teacher Saint John the beloved said: *“In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest” (1 John 3:10)*. So you O brother, whom sin changed your appearance and manners, and you, O sister, whom sin changed your face, attire and voice, return to God with repentance. Repentance will

change you and will return to you the divine image which you lost. Just as man loses his divine image by sin, likewise he loses his honour.

2. Loss of Honour

Man before sin was a holy breath which proceeded from the mouth of God, he was God's image and likeness. After sin, however, the Lord says to him: “*you are dust and to dust you will return*”. He returned to dust, just as he was, not worthy of being called the image of God. He desired to have the divine glory instead he lost the human glory that was given to him.

For, just as animals, he desired to eat, therefore the Lord gave him herbs to eat (Gen 3:18), which previously was the food of animals (Gen 1:30).

He lost his awe over animals and he became afraid of them and they were given the capability to eat him, after, he was the master of them all (Gen 1:26). Even the serpent had the capability to bruise his heel (Gen 3:15).

Even the earth rebelled against him, and brought forth for him thorns and thistles (Gen 3:18). The harshest phrase about the rebellion of the earth against man appears in the saying of God: “*When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you*” (Gen 4:12).

The sinful person is a person who has lost his honour and respect. He is a toy in the hands of the devils and the wicked, he has no dignity. He has lost the respect of himself to himself.

Look at the prodigal son and how he desired the pods which the swine ate and how he wished to be like one of the hired servants in his father's house! Also look at Nebuchadnezzar the king and how they stripped him of his majesty and he became like an animal (Dan 5:2-21). Also Samson the great and how by sin he lost his power and honour, and the people of Palestine despised and ridiculed him (Judg 16:19-25).

Do not let the devil deceive you my brother, for he pictures the sin to you as enjoyment and desires, and promises you of honours and enticements. Whereas when you taste sin, you find at the end that it is bitter, leading you to humiliation and makes you lose everything. You inherit depression and are lead to despair, and you hide your face in shame. As you lose your divine image and honour, you also lose your simplicity and purity.

3. Loss of simplicity and Purity.

The righteous person is a pure person, he knows nothing but good. When he begins to sin, he begins to know evil also and loses his simplicity. He looks at things without his original look. His knowledge of new things, deteriorates his condition and he wishes this knowledge to disappear from his thoughts. Adam and Eve were naked in the garden before sin, and were not embarrassed. They were living in simplicity not knowing

uncleanliness. However with sin, they lost their simplicity and had to make clothing for themselves.

You also O brother, what has sin done to you? Has it made you lose your simplicity of thought and your purity of heart? Has it made you change your look towards people, your look towards yourself and your look towards things. This change is horrifying and I wish that you do not continue in it, so that you do not lose what remains in you of simplicity and purity. I wish that you would return to God with repentance, so that your original purity would return to you, and the Lord grants you a new white robe.



CHAPTER FOUR

In the previous chapter you found out about the results of sin and how it can shatter the inner soul of mankind and make it lose its divine image, simplicity and purity. It will make the soul inherit fear, unrest, torment, shame and carelessness. It remains then for you to have an idea about the punishments.

If you know the punishment for sin, you would be afraid of sin.

We must know very well that just as God is merciful and there is no limit to His mercy, that He is also just and there is no limit to His justice, and just as He is compassionate and forgives, He is also Holy and hates sin.

There are some, who unfortunately, exploit God's mercy with a malicious exploitation which leads them to carelessness and sin, relying with a fake reliance on God's mercy.

This type of person, sins as he likes, and if you rebuke him, he will say to you: *‘God is merciful, compassionate and kind, He will not deal with us according to our sins, and will not punish us according to our offences. He who forgave the adulteress will forgive me also. He who forgave Augustine, will forgive and pardon me. He who accepted Mary the Egyptian and Moses the black, will accept me also with them’.*

He says this forgetting the amazing deep repentance which these saints went through, by which God accepted them. This repentance which was a turning point in their lives and a complete change to their biography. They never returned to sin any more. Everyday they increased in grace and progressed in the love of God. God's mercy to them was not an opportunity for carelessness or continuity in sin, God forbid.

We need to understand God's justice and mercy with a correct understanding which leads us to repentance.

At this opportunity it is nice to mention what Saint Paul said about: *“The goodness and severity of God”*.

- **God's goodness and severity**

The great apostle taught us saying:

“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but towards you, goodness if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Rom 11:22).

It is not right then to rely on God's goodness and to forget His severity. It is not right also to rely on God's mercy and to forget His justice.

- **God's Mercy is just:**

God's attributes are not separated from each other, so that one stands out separate from the other. Sometimes we mention them separately for the purpose of the details and not for separation, so that people will understand them, but they are divinely united.

God is just in His mercy, and merciful in His justice. His justice is merciful and His mercy is just. His justice is filled with mercy and His mercy is filled with justice. We cannot separate His mercy from His justice.

This unity between mercy and justice is the foundation of the act of redemption. If God's mercy stood by itself, without justice, His mercy would have been enough to say to man: '*your sins are forgiven*', and the matter would have been finished without crucifixion. Whereas, with mercy He forgave sin and with justice He paid the price of sin.

Since God is just, He was incarnated and died for us, to pay the price of our sin.

Justice must fulfil its rights, even if the matter reaches the stage that God takes on flesh and becomes like a man in appearance and takes the appearance of a slave and is insulted, crucified,

tortured and dies. If God's justice is like this, where can we escape from His justice?

It is possible to understand God's treatment towards you sometimes like looking through the mirror:

When you look into the mirror at times, you see a smiling happy face and when you look at it at other times, you see a sad, angry face, although it is the same mirror. So then, God shows you your condition, just like a mirror does. When you look at the face of God, you see your inner condition. If you have repented, you will see God in His goodness. But, if you are reckless, you will see God in His severity.

Both God's goodness and severity are represented in the angel who appeared to the two Marys at the tomb of Jesus.

This angel caused both fear and joy. He frightened the guards: *“who shook for fear of him, and became like dead men”* (Matt 28:4). This same angel was the cause of joy to the two women and an announcer of good news. In this way, God is fearful to some and joyful to others.

God's goodness and severity appear, generally, in the work of the angels:

We all know about the angels of mercy. We must not forget that they are also angels of punishment and annihilation. We know how an angel awoke Elijah the prophet when he was hungry and gave him food to eat. Elijah walked: *“in the strength of that food, forty days and forty nights”* (1 Kin 19:8). When

Hagar's son was on the verge of dying from thirst, God sent her an angel. He opened her eyes to see a well of water. Her son drank and lived (Gen 21:15-19). We know that an angel went down to the den and shut the lions' mouths so that they did not hurt Daniel (Dan 6:22). Also, an angel went to the prison and released Peter from it, after breaking the two chains from his hands (Acts 12:7-10).

We need more time to explain the work of the angels who surround the believers and rescue them from evil.

There are angels who bring good news and angels who are: *“ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (Heb 1:14)*. However, the merciful nature of the angels does not prohibit them to carry out striking, punishment and destruction.

We will now give examples of angels whom God sent to destroy and punish:

One example is the angel of destruction who struck every first-born of the Egyptians. They all died in one night *“from the first born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead” (Ex 12:29-30)*. Likewise, the angel raised his sword towards Jerusalem when David the prophet sinned and counted the people. On that day seventy thousand men had died (1 Chr 21:14). Other examples are the seven angels carrying trumpets, whose fearful strikes were mentioned in the book of Revelation (Rev 8:9). It is noteworthy that the first mention of angels in the

Holy Bible was frightening. It was when God evicted man from the garden of Eden and sent the Cherubim with a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life, so that man would not eat of it (Gen 3:24).

Goodness and severity have manifested themselves simultaneously in the two angels who were sent to Lot.

They rescued him and at the same time struck the people with blindness (Gen 19:10-11). They were also manifested concurrently in the story of Elisha the prophet with Naaman the Syrian. When Naaman was healed from his leprosy, Elisha made the leprosy of Naaman cling to Gehazi: *“and he went out from his presence leprous, as white as now”* (2 Kin 5:14-27).

This is how God is in His goodness and severity and how His angels and prophets are. We should then beware of God's severity because of our sins.

- **God's Fearful Punishments.**

God's unlimited mercy did not prevent the passing of fearful punishments by divine justice on humanity because of man's sin. By sin, man defied God's holiness, resisted His righteousness and broke His commandments. Man deserved to be punished. Some examples are:

- **The great flood in which God destroyed man from the face of the earth (Gen 6:7).**
- **The burning of Sodom and Gomorrah.**

The Lord rained brimstone and fire on them. *“So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities and what grew on the ground. But his wife looked back behind him and she became a pillar of salt” (Gen 19:24-26).* When we contemplate both incidents of the flood and the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah, we ask ourselves: *‘Are our sins less sinful than Sodom? Are they less sinful than the sins of the people at the time of the flood? Are they less sinful than the sins of Lot’s wife who became a pillar of salt?’*

- **Has God, who placed these punishments of old, changed in the New Testament?** Isn’t He: *“the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb 13:8), “with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning”?* (James 1:17).

• **Indeed, He is the One who made Ananias and Sapphira of the New Testament fall dead,** because they lied in their conversation with Peter the apostle. How many people lie in their conversation with the priests, bishops or even the Patriarchs?

- He is the One who permitted Paul, His servant, to say about the sinner of Corinth: ***“I have already judged... deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor 5:5).***

Some of the most terrifying things mentioned in the Holy Bible about God's punishment to sinners are: **the curses which God pours on whoever defies His commandments.**

A list of these curses is mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy, in which the Lord says: *“If you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes... all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowls. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. The Lord will shed on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me... And your heavens which are over your heads, shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron... The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them; and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth... you shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continuously, and no one shall save you... Also every sickness and every plague, which is not written in the book of this law, will the Lord bring upon you until you are destroyed... Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say, Oh, that it were evening! And at evening you shall say, Oh, that it were morning! Because of the fear which terrifies your heart and because of the sight which your eyes see...”* (Deut 28:15-68).

Truly fearful and terrifying are these curses. Because of the terrifying hardships which they contain, I refrain from recording all of them.

They give us an idea of God's holiness which does not tolerate sin whatsoever, we also learn from them about God's justice which punishes sin according to what it contains from repugnance, I wish that we read all of this and learn and repent, leaving behind sin which caused all of these curses.

- **Truly the curse entered the world as a result of sin.**

When Adam sinned, God said to him: “*cursed is the ground for your sake*” (Gen 3:17). The matter then developed and the curse advanced to man himself, and the Lord said to Cain: “*So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand*” (Gen 4:11), “*you are cursed*”, this is exactly what was said to the serpent beforehand: “*you are cursed*” (Gen 3:14). In this way the sinful person resembled the devil: ‘*the old serpent*’, and it is right to call sinners: “*the children of the devil*” (1 John 3:10), or that they are a “*brood of vipers*” (Matt 3:7). The curse of the flood was the curse of destruction (Gen 8:21). So was the curse of the bondage which first fell on Canaan, when He said to him: “*cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants, he shall be to his brethren*” (Gen 9:25).

Also the curses of the law (Deut 28) included many punishments. Some of them were death, disease, plague, poverty, failure, injustice, unrest and defeat.

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus cursed the leafy fig tree that did not produce fruits (Mark 11:21), which refers to hypocrisy without piety. It was a symbol to everyone who walked in this path. Truly who can read all of this and not fear? Who can bear God to curse him? Who can bear to lose the blessing which he originally received from God? We should then repent my brothers, because all of these matters have left an example for us. They were written for us, on whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Cor 10:11), to warn us.

We need to wash our sins with the tears of repentance, before the fearful day of judgement catches up with us, when weeping and repentance have no use.

- **The terrifying torture of eternity**

Just thinking about the day of death and the day of judgement, sends a shiver to the sinful heart, leading it to humility and repentance.

It is a terrifying fearful day:

Isaiah the prophet describes it, saying: *“Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it” (Is 13:9). “In that day, a man will cast away his idols...to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the crags of the rugged rocks, from the terror of the Lord. And the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily” (Is 2:20-21).*

About this day Malachi the prophet says: *“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the Lord of Hosts, that it will leave them neither root nor branch”* (Mal 4:1).

Truly the day of the Lord's coming is terrifying. The psalmist in the psalm said about it: *“Clouds and darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about. His lightnings light the world; **the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth**”* (Ps 97).

This terrifying day was explained by Saint John the apostle in his revelation saying: *“I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, **hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?**”* (Rev 6:12-17).

This is the condition of the sinners and the wicked on this day. As for the righteous they will ascend to the Lord upon the clouds, and they will be with the Lord at all times, in His glory. On the other hand, the righteous are in: *“joy inexpressible and full of glory”* (1 Pet 1:8), the hymns of the saints are raised having harps of God (Rev 15:2-3), and these people enjoy the friendship of God and His saints in the heavenly Jerusalem. While these people are in paradise, the wicked are in unbearable torment, not knowing the taste of tranquillity forever.

The torment of the wicked and their pain:

The Lord says about them: *“and these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life”* (Matt 25:46). He also says: *“The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth, then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Matt 13:41-43).

How harsh this eternal torment is, in wailing and gnashing of teeth, in the outer darkness and in the inflamed fire, the pain is augmented when comparison is made between the condition of the wicked and the condition of the righteous.

Paul describes their condition saying: *“These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power when He comes in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe”* (2 Thess 1:9-10). He also says. *“Indignation and*

wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honour, and peace to everyone who works what is good..." (Rom 2:8-10).

There is no doubt that we fear and tremble when we hear this apostle and saint saying: ***"For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgement, and fiery indignation which, will devour the adversaries"*** (Heb 10:26-27). The apostle justifies this saying: "Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord', and again, the Lord will judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31).

Saint John the beloved, famous for his detailed conversation about God's love, talks in his revelation about: ***"the lake which burns with fire and brimstone"*** (Rev 21 . 8:). He describes the punishment of the sinner saying: ***"he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels"*** and in the presence of the Lamb. "And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest

day or night” (Rev 14:10-11;). “And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev 20:10).

He explains as an example of this torment, the punishment of Babylon the fornicator saying: ***“In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow... And the kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, alas, alas”*** (Rev 18:7-10). How fearful this judgement is. For this sake, the holy church has set down to be said in the prayer of ‘al-settar’ (veil): ‘Oh Lord, how fearful Your judgement is, the people assemble the angels stand. The scrolls are opened, the deeds are revealed, and the thoughts are examined. What type of judgement will my judgement be, I who is subdued in sin. Who will extinguish the inflamed fire for me, unless You have mercy upon me, Oh lover of mankind’. God will not have mercy on the sinner, unless he repents.

Truly, it will be absolutely shameful when all of the deeds and thoughts will be revealed in front of all the people and the angels. Who will be able to bear this disclosure at that hour?

It is also terrifying and shameful for the sinners to be separated from the righteous. Here on earth, all are assembled together, the most defiled fornicator with the most holy and righteous person. But there, this is not so. God begins separating the tares from the wheat, the goats from the sheep, and the left group from the right group. He prohibits forever the sinners from the companionship of the saints, the angels and from God. Imagine

the righteous person when he passes away, the angels will carry him just as they carried Lazarus (Luke 16:22). They will take him into the bosom of the saints, and introduce him to everyone.

This is Noah, this is Abel, this is Seth, and the rest of the fathers the patriarchs. These are Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, and the rest of the prophets. Here are Saint Anthony, Saint Macarius, Saint Pachomius and the rest of the fathers the monks. Come let us show you Saint Paula, Saint Nofr, Saint Misael and the rest of the fathers who are spirit- born. Look, here is Saint Athanasious, Saint Cyril, Saint Dioscorus and the rest of the heroes of the faith. Here is Saint George, Saint Mina, Saint Demiana and the rest of the martyrs. They are the angels, the Powers, the Dominions, the Principalities, the Cherubim, the Seraphim and all the uncountable gatherings which are for the heavenly powers. It is an amazing acquaintance festival, in which the righteous spirit becomes acquainted with the synod of angels and saints.

As for the sinners, they will be standing from afar, in the outer darkness, separated from the righteous by a great gulf. They are prohibited from the synod of the righteous, and from enjoying their company.

There is no doubt that the words which explain the condition of the rich man in Hades are very moving. The Bible says:

*“And being in torments in Hades,
he lifted up his eyes and saw
Abraham afar off, and Lazarus
in his bosom. Then he cried and
said, Father Abraham, have*

*mercy on me, and send Lazarus
that he may dip the tip of his
finger in water and cool my
tongue; for I am tormented in
this flame". (Luke 16:23-24)*

How amazing! Isn't this poor Lazarus whom the dogs used to lick his sores and whom this rich man used to look at in disgust. Now though, the situation has changed and the great rich man desires Lazarus to come to him, but he is denied his desire. Sin is deprivation from the saints and moreover it is deprivation from God. Now, besides all the above-mentioned eternal punishment, there are other punishments for sin on earth.

- **Two punishments for sin: Earthly and Eternal.**

Besides all the aforementioned eternal punishment, there are other punishments for sin on earth. Man can escape eternal punishment by repentance. In contrast, man has to suffer the earthly punishment which God imposes on him even if he repents.

Our first parents as an example:

When Adam and Eve sinned, their punishment was death. Jesus saved them from it by His death. But the matter does not stop there, God placed on them another earthly punishment.

What was Adam and Eve's earthly punishment?

The eviction from the Garden was a joint punishment to both of them. What else? The Lord said to Adam: *“Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it, all the days of your life... In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread...”* (Gen 3:17-19). The punishment of toil and the sweat of the face remained clinging to all of the sons of Adam till this day in spite of the great work of redemption on the cross. The Lord said to Eve: *“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children”*. The Lord Jesus came and forgave the woman her sin. Despite this, she still conceives and gives birth in toil and pain. This earthly punishment, which fell on Adam and Eve, is a clear example of what man suffers on earth as a result of his sin, even if God forgives him for it in heaven.

The example of the adulteress woman:

It is known that the Lord Jesus forgave many harlots, for example, the adulteress who washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. Another example is the woman who was caught in this act. The Lord rescued her from being stoned saying to the people complaining about her: *“He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first”* (John 8:7).

With this forgiveness, the Lord punished the adulteress by divorcing her and depriving her of a second marriage (Matt 5:32, Matt 19:9, Luke 16:18).

Many people ask why an adulteress is not permitted to re-marry, since the Lord has forgiven her? The answer is simple. It is possible for the Lord to forgive the adulteress if she repents, and in this way she does not lose her eternity. But she has to suffer earthly punishment as well. Because of her disloyalty to her husband, the Lord cannot trust her with another marriage. She becomes a lesson for others.

There are different types of earthly punishments.

It can be a natural result of sin, a plague from God, or a punishment from society, from civil law or from the church.

The earthly punishment as a natural result of sin.

There are many sins which carry their punishment in themselves. The adulterer for example is afflicted with weakness or anaemia or some other venereal diseases. Whoever takes drugs for example, is afflicted by losing his personality and his temper. Whoever smokes is afflicted with cancer or lung disease or high blood pressure or other diseases. The student who neglects his studies has a punishment on earth which is failure. Whoever gambles is afflicted with poverty and need. The mother who does not upbringing her son properly, will suffer doubly on earth as a result of the bad behaviour of this son.

All of these punishments on earth are different to the eternal punishment. The eternal punishment is eliminated by repentance and the earthly punishment remains intact.

So the mother who does not upbringing her son properly, repents and her sins are forgiven, but her son remains as a bitterness of heart to her on earth. The student who does not study and fails can repent and the Lord will forgive him for his negligence, but this does not bring back a year of his life lost on earth in vain. The person for whom sin causes disease, can be forgiven his sin by repentance, but the disease remains with him as an earthly punishment as a natural result of sin.

. The earthly punishment as a plague from God.

For example, the plague of leprosy which afflicted Gehazi, Elisha's servant. This was his punishment for his love of money and his lying to his teacher (2 Kin 5:27). The plague of leprosy, which afflicted Miriam the sister of Aaron and Moses, was her punishment for what she said against Moses (Num 12:10). The plague of boils which afflicted Egypt, was a punishment for the harshness of Pharaoh's heart (Ex 9:10). The plague which afflicted the sons of Israel, was a punishment for king David's sin. In one day, seventy thousand died (2 Sam 24:15). About this plague the Lord says in His condemnation of the sinner: *"The Lord will make the plague cling to you until He has consumed you from the land which you are going to possess. The Lord will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflammation, with severe burning fever, with the sword, with scorching, and with mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish... The Lord will strike you with the boils of Egypt, with*

tumours, with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed” (Deut 28:21,22,27).

There are other plagues from God other than disease. Failure, for example...can be a natural result of man's carelessness and shortcomings, or a plague from God to remove the blessings (Deut 28). Other examples also of these plagues are defeat, bondage and even death. Sin is death and the punishment of sin is death. An example of this, is what happened to Eli the priest when he did not instruct his children (1 Sam 4:18). Meditate on your life my brother. Look to all that you have done and failed in, in case there is a sin which is the cause of all the plagues which have inflicted you.

. Punishments for sin from the society, the civil law and the church.

There are punishments for sin which inflict man on earth that are not placed by God directly. The sinful person receives from society disgrace, shame and dishonour. This can develop into contempt or rejection and isolation of the person from this society. There are earthly punishments which proceed from the civil law, such as imprisonment, hard labour, execution or exile, which are passed by judges on criminals. Punishment can be dismissal from work or monetary penalties...etc. All punishment may be single or multiple.

There are also many punishments from the church, these are listed in the books of church canons. Examples are the prohibition from Holy Communion for a certain period, or the prohibition from entering the church, or suspension from priesthood or divestment, or other punishments which we will

not mention in detail now. I say however, that when the church was severe and strict in its punishments, the congregation of believers were more holy, watchful, precise and feared God.

Ask yourself, my brother: have you committed a sin which imposes on you a church judgement which has not been placed on you? Maybe you have fled from such a judgement and are not worthy to enter the church, according to the canons. The earthly punishment is an order which God permitted to be placed even on His beloved saints who struggled for His sake and performed miracles in His name.

Punishments for God's beloved saints.

1. The example of David the prophet.

David the prophet committed adultery and murder. He then confessed his sins to Nathan saying: *“I have sinned against the Lord”* and he heard the divine pardon through Nathan's words to him: *“The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die”* (2 Sam 12:13). **In this way the Lord removed from David the eternal punishment. The earthly punishment however, remained. How did this occur?**

David repented with an amazingly deep repentance, and his tears became his bread night and day until he said: *“All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears”* (Ps 6). He contrited himself in the dust and humbled himself in front of God. Nevertheless, the judgment of the Lord keeps pursuing him: *“Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your*

house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord: Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun” (2 Sam 12:10-11). All this came true. Fornication did not leave his house being exemplified by the sins of his sons Amnon and Absalom. The sword did not leave his house because Absalom stood against him. David left Jerusalem barefooted, crying, disturbed and fearful of his son. He spent periods of humiliation, and toil on earth as a result of his sin.

Even when David wanted to build a house for the Lord, and prepared everything, stones and steel: *“and bronze in abundance beyond measure, and cedar trees in abundance”* the Lord did not forget the blood that David shed. The word of the Lord came to him saying: *“you have shed much blood...you shall not build a house for My name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight” (1 Chr 22:3-8).*

Therefore the Lord prohibited him from building the temple and the earthly punishment remained inspite of the forgiveness in heaven.

The matter was repeated later when David sinned and counted the people and the Lord was angered against him. David regretted it, his heart stirred him and he realised his sin and repented from it and confessed it whilst crying out to the Lord: *“I have sinned greatly in what I have done, but now, I pray, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly” (2 Sam 24:10).*

Did the Lord accept this repentance from him and this confession and prayer? Yes, He accepted his repentance and forgave him his sin and deleted the eternal punishment. However, the earthly punishment remained. **Therefore, the Lord proceeded in His punishment to His servant and offered him three harsh plagues which carry within them annihilation and destruction. They were famine, epidemic and the sword of the enemies.**

David said submissively: *“I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man”*. The Lord, however, in spite of this humiliation, did not want to pardon him. He sent an angel of destruction who raised his sword on Jerusalem and killed seventy thousand men, until David cried out to the Lord with unbearable pain: *“Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house”* (2 Sam 24:11-17).

What is this Lord that you have done with your servant David? Isn't he the one whom you said about: *“I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart”* (Acts 13:22) ? Why don't you have pity and forgive? He says: *‘Yes, I will forgive in heaven, but on earth he will receive his punishment’*. How frightening! Even with David O Lord?

Didn't David love You, when he said to You: *“Oh how I love your name O Lord! It is my meditation all day”* (Ps 118)? He awoke at midnight to thank You for Your righteous judgements, and used to say: *“My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word”* (Ps 118)?

and “Oh God, You are my God; Early will I seek you; My soul thirsts for You.. My soul follows close behind You” (Ps 62). David is a man of praise and prayer, a man of the flute, lyre and the ten strings. Why do You do this to David?

If this is the case with David the beloved prophet, then what can we say about ourselves? We do not have the favour that he has, nor his holiness or repentance?

We need then to be alert and awake to ourselves, because our Lord is just and will judge everyone according to one's deeds, no matter what one's spiritual position is with God Himself.

2. The example of Moses the prophet.

This is even a harsher example in its meaning than David's. Who can describe the love which was between God and His servant Moses? Moses is the beloved of God and His speaker. He is the man of wonders and miracles, who split the Red Sea, who struck the rock and it brought forth water. Through his prayers the Lord changed the bitter waters to sweet waters, and the manna and quail descended. His raised hands were mightier than the army of Joshua. Moses whom the Lord himself defended when Miriam and Aaron spoke against by striking Miriam with leprosy saying Miriam and Aaron: *“If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision, and I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?”* (Num 12:5-8).

Moses sinned when he struck the rock twice saying to the stubborn, rebellious people: *“Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?”* the result was that God ordered him not to enter the promised land. (Num 20:7-12).

What is this Lord that you do? Do you forget this long acquaintance for the sake of one sin which happened during difficult circumstances?

God insists however that Moses does not enter the land. What is this that you say O Lord? As the saying goes (the cook of the poison, tastes it). You know how I laboured for the sake of these people for tens of years and endured their stubbornness with patience and I led them in the wilderness whilst they were rebellious and unyielding. I am Moses Your servant, Your beloved friend to whom you spoke face to face. All of this was disregarded for the Lord insisted on punishing him. Moses entreated the Lord: I have sinned, O Lord pardon, O Lord forgive, O Lord forget this sin: *“I pray, let me cross over and see the good land”*. God is consistent in His principle: ***‘I forgive in My kingdom’***. **As for here, the punishment will be enforced, even on Moses. When the begging of Moses the prophet increased, God was angered and said to him: “Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter” (Deut 3:26). Finally after many requests, beseechings and implorations, He permitted him to see the land from afar, from the mountain, but not to enter into it. God in His justice did not show gratitude to His beloved Moses in spite of his favour with God. And you my brother, what is your favour? Is your position with God higher than that of Moses?**

If this is the case, won't you sympathize with yourself and repent, in case you are subjected to God's justice as a result of your sin, and no previous holy life will plead for you? If Moses and David did not escape punishment, would you?

3. The example of Jacob, the father of fathers.

God loved Jacob when he was in the womb, before he was born and before he did any good, the Lord said: *“Jacob, I have loved, but Esau I have hated”* (Rom 9:13). He gave him leadership over his older brother whilst he was in the womb, and He said to Rebecca: *“Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body... And the older shall serve the younger”* (Gen 25:23). Jacob sinned and listened to his mother's advice who loved him more than Esau. He deceived his father and took the blessing.

God then, did not leave him without punishment, in spite of His appearance to him face to face (Gen 32:30) and in spite of the promises, the blessing and the revelation God bestowed upon him.

God appeared to him on the ladder which was connected between heaven and earth and said to him: *“Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth...and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go”* (Gen 28:14-15).

Despite all of this, as Jacob deceived his father, the Lord permitted his children to deceive him also. They sold Joseph, dipped his tunic in the blood of the goat which they had killed and they informed their father that a wild beast had devoured

Joseph. Jacob tore his clothes and mourned for his son many days (Gen 37:31-34). Also his uncle Laban deceived him, and made him marry Leah instead of Rachel whom he loved in his heart and laboured many years for her sake. His uncle also deceived him in his wage and changed it many times.

The hardships continued to pursue Jacob. In his speech with Pharaoh, Jacob summarized his life in a concise phrase in which he said: “*the days of the years of my pilgrimage are...few and evil*” (Gen 47:9). Truly his sin was forgiven and God revealed His acceptance by the blessing, the revelation and the promises. However, in spite of His love for him, He did not delete the earthly punishment.

Are you convinced, my blessed brother, of the danger of the punishment for sin. I need more time if I am to give you many other examples from the Holy Bible, but I will leave this matter for your personal meditations. I will now give you an example or two from the history of the fathers.

4. The example of Saint Moses the black.

In the beginning of his life, he was a merciless murderer. He then repented and went to the monastery and became a monk. He progressed in the life of grace until he became an example of meekness, kindness and the love of the brethren. He used to sometimes pass by the monks' cells and carry their jars secretly to the well and fill them with water for them. God then gave him the gifts of visions and performing miracles. He advanced in holiness and became a spiritual adviser for many. He was then ordained as a priest. He became one of the few pillars of the desert.

Inspite of all this repentance, holiness and gifts, did God forget his previous sins which deserve punishment?

We hear that when the barbarians attacked the monastery, the monks escaped and called Saint Moses to escape with them. He said to them: *‘I know my children that the barbarians will kill me, because I killed many people in my youth’*. The Bible says. *“all who take the sword will perish by the sword”* (Matt 26:52). This actually happened, the barbarians attacked Saint Moses and killed him and the prophecy was fulfilled. People question why such a great saint needed to die this horrific death even after he has repented of his sins which he committed in ignorance when he was young? However, this is God's way.

5. The example of Saint Beeman.

I read a story in one of the precious manuscripts in the monastery about a saint called Saint Beeman. He was very ascetical; he used to live the life of poverty and want, and his cell lacked any coverings to protect him from the cold at night. This saint was visited by a youth who spent the night in a nearby cell. When he woke up in the morning, Saint Beeman asked him how he spent the night, the youth answered: *‘I was weary from the intensity of the cold due to the lack of coverings’*. The saint then said in embarrassment: *‘As for me, I slept in warmth’*. The youth then asked him how was this, he answered: *‘A lion came at night and slept next to me, and warmed me by his body’*.

The youth was astonished at what had happened to the saint and how a lion could lie next to him and not devour him. The

saint then said: *‘I know my son that the beasts must devour me one day. This is because a youth came to me one night and I did not open to him. He was afraid and the beasts devoured him according to what I was told’*. What Saint Beeman expected, actually happened. These are examples of the earthly punishment. There are many such examples for whoever reads the Bible and studies the stories of history which were written for our learning.

. Because of all this, it is not right for us to understand God's extensive mercy separate from His justice, in case we hide behind God's mercy, compassion and affection to insult, neglect and commit sin without realizing its danger. While we believe in God's love for us, we might forget to fear Him.

Some people are shameless of sin and think that the matter is very easy. It only takes them a few minutes with their confession father, confessing and receiving the Absolution. Then nothing has ever happened, God's commandments were never broken and God's heart was never hurt.

Truly my brother, when the priest reads for you the prayer of Absolution, he adds your sin to the bitter cup which the Lord drank; You will be rescued from the eternal punishment by the blood of Christ if you have repented. The earthly punishment however has another account which you might have to pay. Be careful then, for the matter is not as easy as you think.

However, for your comfort, and so that you do not fall into despair and fear, I say to you **that God does not punish us for every sin with an earthly punishment**. This is because the

sins of man are innumerable: *“For we all stumble in many things”* (James 3:2). If God punished us for every sin with an earthly punishment, the punishments would continue without end and without restriction to match the number of sins. However, God abandons many, and in the midst of the hundreds of sins, He punishes for one of them, so that man will not be negligent and fall into carelessness. He will then be humble and benefit spiritually, just as in the case of David the prophet.

God in His mercy allows earthly punishment to call us to awakening and rise from our deep. He also uses it to lead us to contrition.

We feel then that we have sinned and that we have angered God, consequently, repent and return to Him. Therefore, we are rescued from the eternal punishment, this is not because the earthly punishment has taken its place, God forbid, but because it awakened us to repent and so we become worthy of forgiveness through the blood of Christ.

Our suffering here on earth is better than that in eternity and better than its shame. **The eternal judgements are fearful, but it is up to us to avoid them.** At this present moment, it is in our hands to decide our destiny. Saint Paul the apostle could say with all courage: *“Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day”* (2 Tim 4:8). Would you be able to say this same phrase as Saint Paul? I wish you could. Even when the crown of righteousness is given to you, watch out and: *“Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown”* (Rev 3:11). Live the life of repentance and awareness all your days.

Fear of punishment due to sin, motivates you to repent. Doubtlessly there are other incentives, as will be explained in the next chapter.



CHAPTER FIVE

Other incentives for repentance

So far, we dealt with incentives for repentance which emanate from within a person, from the feelings of his heart. There are other incentives for repentance, which are external; they come to man without him even asking. Among these incentives are the following:

The visits of grace:

God: *“desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Tim 2:4). Therefore, He strives for the salvation of all. His grace works in sinners so that they repent, will, and do (Phil 2:13). The visits of grace must come to every person.

Saul of Tarsus as an example:

He witnessed about himself that he was formerly a blasphemer, an insolent man and a persecutor of the church (1 Tim 1:13). Goads used to prick his conscience so that he may leave this harshness and this severity. However he used to kick these goads and not respond. Finally the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus and rebuked him by His saying: *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?... It is hard for you to kick against the goads”* (Acts 26:4 , 9:5). It is clear that Saul's guidance to repentance and to abandoning his persecution of the

church, did not start from within himself, but it came from the outside, from the visit of grace, through the encounter of the Lord with him. Jesus reconciled with him, restored him and called him to His service.

The same situation happened to Jonah the prophet.

He was escaping from the Lord. He disagreed about the calling of Nineveh, in case God's mercy would spare it, and his word would not come true^{*}. Indeed, when God accepted the repentance of Nineveh and this city was saved, Jonah sat on the east side of the city and: *“became angered even unto death” and said: “it is better for me to die than to live” (Jonah 4:1-3)*. Whilst he was in this state, the Lord's grace visited him to save him from his sinful grief. The Lord talked to him personally to be reconciled with him, to explain to him, to change his heart and to lead him to repentance. In this way, the grace through the voice of God was received by the prophet, as it was by Saul. However, grace does not stipulate for God, to talk to man.

However, God may send a person to rebuke the sinner so that he may repent.

For example God sent Nathan to rebuke David to repent. David did not feel what he was in, but progressed from one sin to another: from lust to fornication to murder. Grace visited him through Nathan telling him the danger of what he had done. Only then did he awake to himself, and said: *“I have sinned*

^{*} See Our Book. ‘Meditation on the book of Jonah the Prophet’ (Arabic).

against the Lord” (2 Sam 12:13). He then started an act of deep repentance, where he drenched his couch with his tears (Ps 6).

Therefore David's repentance did not start from his inner incentives, for he was in a continual slumber in sin. But repentance started through an outside incentive; a reprimand received externally. This initiated the feelings of repentance within him and the inner work began.

And you O dear reader, are you aware that perhaps the person who rebukes you about your sin is sent from God's grace to you, to lead to you to repentance?

If you refuse him and refuse his reprimand, as harsh as it is, then you are refusing God's grace which is working in you. As a result, you do not benefit from the visit of grace. The visit of grace is not restricted to superior methods such as hearing the voice of God or the voice of a prophet or to dreams and revelations. The matter can be much simpler than this.

Grace can visit you through sickness and this would be God's voice to you.

Saint Oghris had a disease which not only led him to repentance but to monasticism also. The disease of Saint Timothy the anchorite, and many other diseases mentioned in the Bible and in history, are all examples of visits of God's grace. This type of disease may not inflict you. It may inflict one of your very close loved ones. It pulls your knees down and makes you raise your hands up. You cry from within yourself to the Lord. This disease squeezes your heart well and makes you look up to the

Lord and be reconciled with Him for the sake of this person that you love.

The visit of grace could be in the form of a tribulation or a problem.

This also could be God's voice to you, He calls you to repent. Then the Lord may have compassion upon you and remove you from this tribulation^{*}. The Lord may allow that your enemies overpower you. You return to God and ask Him to rescue you. There are many such examples in the book of Judges.

It is important then that your spiritual senses be trained to recognize God's voice calling you to return to Him.

Therefore, correlate whatever you go through, whether it is disease, troubles or problems with your relationship with God. Make them all strengthen your fellowship with Him, deepen your prayers and increase your love to God.

The visit of grace may come to you during your reading of a spiritual book, or listening to a spiritual sermon or a touching hymn.

You will find a feeling within yourself which urges you to do something with regards to your relationship with God. You will

^{*} See our Book. 'The Spiritual Awakening' for actually it contains a section from the topic: 'the life of repentance and purity' and it has a chapter on (the incentives of the spiritual awakening) which is 28 pages, it should be added to our topic here, which we will leave for now.

find your heart in an unnatural state, moving within you, or the work of the Spirit moving within it. The Holy Spirit rebukes you for a sin, you feel eager to live with God and to reconcile with Him. It is a visit from grace. Care for it and do not miss it.

The visit of grace came to Felix the governor, when Saint Paul the apostle was talking about righteousness, self-control and the judgement to come, and Felix was frightened (Acts 24:25). Unfortunately he did not utilize the visit of grace to his advantage. He said to Paul: *“go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you”*.

But as for you, if grace visits you, do not put your heart aside and do not delay repentance.

Benefit from every spiritual feeling which grace initiates within you, especially when you feel a revolution within you against the life of sin, and when you feel spontaneous love towards God; feelings may not have been present within you previously. Grace visited Agrippa the king when Saint Paul was talking, and Agrippa said to Paul: *“You almost persuade me to become a Christian”* (Acts 26:28). Agrippa was content with the convincing without taking another step.

But as for you, if grace visits you, do not be content with just being convinced.

For what benefit do you receive in being convinced that your way is sinful, without practically overcoming and changing this way? Do not let the visit of grace work in your mind only, or even in your heart only, but it must work in your will also, so

that you will arise and act accordingly. The visits of grace reveal to us a beautiful and comforting truth, which is:

Even if you do not proceed towards the salvation of your soul, God who loves, proceeds with His grace to save you; He is the one who begins.

God only asks you to respond to His voice within you. He wants you to work with Him when He starts to work in you. He wishes that when you hear His voice you do not harden your heart. Hence the visit of grace will lead you to repentance, as it led many.

The visits of grace give every sinner a burst of hope.

He is assured that God loves him, and that He will care for him, and He will search for him just like the Good Shepherd searched for His lost sheep. If, as a result, there are no feelings in the heart of this sinner, to lead him to repentance, then God will plant in his heart these feelings by the work of His grace. He will prepare all of the means which make his heart move towards repentance.



PART THREE

Means of Repentance

(How to Repent)

Introduction:

For every person there is a way which leads him to repentance as grace sees is suitable to him or suitable to his circumstances.

There are general principles along the path to repentance which are suitable for everyone. The most important of these principles are given in the following steps:

1. Be with yourself, examine it and come out with a conclusion regarding your need for repentance.
2. Do not give excuses and justifications for yourself.
3. Do not delay repentance, start now and grab the chance.
4. Be concerned with your salvation, and discover what God asks of you.
5. Avoid the first step which leads to sin.
6. Do not harden your heart, when grace works in you.
7. Reassess your behaviour and keep away from sins.
8. Depart from the small foxes which destroy the vines and proceed with precision.
9. Be concerned with confession and Holy Communion.
10. Be concerned with the treatment of your weak points and especially your loved sins.
11. Be concerned with the love of God, to cast out the loved sin from you.
12. Wrestle with God and obtain power from Him to help you repent.

We will try to explain each of these points one by one, in order to meditate on their uses in the life of repentance.

1. Be with yourself.

It is your own will to repent, well, it is also God's will that you repent, that is because: *“He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4).*

Then the question occurs, to repent of what and how? Therefore, you need to be with yourself because you are either one of two:

I - You may not feel the wrong you are in. You do not know exactly your condition, and you do not realize your faults nor their depth and ugliness. The whirlpool of preoccupations and concerns captivate you continuously and you are drowning in them completely... you have no time to think of yourself and your spirituality, perhaps this matter never crossed your mind.

Therefore, you need to be with yourself to assess it and recognise your faults.

II - You know your faults at least the ones which stand out, but you have no time or chance to think how to refrain from these faults or how to treat them, before you think of treating a particular fault you find yourself committing it again or have fallen into a different one or maybe a worse one... so you are surrounded from every direction by your faults and sins and there seems no chance to get rid of them.

Again, you need to be with yourself and treat it. You resemble a sick person who either does not feel his sickness or he realizes his sickness but he needs precise examination and diagnosis, then the proper treatment.

A repentant needs to sit with the analysing apparatus to know what is happening within himself exactly, and the type and extent of the danger of his sickness. He needs also to know the treatment and how to use it properly to be cured. He should pursue this treatment with a wise practitioner who is an expert with these sicknesses and their treatment. The sick person will not gain all these unless he deprives himself from all his preoccupations no matter how important they are, and assess himself far away from people. Here, the importance of being with oneself spiritually is manifested.

What is the programme for this spiritual session and how does man participates in it?

Repentance and purification of spirit are the aim of this session. You have to discover your sins and weaknesses and blame yourself for them. You have to identify the reasons for your falling; either they are external and forcing you, or internal reasons, which you pursued to sin. They may be habits, or other people's influences. Try to avoid all of these and to refrain from them or treat them.

In this session you will reveal to God your weaknesses and sins.

You reveal your weaknesses to obtain power from him. You reveal with regret all your sins, then He will grant you Absolution and forgiveness. Reveal it when you pray with a contrite heart as David did previously: *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow”* (Ps 50). You will then come out of this session ready to confess these sins in front of the priest, so that he may read for you the prayer of Absolution, and advise you of what is required and allow you to partake of the Holy Communion.

In your spiritual session with yourself, you determine in your heart to abandon sin, with full acceptance and inner content.

Do not limit your session on searching in the past, regretting, blaming and rebuking yourself for its fall. Instead, in this session it is better that you **set up a wise plan for the future through your actual condition and experiences**. Determine honestly to proceed in it with great precision, with seriousness and obligation. With this determination for having a pure life in the future, do not get lost amongst many details but give priority to your clear weak points and to the mother virtues which contain within them the rest of the virtues, such as if you pursue God's love, then you have realized all of the spiritual life.

Show your holy determination to God so that He may bless it and strengthen you.

I advise that this does not become a vow which you dedicate as some people do, not to be a cause to descend disasters on yourself as some people say: *'May God punish me and do more if I ever do this again in the future'*.

These vows and woes contain within themselves reliance on your human ability, as if you had the personal power with which to implement what you promised God with, regardless of the obstacles and the wars which you meet. Many have promised God but they do not implement their promises, then they return in grief saying: *'how I promised God with a broken promise, I wish that from the fear of my weaknesses that I did not promise'*. The whole matter is not more than a holy desire through which you reveal your will and determination to God, so that He grants you power to implement it, for without Him you can do nothing (John 15:5). Thus, you convert your session with yourself to a prayer in which you ask for power to continue on the life of repentance and the purity of heart.

There is no doubt that the devil will resist with all his power, your sessions with yourself as he does not want you to escape from his control, that is by means of two matters:

A - He fears that when you assess yourself you will realise your bad spiritual condition and so you will think seriously about repentance, in this way you will slip from his hands.

B - He fears that if you assess yourself then you will also be with God and you gain spiritual power from Him, which the devil cannot resist and you conquer him with this divine power.

The devil has seen that many who assessed themselves have repented, for example the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24). When this young man was busy with his friends, he remained in his delusion. He did not have any time or any desire to be with himself. This story of his repentance was worthy to be recorded in the Bible from the mouth of the Lord Himself. When he sat with himself, examined his condition and thought of his life and the position he had reached, then he realised the bitter truth.

He realised in his session with himself, the extent of his bad condition which he had deteriorated to.

He said: *“How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger”*. However, is it not enough to just realise the bad condition? No, a solution must be found. He said: *“I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him ‘father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants’ ”* (Luke 15:17-19).

He realised his bad condition, knew the solution, reached a decision and implemented it straight away.

The Bible stated: *“And he arose and came to his father...”* (Luke 15:20). He began a new life in which he was reconciled with the father. If he had not been with himself in this session of

destiny he would not have reached a decision, or repentance, or contrition, or returning and reconciliation, and released from the grasp of the devil, where he put on the best robe.

Another example is Saint Augustine. He was not able to repent whilst he was in the whirlpool of preoccupations, the whirlpool of friends, sin and pleasures and also the whirlpool of philosophy and thought... but when he sat with himself, in the deep session, he was able to reach faith and repentance to return to God, escape forever from the grasp of the devil and become a blessing for many.

It is not just a normal session, but it is a session of destiny.

Believe me, the most important work of the fathers, advisers and preachers is the invitation of every sinful person to assess himself in the presence of God, and in the light of his commandments like Augustine or the prodigal son of whom was rightly said: *“he returned to himself” (Luke 15:17).*

Therefore, the devil endeavours to prevent man from being with himself in two ways:

A . He prevents you to be with yourself by presenting to you tens of preoccupations and hundreds of thoughts. He reminds you of matters which you think are very important and to which you should be devoted. All that will lead you back to your whirlpool, for example, on occasions such as birthdays or new year, the devil can create parties, in order to preoccupy you with them, so that you do not retreat to think about yourself and the goals of your life.

If you wish to be with yourself on the new calendar year of the Coptic year, the devil will prevent you by involving you with spiritual activities, meetings and talks. It is so easy in the feast of El Nayrouz (Coptic New Year) to talk about the martyrs, their suffering, tolerance, bravery and their glories, so that we forget ourselves. We talk about history and forget the reality in which we live. We talk about our great grandparents, but we do not think about how to resemble them. Doubtlessly, the stories of the martyrs are enjoyable but with them we should think about ourselves because they left for us an example to follow.

However, it is an attempt, even if it is with spiritual manner, to prevent man from sitting with himself. If you insist on sitting with yourself and do the other activities as well, then the devil will resort to his second trick.

B . The devil will try to enter into your session with yourself, to make it lose its benefits. He never loses hope. As long as he cannot prevent you from sitting with yourself, he then denies you its spirituality. He does this by giving you thoughts and feelings, and he prevents you from rebuking yourself and he eases your feelings of regret. So how does this happen?

If you remember any sin, then instead of your heart being contrite by it and you rebuke yourself for it with tears of repentance, the devil presents you with excuses and justifications.

But you know very well that your aim of this spiritual session is to purify yourself not to justify it. Purifying the self is obtained

by identifying the sins and rebuking yourself for them, not by pampering the self, or by easing its responsibility by casting it on other people.

Therefore, in your session with yourself, be honest as much as possible.

Do not be amiable with yourself and do not pamper it, for this will not benefit you spiritually and will not lead you to repentance. However, reveal to it all of its errors and weaknesses with all of its defilement and repugnance. Do not try to present it with excuses and justifications, instead offer repentance, regret and contrition of heart. You know that the tax collector went out justified rather than the Pharisee, because he was humble in front of God and asked for mercy, since he was a sinner (*Luke 18:13*). The Bible states: “*you are inexcusable, O man*” (*Rom 2:1*). It is stated also. “*they have no excuse for their sin*” (*John 15:22*).

You will not receive forgiveness by justifications but by repentance you will be qualified for forgiveness.

The tax-collector is distinguished from the Pharisee by self-judgement, in the same way you can distinguish the thief on the right hand from his companion, by his saying: “*and we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds*” (*Luke 23:41*)... Happy is the man who reveals his sins when he sits with himself. More happy is he who presents his sins to the Lord with contrition and tears. **Condemn yourself, as this will lead you to repentance and will gain you humbleness** and contrition of heart, which enables you to confess and will bring you close to the Lord. The Bible says: “*The Lord is near to*

those who have a broken heart”, Saint Anthony rightly said in this matter: “If we judge ourselves, the Lord will be pleased with us”. So, if you sit with yourself and remember your sins, then do not excuse yourself and do not bring the blame on someone else, whilst forgetting what you have done, just like Adam and Eve did.

Blaming others does not make you self-righteous, even if they deserve the blame. Therefore, you must concentrate on what you have done, because you are responsible for it.

Doubtlessly it is a trick from the devil to make you instead of accounting for yourself, to be concerned with other's responsibility for your sins forgetting your own responsibility.

Even trickier is to lessen its seriousness.

He does not make it appear in its true repugnance as if it is a simple matter, which is not worthy of your grief and regret. He would give sins other names or philosophise it and he would hide behind good intentions.

In this way he stretches your conscience, in order to hide sins for which you refuse to bear responsibility, or the results.

Doubtlessly, all these will lead you to negligence and carelessness, and will not help you to repent, but perhaps will push you to continue with what you are in, and will cast away from you the humility and contrition of heart. As for you then, be strict with yourself and rebuke it. If you cannot sometimes

withstand others talking to you frankly about your faults, then at least you can rebuke yourself on your own. Be frank with yourself where people avoid confronting you to spare you embarrassment or because of manners and decency or when they are unwilling to hurt your feelings. Just as Saint Macarius the great said: *‘judge yourself, my brother, before they judge you’*.

If there is in your nature any hardness or severity then use it against yourself. Do not use it against others. It is yourself which needs severity to be deterred and not return to sin. Discipline it then, with a rod of steel and raise it in the fear and obedience of God. So, if you need to examine yourself regularly, then you also need to punish yourself, instead of God punishing you.

In your judgment of yourself, remember, the saying of the great Saint Anthony: ***‘If we remember our sins, God will forget them, and if we forget our sins, then God will remind us of them’***. When David the king did not feel his sin or remember it, God sent him Nathan the prophet who explained the repugnance of his sin and said to him: *“You are the man”* (2 Sam 12:7). When David judged himself and said: *“I have sinned against the Lord”*, straight afterwards he heard the phrase. *“The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die”* (2 Sam 12:13). As for you, do not wait for God to send you another Nathan to expose you, sit then with yourself in order to judge it, repent to be qualified for forgiveness. Some people are used to sitting with themselves in serious sessions at the beginning of a new year, or during fasts or at important occasions in their lives.

Then you sit every day with yourself and reckon it. Examine it, and be reassured continuously of its purity. Be vigilant toward the safety of its orientation, pursue it in the life of repentance, it started previously, be aware that it does not lose the fervour with which it started the path of God.

2. Avoid justifications and excuses:

If you wish to live in the life of repentance, then do not try to continue excuses or justifications for every sin that you fall into.

Excuses will never be in accordance with the life of repentance, nor with the life of humility.

Justifications mean that a person sins and does not want to admit the responsibility of his fault. He sins and presents the matter as if it was something completely natural and he gives reasons for its cause, as if there was no fault in the matter. How can this type of person who finds a justification, for his sin, repent from it?

Justifications are an attempt to cover sin and not repent from it. By finding justification for sin what is easier for the sinner than to continue in it, whilst he has an excuse?

One person covers sin with an excuse, whilst another covers it with a lie. He wants with this justification to come out of a sin unhurt, faultless, blameless and covered with a robe of glory.

However, sin is sin inspite of the reasons surrounding it, or the circumstances accompanying it. In the prayer of the three Holies, we ask for Absolution and forgiveness even for the hidden sins, and for the ones which we did without knowledge, or without our will, and we do not regard all of those as justifications. Whoever said that the path of hell is furnished with excuses and justifications was right.

The history of justifications is old:

The sin of justifying is as old as humanity, ever since the time of our parents Adam and Eve.

Adam tried to justify his sin by saying the woman gave him the fruit to eat. Eve also said that the serpent deceived her. However, God did not accept any excuses from Adam or Eve. He did not even find that these excuses were worthy of a reply or worthy of discussion. On the contrary, He punished Adam for the excuse which he presented by saying: *“Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree...”* (Gen 3:17). Unfortunately, we have inherited the sin of justifying from Adam and Eve, along the generations.

A great saint, such as Abraham, the father of fathers, fell in this exact sin when he said that Sarah was his sister (Gen 20:2-11). For this reason, Abimelech the king of Gerar, took her to his house. He could have come closer to her, if the Lord had not prevented him in a dream and warned him of death as a result of this. Abimelech reprimanded our father Abraham saying to him: “How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not be done”. Our father Abraham

answered with an attempt to justify his actions and said: *“because I thought surely the fear of God is not in this place and they will kill me on account of my wife”* (Gen 20:11).

The reply to this justification in which, he placed the responsibility on someone else, is very easy.

We can say: *‘our father, why did you come to this place which does not have the fear of God? Did you enter this place with God's guidance, who said to you from the beginning of your calling “Get out...to a land that I will show you” (Gen 12:1). Is it possible for you father to sacrifice your wife for the sake of your safety, to subject her to this danger of being wife to a strange man and to subject this stranger to God's wrath? Why do you resort to these human methods for your protection without resorting to God's assistance?’*

It appears that when our father Abraham found the justification, he continued in it and made it a firm policy.

Therefore, he said to his wife with complete sincerity: *“This is your favour that you should do for me in every place, wherever we go, say of me, he is my brother”* (Gen 20:13). In this way, it was possible, at every place in which he dwelt for the same problem to be repeated, because Abraham found a justification for this (Gen 20:12), and he did not say: *‘she is my wife’*. It is unlikely for a person to admit: *“I have sinned”* as long as the method of justification is possible.

Though the sin is very clear, needless of any discussion yet one would present justification and excuses.

An example of this is the man who was given one talent. He took it and buried it in a hole in the ground, without trading with it or profiting from it like his friends did. When his master reckoned with him, he was not embarrassed to present justification and excuses and as the saying goes: *‘an excuse is fouler than an offence’*. So he said: *“Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and hid your talent in the ground”* (Matt 25: 24-25). Of course, his master did not accept his excuse, and ordered that he be thrown into the outer darkness.

The disobedience of Jonah the prophet to the Lord, was clear, but also had a justification.

Jonah escaped from the Lord, and he refused to go to Nineveh, according to the Lord's command, but went to Tarshish in a ship. Later, when the people of Nineveh repented: *“it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he became angry”*. In spite of this, he presented a justification for his attitude, to prove that he was right, and said: *“Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, one who relents from doing harm. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die, die than to live”* (Jonah 4:1-3). This is the excuse which the prophet presented to justify his disobedience to the Lord, and his grief at the salvation of 120 thousand souls. Who can accept these words?

Another obvious sin was that of king Saul, who offered a burnt offering to the Lord, whilst he was not a priest, and despite of the clarity of the sin, he gave justification for it.

When Samuel the prophet reprimanded him for this, he did not say: *“I have sinned”* and he did not regret it or repent, but presented excuses and justifications. He said to the prophet: *“When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines gathered together at Mickmash... therefore I felt compelled and offered a burnt offering”* (1 Sam 13:11-12). Of course the prophet did not accept these excuses. He made him hear God's punishment to him that his kingdom would not continue, and that the Lord had chosen another commander for the people instead of him.

Elijah the mighty prophet, also found an excuse, when he was afraid of Jezebel and escaped!

He received her threats (1 Kin 19:2), feared and escaped. When God asked him about his escape by saying: *“What are you doing here, Elijah?”* he found a justification. He said twice: *“they have killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left and they seek to take my life”* (1 Kin 19:10,14). In this justification, he forgot all of God's amazing works with him, and how He strengthened him when meeting and rebuking Ahab the king (1 Kin 18:18), and how he strengthened him in killing 450 prophets of Baal (1 Kin 18:22,40). Therefore, there was no need for fear and escaping as long as God's hand was with him.

God of course did not accept this excuse from Elijah. He ordered him to carry out a number of important matters, one of them was, to go and anoint Elisha the son of Shaphat as prophet in his place (1 Kin 19:16). As for the phrase: “I alone am left”, the Lord answered him by saying that He has reserved 7000 knees who have not bowed to Baal (1 Kin 19:18). Truly, there are many justifications, all of them are unacceptable and therefore pointless.

With these justifications, man wants to be without blame in front of people, and perhaps in front of himself also; so that he will ease his conscience if it protests against him. Even if the people accepted these excuses, and even if man could deceive himself and anaesthetize his conscience to accept these justifications, God will not accept them. God is all-knowing and has refused all of the above examples of justification. In front of God, every mouth may be stopped (Rom 3:19). While justifications are not suitable with God, submission and confession of sin are in order.

There are other justifications which appear as a shade of evidence for the soul.

An example of this is the virgin in the Song of Solomon whom the Lord knocked on her door. He remained at her door step all night until His head was covered with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night, whilst He was calling her with the most tender expressions. In spite of this she excused herself from opening to Him with her saying: *“I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?”* (Song 5:2-3). Did the Lord accept her excuses? No, but He turned away and was gone, and He made her suffer

the bitterness of abandonment by her saying: *“I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but He gave me no answer”*.

The excuses for not serving the Lord are an example of the justifications that are not acceptable.

Moses, who excused himself from serving by his saying to the Lord: *“I am not eloquent, neither before nor since.. but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue”* (Ex 4:10). God did not accept this excuse from him, and treated the matter of slow tongue for him. Jeremiah also excused himself from serving by his saying: *“I cannot speak, for I am a youth”* (Jer 1:6). The Lord did not accept this excuse from him, but rebuked him saying. *“Do not say ‘I am a youth’ for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid... for I am with you to deliver you”* (Jer 1:7-8).

In the same way the Lord also did not accept the excuses of the one who said to Him: *“let me first go and bury my father”* but He said to him: *“Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead”* (Matt 8:21-22). However, how amazing is the young shepherd, whose flock is attacked by a lion. So, he does not consider his weakness in front of the fierceness of the lion a good excuse. Young David acted similarly in (1 Sam 17).

Such weak justifications and excuses would be challenged by examples of saints who rejected the method of justification.

When will the sinner get rid of the justification for his deeds? David the prophet, after he had numbered the

people, did not try to give a justification for this but his heart condemned him and he said to the Lord: *“I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray O Lord, take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly”* (2 Sam 24:10). This is the way a humble repentant, who confesses his sins, talks in front of God.

As for the non-repentant and unmodest, he tries to find a justification when committing a sin, after its committal and in speaking about it generally.

I would say with sorrow that the continual excuses and justification by such a person will shake his principles. For as long as every sin has its justification, then there are no principles to be followed or spiritualities to persist in. We will try to mention here four general excuses that some people use when they do not proceed correctly in their lives.

I. They say: ‘Every body is like this’. Shall we deviate from society?

As if they consider that if the fault is common, then the individual should not be blamed. It means that the short-comings of the society are no longer short-comings or a common fault becomes an excuse for the individual fault. Certainly not, an error is an error, whether it is common or individual. Because of this, the social workers try to reform the corruption of the society as well as the pastors, the priests, the Bible and the upholders of principles attack these excuses. When we look at the Holy Bible, we see the extent of judgement for this excuse.

Noah, the father of Fathers, used to live in righteousness in an age full of corruption.

In those days the corruption of people reached a stage that led God to drown all the earth with the flood as He said: *“the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Gen 6:5). *“So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground”* (Gen 7:23).

Was that general corruption, an excuse for Noah and his family to proceed like them and say: *‘Everyone is like this, shall we deviate from society’*? But he proceeded with perfection in front of God and people. It was inevitable for him to deviate from that corrupted society. If the phrase: *‘deviate from society’* troubles you, we will use a better phrase: *‘stand out from society’*. The Bible advises us: ***“do not be conformed to this world”*** (Rom 12:2). **That is, do not be like it.**

The same words can be said also about Lot in Sodom.

The whole city was corrupted and for this reason the Lord burnt it with fire (Gen 19). There was not even ten righteous people in it, so that God would not burn the city for the sake of the ten (Gen 18:32).

Was this an excuse to permit Lot to proceed like them, so that he doesn't (deviate) from the society? The righteous keep their high principles, no matter how common the error is. On the contrary, it can be said: If the error was widespread, then this

needs more caution. Only three were saved from Sodom, Lot and his two daughters. The rest perished.

Another example is the righteous Joseph in the land of Egypt.

He was the only one in the Land of Egypt, who worshipped God, whereas everyone worshipped the old Egyptian gods. Raa, Amon, Isis, Osiris, Ptah and Hathor.. etc. Joseph did not permit himself to follow society.

Daniel and the three young men also were like this in the land of captivity.

They were even distinguished in their food, even though they were prisoners of war, enslaved and under abiding laws. The Bible beautifully tells us: *“purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the kings' delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank” (Dan 1:8)*. You also, live with your sound spiritualities, even if you live with them by yourself.

If you cannot influence society with your spirituality, then at least do not assimilate or submit to it. Do not let the common errors influence you.

God's children should obey their consciences, and not be swept away by the current, making excuses that the general atmosphere of the world is like this. It is the weak heart which hides behind excuses. It is the same for the lovers of sin, and for those who falter between two opinions (1 Kin 18:21). However, the heart which loves God is strong, no matter how many

difficulties it finds along the path to repentance, it tries to overcome them.

Why then do you take a weak stand in front of those who insult you for your religiousness?

Those who ridicule the spiritual methods, by trying to weaken your moral, withdraw you to their ways, and try to make you lose the fruitfulness of your repentance. So, if you have truly repented, then don't let them be the cause for your relapse. So either you become very strong in speaking convincingly and prove to them the exaltedness of the spiritual life, or you better keep silent and remain firm in your spiritual path, without hesitation.

II. Some people use obstacles as excuses. You may say it is suitable for the powerful, to overcome obstacles. We will present the thief on the right-hand as a magnificent example, who refused obstacles as a justification.

There were many obstacles which stood in front of the faith of this thief, even if he did not believe like his companion, he would have had more than one excuse. Who does he believe in? He did not see the Lord in His power, transfiguration and miracles. Those, who saw many of Jesus' magnificent miracles, weakened at that time and one of his most prominent disciples denied Him. Also, the voices of the crowds echoed in the ears of the thief: "*Crucify Him, crucify Him*". So will the thief believe in a person who is crucified in front of him, in weakness, bleeding, and is surrounded by expressions of ridicule, reproach and defiance, from every direction whilst He is silent? The priests and chief priests were against Him. The elders of the

people, the leaders and the teachers of the law were against Him. The rulers were against Him. Even the other thief who was crucified next to Him ridiculed Him also.

Those who carried the paralytic are another example for overcoming obstacles (Mark 2:1-11).

It would have been very easy for these people to excuse themselves to the paralytic and tell him that they could not help him or take him to Jesus. For the house where Jesus was staying, was full of people and very crowded. All the paths were blocked, there was no outlet or any entrance and there was no way to get to the Lord. As for them, they did not admit all of these obstacles, because their love of doing good was stronger than the obstacles. They carried the paralytic on a stretcher, uncovered the roof of the house and let down their sick person in front of the Lord to cure him. How great is this good intention, how powerful is this will. Truly the saying goes: *‘where there is a will, there is a way’*.

The strong heart finds a hundred ways for the thing it wishes to do.

The fathers said: *‘Virtue only asks you to desire it and nothing else’*. It is enough for you to desire, then you will find, that grace will open all the doors which were closed in front of you. The Holy Spirit of God will strengthen you, and the spirits of the angels and the saints will surround you. Therefore do not let obstacles be an excuse, but think correctly, in how to overcome them.

Zacchaeus the tax collector also, found in front of him obstacles in arriving to the Lord.

Even just seeing the Lord was impossible for him. Jesus was surrounded by the crowd, and he was short in stature. He was also a chief tax collector, that is a person hated by everyone far from spiritualities, and they ridiculed him when he asked to meet the Lord. So he thought of climbing up a sycamore tree to see Him. Another obstacle in front of him was his great position. However, he overcame all of this. Therefore, he was worthy of the Lord talking and saying to him: *“for today I must stay at your house” (Luke 19:5)*. Truly, if the inner drive in the heart of Zacchaeus was weak, he would have found a justification for the obstacles which were in front of him, and would not have reached the Lord.

How strong are your inner drives and would obstacles become your excuse?

In front of us, is an example which occurred in the age of martyrdom: That of a youth with whom every method of torture did not work. They wanted him to fall by enticing him with respect to his chastity, but they failed. They tied him to a bed so that a woman would come and sin with him. So, when the youth saw there was no way out, he bit his tongue until he bled and spat it in her face. She was terrified and left him, and the youth saved his chastity. If he was weak from within, he would have found a justification for falling. However, his inner power made him victorious and he did not give any weight to obstacles or justifications.

III. Some make excuses for the severity of outside pressures, or the severity of outside enticements.

The heart which is firm from within cannot submit to outside pressures, will not fall on account of it, and will not take it as a justification for his fall. The one who justifies his position by the outer pressures, is the person whose love for God and His commandments is not firm. In his heart is a betrayal from within, and he is not truly faithful to God nor to the commandments.

Take the righteous Joseph as a magnificent example of victory over outside pressures.

There is no doubt that the outside pressure was very harsh on him. He was a servant enslaved to a woman. It was the woman who asked of him to sin. She persisted in this, and he refused. She continued to persist. He was under her authority, she could ruin his reputation, and throw him into prison, as she finally did. If he was weak from within, he would have found something to justify his fall. However, he said: *“How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God”* (Gen 39:9), and he endured for the sake of his righteousness.

The pure heart which is firm in its righteousness does not recognize justifications, and does not submit to outside enticements. An example of this is the story of David with king Saul.

Saul tried many times to kill David who was without offence, and pursued him from one desert to another. Finally, he fell into the hands of David. He saw him sleeping in a cave. David's men

said to him: *“This is the day of which the Lord said to you, ‘behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you’ ”* (1 Sam 24:4).

The enticement was great, with which David could get rid of his enemy by whom he was threatened and become king. However, David refused all this saying: *“The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord”*. So David rebuked his men (1 Sam 24:6-7). There were many justifications. Who said that he was the Lord's anointed? The Lord had announced His rejection of Saul (1 Sam 16:1). *“The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him”* (1 Sam 16:14).

David knew this, for he was the one who played the harp to refresh Saul so that the distressing spirit would depart from him (1 Sam 16:23). Saul was a rejected and sinful person. If you David got rid of him, you would have saved the people from his evil. No, for he is the Lord's anointed one.

You O David, you were the true anointed one of the Lord. Samuel the prophet anointed you as king, and the Spirit of God came upon you (1 Sam 16:12-13). So you became the official replacement to this wicked man. If you captured the king, then you would not have defied him, for this was your right, and all of the people would be happy with you. It was the Lord who drove him into your hands. It would be only the nature of war between the two of you if you killed Saul.

However, David did not accept any of these justifications. He said: *“How can I stretch out my hand against the Lord's*

anointed?” He is a sinner and an evildoer, he is rejected, he is my enemy, he is what he is, but still he is the Lord's anointed, I will not stretch out my hand against him. This is an ideal picture of the pure heart which rejects justifications and enticements.

IV. Some make excuses and say: ‘I am weak and the commandments are difficult’.

You say that you are weak, if you do not consider God's assistance. You are not alone. You might be weak, but you can say: *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Phil 4:13). As long as your prayers exist, then you are not weak because the power of God works in you. It gains you victory over every sin, and lifts you up from every fall.

If David had looked upon himself as being weak, he would not have fought against Goliath.

This feeling of being weak, was a justification for all the men in the army, to remain in their places, and not to stand and fight Goliath. David however, did not permit justifications to protect him from God's commandments and the work of the Spirit. There were justifications in front of David which would exempt him from fighting with Goliath, but he did not use them. Firstly, he was not one of the soldiers in the army, but he came to bring food for his brothers, and he could have shortened his mission and departed wishing them all the best.

Secondly, Goliath was a man to be feared, in his magnificent body and his powerful weapons. No one would blame then, a young boy like David refusing to fight with him. Thirdly, no one asked him to carry out this matter, or even to think about it.

Fourthly, all of the army leaders were afraid of the man, even king Saul himself did not come forth to fight him. So then, it would have been easy for David to rely on these justifications, and say: *‘What have I got to do with this matter, and why should I enter into someone else’s responsibilities?’*, and to depart. However, David’s zeal drove him to go forth to meet Goliath, and save the people from him. The excuses were present, but he refused to use them and to be protected by them. Everyone witnessed the difficulty of the deed, but he was victorious over it, with faith.

The Lord punished those who weakened the people’s morale by talking about the difficulties.

Those who saw the land which flows with milk and honey, said however: *“nevertheless, the people who dwell in the land are strong; and the cities are fortified.... we are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we... There we saw the giants, the descendants of Anak... and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight”* (Num 13:27-33). With this conversation which shatters morale: *“all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night”* (Num 14:1). The Lord rejected these people who made the matter difficult and impossible.

Therefore, do not say that the Lord’s commandments are difficult. For if it was difficult, the Lord would not command us to do it. How can He command us to do something which cannot be carried out?

God cannot command us to do the impossible. He gives the commandment, no matter how difficult it seems and at the same

time He gives the capability for its execution. He gives the commandment and with it He gives grace. The Holy Spirit works within the heart in order to qualify it for work, and participates with it in the work. Otherwise no one would have been capable to overcome Satan who is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8).

Abraham the father of fathers did not prevent himself from performing a commandment which seemed very difficult.

The Lord said to him: *“Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love... and offer him there as a burnt offering...”* (Gen 22:2). Our father did not use as an excuse the difficulty of the commandment that was above the standard of nature. This was the son of promises, the son of his old age, and what would he say to his mother? However, he woke up early and proceeded to execute God's commandment. God who gave Abraham the power to carry out, can also give you power. He made young Jeremiah a fortified city and walls of brass on all the earth (Jer 1:8). Along the path of repentance, do not be afraid from any sin, nor from any habit or particular characteristic, nor from a devil, but say: *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”*. Do not let this fear be a justification for you along the paths of spiritual labour. Abraham did not withhold his son from God and he did not try to find justifications to restrain himself. How about you, what is the difficult thing which the Lord asks from you and you cannot do? Does He ask you to sacrifice your only son? Is what is asked from you very simple?

Blessed are those giants who were victorious over their hearts from within, and they did not excuse themselves with the difficulty of the commandment, as we do in justifying ourselves.

Truly, the kingdom of heaven needs hearts like a rock, not softening in front of obstacles, and not weakening in front of difficulties. Carry out the commandment of the Bible which says: *“be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man”* (1 Kin 2:2). Here, true manhood appears in the life of purity.

Those who do not want, adopt justifications.

With some people, as long as they have an excuse which they can present, then sin and shortcomings become easy. Those who turn from His love, without honesty towards the commandment or being obliged with it, do not take into consideration the Lord's feelings. During the excuse, the person deceives himself, the conscience becomes shaken and not firm.

The gate of excuse is wide in which both truthfulness and lying enter.

Excuses may be untrue, or easy to overcome. There is not a true obstacle which has the power to defeat the will. Excuses become a chance for carelessness or for the love of sin. They become a veil for pride, which refuses the recognition of errors. So they become secondary and not the true reasons. In general, justifications and excuses, show the lack of repentance.

The amazing thing, is that the unrepentant person, despite of his errors, sees his beautiful self as it appears in his own eyes.

Everything he does, has, in his view, its reasons and wisdom. Every sin has its justification. Every shortcoming in carrying out the virtues, also has its justification. He does not find any error in anything which he does. He talks as if he was infallible, not sinning. He defends and justifies. It is difficult for the words: *‘I have sinned’* to proceed from his mouth. If you increase the pressure on him, the most he would say is: *‘what... maybe some people understand this deed in a different way to what was meant by it... But I meant...’*. So another series of justifications take place.

As if he was a god...not sinning! “I said, you are gods” (Ps 82:6). These (gods), who do not sin, cannot repent. What will they repent from? Truly, those who are well have no need of a physician. These people are in no need of Christ, the Forgiver and Saviour. What sin can you see Him, forgiving or saving them from? Even those who have shortcomings in all of the spiritual duties, such as prayer, fasting, attending church and Holy Communion, also find justifications for their shortcomings, and it is as if they have not sinned.

You ask one of them, why don't you pray? Why don't you attend church?

He will definitely not say to you: *‘I am a sinner’*. But he justifies his shortcoming by saying that he has no time on his hands. If you discuss this with him, he will place in front of you a long list of preoccupations. If you ask him: *‘why isn't God*

amongst your preoccupations? Why don't you include Him in the organization of your time?' He then enters into another justification, to try to philosophise the error and says:

'What is in the heart, is most important. So, as long as my heart is pure, then there is no need for prayer! For God is the God of hearts'.

Of course the reply is clear. The pure heart cannot dispense with prayer, but helps in prayer. The pure heart contains the love of God. Whoever loves God speaks with Him and prays. The spiritual person, unites the two matters, the purity of heart and prayer. As the Bible said: *"Do this and do not leave that"*. The purity of heart is necessary for prayer, for the prayer that proceeds from a pure heart, is the one which is accepted in front of God. Therefore, the person who answers by the above phrase, does not understand the meaning of the phrase (purity of heart). For, if the heart is pure, then it is impossible for him to say that he is in no need for prayer. So, he who is in no need for prayer, does not have the purity of heart.

So, you ask another person: *'why don't you fast?'*

He says to you: *'Are all the people who fast, saints? So and so fasts and does this... so and so fasts and does that!'* If you say to him: *'what have you got to do with them? God will not ask you about them, but will ask you about yourself'*. He will then return to the same justification, philosophise the matter and say: *'The life with God does not rely on eating and drinking certain foods. What is important is the purity of heart'*. As if fasting does not assist towards the purity of heart. It is in vain that you talk with such a person about the spirituality of fasting, that

whoever proceeds in it in a spiritual way will grow in the life of the spirit. God commanded us to fast because of its benefits, and the prophets used to fast along with the purity of their hearts. The Lord Jesus Himself also fasted. So, here you do not find any logic, but mere justifications for the disposing of responsibility.

Another makes the excuse of the lack of spiritual advisers and the lack of good examples.

It seems that his excuse, also, is exaggerated. Whoever is in need of advice, undoubtedly, will find it. If he does not find advisers, there are books which fill the world, and they contain everything. In prayer when he asks of the Lord, He will advise him. He has his conscience and also the Holy Bible. Saint Anthony who lived alone in the desert, who did not have a monk preceding him to advise him, did not make excuses for the lack of advisers, but opened the way alone and with the grace of God he made it and advised others. As for good examples, there are many. At least, do not ask for all of the ideal qualities from one person, but take each person as a model in a certain point. There are also the stories of the saints and the righteous who passed away. The essence of the saying is that whoever wants to arrive to God, will find the means. So, the only question remaining is: Do you want? It was nice of the Lord to ask some of the sick who came to Him, for healing, His immortal and deep question:

“Do you want to be made well?” (John 5:6).*

* Read the book (The return to God), for it is from: ‘the series on the life of repentance and purity’. It will complete the understanding of repentance for you, and the means towards it.

Yes, if you want, God is willing to work with You and strengthen you. He is the one who washes you and you become whiter than snow. He is the One who purifies you from every sin, and every defilement of the body and spirit. However, most importantly, you must want. **But if you do not want, then there is no need for justifications. Be honest with yourself.**

3. Do not delay repentance and do not lose the chance.

Some have lost the chance for repentance:

It is God's mercy towards sinners, that He offers to every sinner many chances in which grace visits him and works in his heart to help him repent.

As a result of God's work within him, he finds his heart ignited with a holy desire towards repentance and returning to God. He might have been influenced by a sermon, or a book, or a spiritual meeting, a good example, or by an occurrence of death. A disease may have shaken him from within, or circumstances could have led him to repent.

The wise person is the one who utilises these influences, and does not let the chance slip from him.

Just like what happened with the prodigal son, who, when grace visited him, and influenced his heart and thought, said: *"I will arise..."*, and he arose and went to his father and repented. The

ignorant, however, lets the chance pass by without benefiting from it. He looks for it later but in vain. Hence, the dangerous phrase which was said about Esau:

“He found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears” (Heb 12:17).

He was late in coming to his father, after the blessing was transferred to Jacob, who became the chosen one, and through his descendants, all of the nations of the earth would be blessed. Esau wept and: *“he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry” (Gen 27:34, 38)*. After the passing of time, however, and after the crying was over, he did not gain anything.

Look at the virgin in the Song of Songs, and what happened to her, and learn a lesson.

She was asleep, like any sinner, but her heart was awake to the call of the Lord. She heard His voice calling to her: *“Open for me...”*, but she was slow and made excuses. She finally arose to open, but after the chance had passed, and after her beloved had turned away and gone. She then cried and said: *“my heart went out to him when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer” (Song 5:6)*. The poor virgin was exposed then to many sufferings. Later, the Lord, for the sake of her love, gave her another chance.

But you may lose the chance for good. This happened to Felix the governor and to king Agrippa.

Each of them had the chance, when Saint Paul the apostle stood in front of them defending himself. With regards to Felix, the Bible says: *“Now as he (Paul) reasoned about righteousness,*

self-control, and the judgement to come, Felix was afraid” (Acts 24:25). Grace worked within his heart, and moved him towards faith and repentance. However, he did not utilize the chance, and delayed it to another time, and he said to Saint Paul: *“Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you” (Acts 24:25).*

With great regret though, the book of Acts did not say that Felix found the time to call Paul. In this way, he lost the chance of a lifetime. The great Saint Paul spoke in front of king Agrippa in the same way also, in his deep and convincing style with every work of the Spirit that was within him. Agrippa was greatly influenced, and grace worked within his heart, and he said to Paul: *“You almost persuade me to become a Christian” (Acts 26:28).* The poor king however, did not grab the chance. He stood up from the judgement platform and left. He left behind, repentance and faith, and the chance was lost. The Bible did not say anything after that about Agrippa. Between him and God was just this little incident.

I wish he had done something like the Ethiopian eunuch, who grabbed the chance and gained salvation.

The grace of God arranged with Phillip to meet this eunuch along the road. Phillip explained to the eunuch what he had read in the book of Isaiah. The man was influenced and God worked within his heart. He believed. He did not let the chance slip and said to Phillip: *“See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptised?” (Acts 8:36).* So straight away he went down into the water and was baptised: *“and he went on his way rejoicing”.* This is a brilliant example of capturing the chance. How about you my brother: How many like Phillip did God

send you along the way, by whom you were influenced, but let the chance slip from your hand and did not benefit?

Therefore, do not delay repentance. For many who delayed repentance, never repented and their life was lost.

Look at how many times the Jews rejected the Lord and followed other gods. Also, how the Lord sent prophets and apostles to them to attract them, but they lost all of these chances. The Lord then placed them into the hands of their enemies, rejected their prayers and sacrifices. He said to them: *“when you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear”* (Is 1:15). He also said to Jeremiah the prophet: *“therefore do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you”* (Jer 7:16). Do you want, with your continual delay, to reach a similar condition?

The continual delay of repentance means the rejection of repentance. This is what happened to Pharaoh, until he perished.

How many times did Pharaoh say to Moses and Aaron: *“I have sinned. Entreat the Lord for my sake...”*. In spite of this, he did not repent. Look at his saying after the plague of hail and thunder: *“I have sinned this time. the Lord is righteous, and my people and I are wicked. Entreat the Lord, that there may be no more mighty thundering and hail, for it is enough. I will let you go”* (Ex 9:27-28). In spite of this, Pharaoh did not repent and did not keep his promise. He resorted to delaying. After the plague of the locusts, he said to Moses and Aaron: *“I have*

sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the Lord your God, that He may take away from me this death only” (Ex 10:16-17). The Lord removed from him this plague, as He removed others, but Pharaoh did not repent.

The expressions of repentance were in his mouth, but repentance was not in his heart.

He screamed out of fear, whilst not being convinced. He promised he would repent, but did not fulfil it. He kept delaying his promises to the Lord day after day, and plague after plague, until divine anger caught up with him. He drowned in the Red Sea and perished. The delaying of repentance in his case, was a practical rejection of repentance. They were chances which the Lord presented to him, through the ten plagues. He was influenced by them, and he would decide to repent definitely. He did not, however, utilise these chances for the salvation of his soul. The love of the world was in his heart more than the love of repentance and so he perished.

An example of those who lost the chance of repentance, are the vinedressers (Matt 21).

To these, the landowner sent to many times his servants. They did not listen, and did not turn from their evil. Finally, he sent his son. It was a chance for repentance. But they did not repent. What happened then? He said to them: *“the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matt 21:43).*

Let us take the mighty Samson as an example for the delaying of repentance.

He started well, and hence the Spirit of God descended upon him. His sin began when he knew Delilah, gave her his leadership and submitted to her advice. This woman deceived him more than once. She handed him over to his enemies. Even though he knew this, he did not repent (Judg 16), and continued in what he was doing. Finally, he broke his vow. His enemies took him and plucked out his eyes. They bound him with bronze fetters and he became a grinder in the prison (Judg 16:21). This is what sin and the delaying of repentance did to him. God gave him another chance on the day of his death, as one of the men of faith (Heb 11:22-23).

Slowness in repentance makes a person perish, just like what happened to Achan, the son of Carmi.

He took of the accursed things and hid them. As a result of his sin, the people were defeated in front of the small town of Ai. Nevertheless, his conscience was not moved and he did not confess his error. The Lord said: “*There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel*”. Joshua then announced this truth, but Achan did not move. Joshua then began to cast lots in order to find out who was responsible for God's anger. Even then, Achan did not come forth to confess. The lot fell on his tribe of Judah, and on his family of the (Zarhites). In spite of all of this, Achan did not come forth, until God pointed towards him by name. So, he confessed what he had done, after the chance for repentance had passed. He confessed as one who was revealed by the Lord, and not as one who reveals himself. They stoned him (Josh 7:25).

Lot was lucky when the two angels did not permit him to slow down.

This happened when God wanted to burn Sodom. The Bible says: “*the angels urged Lot to hurry....*”. When he lingered, they took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. They then said to him: “Escape for your life” (Gen 19:15-17). Lot had to flee quickly from the place of evil, in order not to perish. There are many dangerous matters which require haste, and one of them is repentance. Sluggishness and delay do not fit.

The foolish virgins came late, after the door was closed.

That is why they lost the kingdom of heaven. They stood in front of the closed door saying with grief and despair: “*Lord, Lord, open to us*”. But, they could only hear the fearful phrase: “*Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you*” (Matt 25:12). They had come after the chance had passed, after the door was closed. Truly, how dangerous is what the Lord said of sinful Jezebel in the book of Revelation:

“And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent” (Rev 2:21).

The heart stands in awe in front of the statement: “*I gave her time*”, and keeps quiet. As this sinful woman did not repent in the time that the Lord gave her. He explained the plagues that would be placed on her. He said about this also, that He: “*will*

give to each one according to his works” (Rev 2:23). God, in His prolonged patience, gave this sinful woman time in which to repent.

Man should not then delay his repentance, despising God's prolonged patience.

The apostle rebukes us about this saying: “or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Rom 2:4). The apostle sees that such a person demonstrates that in his heart is hardness, he is impenitent and that he is treasuring up for himself wrath in the day of wrath (Rom 2:5).

Examples of those who did not delay.

I like in David the prophet, his haste in repentance.

He was human like us, capable of sinning. However, his heart was gentle and sensitive, responding to the voice of God quickly. His repentance was a true one, without delay or slowness. This appeared when Abigail rebuked him gracefully, as he wanted revenge for himself from Nabal the Carmelite. He did not argue with her and did not justify his position, but he said to her: *“blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand” (1 Sam 25:33).* His repentance was very quick, when he counted the people. His heart struck him, and he said: *“Surely, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly” (2 Sam 24:21,17).*

When Nathan alerted him to his sin towards the wife of Uriah the Hittite, he did not argue, but said: *“I have sinned against the Lord”* (2 Sam 12:7-13). His psalms were filled with phrases of true repentance and contrition, and he drenched his couch with his tears (Ps 50, Ps 6).

Likewise, was the repentance of the people of Ninevah and the repentance of Saint Baesa.

Jonah the prophet gave Ninevah a long chance to repent, and he called out saying: “yet forty days, and Ninevah shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). This great city did not delay its repentance till near the end of this period, but repented immediately with sackcloth and sat in ashes. It was a deep repentance which included everyone. The Lord, then, removed His anger from them.

Saint Baesa's, soul was taken by the Lord on the same day of her repentance, in the same evening that Saint John the Dwarf visited her. If she had delayed her repentance, what do you think her destiny would have been?

Happy then, is the person who utilizes the chance that God sends him for his repentance, and does not harden his heart. Who knows, maybe this chance will not recur.

The Philippian gaoler, was guarding the prison, when the Lord sent an earthquake at midnight. The doors of the prison were opened and the chains were loosened for the rescue of Paul and Silas. This gaoler did not delay, but said to Paul and Silas: *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* (Acts 16:30). He believed. He took Paul and Silas to his house: “the same hour of the

night”. This was done without any slowness: “*And immediately he and all his family were baptised*”. (Acts 16:33).

Isn't there a lesson for us in the story of the Philippian gaoler, when we read the word. “immediately”, or the phrase: “the same hour of the night?” This was: “*at midnight*” (Acts 16: 25). Why then, should we delay our repentance?

We read about a similar situation that occurred, in the repentance of Zacchaeus.

The Lord said to him: “*make haste and come down*”. Zacchaeus did this immediately and took the Lord to his house. The Bible tells us that: “*he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully*” (Luke 19:6). So, the Lord then said: “*Today salvation has come to this house*”. Procrastination does not align with repentance. The phrases which suit it are: “*I will*”, as in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15). “*Immediately*”, “*the same hour*”, as in the story of the Philippian gaoler (Acts 16). “*Make haste*”, “*today*”, as in the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19).

All of the stories of repentance in the lives of the saints show clearly also lack of postponement.

Mary the Egyptian, when was able to enter into the church of the resurrection to take blessing from the icon, immediately carried out what she had decided upon for her repentance. Consequently she became a saintly anchorite. When Pelagia was influenced by Saint Nonious' sermon, did not leave him until he

gave her the grace of baptism. You can check the details of the examples through history.

- **Examples of people who met the Lord and did not benefit.**

The first man in the world who lost the chance of repentance, perished.

It was Cain. The Lord Himself spoke to him, and warned him regarding his sin, before he becomes entangled in it. He said to him: *“sin lies at the door... but you should rule over it”* (Gen 4:7). He advised him to repent: *“If you do well, will you not be accepted?”*. However, Cain lost the chance and did not listen to the advice. He let his thoughts and feelings control him. So, he fell and his fall was great.

It is amazing that there were many who met with the Lord, and lost this chance.

The rich young man, had a chance to meet with the Lord and to hear advice for his salvation. Regretfully however, he went away sorrowful (Matt 19:22). The Lord said: *“and come, follow Me”*. He did not do it. In this way he lost the chance. The Pharisee who invited the Lord to his house (Luke 7:36), did not benefit also from this chance. It was the same also for many others who lived at the time of Christ and met with Him. As for you, if the Spirit of God speaks in your heart, do not lose the chance.

Millions of people who are in hell, wish for a few moments of life, that you have, in which to repent, but cannot find them.

They have lost the chance, and the door has been closed. How about you my brother, you have all of this life, don't you think about repentance, and grab the chance? As the apostle said: *“redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph 5:16).*

Know that the postponement of repentance is one of the works of the devil, who does not want repentance.

He knows that preventing you from repentance in a direct way, is a matter which your conscience will not accept. Therefore, he will never say to you: *‘do not repent’*, but every time your heart moves towards God, he says to you: *‘that's okay but not now. We have a long chance in front of us’*. He keeps then leading you in a series of never ending postponements until your life ends.

- **The outcome of postponement is not for your own good.**

If you are influenced spiritually and have decided to repent, then do not delay:

1. You cannot guarantee yourself. You cannot guarantee that these spiritual feelings will remain with you. For you might search for this desire to repent, and not find it.

2. You cannot guarantee the circumstances which surround you.
3. You cannot guarantee the morning, and what might come with It. So, utilise your present condition.
4. You cannot guarantee what obstacles the enemy will put in your way, for he has known of your decision to repent, and of the visit of grace to you.
5. If you remain in sin, awaiting another chance, your condition might become worse. Sin increases, and is transformed from just a fall or a practice, to a habit. It, then completely controls you, and binds you with chains which are not easy to loosen. You then enter into a series of falls of which you will not know the end of.

The devil postpones your repentance, until he dominates you completely.

You end up in a state, in which you do not know how to repent, or in which you do not want to repent, for he has entered sin into the depth of your heart, and at the same time he has paralysed your will. At this time, he makes you fall into despair. Here we will discuss another point:

- **What does postponement demonstrate?**

It demonstrates your lack of love to God, in breaking His laws and rejecting life and reconciliation with Him. It also demonstrates that the love of sin still remains in the heart. It demonstrates the lack of seriousness in the desire to repent, the serious desire enforces. It also demonstrates that your mistaken

concern with yourself is more profound than your concern with God's feelings and His relationship with you. I say, your mistaken concern with yourself, because whoever is concerned with himself, is concerned with his eternity and salvation and hence with his repentance. Therefore, do not postpone your repentance at all, but as the apostle says: "if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb 3:7,15).

4. Do not harden your heart ^{*}

The extent of compliance to the voice of God:

God calls everyone to repentance, but the hearts differ in their extent of compliance.

Because of His excessive love to mankind God: "*desires all men to be saved*" (1 Tim 2:4). He, Himself strives for their salvation. For the sake of their salvation, He sent the prophets and the apostles, and He sent His divine inspiration to call us in His Holy Book to return to Him and repent as: "*these times of ignorance God overlooked*" (Acts 17:30). He placed in us the conscience to reproach us. He sent to us His Holy Spirit to work in us. He gave us pastors, priests, preachers and teachers, so that we can hear God's voice through their teachings. What is important however is: Who listens? Who accepts? What is the extent of our compliance to the voice of God? Here, the types of hearts differ in the same way as:

^{*} This section was taken from three lectures about (the hardening of the heart), which were given on 28/11/1969, 29/7/1977, 5/8/1977.

The flexible branch and the dry branch differ.

The flexible branch, complies with you: You straighten it and it becomes straightened, you stand it upright and it remains, you change its position and it changes. It is obedient in your hands. The dry branch however, does not respond to you, and if you wanted to straighten it, it resists. As the poet says: *'The branches will be straightened if you straighten them, but if you try to straighten wood, it will not comply'*. Such harsh hearts of this kind, the Lord works with, but they do not respond.

They are exactly the same as a sick person who does not respond to treatment.

The doctor gives him the medicines which suit his disease; the medicines which others have responded to. His body however, does not respond to them. These treatments do not affect him. So, the disease continues as it is, in spite of the treatment. Or the condition becomes worse than before. So, the means of grace do not result in any change with a harsh heart. His characteristics continue as they are, along with his sins.

Certainly, this harsh heart does not wish to be made well.

Or he, because of the harshness of his heart, does not want to confess that he is sick and is in need of healing. He then, remains in his disease as he is. Just like the harsh Pharisees who lived at the time of Christ and had dealings with Him. They saw His miracles and did not benefit, but afterwards they said that He was a sinner. They heard His teachings and did not respond.

Instead they said He was a deceiver and a violator of the law. Solomon the wise man, said:

“Though you grind a fool in a mortar.... Yet his foolishness will not depart from him” (Prov 27:22).

This is because the harshness of heart, does not permit the sinner, who is attached to his ways, to change his ways or to leave his sin. He rejects God no matter how God strives towards him to save him.

It is amazing how the compassionate Lord, strives towards man, and man rejects God!

The great God strives towards the dust and ashes, and the dust and ashes closes his heart in front of God. God speaks and calls, and this poor creature closes his ears, his heart, and refuses to open to the Lord. God knocks on the door, until His head is covered with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night (Song 5:2). However, man closes his door, and does not pay attention to this great heart which has come to him: *“Leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills” (Song 2:8)*. It is harshness of heart. Sometimes we see a person being harsh towards a fellow man, and we feel uncomfortable.

Many people however, become harsh towards God Himself.

It is amazing how man can be harsh in his dealings with God, the compassionate and kind God in whose hand is the spirit of this person, and who deals with everyone with complete gentleness. However, not all of the hearts are like this. There

are kind hearts, which cannot withstand leaving God at its doorstep, but gets up to open to Him without delay, dreaming of hearing His divine voice .

Examples of kind hearts:

The gentle and kind hearted Saint Augustine spent a long period away from God, because the divine voice was not clear to him. When he realized it, he complied to it in the same night, with all the heart and feelings, and he became a saint. Mary the Egyptian remained far from God for a long time, and far from His voice. But, when she felt the voice of God calling her at the holy icon, she was completely changed. She complied to the Lord, and spent the rest of her life in His love. In the same way Pelagia was influenced by the mere sight of the saints, and by a mere sermon which she heard. She had a gentle heart which was easily influenced. In spite of her fornication and wealth, she repented quickly. Her compliance was amazing.

What is amazing in the stories of repentance, is that fornicators comply to the Lord quickly.

In fact , this is not amazing, because most of these fornicators did not have harsh hearts. They had instead, emotional hearts, which complied to love quickly. However, these hearts went astray when they directed their feelings towards the body. The body defeated them. When they found true love from God, or from His saints they would return quickly. Compassion and love were already there, but lacked guidance and direction. This is contrary to the owners of the harsh hearts who do not respond quickly, and they might never respond at all. Therefore, the Lord rightly said to some of the elders of the Jews who were

harsh: *“Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you” (Matt 21:31).*

How wonderful that many fornicators were transformed from sinners into saints.

When the burning compassion they had, was directed to God, their heart was inflamed with His love. They were capable of reaching the life of holiness quickly. Besides Augustine, Mary the Egyptian and Pelagia, we need more time to talk about other sinners who responded to the Lord quickly, and were transformed into saints. For example Baesha, Saint Thais, Saint Martha, Saint Mary the niece of Saint Abraham the solitary, and Saint Avdokia, and many others.* Male examples are: Saint Jacob the struggler, Saint Timothy the anchorite, and the start of the life of Saint Oghris. All of them did not require much effort from God, in their return to Him.

God did not have to beseech them, or call them with persistence.

Just one session with Jesus, changed all of the Samaritan woman's life. She was transformed from a sinful woman: *“for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband”*, to the saint of Samaria. She had a gentle heart which could respond quickly to the Lord, more than the severe Pharisees who spoke about high principles but did not carry them out. David the prophet, after his sin and fornication, could not withstand the one sentence from Nathan: *“You are*

* See the book “The Spiritual Awakening”, to gain an idea about these saints.

the man". So, he cried out that night saying: "*I have sinned against the Lord*". He repented with an amazing repentance, in which, every night he made his bed swim, and drenched his couch with his tears (Ps 6).

The gentle heart may only need a word to change its life style.

Thais heard one phrase from Saint Besarion, which made her fall to the ground, and break out in tears. Then she went out from the place of sin with him, to live as a saint. Baesa heard one phrase from Saint John the Dwarf, which influenced her together with his tears for her. She went out with him, repenting. The angels lifted her spirit that night, pure as a beam of light.

The stories are many, all rotating about one orbit, which is the gentle heart that responds quickly. This does not only occur with fornicators but with many others as well.

Saul of Tarsus was changed by one phrase from the Lord.

Saul was very harsh in carrying out the law. He was persecuting the church. But his heart was not harsh. It had a zeal which he counted as holy, and he did what he did in ignorance (1 Tim 1:13). When the Lord Jesus appeared to him, and said but one statement, he accepted the word with joy. He was changed to the opposite. He believed and suffered for the sake of the Lord.

Peter the apostle, cried bitterly at the mere sound of the cock's crow.

He did not require much rebuke. It is enough that he heard the cock crow. Then a revolution broke out within him. It squeezed his heart and eyes. A little is enough to make a kind heart repent. Jesus looked up to Zacchaeus the tax collector and spoke to him. Zacchaeus could not withstand, and proclaimed his repentance in front of everyone (Luke 19:5). Jesus spoke to many Scribes, Pharisees and priests, but they did not benefit. Zacchaeus' heart was not hard to repent like theirs, despite of what was known about the injustice of tax collectors.

Matthew the tax collector also, only needed one call from the Lord to change his life: *“Follow me”* (Matt 9:9). He then, left everything, arose and followed Him. Peter and Andrew the fishermen acted similarly when the Lord called them: *“Come after me , and I will make you become fishers of men”* (Mark 1:17). The sensitive heart does not only obey the voice of God , but responds to any sign from Him, even from afar, since it is opened to God regularly.

The matter then depends on whether the heart is hard or soft. Both types appear together in the story of David and Nabal the Carmelite.

David requested some sheep from Nabal the Carmelite , because he and his men were in need of food. Nabal did not respond, due to the harshness of his heart. David warned him, but he did not take notice, again because of the harshness of his heart. Neither requesting nor threatening worked with Nabal. When Abigail, his wife learnt of the incident her heart was

moved quickly and she responded. She met David and presented to him the food which his men needed. David's heart was moved by her and she could rebuke him in a decent manner for trying to avenge himself. David in this story, though firm but strong, presents an example of the kind heart which accepts reproach quickly and turns from his errors. He said to her: *“blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand”* (1 Sam 25:33).

The kind heart accepts reproach, but the harsh heart revolts.

David accepted the reproach from a woman. In the same way Saint Anthony accepted the reproach from that woman who said to him: *‘if you were a monk, you would have lived in the mountain’*. He did not just accept the word and carry it out, but even considered it to be God's voice to him. Contrary to this was Saul the king, who was known for the harshness of his heart. When his son Jonathan talked to him for David saying: *“Why should he be killed? What has he done?”* (1 Sam 20:32), Saul's anger increased against his son Jonathan, and he cast a spear at him to kill him. He swore at him with abusive language and he disgraced him (1 Sam 20:30-34). The harsh heart does not accept guidance nor advice. It does not change its thoughts, but its pride convinces it to stay firm. Therefore the Bible rightly said:

***“God resists the proud”* (James 4:6)** The Lord did not ever stand against the poor tax collector, but He stood against the harsh and proud Pharisee, and against the harsh Scribes and Pharisees, who in their harshness laid heavy burdens

on men which were hard to bear (Matt 23). These harsh people lose themselves, lose the people and lose God.

The harshness of heart delays repentance.

Pharaoh might be the most prominent example of this harshness.

All of the plagues were not able to soften his heart. If he sometimes had said: *“I have sinned against the Lord”* (Ex 10:16), he would return after that with his heart hard as ever. Every time he made a promise, he would go back on his promise after God had removed His anger. As the Bible says: *“But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them (Moses and Aaron)”* (Ex 8:15). Pharaoh remained in his harshness of heart until he perished. God wanted to attract him to Himself through these plagues. But he refused listening to the Lord, inspite of all of God's wonders which he himself had experienced.

Another example is the rebellious people in the wilderness.

All of God's wonders were with them in the land of Egypt, as well as in the wilderness, all of His great charity was for them. All of this did not soften their hearts. The ten plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea, the manna and quail for food, the water which God burst open to them from the rock, the pillar of fire which gave them light at night, the cloud which sheltered and led them during the day did not make them repent.

The Lord described them many times as: ***“stiff - necked people”***. (Ex 32:9; 33:3,5; 34:9 Deut 9:6). “They are impudent and stubborn children” (Ezek 2:4) and: “impudent and hardhearted” (Ezek 3:7). Because of their harshness, they did not respond to the Lord and did not obey Him. Instead they were continually complaining to Him. They did not repent at all, no matter how good He was to them. He even said about them:

“All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people” (Rom 10:21).

Imagine, God stretches out His hand to reconcile the people, and the people reject God's hand which is outstretched continuously all day. They did not stretch their hand out for pardon or reconciliation. What did they benefit then, from their hard heartedness? They lost the Lord, did not enter the promised land, and all of their complaining generation perished in the wilderness. God was angry with them and was going to destroy them if it wasn't for Moses' intercession on their behalf (Num 32). The harshness of their heart clouded their minds. They could not remember any of God's good deeds. They did not soften, and return to Him. All of the sayings and warnings of the prophets did not bring about any change.

As if God's seeds for them have fallen on a rock.

Water, fertilizer, a working hand, or agricultural experience cannot be of benefit to seeds on a rock. By the same token a hard heart does not feel the sting of the conscience, and does not respond to the voice of the Spirit within him. He may listen or read the word of God, but doesn't benefit. He may go to church but remain unchanged, even partake of the sacraments

of Confession and Holy Communion, counting God's blessings or learning of God's warnings do not make a difference. He is a rock, a harsh heart which is not influenced. The saying of our father Abraham, the father of fathers, fits him: *“neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead”* (Luke 16:31). For this sake, the Bible alerts us saying:

“If you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb 3:7).

God's voice comes to us from many sources. God talks to us through His Bible, sermons and spiritual advice, we may hear it through incidents where God's hand is very clear, or through the quiet session with the self. The most important thing in all of this, is for us to meet the voice of God with attentive ears and with an open heart, a soft and non-resisting heart.

In this way even if we harden our heart once we will not continue to do so.

The virgin in the Song of Songs did not open the door to the Lord the first time, and her heart was hardened towards Him. But the second time her heart softened . She said: *“My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him”* (Song 5:4). She got up to search for this beloved everywhere, saying: *“I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am lovesick”* (Song 5:8). I wish we would fight the hard heart within us . If our heart is kind, all of the spiritual means will influence us, leading us to repentance and to the love of God.

The sensitive kind person, will be influenced by every spiritual matter.

If he hears the Liturgy, some hymn, or a sermon, or reads a spiritual book, he is influenced. He is also influenced in remembering his beloved who have departed. If he sins, he says: *'In case the spirit of so and so might have seen me now'*. In this way, he turns from his sin instantly. Looking at a picture of Jesus crucified, affects his feelings and he weeps, joining Saint Mary the virgin at the cross: *'but my heart burns when I gaze at you hanging on the cross which you endured for the sake of all; O my son and my God'*.

The eyes of a sensitive person, I compare to a sponge filled with water.

The slightest touch or pressure makes it hard for it to hold the water. In the same way, a kind hearted person finds it hard to hold his tears. If he sins, he returns quickly, and he does not continue in the error. This was evident with David the prophet, and Peter the apostle after his denial. Reject then my brother the harshness of heart, so that your heart becomes kind and sensitive, responding to every spiritual influence without delay.

Know that the harshness of heart has dangerous hazards.

It leads to spiritual laxity, falling into sin and non- productivity. If the harshness of heart continues as a way of life, it will make life dry out completely, to be burned finally (Heb 6).

Do not say: *'What can I do? This is my nature'*.

No, your nature originally was in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26). Every error which follows is an artefact which you can get rid of by repentance and by accepting the work of the Holy Spirit within you. Many harsh people were transformed to meek people. For example, Saint Moses the black, was transformed from a murderer to a meek monk with a very kind heart. He became an adviser to many, and his heart was completely free of every harshness towards God and people.

We will explore then, the reasons for the harshness of heart, and we will investigate how to treat it.

The Reasons for the harshness of heart and its treatment.

Common reasons for the harshness of heart are listed below:

I. The practice of sin

Sin hardens the heart. Continuance in the practice of sin hardens the heart even more. For as long as a person lives in sin, he forgets God, His commandments, His death and His redemption. Forgetfulness hardens his heart. Sin becomes an easy and simple practice to which he does not hear the voice of his conscience, nor the voice of the Spirit. Repentance from sin removes this harshness. Meditating on the repugnance of sin, removes this harshness from the heart. We have discussed this in detail in chapter one of this book.

II. The pleasure of sin

If a person enjoys sin, it will be easy for him to forget God's love and commandments. His heart becomes hardened. The joy of sin overcasts the mind and heart .

When Eve saw that the tree was appetising to eat her heart was hardened.

She forgot God's commandment, and the judgement of death. She overlooked the life of purity and the love of God. The desire for the tree was overwhelming.

In the same way, Samson forgot his vow and the pleasure of sin anaesthetized him.

When he was with Delilah, he was not with God. The sinful desire made him forget everything. The Spirit of God which was in him called, but it no longer influenced him. He forgot that Delilah was not faithful to him, and handed him over to his enemies more than once. However, the heart through the desire was hardened even from hearing the voice of the mind. He became stubborn. Nothing affected him. Samson lost his honour and his vow (Judg 16).

For the same reason, the rich young man rejected the Lord's commandment.

He was searching for the everlasting life. He used to learn the commandments from a young age. However, the love of money was in his heart. The pleasure of having money hardened the

heart of that youth. So, when he heard the commandment from the Lord, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Matt 19:22).

The pleasure of sin hardened the heart of Pharaoh.

In front of him were hundreds of thousands whom, he could utilise in his works. How can he let these people leave, and lose their free labour? The pleasure of the sin of exploitation and lordship, hardened his heart. He did not benefit from all of the plagues which fell upon him and on all of Egypt. Every time his heart responded, the joy of sin would retract him.

Ahab acted in the same way, when he desired the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.

The possession gave him a great pleasure. He broke God's commandment and submitted to Jezebel's advice. He killed Naboth unjustly after he devised an accusation around him, and he called upon false witnesses. The pleasure of having that vineyard, blinded his conscience completely. His heart was hardened and could accept injustice and murder.

The pleasure of sin makes the voice of the conscience lose its influence and hardens the heart.

Man either forgets God's commandment, or delays its execution in order to harbour a desired sin for a longer period. During this, he blocks his ears to hear any inner voice which rebukes him, and any external voice which advises him. His heart becomes stubborn, resisting change. The mind calls him to stay away, his conscience and all of the spiritual influences call him

too. However, the heart which has been hardened by sin says: *'Yes I will stay away, but not now'*. He delays repentance.

Delaying hardens the heart, and makes it less responding towards the spiritual call. The harshness of heart makes man delay repentance. The delaying of repentance, hardens the heart even more. Every time man delays his repentance, and continues feeling that he is enjoying sin, his condition increasingly worsens. His practice of sin makes him realise its joy and benefits. The pleasure of sin invites him to increase his practice. In all of this, the heart is hardened and is not influenced by spiritualities.

There is no solution but for him to stop enjoying sin.

He is either convinced that he is in a state of loss, and that sin harms him here and deprives him of his eternity. Or some outcomes of sin shake him greatly. God may strike him with a plague and he collapses. He is bored with sin and becomes tired. Now he thinks differently. There is still another important treatment which is:

The increase in nourishment of the spirit, until sin loses its pleasure.

Man's view of sin must change. This might be what the apostle meant by his saying: *"be transformed by the renewing of your mind"* (Rom 12:2). With the renewing of the mind, he no longer enjoys sin.

III. The external harmful influence also causes hardening of the heart.

The association, friendship and surrounding, have a great influence on the condition of the heart. If you associate with people who have a sensitive heart towards God's commandments, then their attitude will be reflected upon you and you will learn precision in spiritual conduct.

If you associate with people who are careless, they will teach you harshness of heart. If it wasn't for the association with Jezebel, King Ahab's heart might not have been hardened to kill Naboth the Jezreelite (1 Kin 21). Jezebel was the one who presented to him the sinful thought. She helped him to execute it. She planned everything for him, simplifying the punishments. She hardened his heart and he responded.

Similarly, the advice of the young men succeeded to harden Rehobam's heart.

They advised him to say to the people: *“My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist . . . my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges”* (1 Kin 12:8-11). They explained honour, in a way, which ruined him. His heart was then hardened, and he carried out their advice.

There are those who simplify sin to others, and assist them to do it.

There are things which the heart naturally rejects. However, some encouragement or an offer to guide usually help overcome the natural obstacle. The person then submits and falls into sin.

A simple example is the person who is encouraged to smoke for the first time, the groups of hippies used to do horrific things, such as nudity in front of people, or practicing sex in front of friends, or other kinds of rude things including murder and drinking blood. Their followers used to be disgusted with this at first, but they were finally led, and practiced these things, as they appeared at the back of their minds. Their heart was hardened. The saying:

‘Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are’, is quite correct.

The hardest heart is that with a vast conscience. It justifies every error, finds an excuse for every sin, and makes the mind be at service to the wishes of the self. If you come across this type of person, stay away from him. He may implant in your heart thoughts and desires which were not originally yours. He may harden your heart by justifying sin, or by regarding it as a natural thing, or at least mocks your precision in the spiritual life, regarding this as an extravagance or a difficulty. Your heart hardens.

Evil company may be books or dirty advertisements.

Sound recordings, films, or illustrations. Any of this leaves in you an influence in a certain direction, and leads you where God does not wish you to be. The acquired knowledge will develop in you thoughts which change your spiritual view. Your heart is hardened. They present to you new aspects of freedom, power, personality and happiness, which might confuse your principles and beliefs. Be cautious then, and be careful in choosing what to read and view. Examine what you hear, even inside your home.

**Examine every new thought that occurs to you.
Practice differentiating the spirits.**

Do not accept every advice, thought and opinion, but be strong from within. Thus, you will acquire the virtue of differentiating, and testing the spirits (1 John 4:1). Do not lose your spiritual principles. Be very careful in choosing your friends. Seek much guidance in every new thing you meet. Examine everything in the light of the Bible's teaching, in the lives of the saints, and in the firm spiritual principles.

IV. Submitting to obstacles assists in hardening the heart.

We should overcome obstacles, and not submit to them.

Nothing is easier for the devil than for him to place obstacles in front of you in every detail of your spiritual life. The fear for health stands as an obstacle in front of prayer, spiritual readings, meetings and serving. Monetary needs might stand as an obstacle in front of giving tithes to God. Preoccupation stands as an obstacle in front of sanctifying the Lord's day. What is called wisdom, appears to cover every wrong action. So, the worldly wisdom becomes an obstacle in front of your spiritual progression. With such wisdom you learn to lie and practice adulation, favouritism and fear.

Your submission to obstacles, teaches you carelessness, and hardens your heart.

The strong heart does not acknowledge that there is an obstacle which can stand in front of it. He also, does not permit these obstacles to harden his heart, but he lives a life of continual victory. He finds, in the victory over every obstacle, a spiritual joy. When confronting obstacles placed by the devil he remembers the saying of the apostle: *“Resist him, steadfast in the faith”* (1 Pet 5: 9).

V. Disregard of God's kindness usually leads to the harshness of heart.

A person sometimes sins, and because he does not find a divine, deterring punishment, he despises God's commandments, and loses fear of Him. His heart is hardened. Whereas, we see a person being precise in his formal actions for which he can be blamed, questioned or punished. This reminds us of the apostle's saying: *“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath”* (Rom 2:4-5).

Talking about the fear of God sometimes benefits a harsh heart.

The one who is moved by love, can benefit from a speech about God's love. In contrast, the contemptuous might benefit when reminded of God's fear. The apostle says: *“Do not be haughty,*

but fear” (Rom 11:20). He also asks for: “perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1). This might remind us, that pride, is one of the reasons for the harshness of heart.

VI. Pride.

Pride hardens the heart. The proud person only thinks about himself and his honour. He does not place God nor people in front of himself. For the sake of executing his will, he could do anything, and would not care less. In this way, he attains a hard heart. The humble person, on the contrary has a contrite heart in front of God. He obeys and is not hard. If man could evaluate himself as dust, he would be led to repentance, then the harshness of heart would leave him, and grace would join him instead.

VII. The loss of reverence of the spiritual means leads to a hardened heart.

Whoever practices the sacraments without spirit, loses their reverence.

Hence, they no longer influence him. In this way, he does not benefit from them, and his heart is hardened. Formerly, when he used to enter the church, his heart was humbled and fearful. He felt that he was in front of God in His house. As for now, he enters the church, with continuance in his sin, roaming in it, talking and discussing, and it does not leave any influence on him. It is the same for the altar. He is used to partaking of Holy Communion and Confession recklessly. Similarly, his prayer and reading are without spirit. His fasting is a bodily act. Because

his heart has been hardened by continuation in sin, these spiritual means no longer change him.

When a sick person becomes addicted to certain medicines, these lose their effect on him.

For example too many pain killers very soon lose their effect on the pain. An employee who meets his boss regularly and associates with him, no longer fears or reveres him as the other employees do. A person who has lived in holy places and visits them regularly is no longer influenced by them, like a person who visits them for the first time. Therefore, whoever practices the spiritual means, needs to practice them with spirit, depth, understanding and humility, so that he would regain their reverence. He would then benefit from them to turn his heart to God.



5. Avoid the first step, and beware of the small foxes.*

If you want to repent, then beware the first step leading to sin. In most cases, sin does not attack you all at once

*The topic of: ‘ the first step’, was given in saint Mark’s hall at Anba Rewais on Friday 10/6/1966, it was also discussed at the church of the Angel at Damanhour amongst a series of lectures about the life of repentance. As for the topic of the: ‘ small foxes’, it was given in the great Cathedral on Monday 6/7/1980 amongst a group of lectures about the book of the Song of Songs.

with all of its strength, but creeps towards you over a long period of time until it reaches you after many progressions. So then, detect where sin initiates and observe its stages.

Sin usually starts with contact, then with stimulation, and then with kindling.

Sin contacts you firstly through stumbling blocks, recklessness, or through wicked acquaintances. If you give it a chance, it will influence your thoughts or emotions. So, if you do not trust this inner stimulation, accordingly it will then increase and be transformed into kindling. In these two stages, the influences of sin are internal. This is more dangerous, and the matter may become worse.

The matter develops into an inner struggle, which might end up in submission and falling into sin.

It is a struggle between the conscience and sin, or between the spirit and matter. Struggle indicates that the person is rejecting and resisting sin. It is a tiresome stage, but it is better than submitting and falling. A person puts himself in such a situation through neglecting the initial stages.

You cannot guarantee victory in this struggle between you and between sin.

You could be successful in it after toil, or you could fail and give in your weapon, that is submit to the enemy and fall. It is the nature of sin, that it should be accomplished. Once you fall in sin, the enemy will not leave you alone. Instead he will continue his warfare until the sin is repeated, becomes a habit or

a characteristic of you. As such, you can no longer resist, and you submit to every suggestion that the devil makes to you, as his slave and thus sin dominates you. The captivity of Babylon is a symbol. The psalmist says: *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion”* (Ps 136). He also says: *“How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?”* The devil is not satisfied by making his prey a slave to sin, but continues to make him slide to an even more disgusting state.

The bondage develops into the humiliation of the bondage where man desires sin and does not find it, even after asking and pleading for it with all of his strength. The person who desires money or possessions, or the desires of the flesh and cannot obtain them. The person feels humiliated who asks for majesty or pride or revenge or spite, and proceeds with all of his desire hoping to find them. He would plead with and beg of the devil, to grant him sin. The devil continues to humiliate him until he despises this person. Which one of these stages are you at?

I wish that you would cut your struggle short and avoid the first step.

This is easier and guaranteed. It also demonstrates your purity, your rejection of sin. You do not negotiate or deal with the enemy. To this effect, Saint Dorotheos compared:

The seedling to the big tree.

He said that it is very easy to uproot a seedling from the soil. You grab it with your hand and remove it with ease. However,

if you wait until it becomes a big tree, it will be very difficult for you to uproot. Even if you succeed at this, there is another danger.

You might have overcome an evil thought from within you, after a long struggle. However, during the struggle you might have defiled your mind and perhaps your heart.

Even if you have cast it out of your conscience mind, it remains in your memory, and in your subconscious. It might return to you after a while, or appear in your dreams or in your presumptions. Why need all of this toil? It is better to eradicate it at the beginning of the matter, before it sets in with increasing chances to ruin your spirituality. Try to overcome sin at the beginning, that is in the stage of contact.

As much as you can, try to keep away from contact with sin.

The first psalm says: *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful” (Ps 1).* One of the saints noticed a kind of development in what the psalm said. Walking, then standing, and then sitting. The first one, walking or proceeding is less dangerous than standing which is less dangerous than sitting, that is settling. The last stage of the scornful is more horrific than the stage of sinners, because they are reckless sinners. Therefore, do not allow sin to develop with you, or induce you to develop with it. Deviate from it at the first step. This is if you want to repent and if you want to keep your heart pure. On the whole:

Whatever stage you are at, do not develop to a worse one.

Hold on while you are relatively stronger at the beginning of this deadly stage of contact. If you are affected, then your will has begun to respond to sin, and in the kindling you have weakened. In struggle, you enter into a stage of life or death. When you fall, then your will has given up quickly in this war. When you become a slave to sin, that is the end of your will. You then become a person deprived of his will. Watch yourself then, and beware the first step. Know well that:

Everytime man takes a step forward along the path of sin, his will becomes weaker. He is inclined towards sin, making room for the devil within himself. Everytime he takes another step towards sin, the love of God decreases in his heart, and his fall becomes certain. Therefore, the psalm says: *“O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed.....”*

“Happy shall he be who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock” (Ps 136).

The daughter of Babylon (the land of captivity) is the sin. Her children are the desires or thoughts of sin at the first step, before the sin could grow. Happy is he who takes them and dashes them (that is, gets rid of them) against the rock. As the Bible says: *“and that Rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:4)*. That means, happy is he who resists sin, at its very beginning in the mind, and seeks help through the power of the Lord Himself to annihilate it. We will try to give examples from the Bible about the development of the stages of sin.

How did the matter develop in the fall of our mother Eve?

Let us take a lesson in our lives from this first sin. Did Eve fall when she took from the tree and ate, and gave her husband and he ate with her? No, for this was the last stage in the problem. It was a very natural development to everything that had preceded it.

The problem actually started when she sat with the serpent who made her listen to some amazing words: *“You will not surely die..... in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”* (Gen 3:4-5). Here, doubt entered the heart of Eve, and she started to lose faith in the truth of God's words, who said: *“in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”*. At least her faith began to shake and she doubted God's promise. Doubt handed her over to desire divinity, knowledge, and not just the mere desire of the fruit. Here, her inner stimulation had reached its peak. Eve lost her simplicity and her inner purity. She looked at the tree and found: *“that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise”* (Gen 3:6). Eve passed by the tree everyday, since it was in the middle of the garden, but she had not looked at it like this. So, where did this look come from?

A strange thought entered into the heart, which was transformed into a desire. The desire dominated the heart and the will submitted to it.

At that stage, neither Eve nor Adam were capable of abstaining from eating. The condition of their hearts had completely

changed. Their original state of purity and simplicity was lost. Doubt then, took the place of faith. The desire increased greatly and the will was greatly weakened. Eve then fell, and Adam followed.

Eve should have kept away from the first step.

That is, not sitting with the serpent which is: “*the most deceiving animal of the wilderness*” (Gen 3). She could have spared herself listening to words which were against God's commandment. As she listened, she should have rejected and not believed them. She should not have let the sinful thought enter her heart and be transformed into a desire. If such a desire would tempt her, she should have resisted it. However, she let the matters develop in her heart, and led her from one sin to another, until she reached the highest level of falling. She could have avoided all of this, if she kept away from the first step.

Do you wish then, not to fall? Keep away from the serpent.

Keep away from: “*Evil company (which) corrupts good habits*”(1 Cor15:33). Beware external, evil influences. Protect your eyes from viewing sin. Keep away from this first step, that may lead you gradually to a total loss. Samson fell, as a result of another serpent. Samson was a great judge, who had honour and reverence, whom the Spirit of God used to move (Judg 13:25), and whom the Spirit of the Lord came upon (Judg 14:6). This Samson, revealed his secret, broke his vow, and his enemies despised him. They put out his eyes and made him pull the grinder in the prison.(Judg 16:21).

Did Samson's distress come suddenly? Or was it the outcome of a few developing stages?

Yes, it had developments, one step led to another. Firstly he went to Gaza and sinned there (Judg 16:1). Then he became acquainted with a woman called Delilah. His relationship with her developed into love, devotion and then living with her. In all of these, his conscience did not bother him. His enemies felt this and used it against him. She tried to know the secret of his power in order to hand him over to his enemies. She asked him more than once. She betrayed him to his enemies, and he knew it. Nevertheless, he kept his relationship with her. He lost his personality with her. He developed until he told her his secret, and so she sold him to his enemies for silver. He accepted to give her his head, to shave his hair. So, he lost his power and they captured him. He could have avoided all of this, if he had kept away from the first step, or, if he had woken up to himself at any of the stages which he passed through, before culminating into the tragedy.

Lot's tragedy also passed through stages and developments.

Sodom perished and with it perished all of Lot's riches. He lost everything and all of his relatives, and he lost his wife also. He could have perished with the city, if it wasn't for the two angels who took him out with his two daughters (Gen 19). When I analyse Lot's problem, I turn back the hands of the clock some years, when he used to live in friendship with the man of God, Abram, next to righteousness and the altar. Then the problem began.

Lot loved riches and abundance. He desired the grassy land.

The matter reached the stage in which he was separated from Abram, the man of God. This was his first loss. So, in searching for the grassy land, he saw Sodom. The land was watered: *“like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt” (Gen 13:10). “Then Lot chose for himself”*. This was a spiritual error. *“But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord” (Gen 13:13)*. In spite of this, Lot did not look at the spirituality of the place, but at its greenery. So he left Abram and the altar, to go to the abundant land, in the company of the wicked. He went to the place which had materialistic wealth, and not to the place where he could worship God. His spirituality then became of secondary importance to him. *“For that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds” (2 Peter 2:8)*.

Things became even worse.

He mixed with the people of the land. His daughters were married to them. He lost his spiritual reverence amongst them, when he warned them of God's conviction later on: *“to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking” (Gen 19:14)*. They attacked his house when the two angels entered it, and the matter ended with the destruction of the city, and the loss of everything he had.

It would have been more appropriate for him to be alert from the beginning, and not to have left Abram.

He should have fought against the first step in his heart, which was the love of the abundant land, the love of wealth and spaciousness. He could have avoided the great loss.

Let us now contemplate on David's sin, and see its first step.

David committed fornication which led him to murder to cover his sin. The matter led him to a method of lying and perverseness in order to deceive Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam 11:8-13). Was fornication then, the first step? No, for he previously saw the woman bathing and desired her. Even this was not the first step. This was preceded by David leaving his bed, walking on the roof of the king's house, looking at the peoples homes and the privacy of their personal lives. However, this step was preceded by another fundamental step.

The first step in the fall of David was the life of luxury.

This luxury made him stay in his palace, whilst the people were occupied with the war in the desert. He did not go out to battle with them. He did not even contribute with his feelings. Uriah was more noble than him in this point, for, when David invited him to go home and to rest, Uriah answered: “. . . *the servants of my Lord are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing*” (2 Sam 11:11).

Previously, David's life was different.

He was pursued by Saul, escaping from one desert to the other. He lived in the caves, fought by himself, and slept on the ground and he did not sin at that time. As for later he was in luxury, living in palaces, having servants attendants and slaves. He sent the army to fight, whereas he was in his house on his bed. He stands to walk on the roof, and look at the people. He did not have the feelings of sharing with his fighting army.

Luxury led him to desire, sin, and the attempt to cover it.

Because of his many sins, he later drenched his couch every night with his tears (Ps 6). When God wanted to treat him for his first step, he permitted Absalom to rise against him. David went out from his palace barefoot (2 Sam 15:30). Shimei the son of Gera cursed him along the way. God returned him to his original rank.

Let us contemplate then, on how Solomon was able to burn incense to the idols.

\

Solomon was the wisest person on earth in his generation. Twice God appeared and spoke to him (1 Kin 11:9). He granted him wisdom, majesty, and a big heart. How then was he able to fall into this amazing ignorance? There is no doubt that it did not come suddenly, but developed gradually.

The first step was that he married foreign women (1 Kin 9:16-24).

The situation developed until the Bible said: *“But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh. women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites” (1 Kin 11:1).* This was against God's commandment which disallowed marriage with foreigners.

Next he built high places on the mountains for the gods of these foreign women:

“Who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods” (1 Kin 11:7-8). Solomon's situation ended up in tragedy through the development of his sin, and the Bible says: *“For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods . . . For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord” (1 Kin 11:4-7).* All of this developed after the first step of marriage to foreigners. More time is required if we were to discuss the development of sin with these great people, and how the first step in sin led them to more horrific steps. My advice is:

You are not stronger than the prophets, the wise, and the great people who fell. Be aware then, of the first step to sin, and escape for your life.

You are not stronger than Adam, who was in Paradise, in a superior natural state, and not stronger than David whom the Spirit of God descended upon and was the Lord's anointed. You are not stronger than Samson the Lord's consecrated one,

whom the Spirit of God used to move, and not stronger than Solomon, whom the Lord spoke to twice, and was the wisest person in his generation. You are not stronger than Abraham the father of fathers and the beloved of God, who in order to rescue himself, lied and said that Sarah was his sister and subjected her to be lost (Gen 20:11-13). The Bible is correct in saying about sin that:

“She has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men” (Prov 7:26).

We should then, be aware of sin with all of its power, not only when it intensifies against us, and attacks like: *“a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet 5:8), but from the first step. We take her little ones, and dash them against the rock. We should act accordingly with the obvious, horrific sins, and every sin, no matter how simple or small it seems, we fulfil the saying of the divine inspiration in the book of the Song:

“Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines” (Song 2:15).

The vine in general is the church, and in particular it is the heart of every believer. The foxes are the cunning sins which appear to be small, unlike the ferocious beasts.

Its danger lies in its small size as no one will give it importance.

So, they leave it to progress and grow, until it reaches a destructive stage which is difficult to resist. This commandment calls us to precision and importance, to search in our lives for

these small foxes and to resist them. We also learn an important lesson, that:

We must not neglect any sin, no matter how small it appears.

Any simple hole in a ship, can lead to, if neglected, to a drowning disaster. The river Nile with its great channel, started with drops of rain which fell on the mountains of Ethiopia. It progressed until it came to Egypt as a river. The great hill of rubbish which they placed on the Holy Cross, started with one basket of rubbish. The longest journey in sin, started with one step.

We should be alert and take great care of every step which leads to sin. We must cast out the small foxes which may be laziness, carelessness, laxity, or unnecessary talk or conduct. Know that whoever gives importance to the little ones, will also give importance to the great ones. As the English saying goes: *‘Take care of the penny, and the pound will look after itself’*. Then, do not neglect the small things, but give importance to its resistance.

There are small foxes which entered into the lives of the saints. We will take Abraham as an example.

Our father Abraham sacrificed his wife Sarah twice, saying that she was his sister. When she was taken to the king of the country, she was desirable in his eyes, for she was a woman of beautiful countenance. This happened once in Egypt (Gen 12:10-20), and another time in the land of Gerar (Gen 20:1-14). If it wasn't for the Lord's intervention, Sarah would have been

lost, and would have become the wife of someone other than Abraham, while he was alive. How did our father Abraham fall into this situation?

The first step might have been the fear for his life.

He feared and said to Sarah: *“Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and they will kill me, but they will let you live”* (Gen 12:12). Would you then sacrifice your wife? This is too much. Abraham's fear of death was preceded by another fear of famine. The Bible says: *“Now there was a famine in the land, and Abraham went down to Egypt to sojourn there”* (Gen 12:10). Egypt, for its wealth, symbolises the relying on human assistance.

However, a small fox got Abram.

This unseen small fox was weakness of faith in the heart of Abram, with respect to God's support of him during the time of the famine. This weakness in faith, led him to rely on human assistance. He went down to Egypt. The devil then knew these points of weakness and led him to fear for his life from death, as he feared for his life from hunger. Fear led him to sacrifice his wife, and this led him to lie and say that she was his sister. The small fox which entered into him was able to destroy the vine from all of these directions.

Another small fox entered into Job, which was self-righteousness.

Job's problem was that he was a blameless, upright man, and he knew about himself that he was blameless and upright. For this reason, he fell into self righteousness. He was, as the Bible said: *“righteous in his own eyes” (Job 32:1)*. God then kept purifying him through the temptation, until he said: *“I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42:3)*. It is very easy for a small point to drag many problems.

A small fox fought the righteous Joseph, which was, talking about himself.

He told his brothers about his dreams and about those who bowed down to him in the dream. This aroused their jealousy which was transformed into hatred. *“So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words” (Gen 37:8)*. The situation developed until they finally sold him as a slave.

Therefore, it was good that the virgin Saint Mary did not talk about all of the marvels which happened with her, but kept all these things in her heart (Luke 2:51).

The coloured tunic was another small fox which caused problems.

Jacob made a coloured tunic for the son of his old age, Joseph. This aroused the jealousy of his brothers: *“But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to*

him” (*Gen 37:4*). Do you also do this, when you are submerged in your dealings with people, and show love to one more than the other?

Truly, who would have thought . . .?

Who would have thought that the first step in many sins ends in the selling of a brother, the deceit of a father, by his children and Pharaoh's bondage of these are a result of a coloured tunic or the telling of the story of a young boy's dreams? However, they are the small foxes which destroy the vines. The Bible therefore says: “*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise*” (*Eph 5:15*). Be very precise then, for a sin which you thought to be simple might drag you to many problems. Whereas, precision will definitely benefit you, and will teach you vigilance. We will give you an example of this.

Whoever gives importance to decency within his room, will no doubt be decent outside.

He who in his own private room, is too embarrassed to act indecently: because of the spirits of the angels and saints, no doubt will proceed with decency in front of the people. Decency becomes one of his characteristics. On the other hand, whoever does not care to sit modestly in his private room, will not mind sitting in the same way in front of people.

The devil is smart. He does not attack you with a horrific sin all at once.

He does not ask you to open a wide door to enter into your life. He only wants to gain your permission to enter through the eye

of a needle. You may not notice and permit him. This is sufficient for him. He then keeps widening it until he destroys all of your life. Therefore, circumspection is better.

Many are the sins which enter through the eye of a needle.

The devil for example, does not ask you not to pray, but to delay it. If he finds you accustomed to prayer, then when you wake up, he says to you: *'wait until you have washed your face'*. Before you awaken, he has placed in your mind, many thoughts to occupy you and make you forget, and other things to delay you. As for you, do not give him a chance, but continue in your prayers, even whilst you are going to wash your face. Be very careful then. Keep away from the first step which leads you to negligence and laxity, or which leads you to sin.

The first step to sin may not be a sin in itself.

A sinful relationship may begin as an innocent friendship without any errors. It might be, wasting all your time at home, around the television and films, which started by viewing an innocent educational film or soccer match. Then study time was lost along with missing on church meetings. Man then, must be circumspect and aware.

The first step towards sin, differs from one person to another. Luxury was the first step in David's sin, and jealousy was the first step in Cain's and Joseph's brother's sins. The marriage of foreigners was the first step in Solomon's sin. The sinful external influence was the first step in Adam and Eve's

sin, and in the sins in the time of the judges (Judg 3:5-6). The love of women was the first step in the fall of Samson. Fear was the first step in the sins of Peter and Abraham.

Search then, for the first step in your sins.

Be very aware of it. If you fall in the first step, do not continue into the second. Your first step might be that you have gone to Gaza, or to Sodom, or to Gerar. Perhaps a weakness in your personality might make you submit to the advice of the wicked. Perhaps the love of God is not in your heart. Perhaps your first step is conceit or increased self-confidence, which does not lead you to awareness. Perhaps the first step in your fall is the stumbling blocks. Whatever it is, we will try to search for it with you, in order to get rid of it.

Benefit from the study of the first step which befell another person.

Especially those who were mighty in the life of the spirit. Look then: *“How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished”* (2 Sam 1:27).

By being careful about the first step, you will learn the life of circumspection. Make sure you get rid of the small foxes which destroy the vines. As Saint Sarah said: *‘a mouth denied water will not ask for wine. A stomach which is denied bread, will not ask for meat’*.

6. Avoid stumbling blocks, and escape from the sources of sin.*

Avoid all types of stumbling blocks. those that others put in your way and those which you put in other people's way.

Stumbling blocks are dangerous.

Literally, stumbling means falling.

Whoever makes another stumble is responsible for that person's fall.

In this, he carries or shares the guilt of this stumbling person. The Lord Jesus said: *“Woe to that man by whom the offence comes” (Matt 18:7), “It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea” (Matt 18:6, Luke 17:2).*

The phrase: “Woe to that man”, demonstrates the danger of his sin.

Saint Paul the apostle recognised the danger of making others stumble, and wished that no one would perish as a result of him. He said his famous phrase: *“If food (the eating of meat) makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Cor 8:13).*

* This is from a lecture on ‘stumblings’ given on Friday 23/1/1970 in the great Cathedral, and another lecture with the same name given at the university group meetings, and a third lecture headed: ‘escape for your life’, which I gave on Friday 25/8/1972 in the great Cathedral.

Those who cause stumblings will precede other sinners for Judgement. Jesus said: *“So it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire”* (Matt 13:40-42). He will put those who offend before those who practice lawlessness because they are the cause of many sins.

The making of others to stumble is a dangerous matter, but the making of the young and simple to stumble is even more dangerous.

This is what the Lord said in the woe which He poured on those by whom the offence comes: *“whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin . . .”* (Matt 18:6). *“It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones”* (Luke 17:2).

This is because the little ones and the simple, fall easily.

They believe everything, quickly and without discussion. They do not doubt in whoever is talking to them. They cannot differentiate between true or false matters. Therefore, the guilt of whoever causes stumblings and the guilt of whoever accepts them are beyond comparison.

This lack of equivalence was found in Eve's stumbling in sin.

Eve was very simple, extremely pure. She had no experience with sin. She did not know evil. She did not doubt anyone else's words, since she did not know that there were other creatures which lied. The serpent was: *“more cunning than any beast of the field”*. It knew how to lie, and how to shape the stumbling with cunningness. Therefore, because of the lack of equivalence of the two sides, it was able to make Eve stumble. Eve was, with respect to the serpent: *“one of these little ones”*.

It is the same with the stumbling of children also.

They are in an age in which they believe everything, imitate every movement and feature. They repeat the expressions which they hear, without understanding. They are soft dough, which can be shaped with ease. Therefore it is very unlawful for anyone to corrupt them. The stumbling blocks presented to them by their parents, brothers and sisters, neighbours, teachers, relatives and different types of advertisement, are very dangerous. The dealings with children have to be with great care, as with sensitive equipment.

Therefore refrain from making others stumble especially the simple and the little ones.

Be very cautious not to weary the thoughts of the simple. Imagine a person who has the simplicity of children, whose heart has not been opened to sin. Contact of this person with a person who is relatively broader in mind and experience opens his eyes to stumblings. His thoughts become contaminated. The

acquired stains of thought, deprive him of his simplicity, make him doubt, and make him stumble and fall. Will he not carry the judgement of the simple, who stumbled?

Whoever makes a little one stumble, is like someone who opens fire against an unarmed person. The words (little ones), are taken then, with their relative meaning and not their literal one.

That is, whoever is smaller than you in knowledge, in will, in position, and whom you can make fall, is a little one. Truly this is a very dangerous matter for two reasons:

- (a) The feeling of guilt of corrupting a righteous person and now
- (b) What would happen if the person who made another one to fall, repents, whereas the one who stumbled does not repent? Will the conscience of the former be at ease? When he can see whom he made to fall?

Therefore take great care not to be a stumbling stone for others.

It is in your power to repent. You can repent if your heart returns to God. However, the repentance of the person whom you made to stumble, is not in your hands. If he continues in his sin in which he fell because of you, and his soul perished, will your soul be taken in place of his soul? Even if God forgives you through repentance and you are saved, does there not remain in your heart a severe pain, when you see him who perished through you? This is if you were the cause of others'

stumbling. If the stumblings come to you from others instead, then my advice to you is:

Keep away from stumbling stones and escape from all of the causes of sin.

Remember the saying of the angel to Lot: “*Escape for your life . . . Do not stay anywhere in the plain . . . lest you be destroyed*” (Gen 19:17). Remember also how the righteous Joseph escaped from stumbling, which beseeched him. His escape protected him from falling into that sin. In the same way, when the Lord chose our father Abram, and wanted to make him a holy nation, He kept him away from stumblings, in that He took him out from his country and kindred (Gen 12:1).

Your escape from sin and its stumblings, demonstrates your rejection of sin.

The escape from stumblings is a virtue, for it demonstrates that the heart from within does not desire sin. Therefore, do not be mistaken to think that escaping is weakness. It is not wise for man to be lax with his power, to subject himself to temptations, and to enter into wars which might weary him. Then, do not describe the departure from stumblings as weakness, but say that it is preservation. The fathers advised some people about, ‘*the substance of sin*’ saying:

Whoever is close to the substance of sin, will encounter two wars, internal and external, but he who is far from it has one war.

It is not only the fathers who advise the escape from stumblings, but the Holy Bible itself says: *“Flee also youthful lusts”* (2 Tim 2:22). The reason being that, *“Evil company corrupts good habits”* (1 Cor 15:33). The first psalm is clear in its saying: *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful”* (Ps 1:1). Their friendship is all stumblings. Even the Lord Jesus Himself says:

“If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you” (Matt 5:29-30). He said this in the sermon on the mountain. He repeated the same words on another occasion (Matt 18:8-9). This repetition demonstrates the Lord's concern with this point in particular, that is the keeping away from stumblings. It is not necessary to take the Lord's words here in a literal way, **but we can explain these verses in their spiritual meaning.**

The dearest person to you, is as dear as your eyes. The person who helps you the most, is like your right hand. If the stumbling comes from within you and not from the outside, be firm and keep away from it according to the Lord's commandment, even if the matter leads to your martyrdom.

- **Where does the stumbling come from?**

The stumbling could be internal, from within a person.

“Out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil” (Luke 6:45). So from within him, there initiates desires and thoughts which disturb him. The stumbling might be from his senses which gather visions and conversations which weary him. It might be from his desires, pastimes, hobbies, thoughts and feelings, and from what he has stored in his subconscious of pictures, news and thoughts. Therefore, he makes himself stumble. If a desire does not come to him from the outside, he brings it about to himself from within, by his personal conduct. Truly: *“a man's foes will be those of his own household” (Matt 10:36).* His household is his heart and thought. If you are like this, then try to control yourself, as the apostle said: *“bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5).*

There are external stumblings from humans and from the devils

In the first sin of humanity, the two types are found. Eve stumbled because of the devil and Adam stumbled because of Eve. The devil makes people stumble in a direct way, through other humans and through his servants who: *“transform themselves into ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:15).*

There are stumblings from the devils, such as revelations and false dreams.

For the devil, as the Bible says, can: “transform himself into an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14). In *the ‘Paradise of the desert fathers’* it is mentioned that the devil once appeared in the form of an angel to a holy monk, saying: *‘I am Gabriel the angel, God has sent me to you’*. The monk answered him very humbly: *‘Perhaps you were sent to another person and were lost along the way, but I am a sinful person and do not deserve an angel appearing to me’*. The devil then departed.

The devil can appear as a spirit of a person who has departed.

He says I am the spirit of so and so (one of your relatives or friends). He tells of things which are related to this person or his house or his family, to convince the person who sees him. He also appears in the form of one of the saints or anchorites, in order to deceive people.

The devil might appear in a dream.

There are many dreams from the devil. Saint Anthony knew of a certain incident because he said: *‘the devils came and informed me’*. Therefore my advice to you is, do not believe or be led by dreams. Some dreams are from God, for example the dreams of Daniel, Joseph the righteous, and Joseph the carpenter. But there are dreams from the devil with which he makes people stumble, and there are also revelations from the devil.

Also, do not follow the spirits, for they have deceived many.

The Bible says: *“Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1)*. These are sent from the devil. The false Christs and the Antichrist in the end of the age is referred to by the apostle when he said: *“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish” (2 Thess 2:9)*.

Therefore distinguish the thoughts of the devil and his tricks.

He fights by thought as well as by revelations, dreams and spirits. Don't you however, believe him, as the apostle says: *“lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor 2:11)*. Therefore do not follow every thought which comes to you, thinking that it is from the Spirit of God. Do not say with courage: *‘the Spirit said to me’*. Be patient with thoughts, to know whether they are from God or not, and seek advice. Saint Macarius the great had a thought to visit the anchorite fathers in the inner desert, and it seemed to be a holy thought. However, Saint Macarius said about this: *‘I kept suppressing this thought for three years to see whether or not it was from God’*. So, do not run after thoughts to carry them out.

The devil presented to Jesus three thoughts. He rejected them all and answered him back. You also, reject every thought which comes to you from the devil. Remember what

was said by your godmother at baptism: 'I renounce you O Satan, with all your evil thoughts . . . and all your soldiers. . . and all the rest of your hypocrisies'. Reject every thought which does not advance you spiritually nor build you, whether it came to you from the devil or from people.

Escape from the stumblings of the devil in the same way as from the stumblings of people.

The stumblings have a general type which covers all of society, and a specific type for you personally. The people that you associate with, whether they are enemies or friends, can be stumbling stones for you and others.

The stumbling might come from your dearest relatives and loved ones.

The majority of youth who become corrupt, do so, through the corruption of their very dear friends who influence them. The stumbling came to Samson from Delilah, who was the person whom his heart loved most. The stumbling came to King Ahab from his wife Jezebel. We will not forget that the stumbling came to our father Adam from Eve. The stumbling comes to many children at home from their parents. If the home is not religious, then they hear there, abusive language and the words of quarrelling. They take then, from their parents all of the wrong characteristics and habits.

The stumbling came to Jacob the father of fathers from his mother Rebekah.

She was the one who made him disguise himself in his brother Esau's clothes and deceive his father Isaac, and receive the blessing from him. She was the one who made the plan and prepared everything. When Jacob was worried that this deception might be discovered he said: *"I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing"*. His mother said to him: *"Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice . . ."* (Gen 27:8-13). It is very easy for a stumbling to come to a daughter from her mother. A mother destroys the life of her daughter after her marriage, by intruding and imposing her opinion on her and on her husband.

The stumbling came to Lord Jesus from His disciple Peter, and so He rebuked him.

This stumbling was a wrong advice. When the Lord was explaining to His disciples that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem: *"and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and Scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day"*, Peter did not like his great Teacher to surrender Himself. *"Then Peter took Him aside"*, and said to Him with an erroneous love: *"Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You"*. But the Lord turned to him and said: *"Get behind Me, Satan. You are an offence to me . . ."* (Matt 16:21-23). In this way the Lord rejected this stumbling from His disciple and friend.

You must reject the stumbling which come to you from your loved ones.

Even if this stumbling is from your closest relative. The Lord Jesus said: “*. . . a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*” (Matt 10:36-37). Love is firstly to God, and from His love proceeds all other love. Obedience if firstly to God, and from His obedience proceeds all other obedience. The Bible even said about the obedience of parents: “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right*” (Eph 6:1). It is then an essential obedience, but: “*in the Lord*”.

Therefore, Jonathan did not obey his father Saul in his persecution of David.

But he rebuked him by his saying: “*Why then will you sin against innocent blood, to kill David without a cause?*” (1 Kin 19:5). King Saul was a stumbling to his son Jonathan, but Jonathan overcame this stumbling. In the same way, King Solomon, even though he had great respect for his mother, Bathsheba, did not obey her in her intercession for Adonijah his brother (1 Kin 2:19-23).

The limit of obedience precludes a stumbling.

From your association with people, and from your experience in life, you can realise the sources of stumbling to you. Benefit then from this experience, by surrounding yourself with a pure atmosphere as much as you can. Those whom you cannot keep

away from physically, keep away from with respect to thought and direction of life. As the Bible said: *“have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them”* (Eph 5:11). If you cannot reprove it, then at least do not walk in its current, and do not submit to the stumbling.

Take care that you yourself do not become a stumbling for others.

If you do, you will be responsible in front of your conscience and in front of God, and perhaps in front of people, that you are the cause of someone's fall.

The responsibility of the stumbling.

A youth was stumbled by a young lady, and fell into lust. What is her responsibility?

If this young beautiful lady was well behaved, and her beauty was the cause of the stumbling of this youth, then she would not be blamed at all, and there is no responsibility on her in this stumbling.

There are female saints, whose beauty caused some people to stumble.

Probably the most famous example of this, is Saint Justina who was very beautiful. A man fell in love with her. As he could not possess her, he used magic to try to reach her. The mere mention of her name drove out the devils which were utilised in the magic. Even Cyprian the magician believed because of this, and he became one of the saints of the church. Can we say that

Saint Justina had a responsibility in the stumbling? Definitely not, but:

The responsibility is completely upon whoever desired her, and the stumbling was caused by his desire.

In the same way we can talk about Saint Sarah the wife of our father Abraham. She was very beautiful. Her beauty attracted the kings, even Pharaoh took her to his palace once (Gen 12:14-15). Abimelech the king of Gerar took her another time (Gen 20:2). She had no blame in both occasions. Naturally she is not to blame for being beautiful, but all of the blame is in whoever desires.

When then, is the woman responsible for the stumbling?

When she means to allure the man and attract him to herself in a provocative way; or if the man falls because of her manners, speech, or allurements; or if in her make-up or clothing she was actually a cause of stumbling to the normal person. In this way the young lady would be responsible for making the youth's heart filled with desires which make him commit the sin by his own senses or physically. He stumbles when she occupies his thought. As a result he neglects his responsibilities and loses his spiritualities. However, if all of the above are caused by the young lady's natural beauty, then she is not to blame. We say this so that some of the pure young ladies do not doubt in themselves, and fall into delusions and into the complex of blame because of their beauty. What has been said about the woman in this example, can also be said about the man.

What then, is the offence of these people?

What is Joseph the righteous' offence in that Potiphar's wife desired him because he was handsome? Can we say that he made her stumble? Or that his conscience troubles him at her fall into desire because of him? Certainly not. With the same reasoning, what is the offence of the two angels whom the people of Sodom coveted? As angels do not have bodies and in addition, they had the purity of angels. The stumbling here however, is in the corrupt heart which desired. A similar argument can be held about Zechariah the young monk, whose story was told in the paradise of the fathers. He was very handsome. Many people stumbled because of that. He was compelled to go down to the salt lake and disfigure his body and his looks, to keep away the stumbling which was caused by other people's errors.

You cannot escape from the responsibility of your error by unjustly sticking it to someone else, saying that he made you stumble in spite of your righteousness.

The words of the Lord Jesus about the simple eye are very beautiful.

He said: *“If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness”* (Matt 6:22-23). Many stumble because their eyes are not simple. Sin is in their eyes, therefore everything can arouse sin within them. I wish then, that every person would train himself towards this simple eye. Just like we talked about the scope of the young lady's responsibility in stumbling the youth, we can say:

There is also a responsibility for a youth in stumbling a young lady.

She may stumble through his use of a lot of praise and sweet words, and the affection which he shows her with abnormally increased kindness. He makes her stumble through his great persistence towards her, and in pursuing her intensely, until she weakens, becomes embarrassed and responds to him. He also makes her stumble through the promises which he makes to her, and his repeated assurances. She believes him. In this way he keeps her in suspense and wearies her. However is she stumbles just by his personality, then he bears no blame.

As for you then, keep away from both of these types of stumblings:

A. Keep away from the stumbling which actually arouses, which contains a type of seduction or enticement, which makes you responsible in making others fall. Try also as much as you can to keep your eye simple.

B. Keep away, even from the naturally innocent opportunities which cause you to stumble because of your weakness. Say to yourself humbly: *‘I do not want here, to search for where to place the responsibility, on someone else or on me, but: **I will keep away in order not to fall, even if it is because of my weakness.** Even if someone else is completely innocent, as the wild beast was innocent of the blood of the son of Jacob, or as the son of Jacob was innocent of the sin of Potiphar's wife’.*

We can analyse the remaining types of stumblings, similarly.

By the other stumblings, we mean those that are outside the sphere of sexual matters. A person misunderstands, although your words are very clear and do not at all mean what he understood. Someone says to you: ‘You mean me with these words’, whereas you are completely innocent and do not mean him. It is his thinking, doubting and feeling that are wrong. We say in all of this, that:

The stumbling is not from the speaker, but it is the responsibility of the wrong understanding.

In spite of this, you are obliged for the sake of love, to clarify your correct intention, and to explain what was obscure to another person's understanding. You should also be aware your speech is not correctly understood. Keep away from stumblings also. Be very careful in speech and conduct, and especially when there are some suspicious people around who understand your words in their own personal way. There is one type of people, who would say regularly:

‘I have been complexed by people's conduct. I have been complexed by their words’.

He means that he stumbled because of them and their words. This may be true or exaggerated. They may have inner complexities, or the complexity may reside in the people's conduct. The Lord Jesus had said to us: “*offences must come*” (Matt 18:8;). This is because we do not live in an ideal world, but in a world which is full of stumblings. It contains wheat and

also tares. The tares will remain with the wheat until the day of harvest (Matt 13:30). What is our position then?

We must not search for the person who is responsible for the stumbling, but the salvation from it.

The Salvation, is in escaping from the stumblings, and not in examining who is responsible for it. This examination could very easily make us fall into other errors. However, it is not reasonable to say that we are complexed by the stumblings of the people.

It is not right for stumblings to make us lose our inner purity.

It is not right for stumblings to make us lose the peace in our hearts. We are not in heaven, but on earth, and on earth there must be errors. What is important then, is to escape from these errors. We will not be delivered from them by grumbling and complaining, and we will not be rescued from them, if we are complexed by them. However, we will be rescued from stumblings, by purity of heart, and by not responding to them, and at the same time we must not make others stumble.

If we are strong from within, then stumblings will not harm us with anything.

We will be like the house which was built on the rock, on which the rain descended and the winds blew, but did not harm it with anything (Matt 7:25). The responsibility is not completely, in all situations, on the person who causes the stumblings.

There are temptations from the other person, and if it wasn't for him, the fall would not have occurred.

The alcohol (methylated spirits) might say, that the match stick made me burn and I burned. But I say: If the methylated spirits was not an inflammable substance, then the match stick could not make it burn. The same match stick does not affect the cup of water, but if it comes close to the water, it goes out. Anyway, whether you are water or alcohol, escaping is safer. Escaping at least contains meekness, and meekness saves many people. Saint Anthony saw the trap of the devil set up, and so he cried: *'Oh Lord, who can escape from it?'* Stumbling is a first step, if you fall into it, then do not complete the rest of the steps.

The presence of the stumblings is not an excuse for you, and is not a justification for your errors.

For God placed in you His Holy Spirit, and gave you power to resist. If you respond to the stumblings, then you have lost this divine power and did not use it. Victory is possible. Remember Joseph the righteous, who was stronger than the stumblings and was victorious, inspite of the severity of the war which he was subjected to.

The stumbling is a mere display, if it does not meet with acceptance, it passes by.

- **The types of stumbling.**

Many concentrate the talk about stumbling in sexual matters.

It is truly important and dangerous, but it is not everything. The stumblings in this field come in many ways from the sexual stimulation by way of enticement which some individuals use, or by way of different amusement and pleasure aids, with offending pictures, foolish songs, sexual jokes, or by way of futile stories which are heard and read, and also by tales and films. The stumbling comes through association, and bad company, and it also comes from within the soul.

As for you, keep away from all stumblings, and control your senses.

Know that: *‘the senses are the door to thinking’*, as Saint Isaac said: *‘What you see and hear, brings wrong thoughts to you, and becomes a stumbling to you’*. Thought then gives birth to desire, and desire leads to a physical sin. But in case you ask: What should I do? Should I close my eyes, when the stumbling is in every place? It is inevitable that I see and hear. I say to you that you are not responsible for the first look, as long as it comes accidentally.

However, you are responsible for the second look and its propulsions.

If the offending view which you saw arouses or delights you, and you looked at it again with your free will, whether it was a live picture or a printed one, then you have sinned here, because you looked with your free will. If the first look was with your desire and will, then you are responsible for it also. We can say the same things about bad hearings. Escape from them. What about if you cannot?

If you are required to hear it, then don't give it your depth nor your thought.

Let it be a hearing which passes by. Do not let it enter into your depth, do not think about it, do not repeat it in your mind, and do not comment on it.

As much as you can, escape from offending encounters.

If you are compelled to have them, make them as short as possible. Do not stay alone with a person whom the devil uses to combat you, and you weaken from within in his presence. Try during such encounters to raise your heart to God in prayer. Do not remain in the encounter with all of your heart and affections. This is a short word about sexual stumblings, for it is a long topic and books have been written about it. This is not the place for it. We would like to say here, however, that not all of the stumblings are sexual.

There are stumblings of thought for example, and they are of different kinds.

Amongst them are wrong philosophies. When you read them, they confuse your thoughts, and bring doubts to you, if you are reading without previous preparation of the true sound thought. You must be careful of what you read.

There are heretical books, which attack religion.

There are many heretics. There is a reply to everything they write, but they form a stumbling with regards to those who have not studied or do not have the knowledge. This causes them to doubt, which is more dangerous to them than the sins of the flesh which they can easily be delivered from.

The misleading in religious thought are many and cause stumblings.

Jeroboam the son of Nabat was a stumbling to Israel and made him sin, and to digress from God's worship (1 Kin 14:16). He was one of the misleaders of the people before the coming of Christ: Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him (Acts 5:36-37). Also in the time of Christ, the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and the like, were misleading the people. They were a great stumbling. They held the keys of knowledge, but they did not enter and did not let anyone else enter who desired to. They made all of the people stumble through their teachings.

One of the stumblings of thought, is digressed doctrinal thought.

Such thoughts contain an innovation or a heresy, or a theological idea which has not been handed to us by the holy fathers or which does not agree with the prevailing doctrine in the church, in which everyone believes. These thoughts make people stumble, and arouse doubt within them. Do not then accept these thoughts, as the apostles said (Gal 1: 7-8; 3 John 10:11).

Escape from these stumblings of thought, for you are in the age of repentance.

You are a person who is searching for salvation. What then, have you got to do with these thoughts which confuse your intellect, and enter you into fields of argument and perhaps into disputes, which do not agree with your endeavour of purity of heart through repentance. I will leave it to the specialists to reply. Be devoted to spiritual books, so that the more you read of them, your love of God will increase, and you will feel your heart come closer to Him. Similarly escape from all other stumblings of thought such as:

The stumblings of thought which make you offend people and judge them.

There are individuals whom, if the thoughts or news of judgement troubles them, they pour them completely into the ears of others, they do not care whether, or not, the news makes them stumble or enter into their hearts making them doubt, judge or belittle people, or love them less. As for you,

escape all of this, and try to keep your love to everyone. Keep away from those who distort people's image in your sight, in order to preserve your purity of thought.

There are stumblings from those who portray their secrets to people.

They cannot keep a secret, they even portray their private secrets and sins to people. So, the listener stumbles by hearing them. He also stumbles by the names which are mentioned in these stories, and he might fall into sins because of this. Even though the church is very careful in making confession secret, people still continue to tell others, and their stories become a stumbling.

A stumbling of thought also, is the wrong and harmful advice.

An example of this is: '*the advice of Ahithophel*'. Ahithophel was the adviser of David. He left him and joined Absalom's conspiracy, so that he could offer him advice with which to destroy David, the Lord's anointed, and all who were with him. David went to pray saying: "*O Lord, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness*" (2 Sam 15:31). Undoubtedly, Ahithophel's advice was a stumbling to Absalom, and an encouragement to him in the revolution against his father David. The Lord however, heard David's prayer and destroyed Ahithophel's counsel.

Another example similar to Ahithophel's offensive counsel is Balaam's counsel to Balak (Num 22).

The Bible gave it the name: *“the error or Balaam”* (Jude 11). The book of Revelation says about Balaam that he: *“taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality”* (Rev 2:14). This was so that God's wrath would come upon them, and so that His enemy would overcome them. Undoubtedly it was an evil and offensive counsel.

Choose then, your counsellors and keep away from every offensive counsel.

Whether it came from those whom you sought for advice, or from those who voluntarily advise you in your life. They might seem to sympathise with you, whereas their sympathy is not spiritual.

Bad examples cause stumblings to some.

Do not let this matter offend you, no matter how great the person was by whom you stumbled, as a result of his conduct. Do not let this change any of your principles, nor your love to God and the church. Remember that it was said about Elijah the great prophet: *“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours”* (James 5:17). Let your firm example be in the Lord Jesus and the lives of the saints. As for the people's errors, do not let them make you stumble, no matter how great those people are. Good is good no matter how people keep away from it. The holy

Bible mentioned to us the sins of the prophets, to know that man is man with his weaknesses, in any position whatsoever.

As for the specific stumblings in your life, examine them and know their causes and keep away from them. For repentance does not agree with stumblings.

Search for the reasons which make you stumble and lead you to sin. What are they? Are they close to you? How can you keep away from them? Are they within you, or do they come to you from others? Keep away from these stumblings as much as you can, so that they don't influence you. Escape from friends who drag you down, and make you lose your spirituality. Repeat regularly what we say in the Lord's prayer: *“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”*.

7. Do not be tolerant with sin.*

Man falls many times into sin, because of tolerance. So, how is this? It is known that sin starts with an external war, which wants to enter and dominate. **Through tolerance, the external war is transformed to the inside of the heart.** How does this development occur? What is the role of tolerance in this? The sin from the outside might be: a stimulating vision, or a picture in a book, or a word said by someone, or anything which could be desired or owned. Then man becomes tolerant

* I gave a lecture on this in the great Cathedral on Friday 28/10/1977.

with his senses, with his hearing or viewing, and so thought comes to him weakened at first, and it can be easily cast out.

However, the tolerated thought goes down to the heart, and is transformed into a feeling.

If a man wakes up to himself, he can get rid of this feeling, being completely sure that this wrong feeling keeps him away from the love of God, and leads him to sin. This wrong feeling in itself, is a sin, and it is a lack of inner purity and defiles the heart.

However, tolerance with feelings, transforms them into stimulation or desire.

Here, the person begins to submit to thought, and enter into an inner struggle between his desire and conscience. The nature of desire is to dominate. You can get rid of it, if you cast it out firmly. But, through tolerance, the desire or stimulation begins to spread, to the extent that this inner war covers man's thought, heart and senses, and perhaps his body also.

By tolerating desire, it tries to express itself practically, that is:

It tries to satisfy itself in a practical way. If man tolerates this, the action will be carried out. The sin then becomes complete. Furthermore, sin does not stop there, but wants to be repeated. So, man either repents after his fall, or his sin is repeated.

However, he sometimes tolerates doing sin, so that it is transformed into a habit or a characteristic.

Thus, he submits to its domination and becomes a slave to it. He does it sometimes against his will and cannot control himself. For example a person becomes angry spontaneously or talks without control of himself. Whoever commits fornication, or collects money, or mocks others, does that without examining himself and controlling what it does.

The righteous, instead are firm. They are not tolerant with themselves.

They keep a very close observation of every thought and feeling. They observe with firmness their senses, and every word which proceeds from their mouth, and every conduct. Their hearts are: "A garden enclosed ... A spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (Songs 4:12). Their hearts, thoughts and senses have fortified doors, which are very well guarded, and no one can slip from them, for the observation of the conscience is vigilant in awareness, and grace protects it. This righteous, fortified person, who is vigilant in the salvation of his soul, sings for it and sings for the Lord's protection of him and says: "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem . . .

For He has strengthened the bars of your gates, He has blessed your children within you.

He makes peace in your borders" (Ps 147). Are you like this? Or are you tolerant in protecting yourself? Are you meticulous

in closing its doors, or do you open them from time to time, thinking that the enemy cannot destroy your fortification.

Do not then be tolerant with sin, relying on your strength, confident that the devil cannot overcome you, at least in this or that particular point. But take a lesson from the fallings of the saints and prophets. Know that sin: *“has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men”* (Prov 7:26). Whoever is not careful, does not keep away from stumblings, does not escape for his life, and does not ask for God's help day and night, can fall just like many strong men have fallen before. Know that if you are tolerant with sin, it might drag you, without you feeling it, step by step into falling, and to destruction.

Contemplate on any dangerous results which happen to you, whenever you are tolerant of sin.

Whenever you are tolerant of sin, your awareness decreases, your will weakens, and your love of God decreases. You then change, internally and externally. You are in the fullness of your strength at the beginning of the spiritual war, and in the fullness of the work of grace with you. However, every time you are tolerant of sin, your strength weakens, your resistance decreases, the influence of sin in you increases, and its dominance over your thoughts, feelings and will, increases. Then, the thought of sin has asserted its feet within you. Whenever you try to get out of its sphere and out of its domain, you find difficulties and enter into a struggle, which you could have overcome right at the beginning.

With your tolerance, you find an enemy within you who resists you and presses upon you.

With the continuity of tolerance, you become exhausted and you submit. A steel rod in a magnetic field can only be attracted to the magnet.

In your tolerance of sin, you grieve the Spirit which lives in you.

You also quench the fervour of the Spirit in you (1 Thessalonians 5:19; Eph 4:30), and you surrender the grace given to you. With this tolerance of sin, you reject your spiritual weapon, betray the Lord, and open the door to His enemies and resisters. You betray God's company, and enter into the company of sin, perhaps because of negligence and slackness. Your firmness begins to shake from within. Whoever is strong cannot tolerate sin.

Your tolerance of sin, means that your ideals have begun to shake.

You have begun a steep descent leaving behind God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26) and you have accepted to negotiate with the devil, and given him a place within you. The devil then sees that you are of the type who can submit and respond to him, and not of the type who resists intensely and rejects his suggestions no matter what they are.

The devil tests you, to know your type.

Are you easy or difficult? Do you reject all of his suggestions with firmness and without discussion? Do you accept, or negotiate? Are you tolerant with him and meet him half-way along the path? Therefore, he presents to you his thoughts and tricks. So, if you are tolerant, he will present them again. If you are still tolerant and become slack, he will then know your nature, and will treat you according to this experience.

Your reverence will fall in front of the devils, because of your tolerance with them.

There are saints whom the devils fear and revere. There was a saint to whom the devil came to fight. The saint tied him outside the cell. A second and a third one came and he tied them also outside. They kept screaming until he ordered them: *'go and be ashamed'*. Saint Isidore, the priest of the cells, the devils said to him: *'Isn't it enough for you that we cannot pass by your cell, or by the cell which is next to it? We had one brother in the desert, but you have let him attack us night and day with his prayers?'* The devils used to fear Saint Makarios the great saying: *'Woe from you O Makarios'*. The devils screamed when he entered into the island of Philae to which he was banished by the Arians.

The devil fears God's true children, who defeat him.

If he sees, that you accept his thoughts, are tolerant of him, opening your doors to him, and betray the Lord because of him,

then your reverence will fall in his sight, and he will not see that you are God's image, which he fears, nor the temple of the Holy Spirit which he trembles from. Therefore, the devils will play games with you, and each one of them will hand you over to another in order to make fun of you. Just like a ball in a playing field, where the players pass it among them. Each one of them kicks it in a certain direction. Be cautious then and do not be a ball in the playing field.

Whoever is tolerant once, will be accustomed to tolerance and will continue in it.

Solomon was tolerant with himself in breaking God's commandment which prohibits marriage to foreigners and so he married Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kin 9:16). The matter became easy to him, and so he continued in it, *“King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites, from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, you shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. For surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods”* (1 Kin 11:1-2).

When the devil saw Solomon's tolerance, he pushed him to more dangerous things.

As he was tolerant with himself, and broke the commandment by marrying these women, his tolerance increased, and so he built high places for these women to worship their gods. His tolerance led him to build a high place for Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and another for Molech the god of the Ammonites. So, he inclined his heart towards other gods. (1 Kin

11:1-9). The devil might have feared Solomon at the beginning, because he was the wisest person on earth. So, when he saw him tolerant of sin, he pushed him in his tolerance to the farthest limit that you can imagine.

This was clear in Solomon's tolerance of the love of women.

Solomon allowed himself to be tolerant in the great number of wives, and the devil did not stop him at a reasonable limit, but let the tolerance continue with him, until he had: “*seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines*” (1 Kin 11:3). If tolerance can force a wise person to this level, what can be said then about ordinary people?

Therefore do not be tolerant at all, no matter how simple the sin seems. Your mere saying that it is a simple sin, will lead you to tolerance.

Do not say that this is a trivial matter and does not trouble the conscience, and that this is not a sin. Do not say that this conduct will not cause me to stumble, and will not leave any effect in me. Many have fallen because of lack of precision. Whoever is not cautious of the small ones, can fall into the great ones. Every sin is a rebellion against God and a separation from Him. It is also a defilement, a falling and a weakness. Do not think that the sins which destroy man are merely the falling into the great ones, such as fornication, blasphemy, murder and stealing, for the Lord said:

“Whoever says, you fool, shall be in danger of hell fire” (Matt 5:22).

“Whoever says to his brother, Racca, shall be in danger of the council”. Many are tolerant with words, whereas the Bible considers sinful words as a defilement. It says: “What comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man” (Matt 15:11). On caution with respect to the tongue, and the lack of tolerance in the errors of speech, Saint James the apostle advises us to be cautious with our tongue and not to tolerate the errors of speech saying: “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless” (James 1:26). Then, do not only be cautious of fornication, stealing and murder, since one word might be the cause of your judgement. The Bible says: “by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt 12:37).

“For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgement” (Matt 12:36).

The saints did not understand the phrase (the idle word) as meaning the evil word, such as lying, abuse, blasphemy and judging. But they understood the idle word as every word which is not beneficial, and not for building. Any word does not build the soul of the listener, and does not build the kingdom. Therefore, they kept silent, and they did not talk except with consideration, where they saw that the words were for building. Undoubtedly, whoever is not at all tolerant with himself in speaking a word which is not for building, cannot naturally be tolerant with himself in speaking an evil word.

Whoever is not tolerant in a word, will not be tolerant in an action.

The precision which he becomes accustomed to, includes all of his life and all of his behaviours, knowing that every action leads him to the Judgement, no matter how simple it is. The mere look backwards which Lot's wife did, changed her into a pillar of salt (Gen 19:26). A lie which Ananias and Sapphira lied, made them fall down dead immediately without repentance (Acts 5:1-10). Therefore do not divide sin into great and small, in order to allow yourself to be tolerant of the small, but be precise in everything. Know that tolerance with the small thing makes it grow. The Lord Jesus did not prohibit us from fornication only, but from the lustful look also. He did not only ask us to persevere whoever compels us to go one mile, but asked us to persevere the second mile also (Matt 5:28, 41).

Whoever is tolerant in the first step, will fall into the second.

Whoever is tolerant in the second, will fall into the third, and he will continue in this way without limit. The devil has been described as a: *'weaver of ropes'*. He weaves a rope to catch us and he is very patient. He does not mind preparing a trick over ten years, to make you fall into one sin. Be cautious of him, and never be tolerant with him. The devil blames you if you are precise in your conduct and not tolerant.

The devil describes you as being radical or deluded and a complicator of matters.

Do not listen to him. Remain firm in your spirituality, and do not let these accusations infuriate you. Be like Saint Babnouda the bishop, who when one woman saw his great precision, she said: *'this old man is deluded'*. The saint answered her saying: *'Do you know O woman how many years I spent in the desert in order to possess this delusion? For I have spent fifty years to possess it, and so should I lose it for your sake in one instant?'* He then left his bishophood and departed, because he considered the salvation of his soul more important. Know that sin is the breaking of God's commandment, and remoteness from His love.

Therefore, in your tolerance, **you are not only tolerant with yourself, but are tolerant with God's rights.**

Do not be tolerant with yourself in committing sin. If you do sin, **do not be tolerant in punishing yourself for its sin.** Tolerance in disciplining the self for its falls, leads to carelessness, lack of fear and contempt of God's commandments. These make recommitting sin easy, relying on God being loving and forgiving for: *"He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities"* (Ps 103).

Do not substantiate for yourself then, and do not forgive it with ease.

Know that when sin does not receive its due punishment, and the soul is not contrited and humiliated by it, then there is

nothing easier than for man to return to it. Do not say that this sin I have done in the past, it has passed and ended, and I have received Absolution and forgiveness for it. No, but rebuke yourself regularly. Remember that David the prophet drenched his couch with tears for long periods, after he heard the verdict of forgiveness from God through Nathan. In spite of this forgiveness, his tears became his drink, day and night. He was belittled in his eyes, and kept rebuking himself for a long time, which was his whole life, saying: “*my sin is ever before me*” (Ps 50). You also be likewise, and impose punishments on your sins. Be fervent in spirit (Rom 12:11). Do the work of the Lord with every eagerness, and every aspiration, and do not be tolerant in this, for it has been said:

“Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully” (Jer 48:10).

Be like the shepherd who is vigilant over his sheep, who guards the watches of the night, remaining awake, and not being tolerant with himself in sleeping for an instant. Be fervent in your worship. If you find yourself tired, or not having the desire to pray, do not be tolerant with yourself and sleep, without praying. In case by this tolerance you become accustomed to carelessness and laxity. But as Saint Isaac the Syrian said: *‘if you are tempted with neglecting your prayers before sleeping, do not submit, but: **Force yourself to pray at night, and increase the psalms**’.*

In the same way, be firm in your fasting. If you are tolerant in the time of abstaining, you will also be tolerant in the type and amount of food, then you will be tolerant in controlling yourself. This lack of control will accompany you in all the

details of your spiritual life. Be alert. Practise the salvation of your soul, with every caution, being vigilant regularly, lest, coming suddenly, He find you sleeping (Mark 13:36).

Do not sleep, and if you do sleep, be cautious of the late awakening.

Samson remained tolerant of his spirituality, neglecting his salvation for a long time. When did he awake? It was a late awakening, after he had lost his vow and his power, and the enemies had captured him. Lot was the same. When did he awake? Very late, after he had lost everything in the burning of Sodom. Many fell, because they were tolerant with spiritual negligence, and they did not wake up to themselves until it was late, after the sin was established within them. Do not be like these people.

As a person who is honest about his spiritual life, do not be tolerant of sin.

8. Reassess your behaviour and beware of those disguised as lambs^{*}

Because sin does not like to reveal itself, it disguises itself.

It reveals itself, to the careless who love it. However, to the children of God, it always disguises itself, so that they will not

^{*} This is from a lecture which I gave at the beginning of the sixties, in Damanhour.

be aware and keep away from it. There is no hindrance at all for it to disguise itself in the form of a virtue, or behind any kind name which is unexposed. These sins conform to the Lord's saying:

“Who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matt 7:15).

As false teachers are misleading so are the sins which mislead man and exploit his simplicity. The devil himself comes with sheep's clothing. As the apostle says:

“Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light . . .

His ministers transform themselves into ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:14-15). This happens in order to achieve the deception, and so the fall is accomplished. For this reason the children of God are always in need of wisdom and differentiation, in order to differentiate between the Lord's path and the devil's path, and to differentiate the Lord's will from other wrong wills. Many people walk in the wrong path as a result of ignorance and lack of knowledge, and as a result of the deception of the devils to them. Therefore, the priest in the Holy Liturgy asks for forgiveness and reconciliation from God, saying, *‘on behalf of my sins and the ignorant of your people’*. Why do we call them ignorant? Because the Bible says:

“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”.

This verse was mentioned in the book of Proverbs (Prov 14:12). It was repeated, because of its importance, another time in the same book with the same wording (Prov 16:25). Therefore man can be deceived. The Lord said: *“My*

people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6). Therefore, Solomon the wise man also advised:

“Lean not on your own understanding” (Prov 3:5).

In this way we see David the prophet crying a lot in his psalms and saying: *“Show me Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your paths” (Ps 119)*. If the great prophet, whom the Spirit of God descended upon, says this, then what shall we say? Not all people are wise, and the wise are not wise in everything: *“The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness” (Eccl 2:14)*. We do not use wisdom. So, what should we do then?

We should seek advice, so that we are not deceived by the sheep's clothing.

The Bible teaches: *“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise” (Prov 12:15)*. We should not listen to advice from every person, for the advice of Balaam was a deception (Jude 11). Ahithophel's advice was also not according to God's will. We can say then, that not every advice is from God, for the divine inspiration said:

“O my people! Those who lead you cause you to err” (Is 3:12).

There are many who perished as a result of wrong advice. This deceiving advice wore the sheep's clothing and with it destroyed its friends. As the Bible says: *“if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch” (Matt 15:14)*. We saw how Rehoboam was lost as a result of the wrong advice (1 Kin 12:10). The Lord

rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees for their wrong advice, and He said that they were: “*blind guides*” (Matt 23:13-16).

These of course are other than the saintly advisers (Heb 13).

Of whom the Bible says: “*Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct*” (Heb 13:7), and also: “*for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account*” (Heb 13:17). Therefore, we are in need of great differentiation, to discriminate between the correct and wrong advice; between the spirit of wisdom and the spirit of deception. As the apostle said: “*test the spirits, whether they are of God*” (1 John 4:1). Whoever clings to the Spirit of God within him, will be advised by the Spirit. Isaiah the prophet describes the Spirit of the Lord as: “*The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel*” (Is 11:2). We pray then that the Lord rescues us from every deception of the devils.

And from sins which are disguised in the attire of virtues to deceive us.

If anyone falls into this deception of the devils, humility will lift him up from his fall, as he realises it, or on being advised by a loyal friend or a wise adviser, he then confesses his error, and does not repeat it. In this way he gains knowledge and repentance. However, it is difficult for those who are too proud of their knowledge and conduct to repent.

This is because the person who is righteous in his own eyes, defends his sins, and calls them something else in order not to be ashamed.

Because if he confesses that it is a sin, then he admits he is guilty, a fact which his pride cannot accept. There is no objection then, in clothing it with sheep's clothing and calling it by another acceptable name, which is not embarrassing to him, so that he is not revealed in front of people. He deceives himself so that he is not revealed also in front of himself, if possible.

Those who cover their sins with sheep's clothing, will not repent.

How can they repent from it and leave it, whilst they do not count it as sin, and do not admit that it is a sin? Instead, they call it a virtue, by which they defend their conduct, and hence continue in it. It becomes a habit, or a firm program in their lives which they do not change, because they call sin a false name, and they cover it so that it does not show.

With this naming and covering, their principles and standards are shaken.

The sin which is revealed and known, is easy to resist and avoid. It troubles the good conscience. Even if man falls into it, it is easy for him to leave it. Therefore the devil, who is wise in evil, works at changing standards at their roots.

By giving sin another name, the devil enters into a war of naming with man.

The devil's deception increases if he can make from this naming a widespread understanding amongst the people. This is more dangerous, if it is spread amongst many people who repeat it unconsciously. These naming are intentional deceptions of the devil or the instigators of evil. For the ordinary person, sin here can be ignorance and he needs spiritual awareness. Or, it can be following leadership, and guidance without depth. Then he needs strengthening of personality, whether in thought or in conduct, so that the whirlpool does not pull him, and does not follow the trend whatever its direction. This is as a result of the deception of the devils and their followers who fight the virtue.

We find that many values, require the clarification of their meaning.

That is, we enter with them into a war of definitions, so we must know the meaning of these virtues or values, and the contents or the limitation of their meaning exactly, so that there is no clear error in their execution, in case they have two opposing meanings with respect to one virtue.

Here are some examples of virtues that need limitation of their meaning.

What is the meaning of freedom for example? What is the meaning of power? What is the meaning of majesty and honour? In the same way, what is the meaning of victory? What is the meaning of masculinity, bravery and courage? What is the

meaning of success? What is the meaning of striving? They are all great values. People however, differ in understanding their implications and meanings, assuming they have good intentions. On this basis some people fall into sin, with a wrong understanding, whereas others avoid sin through correct understanding.

How many sins hide for example, under the name of wisdom?

Man falls into flattery, cowardice and hypocrisy, and he calls these wisdom. He falls in conformity with evil, and walks in the general wrong trend, and he calls this also wisdom. He uses lying, deception, and detours and evasions, and he regards these as wisdom from him, it is enough that it delivered him to his aim or kept him safe. As if the achievement in itself is the wisdom. Here he has missed the meaning of wisdom, since evil is not wise. It is unwise for man to lose the kingdom of heaven, for the sake of any perishing objective on earth. The apostle was right when he said:

“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (1 Cor 3:19).

It is not only foolishness, but it is also a reason for punishment: *“for it is written, ‘he catches the wise in their own craftiness’ ” (1 Cor 3:19).* The ‘wisdom’ which is a type of craftiness, smartness and trickery, is not spiritual, and so keep away from it. For the serpent was: *“more cunning than any beast of the field” (Gen 3:1).* It was a devil.

Jacob used human wisdom, which made him fall into many sins.

With this '*wisdom*', that is trickery and smartness, he stole the birthright from his brother through cunningness, in a way which was free of love and brotherhood (Gen 25:30-34). With the same '*wisdom*' he deceived his father until he stole from him the blessing which should have been his brother's (Gen 27). His mother Rebekah joined him in doing this. With the same wisdom also, he took from his uncle Laban all of the newly born sheep (Gen 30:31-43). In this point in particular he was not honest with his uncle Laban. It is the same tricky way, which is far from the innocence of simplicity.

How much is such a 'wise' person in need of repentance from his wisdom?

If he called the matters by their true names, and said that they were tricks, or smartness, he would be able to repent. However, if he calls them wisdom, then this is a name which obscures sin, and does not help him towards repentance.

Believe me it is difficult for a person who is wise in his own eyes to repent.

Since he does not see any wrong in what he does. But he sees that his dealings show intelligence and good conduct. Is it possible then, for man to repent from intelligence and good conduct? No, but people pursue him so that he can teach them how to reach their goal, and he becomes an adviser leading to wrong paths. More than this, he boasts of his wisdom, and how

he was able to utilise his mind to obtain whatever he wanted. He matches the saying of the Bible:

“Whose glory is in their shame” (Phil 3:19).

The person, whose soul is contrited because of the shame from his own sins, can repent. But the person who sees glory and pride in his shame, will remain as he is, satisfied with himself. An example of this is the merchant, who boasts of being able to manipulate the market and lie. The employee who is proud of taking his boss under his arm with fabricated reasons which he presented to him, so he believed the trick and believed him. In the same way is the person who is proud of being able to act any role on any person, and wins the situation with his perfect acting. Or the male youth who is proud of being able to make any young lady fall, no matter how religious she is. How can such a person repent, if he is proud of his sins?

This reminds me of the devils who were proud of making the saints fall.

The Pharisees in taking everything literally, were proud of walking in the difficult path, and tightening on themselves. Even Saint Paul when speaking about his past said: *“according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee” (Acts 26:5).* Whereas the Lord Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for laying heavy burdens on people, for they neither go in themselves, nor do they allow those who are entering to go in (Matt 23). The Pharisees were proud of taking things literally, therefore they did not stop being literal, but they regarded it as precision in religious matters, and strengthening of religiousness. They had another name which covered and protected them.

Every sin in the same way, can have another name which the sinner uses as refuge. The sinner then cannot repent.

Smoking does not appear to be health destructive, slavery to the will, and loss of money. It takes the name of pleasure and relaxing of the self, and it is a name which does not trouble the conscience very much. Dancing takes the name of art, and the professionals in this field are called artists. Nude pictures which make many people stumble, are also an art exclusively. There are many other things which also resemble this. The sin of fornication also wears the sheep's clothing, and carries the name of love. Its perpetrators mix between love and desire. Proclaiming good deeds in front of people to gain their praise, is not taken as hypocrisy, but when it wears the sheep's clothing, it takes the name of the good example, practical teaching, presenting God's image to the people, and not making them stumble.

Under the name of making fun and joking, many other sins are also hidden.

One person mocks another, hurts his feelings, and takes him as an opportunity for his fun. Others laugh at him without caring about how all of this would affect him. If you blame him, he will say that this is merely a joke. Therefore, he calls the lack of respect for people a joke. Under the name of joking also, he lies and calls it a white lie or making fun or a joke. He steals and hides, or takes things which belong to others and says that he is only joking. A male youth deals with a young lady with some unsuitable sexual dealings and considers it a joke. All types of joking which are not suitable come under the name of making

fun, and includes everyone no matter how high his position. The person who blasphemes later apologises for this by regarding it as making fun. All of this comes under the name of light heartedness and friendliness. You ask, isn't there a limit to this joking? And there is no answer.

On the other hand, harshness also wears the sheep's clothing.

The harshness of the father towards his son, does not appear under the name of harshness, but under the name of firmness and discipline, and this harsh father finds for it a particular meaning in the saying of the Bible: *“He shall rule them with a rod of iron”* (Rev 2:27). He forgets the saying of the psalm: *“Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure”* (Ps 6:1). A father might kill his sinful daughter, and he does not call this matter an offence of murder but calls it cleansing and elimination of disgrace, and defending of honour. It is merely a sheep's clothing, to comfort the conscience and justify the act.

The persecution of whoever disagrees with an opinion or doctrine, is called holy zeal.

In this way, it takes another name which makes it seem like a virtue. The Lord Jesus said about this: *“the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service”* (John 16:2). With this new naming, Saul of Tarsus used to comfort his conscience in all of the types of harshness which he did (Acts 26: 9-11). In this he said about himself in previous boasting: *“concerning zeal, persecuting the church”* (Phil 3:6). Similarly, many shades of anger take the name of defending the

truth, defending order and honour. They are all sheep's clothing which do not trouble the conscience.

The futile life hides behind the name of 'freedom'.

Perhaps the prodigal son who left his father's house, thought to practice his personal freedom, to try life and experience it. The existentialists in all of their errors make this excuse also for the practice of freedom, the feeling of their personal essence, and the feeling of their existence. Under this name they perform every type of vileness, and attack other people's freedom. He was right, whoever said: *'How many crimes did I do in your name, O freedom?'*

Similarly many other sins wear the sheep's clothing.

A mother might interfere in her newly wed daughter's affairs. She calls this interference which destroys that house, love towards her daughter, defence and protection of her honour. A lawyer or an accountant might lie, and place that under the heading of necessities for the profession. Whereas the profession is respectable, and this is not part of its necessities. Sin does not like to be called by its true name, because this troubles the person.

Even a heresy in religion, does not at all appear in the name of a heresy.

It is presented instead, under the assumption that it is the correct understanding for religion, which many people are ignorant of. If this heresy carries a doctrine which the people

are not familiar with, he calls it a renewal. If the adherers to church traditions resist him, he says: *'Do you hinder our thinking? We have the freedom to think as we like'*. He might have the freedom to think, but does he have the freedom to spread his wrong thoughts amongst the people, and then be subjected to the judgement of Saint Paul the apostle (Gal 1:7-9). Even, whoever makes others to stumble through his conduct, does not say that he offends them, but that he is teaching them life.

As for you, keep away from wrong meanings and sheep's clothing of sin.

In this way, you have your own firm and established principles, which are not moved by new naming or non-spiritual understandings, but rely primarily on God's word, and on the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Protect your purity. Do not allow yourself to call your sins by another name which eases your conscience with a false, temporary comfort, whereas deep within, you feel it is a type of escaping from responsibility. But more appropriately, reveal your sins in front of yourself in order to repent from them, and in front of God to gain forgiveness. Blessed is he who discovers his sins and regrets them, and does not cover them by another name.

If you call your sin by another name, you will not repent.

Man leaves behind what he sees as wrong. If it is not wrong, why then should he leave it? It is a hindrance from the enemy, with which he prevents repentance. Using a method of false

compassion, he tries to comfort the person, but he does not comfort the spirit and does not help it to give importance to its eternity. As for the owners of the sheep's clothing, they must remove their cover so that they can see sin in its true sense, that is, very wrong, making the person lose his purity, and needs repentance.

As for the owners of the new naming, they are in need of renewal of mind.

The apostle advises: “*do not be conformed to this world*”, that is do not look like it or resemble it: “*but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Rom 12:2). Endeavour to renew your minds which have been destroyed by worldly meanings and sheep's clothing by clinging to correct spiritual understanding: “*that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*” (Rom 12:2). With this renewing of mind, man can repent.

9. Flee from your beloved sins and treat your points of weakness.*

The sinner is not only the person who falls into every sin, and perishes with this complete, comprehensive fall. But, one sin is enough for him to stain his soul, and become the reason for his destruction. One loved sin represents the point of weakness in him.

* This is from a lecture which I gave at the great Cathedral on Friday 29/12/1978, in readinss for the beginning of a new year.

This beloved sin of his, becomes the obstacle between God and him.

If he overcomes this sin in particular, he becomes victorious in his spiritual life. If he is defeated by it instead, then all his victories over the rest of his other sins will be of no benefit to him. This sin represents the entrance gate of the devil into his heart and will. It is necessary for him to have victory in the same battlefield where he was defeated by the enemy. This weak point is most probably firm and recurring in all of his confessions, every time he goes to confess his sins.

This point of weakness, reminds us of one hole in a ship.

No matter how fabulous and magnificent the ship is, this one hole could be the reason for its sinking. In the same way, one stain on a garment, is enough to make it dirty, no matter how beautiful and clean the rest of it is. One drop of ink in a cup of water, makes it all undrinkable. We have to fix the hole in the ship, no matter what other improvements are being made. In the same way, we should work to remove the single stain from the garment, and we should not be proud that the rest of it is clean.

A student who failed one subject in the exam is regarded as having failed, no matter how successful he was in the rest of the other subjects. Even if he gains full marks in the other subjects, he repeats the year for the sake of this one subject which he failed. He must know then, his point of weakness, concentrate on it and treat it.

A sick person who suffers from a certain disease which torments him remains in pain, no matter how well the rest of the systems of his body are. His doctor then needs to concentrate on the region of the pain in particular, in order to treat him. The same thing must be done immediately with sin, because it is a disease.

Take another example of a person who fasts.

In his fast he abstains from many foods, but he cannot abstain from a particular food, which he desires. What does such a person gain from his fast as long as he is weak, not having the power to control himself, in the point in which he is being fought with the desire of food? Don't we truly say, that if he abstains from this food in particular, he would be successful in his fast and in his spirituality? However, if he falls in this, then he has fallen in all. The Bible reminds us of this by saying:

“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

What is the meaning of this phrase by the apostle? How should we understand it? You will understand it by answering the following question: Do you love God, so that there is nothing else which can keep you away from Him? If you find anything at all, then this is the problem in your life, and it is your point of weakness. It is probably your beloved sin which competes with God in your heart. God says: *“My son, give me your heart”*. If your heart is somewhere else, far from Him, then there, is the obstacle which hinders you from fellowship with God.

There were not many things which kept Adam and Eve away from God.

There was that one tree and none other. If they were able to overcome it, their lives would have been perfect in front of God. However, in their defeat they lost everything. Overcome then, the weak point which is in you, which the devil knows about. He knows very well, that every time he wants to defeat you, he will come to you through this door in particular.

Many people comfort themselves with righteous deeds which they have done. They remember them in order to cover this sin. The Lord however, does not accept these coverings.

An example of this is the Pharisee, whose weakness was that he thought that he was righteous, and he despised others for their sins. This man had many good points, he tithed from all of his possessions, he fasted twice a week, and he was standing in the temple praying. He was not an extortioner, unjust or an adulterer. In spite of this, he did not leave the temple justified (Luke 18:9-14). Why? For all of these deeds cannot cover his inner arrogance, which was his particular weak point. This is one sin he must get rid of in order to be justified in front of God.

The children of Israel tried to cover their sins with sacrifices and incense, with offerings and keeping the seasons of the Sabbaths, the phases of the moon, and the rest of the rites and prayers. God however, did not accept this from them. He said to them: *“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? Says the Lord ... Bring no more futile*

sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me .. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean. Put away the evil of your doings” (Is 1:11-16). This is what is needed for the disease, not the covering of the rites and practices.

Sin is not eliminated by other righteous deeds, but by repentance.

Therefore do not lose the way. Fight your sin wherever it is. Do not say: *‘I will fast two days. Or, I will give my money to the poor’*. All this will not be accepted from you, if you sin in your heart. But face the reality of yourself with honesty. Learn lessons for your life from the Bible.

Take as an example: the story of the rich youth (Matt 19:16-22).

He was a person who cared about his eternity, and he asked. *“What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”*. He used to keep the Lord's commandments from his youth. However, there was a point of weakness in him, which was the love of money.

The Lord concentrated on this weak point in particular.

He said to him: *“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in*

heaven”. Here, the Lord placed His hand on the wound which tormented this youth, so he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

The Lord also placed His hand on the wound which troubled Job.

The righteous Job was: “*blameless and upright*”, by the Lord's witness of him (Job 1:8), “*there is none like him on the earth*”. He was very compassionate towards the poor, and he rescued the weak from their oppressors. He was: “*eyes to the blind, and ...feet to the lame*” (Job 29). In brief, he was a righteous man. What then was the point of weakness?

He was righteous, and knew about himself that he was righteous. So self-righteousness troubled him. (Job 32:1).

Therefore, the Lord dispossessed him of everything. his children and riches, his health and honour, and from people's respect to him. He had nothing left. He entered into reproof with the Lord. Finally he said: “*I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know ...I will question you, and you shall answer Me ...Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*” (Job 42:3-6). When Job reached the dust and ashes, he got rid of his self-righteousness. God then lifted up His temptation from him. He became more righteous than he was. He was also victorious over the weak point.

Balaam was a prophet. He had a weak point which destroyed him.

The Lord appeared and spoke to him (Num 22:12). When Balaam was asked to curse the people, he said: “The word that *God puts in my mouth, that I must speak*” (Num 22:38). He built seven altars, and he offered seven sacrifices. “*Then the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth*” (Num 23:5). He spoke kind words, and prophesied about the Lord Jesus: “*The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor . . . the utterance of him who hears the words of God; who sees the vision of the Almighty; who falls down, with eyes opened wide . . . I see Him, but not now. I behold Him, but not near. A Star shall come out of Jacob. A Sceptre shall rise out of Israel...*” (Num 24:3-4, 15-17). Then Balaam fell through his weak point, his love of money. The Bible describes Balaams' error as a tragedy.

Solomon fell through his weak point which was the love of women and pleasing them.

He was the wisest of this earth, with a wisdom from God Himself. God appeared to him twice and spoke to him. He was the one who built the temple, and blessed the people. He also wrote many of the books in the Holy Bible. In spite of this, he had one weak point which was the love of women, he married foreigners, and this one sin dragged him to his fall. He inclined his heart to the gods of his wives. With this same point of weakness, the great Solomon fell, even though he was the Lord's consecrated one, whom the Spirit of God fell upon and used to move.

We need more time if we were to talk about the weak points which troubled the prophets.

Abraham the father of fathers was perfect and righteous in everything. However, there was one weak point in him which was fear which made him fall into sins (Gen 12:20). Peter the disciple of the Lord was a great saint. His weak point was rashness. Thomas the apostle had a weak point of doubt. The weak point which troubled Jacob the father of fathers was reliance on human devices.

Some sinners were lost by one weak point.

The sin of envy was the one which destroyed Cain, and led him to the murder of his brother. The sin of pride alone made many people fall. Similarly the sin of fornication. A person might have many virtues, but he falls for the lack of controlling his tongue. In this respect the Bible says: *“by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned”*. Another person will fall through stubbornness.

The sin of pride by itself made the devil fall.

It is the only story which the Bible talks about in the fall of the devils, as Isaiah the prophet told it (Is 14:13-14). He then entered into the sin of envy, then lying, then his sins multiplied. All of this however, came after the sin of pride, which made him fall from his angelic purity.

Each of the heretics also has his own fall.

Do not think that all of the teachings of the heretics were heretical, or that all of their words were innovations in religion. Amongst them are those who had sermons full of spiritual depth. Tertullian, who fell into the heresy of the Montists and became their leader. Otakhi also, was one of the more spiritual monks in Constantinople, who then fell into a heresy. It was one point, which destroyed each of these people. The examples are many.

Every person's weak point is the reason for his fall.

Contemplate on your point of weakness, on your loved sin by which you fall and your resistance weakens. In your repentance, concentrate all your effort on this point, all your prayers, and all that you receive from the assistance of prayers. If you overcome it, the devil will be afraid to fight you from then on. By quitting this loved sin, you show that your love of God is what leads your life, and not your love of desires. Beware of keeping this loved sin and saying to the Lord:

‘I love you Lord from all of my heart, but relinquish to me this one point’.

In this case, you do not love God from all of your heart since there is a rival to Him in your heart. This rival is this sin in particular. You love this sin more than you love God. As if God says to you: *‘Now it is clear which battlefield you must fight in, that is, this point in particular’.*

The devil does not fight you in all sins, but tests you first.

He passes through your territory, captures it, and finds out the aspects of weakness in it. Very cleverly he knows in which sin to fight you, and the one in which you will fall into easily, and respond more to.

You have to be honest with yourself, examine it and know where you are falling from. If you cannot escape and keep away from stumblings, then be cautious in this point in particular, taking every precaution. Ask for assistance from the Lord so that He can stand with you in your wars.

Do not place for yourself a long spiritual program to follow.

Concentrate however, on the main battlefield, whether by escaping or by fighting. Fight the points which stain the purity of your heart and spirit, and which were a battlefield of defeat to you in the past. In your struggle learn a lesson from David the prophet. Do not say: *‘I have overcome the great Goliath and defeated him, and overcome the bear and the lion and took the lamb from it. I won also when Saul was pursuing me. I tolerated him and overcame myself’*. Instead say: *‘My battlefield is Beth Sheba, there I must be victorious’*. The Lord will be with you.

10. Be concerned with your eternity and calculate the cost.*

My brothers, our spiritual path, is a long one. The whole life is not enough for it.

It is necessary for us to know exactly, what is expected of us. Are we also walking in the way, and progressing in it step by step everyday towards the aim? Or have we not started yet? Or have we walked some steps and then stopped? In this way from now on we should calculate the cost, being vigilant towards our salvation. What is expected of us is not the mere normal faith, but the life of holiness, as the apostle says:

“As He who called you is holy, you also be holy” (1 Pet 1:15).

“Perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 1:7). Yes, we are expected to have this: *“holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).* This holiness is not the end of the road, but it is necessary, if we reach it, to grow in it. Till what limit should we grow? We should grow until we reach perfection, according to the Lord's commandment:

“Be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt 5:48).

Have we then reached this holiness and this perfection? What we know of relative perfection has steps. All of the perfect

* From two lectures: Firstly (the long path) which I gave at the conference of the friendly at saint Mark's, Shoubra on 24/2/1963. Secondly (calculating the cost) which I gave at the Cathedral on 31/10/1969.

among us, press towards the goal (Phil 3:14-15). Till what limit do they press? Till the limit which the apostle describes:

“.....that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:19).

Believe me, I stood in front of this phrase in amazement when I read it for the first time. Then I repeated the reading, where the apostle says: *“you being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:18-19).* Here I keep silent. For, what can I say? I remember however, that the apostle did not ask us only to walk according to the Spirit (Rom 8:1). But he said:

“Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18).

What is the essence of this filling with the Spirit? O Lord, I do not know. Does it simply mean that there is nothing in our substance which is void of the Spirit, or does this filling include all of our substance? If this happens to us, I wonder then how we would walk? The apostle says that what is expected of us, is to walk just as the Lord Jesus the incarnate God, walked on earth. *“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6).* Who can do this, no matter how he tries? Truly, how high these elevations are, whom the Spirit wants to lead us to, in order to be in: *“the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:26-27).* It is a state of continual growth, which does not stop at a limit.

I said one day, that: ‘it resembles he who pursues the horizon’.

A man who looks at the horizon, and sees it there at the end of the path. He goes to the end of the path, and finds that the horizon is at the mountain, as if heaven coincides with earth. So, he goes to the mountain and sees the horizon far away at the sea. He then goes to the sea, and sees a far outstretch, without any limits. The life of perfection is likewise.

For this sake, the saints said about themselves that they were sinners.

We read about the fathers of the deserts, who were elevated greatly in the life of the Spirit, and we see that they used to sit in their cells crying for their own sins. Even the apostles, the saints, used to also talk about their sins. One of the most prominent examples of this might be the saying of Saint Paul the apostle: *“Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief (1 Tim 1:15).* If Saint Paul the apostle then, is the chief of sinners, then what shall we say about ourselves?

The example of Saint Paul the apostle should make us be greatly contrited.

Saint Paul the apostle labored more than all the apostles (1 Cor 15:10), preached in many countries, wrote 14 epistles for our sake, and performed amazing wonders and miracles. By the abundance of the revelations, he was given a thorn in the flesh, lest he be exalted above measure (2 Cor 12:7). This Paul was the one who ascended to the third heaven, and heard inexpressible words (2 Cor 12:4). This Paul says about himself:

“Not that I have already attained..... but I press on, that I may lay hold..... I do not count myself to have apprehended; but only one thing I do.....” (Phil 3:12-13). What is this that you do? He answers:

“Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead”.

He reaches forward to what is ahead. Till where? Is there something beyond the third heaven? More than this life which is filled with preaching, holiness and miracles? If Saint Paul in spite of all of what he reached says: *“I press toward the goal” (Phil 3:14)*, then what about us, who have not apprehended anything of what this great saint apprehended, who are not walking in the love of God, nor even in His obedience? We do not act as loving children, and not even like honest, faithful servants.

We have not reached the stage of: “unprofitable servants”.

The Lord says: *“When you have done all those things which you are commanded , say, we are unprofitable servants” (Luke 17:10).* For, we are still in the limits of the orders, and have not yet been elevated above the law, to the degree of love which sacrifices everything, loses all things, and counts them as rubbish, to gain Christ (Phil 3:8). If this is the condition of whoever stops at the limits of carrying out the commandment, then what can be said of him who sins and breaks the commandment? He is definitely not a servant of God: neither a good servant, nor an unprofitable servant. Instead he is resisting God and a servant of the devil. I say this to you, so that you know yourself, and so that you know the stage which you have

already done along the path to God, in case you think that if you pray two psalms, you have arrived at the goal.

Know then my brother, wherever you are, and be concerned with your salvation.

You have one soul and none other. If you gain it, you have gained everything. If you lose it, you have lost everything. For, what can you take from the world instead of your soul? The Lord says His immortal phrase:

“For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Matt 16:26).

Sit then with yourself. Examine yourself very well. Are you walking in the path or not? Are you keen about your eternity, or are you lost? Did you lose the days of your life which you should have utilised in knowing God and His love, and in spiritual growth, to apprehend the goal for whose sake the Lord apprehended you.

My brother the path is long in front of you, and you have not started yet.

The path starts with fear, since: *“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 9:10)*. Fear gradually leads to love. Until now you have not reached the fear of God, because you still break His commandments. When then, will you reach love? You cannot reach God, unless you walk according to the Spirit. If you walk according to the Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit will appear in your life.

The fruits of the Spirit make a long program, which Saint Paul the apostle explained.

He said: “*but the fruit of the Spirit of love, joy, peace, long suffering,. kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*” (Gal 5:22). Love which is the first of these fruits, was explained in detail by the apostle in (1 Cor 13), and he established for it about fourteen signs. So have you reached any of them? Also, what about prayer and its details? What about contemplation and all of the spiritual means? What about the wars of the devils and how to overcome them? I do not wish to burden you with the details of the spiritual life, because I will talk to you about all of it, God willing, in a big book called: ‘*The Signs Of The Spiritual Path*’. As for now, all that I advise you with, is to start in the first step in your relationship with God, because if you don't start with the first step, then how will you arrive?

The starting point in your relationship with God is repentance. With it you are reconciled to God, and return to Him. That is, you are moved from the outside to the inside of the circle. Then, grace carries you, and crosses over with you the steps of the way. In this way you move from the step of repentance, to purity, to holiness, to relative perfection, to growth in this perfection. Do you want to start the way and step over to repentance? Place in front of you the following principle:

11. Keep God's love in order to cast out the love of sin.*

Man cannot live in emotional emptiness.

He then either fills his heart with the love of God, or this heart is filled with the love of the world and flesh. *“Friendship with the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4)*. On the otherhand the love of God is stronger and deeper than any other love. Therefore if you place it in your heart, it will definitely cast out every other desire from it. The saint who said:

“Repentance is exchanging one desire for another” , was correct.

That is, instead of desiring the world, flesh and sin, all of your desires are spiritual, concentrated on God and the life with Him. Do not let your heart be void of God's love and His kingdom, in case the love of sin comes in to live. Keep this balance undamaged within your heart. Do not let the scale of the world dominate you with many influences of visions, hearings, readings, minglings and associations. Utilise however, with every power all of the spiritual means which are given to you, which deepen the love of God in your mind.

* From a lecture on (love and not practices) which I gave at the great Cathedral on Friday 11/11/1977.

Be sure that sin cannot enter a heart which loves God.

The person who loves God, is not the person who just practices the spiritual means such as prayer, fasting, spiritual reading, going to church, Confession and Holy Communion. Above all it is important that these spiritual practices originate from the inner love in the heart.

Religion is love: love for God, love for doing good and love for others.

If this love is not present, the heart becomes lax, and loses the spiritual flame which he received from the Spirit of God on the day that he knew God. Laxity develops into sin, no matter how much service this person had at church, and no matter how much activity and fervour he had.

Without the love of God within you, you cannot repent.

Without the love of God you would not leave sin because of purity of heart. But it is merely outer proceedings of a formal reconciliation with God, because of fear of His anger and punishment. A person who fears God's punishment, and fears that sin might lead him into hell becomes religious. He calls this (piety), that is the fear of God and His anger. With this fear, he keeps away from practicing sin, but the sin does not keep away from his heart.

The heart remains swinging, to the right and to the left, and will not settle except with love.

Repentance then, is the transformation of the heart's feelings with love towards God. All of the spiritual practices such as prayer and fasting, are not then standing up on their own, but are connected to this love. So prayer without the love of God, is not truly prayer. It is likewise with fasting, attending church and Holy Communion. You pray and say then: *“My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness”* (Ps 62), *“Your name is loved O Lord, it is my meditation all the day”* (Ps 119). You read in the Bible and say: *“How sweet are Thy words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth”*. You go to church and say: *“How lovely is Your tabernacle, O Lord of Hosts. My soul longs, yes even faints for the courts of the Lord”* (Psalm 83: 1).

With these feelings you find pleasure in repentance, and your repentance continues and settles down.

If this love is not in you however, then even if you leave sin, very easily it will fight you so that you will return to it. Why? Because you did not find your satisfaction in the life with God. You did not find in the life of repentance, what fills your heart, and what fills your affections and feelings, and what protects you from asking for love from the outside. I know that you want repentance. If this was not so, this book would not be between your hands now. You may think you have actually started repentance because you practice spiritual means.

However, you pray and fast, and do not feel the love of sin has left you.

Why? We all believe in the benefits of the spiritual means, but on the condition that you practice them in a spiritual way. If you pray, fast and read the Bible, and you find in this a spiritual satisfaction, pleasure, comfort and joy, then all of this will lead you to deepen your love of God. Then you are following the practice. Whoever follows the practice arrives.

If you do not live in repentance with this love, then you are lost.

You must then possess God's love, which can cast out from your heart the love of sin. You must know the Lord Jesus, in order to leave your waterpot at the well (John 4). If you do not have this love, ask for it in your prayers with every persistence. It is a prayer which you say at all times, from all your heart, from all your thought, and from the depth of your depths:

'Grant me O Lord to love you. Remove the love of sin from my heart, and give me your love'.

Search for all of the means which help you love God. Not every reading is of benefit to you. There are however spiritual readings which will greatly influence your heart, touch your feelings, and motivate you to love God. Also there are certain hymns which kindle your spiritual feelings. There are holy places which will leave an influence in you, and individuals who are loving to God, who will help you love God like them, by watching them, cling with all your power.

Keep away from everything, which keeps God's love away from your heart.

Protect this love by taking every precaution, because it is the one which casts out from you the love of sin. As the love of God increases in you, your heart then rejects sin, and is disgusted by it. You then regret your first days when you loved in sin. Thus, God grants you a new heart which loves God, which is completely different to the old heart. In this heart which loves God, you worship God with joy, and you will not find difficulty in keeping His commandments. You will then sing with John the beloved saying:

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

Why aren't they burdensome? Because you live in them with joy, with love, without inner struggle troubling you. You will not find another law in your members, warring against the law of your mind, and bringing you into captivity to the law of sin (Rom 7:23).

The person who loves God, finds pleasure in carrying out His commandments.

He finds pleasure in doing what pleases Him. He does not allow himself at all to anger Him. A person who loves his parents finds pleasure in satisfying them, in gaining their blessings, and does not allow himself to anger them in anything.

If you reach this feeling, you can then repent with ease.

Without the love of God however, you will find repentance difficult and burdensome. You will not feel the desire not to walk in the paths of sin, unless you find a love which is deeper to take its place. Search then, for this deeper love. Walk in all the means which will take you to it. therefore, you will not find repentance difficult at all, and you will not find the commandment burdensome.

When is it that you find repentance difficult and the commandment burdensome?

You will find it so, if the Love of God is not perfect in your heart, or you have not obtained any of it yet. Therefore, when you try to repent, you struggle against an opposing love from within you. You press down on your will, on your heart and on your affections. You also try to escape from sinful, established visions in your subconscious and in your memory, which pull you down, far away from God. But, if you love God, then you will not be able to sin, and the wicked one cannot touch you (1 John 3:9, 5:18).

Then, the commandment will not be burdensome. Instead the sin will be burdensome.

The sin will be difficult, no matter how the enemy tries to pressure your will, you resist and refuse to sin, and you say from all of your heart: *“How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”* (Gen 39:9). You will find the Lord's commandment joyful and luminous, enlightening the

eyes (Ps 19). Repentance becomes easy to you, and from it you obtain the purity of heart. But in case you ask: *‘How can I reach this love of God that casts out from me the love of sin?’*

Some of the means which lead you to the love of God, are:

Read abundantly the stories of the saints who loved God from all their hearts, and sacrificed everything for His sake. They lost everything for the sake of the honour of knowing Him, and to be in Him. Read many books about virtues, so that the love of good will be kindled in your heart and you will leave what you are presently in. Read the stories of repentance and the return to God, for it is very influencing and of benefit to you. Remember death, judgement and the eternal kingdom, in order to feel the insignificance of the sin which fights you, and the insignificance of the whole world. Remember also how God loved you all of your life and dealt kindly with you. These pleasant memories will kindle in you feelings of love and recognition of the favour to God. You will love Him then, because He loved you previously. What can I say? I wish you would turn the pages of this book and re-read what was written about the incentives of repentance. An addition in order to reach repentance, you need to wrestle with God, to give you His love, or to give you a new heart which loves Him. How can this be?

12. Wrestle with God and obtain help from Him.*

You want to repent, and overcome your sins. You rightly do. Remember that:

Victory over sin is not merely a human labour.

I. Firstly, because sin is strong, it has this power with which: *“she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men” (Prov 7:26)*. Can this sin which befell Adam, Samson, David, and Solomon be fought by you alone, without divine help. Impossible!

II. This sin had authority over you, when it made you fall previously.

III It is not only an external war. As it finds a response within you, the war then doubles.

IV. This is the teaching of the Bible which says: “Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Ps 127:1). This is the saying of the Lord Himself:

“Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

V. In every labour that you do on your own, without God participating with you, most probably you will fail. Even if you

* From two lectures which were the second part of the series (the Spiritual Awakening), given on 13/11/1970, 20/11/1970, and a third lecture on (the Struggle with God), given on 28/3/1975. And a forth lecture on (the life of victory, and fighting for the Lord), given on 6/4/1979. All these lectures were given at the great Cathedral.

succeed, you will count it for yourself, and vain glory will fight you, thinking that you were victorious with your own power. It is known that humility is one of the strongest weapons which defeats the devils. It was utilized by Saint Anthony, when he used to say to the devils: *‘I am weaker than fighting with the smallest among you’*. Then he cried to the Lord saying: *‘Rescue me O Lord from these, who think that I am something’*.

VI. Your previous experiences have proven your failure in repentance with your effort alone.

How many times have you tried to rise and then fell another time? How many times did you promise God about repentance, and said insistently that you would not do this sin another time? But sometimes you brought the woes upon yourself and said: *‘Make me sick O Lord if I do this another time’*. You used to say this, as if the matter was in your own hands and capability. My advice to you, instead of saying: *‘I will promise You that I will repent O Lord’*.

To say to the Lord: “Restore me, and I will return” (Jer 31:18).

Ask repentance of Him as a good gift from Him, for He Himself promised this, and said: *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you... I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes” (Ezek 36:26-27)*¹. Hold firm to His holy promise, and ask Him to grant you this

¹See the section (a new heart) in the book (how to start a new year), from page 27 to page 40 (Arabic).

repentance. He will give you the new heart, and He will make you follow His commandments.

This is what the church teaches us in the prayers of the hours.

We say in psalm fifty: *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow”*. Then it is God who washes you and you become white, you are not the one who is capable of washing yourself. In many of the psalms we say: *“Save me O Lord. Protect me. Teach me Your ways”*. In the prayer of the third hour we say: *‘Purify us from iniquity and save our souls’. ‘Purify us from the iniquities of the body and soul, lead us to a spiritual life so that we may seek righteousness’*. This is also what we say in the divine liturgy:

‘Purify our souls, bodies and spirits’.

We repeat this phrase more than once in the liturgy. So, we learn from the church that repentance, cleanliness and purity, are not merely the result of our labour, but we also ask for them from God in our prayers. As if man says to God: *‘I’m unable O Lord to purify myself. Please arise and do this work according to Your former promise. Arise O Lord my God. Arise my Lord and save me my God’*.

Here, the importance of prayer in arriving to repentance is shown.²

Saint Isaac concentrated on it solely as evident from his saying: *‘Whoever thinks that he has another path to repentance other than prayer, is deceived by the devils’*. As for you, at least in all of your struggle, do not rely on your strength, intelligence, will, or your training. On your own without help from God, you cannot arrive at repentance. Say to Him: Lord I am in need of You, and without You I can do nothing.

“For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

The evil I will not to do, that I practice” (Rom 7:18-19). “I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Seek Your servant” (Ps 119).

Aren't you the one who says: *“I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick” (Ezek 34:15-16)*. I am the lost, the broken, the sick one. Seek me. Bring me back and strengthen me. I have reached a stage of weakness and deficiency O Lord, in which I cannot promise You that I will repent, and if I promise You, I will break my promise, most probably.

² See the book (The Return to God) from page 53 to 56 (Arabic). The section whose title is (prayer is an aid to return). Also pages 85 & 86.

I will not promise You, but I will ask a promise from You, to save me from sin.

Didn't You say: *“come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matt 11:28). Yes, I need You to give me rest O Lord, from this heavy burden. Did you not say: *“the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luke 19:10). I am the one who is in need of salvation from You.

I need not only salvation from Judgement, but salvation from sin itself.

Your name is: ‘Jesus’, that is the Saviour, because You save Your people from their sins (Matt 1:21). Save me then from my sins. I wish I could hear from You, Your comforting saying: *“For the oppression of the poor, for the comforting of the needy, now I will arise, says the Lord; I will set him in the safety for which he yearns”* (Ps 11).

Therefore my brother, learn to wrestle with God for repentance.

Wrestle like a drowning person who finds in front of him a boat which can save him. Wrestle like Jacob who said to the Lord: *“I will not let You go unless You bless me”* (Gen 32:26). Say to Him, I have tried myself O Lord, and have known my weakness and deficiencies in front of sin. It remains for You to enter.

**Do not blame me because of my weakness O Lord,
but rescue me from this weakness.**

Instead of judging me, for I am defiled, purify me from this defilement. You have given me commandments to carry out, give me strength to carry out these commandments. Give me the resistance with which to resist the devil. Give me Your love which will cast out from my heart the love of sin. Stand firm, my brother in your prayers, for it is a guaranteed route to repentance.

**The person who experiences powerful prayers, does
not experience defeat at all.**

The person who includes the Lord in his fights and wars, will never be defeated. Wrestle then with God. Take power from Him, and the spiritual weapon with which to fight. Take the divine promises from Him, the new heart and the pure spirit. Take the will and the determination from Him. Take the faith to fight with, and the confidence that you will win. Be sure that if you are victorious in your prayers, you will succeed in all the battlefields. If you succeed in your struggle with God, no power on earth will be able to prevail against you, but you will be able to enjoy the beautiful phrase which the Lord said to young Jeremiah:

***“They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail
against you. For I am with you, says the Lord”.***

I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you (Jer 1:19). Then: *“a thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you (Ps 90).* It is true that: *“the Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your*

peace” (Ex 14:14). He will fight for you in your outer wars. He will fight for you in your inner wars, in the heart and mind. Therefore, in all of your spiritual wars, place in front of you this principle that the battle is the Lord's.

“The battle is the Lord's” (1 Sam 17:47).

For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few” (1 Sam 14:6). When the people were fighting against Amalek it was the Lord who did, for it was said: “the Lord will have war with Amalek” (Ex 17:16). In the same way the Lord will have war with all of your sins which defeat you. He is the One who overcomes them in you and not yourself, because He said: “I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Your spiritual victory then, is only through the Lord. You will not reach repentance, and will not overcome any sin, except through the Lord. You will say with David: “The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation” (Ps 117). You will say with Saint Paul the apostle:

“We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom 8:37).

Our victory then is not with our determination, or by reliance on ourselves, but with Him who loved us. From His love to us, He raises us from our fall with His power, and: *“leads us in triumph in Christ” (2 Cor 2:14). The Lord always, as the apostle says: “gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57). Do not turn from Him then, concentrating all of your efforts for repentance on yourself. Instead, take the strength from Him in order to repent. Shout out with our teacher Saint Paul saying:*

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13).

In Christ then, in His strength and with His assistance, you can do all things. Outside of Christ you can do nothing. Wrestle with Him first, before you wrestle with sin, as Jacob wrestled with God before going to meet Esau. When he won with God, Esau became light in his burden. Do you say to Jacob, go first to Esau? He will answer you: *‘no one can overcome this person except God. Therefore I will go to God first, and I will take Him with me when meeting Esau’*. Do the same thing with sin.

With a very humble heart say: ‘I am weaker than this war’.

‘I am weaker than fighting your littlest one’, as Saint Anthony said. Barak the commander of the army would not go to the war without Deborah the prophetess (Judg 4: 8). You also do not overpower sin on your own without God fighting with you. Say: *‘who am I to stand in front of the devils alone?’* I am not qualified for this fight. You O Lord are my victory. Come and overcome the world in my heart, as you overcame it previously.

‘You know everything O Lord, You know my weakness and defeat’.

You know that I do not possess a will, the power or the determination. But sometimes I do not possess the mere desire of repentance. I do not know how to fight, and do not withstand the temptations of the enemy. Briefly, I do not know

how to repent. If I know, I do not succeed. If I succeed once, I am defeated several times.

Pluck me like a brand from the fire, like Joshua (Zech 3: 2).

For the sake of Joshua's repentance, the angel of the Lord stood against the devil who opposed Joshua, and said to him: *"The Lord rebuke you Satan. The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you. Is this not a brand plucked from the fire? The angel plucked him from the fire and clothed him with rich robes"* (Zech 3:1-5). God loves this wrestling with Him. Those who wrestled with Him, in prayer and supplication, took power from Him.

However, a person might say. 'I prayed a lot but did not repent'.

No, my brother, every prayer which agrees with God's will must be answered. Prayer for the sake of repentance agrees with God's will, but:

I. Perhaps you have actually prayed. However, the outcoming prayer is not from the depth of heart, which wrestles with God with true desire of this repentance, and with the favour of the son with his father.

II. Or perhaps you have prayed, but have not stood firm in your prayers. But you said some words, and were bored quickly, and you did not have perseverance in prayer. You need prayer which asks, and waits for the Lord in faith, the prayer which is distinguished by struggle, persistence, and insistence.

Elijah continued to ask from the Lord, and repeated the prayer several times, until he received the answer in the seventh time (1 Kin 18:44). Look unto Jacob who wrestled with the Lord: “until the breaking of day” (Gen 32:24;). That is, all night and he was not bored.

III. Or perhaps your prayers are without faith and contrition of heart.

IV. Or perhaps the quick answer is not for your own good, as Saint Basil said: ***‘Sometimes God delays in answering our request, so that we may know its value. Because the things which we receive with ease, we lose with ease’.***

Sometimes God wants you to be subdued by sin, so that you may know the value of leaving it. If He grants you repentance, you feel a great joy, you will protect it with all your strength, because you received it with great difficulty and after some time. Then, you will be more precise in your repentance, being more cautious and fearful of falling.

V. Or perhaps the delaying of repentance, is caused by God wanting to know the extent of your seriousness in requesting repentance, and the extent of your firmness in the request.

VI. The delay in the answer might be caused by you. For you are the one who wants. Truly you ask with your mouth, but your heart does not want. You are the one who places delays for repentance. As the Bible says: “if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb 3:7).

Therefore do not ask for help, whilst you are sleeping and lax.

The labour of God for your sake, is not an encouragement for you to be careless and lazy, relying on God's labour. God wants you to work with Him. He labours for your repentance, and you participate with Him. He offers you assistance but don't you place obstacles by your will, and do not leave your doors open to sin. Briefly, enter with all your capabilities, no matter how few they are, in communion with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14). Present your desire firstly, and present your submission to the labour of God in you. Present also what you can, of labour.

Even then, do not be upset. For God saved many who did not have any ability to do anything.

There are persons who do not do anything: The woman who had a flow of blood, touched His garment with faith. The Lord said to the man with the withered hand, stretch out your hand, so he stretched it. He said also to the blind man, go, wash in the pool of Siloam, so he went and washed (John 9:7). Other than these however, there are those who do not do anything, like the paralytic who was led down through the roof (Mark 2:4). Also the injured man, whom the good Samaritan carried, was lying along the path between life and death (Luke 10:30). The impotent man of Bethesda, who remained thirty eight years unable to be healed (John 5:5). Similarly were all of those who had incurable diseases.

What did these people such as the paralytic and the like do? Nothing. Likewise all of the dead whom the Lord Jesus raised.

Could the dead person do anything to be rescued from death? No, without a doubt. The sinner is regarded as dead in trespasses (Eph 2:5). He has a name that he is alive, but he is dead (Rev 3:1). If he cannot do anything, then the Lord can raise him. Therefore do not despair, nor be disturbed. All of these examples in their symbols give us an idea that:

**God searches for the salvation of the sinners,
those who are able and those who are unable.**

He who is able, is like the prodigal son, who was able to return to his father's house. He who is not able, is like the lost sheep and the lost coin. All these three were mentioned in one chapter (Luke 15). The Lord has one condition for those who are unable, and that is that they do not oppose His work for their salvation. An example of those who are unable are the: *“barren . . . who have not borne”* (Is 54:1). She was a symbol of the barren soul which does not yield fruits to the Spirit, and the Lord made her more fertile than those who have children.

There are people whom the Lord saved without their asking.

The Lord accepted Abraham's pleadings for Lot, and took him out of Sodom, whereas Lot himself did not ask. When the two angels informed him that Sodom was to be burned, he was slow in leaving. The Bible says: “the angels urged Lot to hurry..... and while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's

hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city” (Gen 19:15-16).

The phrase: “*the Lord being merciful to him*” is a comforting phrase without a doubt.

God who had compassion on all of those, will also have compassion on you, grant you repentance, lead you to it, and He will take the heart of stone out of you and give you a new heart (Ezek 36:26). Blessed is the Lord in all of His labours of love, and in His endeavour to save everyone.

PART FOUR

The Signs of Repentance

Fruits worthy of repentance.

1. Confessing the fault
2. Embarrassment and shame
3. The regret, the suffering and the tears
4. Contrition and humility
5. Repairing the results of the fault
6. Compassion for the sinners
7. Other feelings
8. Spiritual fervour
9. Proceeding in the virtuous life
10. Purity

Fruits worthy of repentance

Saint John the baptist called out saying: “*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt 3:2). He also called out saying: “*bear fruits worthy of repentance*” (Matt 3:8, Luke 3:8). This is what Saint Paul the apostle did also, who called all of those who were in the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles: “*that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance*” (Acts 26:20). Repentance then, is not merely a work of the heart, but there are works and fruits which are worthy of it and show it. As the Bible said: “you will know them by their fruits” (Matt 7:16, 20).

What are these fruits which show that a person is repentant?

We wish to discuss them in these pages one by one, so that each person will examine himself by them. Is he repentant or not? With them he will know the extent of the honesty of his repentance.

1. Confessing the fault.*

Confessing the fault encloses four important points which are:

A. Confessing the fault to God in prayer.

* From a lecture given on 24/2/1968 with other lectures.

This is because sin is originally directed towards God, as David the prophet confessed in psalm fifty, saying to the Lord: *“I have sinned against You-only against You”* (Ps 50). Like Daniel the prophet's confession: *“we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from your precepts”* (Dan 9:5). Like the confession of Nehemiah saying: *“Both my fathers' house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commended Your servant Moses”* (Neh 1:6-7). Similarly also, the confession of Ezra the Scribe (Ezra 9:6).

You sinned against God. Against His compassionate heart and His majesty.

You have sinned against the loving compassionate heart which took care of you with love and protection, you departed from His love, and defiled His holy temple, which is you. You have loved the world more than Him. You neglected His majesty and broke His commandments. That is why Nathan said to David: *“Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight?”* (2 Sam 12:9).

It is amazing: They are embarrassed from their confession father, but not embarrassed from God.

In the same way, man is embarrassed from committing sin in front of people, but is not embarrassed from committing it in front of God. David was ashamed of his lack of embarrassment in committing the sin in front of God, therefore David said to Him: *“I have sinned against You, only against You, and done what You consider evil”* (Ps 50). Daniel also said: *“We have*

done evil in front of You". In spite of this, God referred us to whatever we are embarrassed from.

B. Confessing to the priest.

Being an agent of God or a servant to Him, and not because of his personal attribute. Whoever confesses to him, confesses to God in the hearing of the priest. This reminds us of the saying of Joshua the son of Nun to Achan the son of Carmi: *"give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me"* (Josh 7:19).

Confessing to the priest is known in the Old and New Testaments.

All of those who came forth to the baptism of repentance from John the Baptist, the priest: *"were baptised by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins"* (Matt 3:6). The sinner in the Old Testament, according to the law: *"shall confess that he has sinned in that thing, and he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord for his sin"* (Lev 5:5-6). In the New Testament: *"many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds"* (Acts 19:18).

The sinner confesses to the priest, to receive Absolution and permission to have Holy Communion.

Embarrassment in front of the priest in confession is beneficial and assists in not repeating the sin. Since the fear of the embarrassment of confession makes him not commit the sin another time. Until he rises spiritually and becomes accustomed

to embarrassment from God, who sees and hears him during his sin. Also Holy Communion, with the embarrassment of confession, reminds us of the eating of the Passover lamb with bitter herbs (Ex 12:8).

Confession should be mixed with repentance; it is called the sacrament of repentance.

It is not a settlement of an old account, in order to open a new account! However, it is repentance, and confession is one of its signs. Confession means a person reveals and judges himself. Therefore he needs humility, contrition, and submission also. So, it should not be merely stories which the confessor tells to the priest. During confession also, the confessor should not justify himself, or defend himself, or place the responsibility of his errors onto others, or transform the confession into a complaint. In all of this, confession then leaves its meaning of being a sign of repentance, and a part of its components. We have talked about confession to God and to the priest. We will move onto the third type.

C. Confessing to the person whom you sinned against, is to comfort his heart with regards to you and be reconciled with him, following the saying of the Lord: *“Leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother”* (Matt 5:24). So you will say to him: *‘I have sinned against you in so and so, please forgive me’*. He will forgive you according to the saying of the Bible: *“If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you saying: ‘I repent’, you shall forgive him”* (Luke 17:4). There only remains the fourth type of confession, which is:

D. The confession between you and yourself, that you have sinned.

This is the source of the three confessions which we have mentioned, and it precedes them in time. If you do not confess from within yourself that you have sinned, then what are you going to confess to God or to the priest about? How will you confess then to whom you sinned against, if you do not feel that you have done anything wrong? You must then reckon with yourself, and feel from deep within you, complete conviction that you have sinned, for without this, it is not repentance nor confession. Saint Macarius the great said:

‘Judge yourself my brother, before they judge you’.

A father of monks of the mountain of Nitria said to the saint, Pope Theophilus: *‘Believe me my father, there is no greater than a person going back and blaming himself for everything’*. You must then judge yourself firstly within your heart. This will push you to judge yourself in front of God and the priest.

Whoever does not judge himself, cannot repent.

The tax collector judged himself. He judged himself as a sinner. Therefore he was able to stand in the temple with humility and offer repentance, ask forgiveness, and walk out justified (Luke 18:13). As for the Pharisee, who did not judge himself in anything, he did not find an error in his life to offer repentance for, or ask forgiveness for. Whoever feels that he is completely well, is it possible for him to search for a doctor or ask for healing? Similarly from the spiritual direction: only the person who confesses his sins asks for repentance.

When David did not feel his sin, he did not offer repentance.

David sinned, and amongst the whirlpool of the sin, he did not at all think about what he had done. Therefore he did not offer regret nor repentance. It was then necessary for God to send Nathan the prophet to him, who revealed to him the burden of his sin and its ugliness. David then confessed that he had sinned (2 Sam 12:13). From this time only, the story of his repentance started.

Job also did not know that he was being fought by self-righteousness.

Therefore, he entered into a long discussion with his three friends, and his complaints to God Himself increased, he said to Him: *“You know that I am not wicked, and there is no one who can deliver from Your hand” (Job 10:7). “But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). “He was righteous in his own eyes” (Job 32:1).* The matter needed God to send Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, to reveal to Job himself, and for God to talk and explain to him, until Job finally reached contrition and said to the Lord: *“Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth” (Job 40:4). He also said. “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know” (Job 42:3).*

The two greatest matters which prohibit confession and repentance are, excuses and self righteousness.

As if man excuses himself by his weakness, or by the weakness of human nature generally, or by the severity of the outer wars, or that he committed the sin through ignorance or forgetfulness, or he was in it a sacrifice for someone else: Or he places the responsibility onto someone else. so he accuses the church for not caring for him, or he accuses his confession father of not being concerned for him, or he reproves God Himself for not sending assistance. The true repentant however, only accuses himself, carrying the disgrace of his sin by himself. He stands in front of God as a sinner not justifying himself, like what happened to the thief on the right, who confessed saying: *“And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds”* (Luke 23:41).

Excuses try to cover up sin, or lighten its burden. Self-righteousness, however, is more dangerous, because it denies the existence of sin. It is more dangerous than the excuses which confess the existence of sin, but tries to escape from its responsibility, or to reduce it. As for self-righteousness, it does not see that it has done anything wrong. That is why the Lord rebuked the Pharisees: *“who trusted in themselves that they were righteous”* (Luke 18:9). He said, that He: *“Did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance”* (Matt 9:13). Truly, those who see themselves as righteous and beautiful in their own eyes, perhaps this saying of the Bible applies to them: *“There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness”* (Eccl 7:15). These people are completely far away from repentance.

If you confront them with their sins, they will argue a lot, and will not confess.

Heaven will not rejoice over ninety-nine (just persons) such as these, who see that they “*need no repentance*” (*Luke 15:7*). But it rejoices over one sinner who is contrite in his repentance, confessing his sins.

The sins which he confesses, are the ones which he repents from and asks forgiveness for.

We only regret the sins which we know and confess. We also need to regret the sins which we know about our past, which God will reveal to us, or which will be revealed to us through our spiritual readings, through sermons, and through the mouths of advisers and the fathers. So we begin to repent from them. In this way, we grow in our repentance and in the confession of our sins.

Our spiritual measures become more sensitive, and our balance becomes more precise.

So we do not only know our sins, but even more we feel the burden of these sins and their ugliness. David the prophet when he knew the depth of his sin, he then had depth in repentance, and depth in contrition of heart and humility in front of God. Therefore it is up to us to deepen our spiritual understanding, to know our condition exactly.

Our virtues which we are proud of now, might cause us to cry in the future.

We will cry for its smallness, insignificance, and the weakness of its level, whenever superior spiritualities and spiritual revelations increase in front of us, and we will cry also for our pride in these virtues. Most importantly, we must have true knowledge, whether of our sins or our shortcomings.

With confession, man is worthy of forgiveness.

This is according to the saying of Saint John the apostle: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:8-9).

Confession is not merely the word: ‘I have sinned’.

Achan, the son of Carmi, said this word after missing the opportunity (Josh 7:20). He remained far away from confession all the time, until God pointed to him by name. So he was obliged to confess. He did not receive forgiveness, but was stoned by all the people. Judas Iscariot said: *“I have sinned”* (Matt 27:4), and died perishing. Pharaoh, through diplomacy and not through repentance, said: *“I have sinned”* (Ex 9:27). He repeated it another time and said to Moses and Aaron: *“I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now, therefore, please forgive my sin only this once”* (Ex 10:16). In spite of this, Pharaoh perished, because his heart was not repentant.

The confession which we mean, is the one which springs from repentance.

It is a sign from the signs of repentance, and a component from its components. Confession without repentance however, does not benefit you with anything. As long as we are in the flesh, and as long as the opportunity for repentance is in front of us, before the door is closed, we should then examine ourselves, realize our sins, confess them, and present repentance for them. In this way the sins are covered by the blood of Christ, and we receive Absolution for them. We will also receive Absolution through the spiritual path of advice, to walk in the correct path. Confession which is mixed with repentance, includes leaving sin and regretting it. Of the signs of repentance also is:

2. Embarrassment and Shame.*

Embarrassment and shame accompany repentance, whence the repentant feels the ugliness of sin.

As if he says to himself: ‘How did I fall to this level? Where was my mind? Where was my conscience when I did this? How did I become so weak? How did I submit? How did I forget my divine image and my spiritual position?’

* See our book (the Spiritual Awakening) which has a section on embarrassment and humiliation, as one of the feelings which accompanies the spiritual awakening (from page 65 to 74) (Arabic) .

He is embarrassed from his sin, which stands in front of him always (Ps 50).

The visions of sin pursue him as if they were whips of fire which inflame his conscience, so he feels embarrassed of himself. He hides his face and places his hands on his eyes, as if he does not want to see. He is in front of himself, a person who was caught in the act.

He cannot lift his face up to God due to the severity of his embarrassment.

Like the tax-collector of whom was said that he: *“standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven?”* (Luke 18:13). But beat his breast, confessing his sin and asking for mercy. Like the prodigal son also, who because of his great embarrassment said to his father: *“I am no longer worthy to be called your son”* (Luke 15:19). Every time he remembers his sin, he says with the psalmist in the Psalm:

“My dishonor is continually before me, and the shame of my face has covered me (Ps 44:15).

As if he says with Daniel the prophet: *“O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face”* (Dan 9:7). He is embarrassed from the disgrace of sin and its exposure. He is embarrassed from the defilement of sin and its impurity. He is embarrassed from his defeat in front of sin, as if he was a soldier who surrendered his weapon to the enemy and was taken captive.

He is embarrassed from God's love to him, and from God's holiness.

He is embarrassed every time he compares his treatment of God, and God's treatment of him, and how he met God's love with rejection and denial, and also with betrayal. Also, how God used to see him in his falls, God who is all Holy and perfect. He is embarrassed from God's perseverance with him and how God was patient with him until he repented.

He is embarrassed from the spirits of the saints and angels.

Who used to see him in his falls and were amazed, and prayed for his sake to be raised. He is also embarrassed from the spirits of his relatives and friends who passed away, and how without a doubt they were amazed when they saw that his condition was like this. How shall he face them in the future?

He is embarrassed from his enemies who would rejoice in him if they knew his falls.

He is embarrassed from all of these people, he is also embarrassed from the church and its holiness, he is embarrassed from the sanctuary and the altar and from proceeding to Holy Communion. He is embarrassed from his prayers which contain phrases about God's love and the adherence to Him, and he is the one who separated himself from this love.

He is embarrassed from his promises with which he made to God previously.

And how he broke all of his oaths, even those which he spoke to God about with great seriousness, whether that was in front of the altar, or whilst he placed his hand on the Bible, or on spiritual occasions.

He is also embarrassed in his confessions, every time he mentions the ugliness of his sins.

He is belittled within his own eyes. He feels despise towards himself in this state of fall and weakness, as if he wants to get rid of all his past. He is ashamed of this part of his past.

With all of this, shame of sin is a healthy sign.

It shows that the person is rejecting it and is disgusted by it. This is a sign of purity of heart, it differs from the state of fall, in which he was accepting sin or was satisfied with it or enjoyed it. If this shame of sin remains with him, it will help him not to fall in the future.

There are types of people who try to escape from shame and embarrassment.

This is through sinful deeds which push them to continue in sin. The devil utilizes their embarrassment of their previous sins, and pushes them to change their religious surrounding which they live in, where they are embarrassed in comparing their falls with its purity. Or he calls them to change their confession father, so that they will be embarrassed to say their sins in front of him. Or

he invites them to leave confession completely, or to leave the church and the religious life. Or they escape from their embarrassment, by drowning in the life of entertainment, amusement and laughter.

All of these are actions of despair against the life of repentance.

Therefore we bless the repentants who feel ashamed of their sins. Accompanying this shame also is regret, tears and the torment of the conscience.

3. The regret, the suffering and the tears.*

Suffering because of sin, is one of the signs of true repentance.

David the prophet said about it in the sixth psalm: “for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled” (Ps 6). Truly, the Lord Jesus suffered for our sins, but we must enter with Him into: “*the fellowship of His sufferings*” (Phil 3:10).

The suffering of the repentant due to his sin, is balanced by his previous enjoyment of it.

This enjoyment which he received previously, he returns in repentance four-fold, by bearing the suffering of the torment

* The lecture about tears is old, it goes back to 1964. I added to it a lecture called (He carries his disgrace), which I gave at the great Cathedral on 7/4/1974.

and the rebuking of the conscience. The phrase: “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*”, he suffers literally in his repentance by any measure, in a hell which he passes through here on earth, like the burnt offering made by fire which is a sweet aroma to the Lord (Lev 1). He reprimands himself severely, disciplines and punishes himself. He asks for spiritual punishments from his confession father, in case his conscience rests even for a little while. With punishments he declares his objection of his sins.

Whoever repents carrying his disgrace, accepts two types of punishment.

The first type, is the punishments which he places upon himself, whether by bitter reprimand, or by forbidding himself from things he loves, so that he renounces this world which he previously loved. The second type, is all of the punishments which come to him from the outside, whether from God or from people. He accepts all of these punishments with satisfaction, without grumbling or complaining, he is convinced by them and feels that they are less than what he deserves.

Even the punishments which afflict him unjustly, he accepts also with satisfaction.

Like what happened to Saint Ephraim the Syrian, who was imprisoned once unjustly, so he accepted this and said that he deserved this for an old sin, which had no relation to this matter. Also like the acceptance of David the prophet of the scorn and abuse from Shimei the son of Gera (2 Sam 16:5-10). Like also the acceptance of Saint Moses the black of his eviction on the day of his ordination as a priest, and he said to

himself: *'Rightly they have done to you, you black coloured man whose skin is grey'*.

Those who do not withstand discipline and punishment, are far away from repentance.

For the repentant feels that he deserves everything he goes forth to. He does not reject any bitterness which sin brings, but accepts it with thanks, carrying his disgrace. Suffering is a clear result of sin, as happened to Adam and Eve (Gen 3:16-17). You cannot escape from it.

Every time the punishment continues for a longer period, the heart becomes more purified.

Like the clothes which continue boiling for a longer period, they become more clean. Like the gold which remains in the fire for a longer period, becomes clean from impurities. Contrary to this, whoever gains forgiveness with ease, escaping from any suffering which sin brings, it is easy for him to return to sin another time, if he does not feel the ugliness of the results of sin.

Do not say the Lord has borne all the suffering for me, and I will rest.

Do not look at the Lord's sufferings with this carelessness, thinking only about yourself. Remember that those who partook of the Passover, ate with bitter herbs (Ex 12:8). What is the position of the bitter herbs in your life? What is the extent of your entering into the fellowship of the Lord's sufferings? If you see the Lord carrying the cross as a ransom for your sins, run

behind Him and say to Him: *'let me carry it with you like the Cyrenian'* (Luke 23:26). Or say to Him in suffering: *'I am your cross O Lord, you carried me all of this long time. I am the thorns which they placed around Your head O Lord. I am the nails with which they pierced Your hands and legs O Lord. I wish I was crucified with You like the thief on the right. Or I wish I could say with Saint Paul the apostle: "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20)'*. Do not put the sufferings of Christ away from you, since this will make you careless and you will look to your sins without suffering. If we should then go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach (Heb 13:13), then at least, we should bear our own reproach with humiliation and tears.

4. The Tears

There are many types of tears. Here we will talk about one type, and that is the tears of repentance, which man weeps with over his sins. Do not think that weeping over the sins is a step for beginners. Many of the great saints wept for their sins. This was a known spiritual programme for the fathers of the desert.

The most prominent example of weeping over sin might be David the prophet.

He was the one who said: *"All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears"* (Ps 6:6). What was the amount of weeping of this repentant prophet, who used to drench his couch with his tears? Was he weeping over his sins,

when he returned to his house only at the end of everyday in the evening? No, for he says: “*My tears have been my food day and night*” (Ps 42:3). Even during his eating and drinking he says: “*I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping*” (Ps 102:9). That means that during his drinking, his tears fell into his drinking cup, so he mingles his drinking with tears.

His tears were abundant, inspite of the majesty which surrounded him.

He was a king, a leader of the army, a judge to the people, and the father of a large family. In spite of this, he did not give importance to all this majesty and luxury but said to the Lord: “*Give ear to my cry*” (Ps 39:12). He also says to God: “*Put my tears into Your bottle*” (Ps 56:8).

In case someone asks: Why should I cry when my sin has been forgiven?

‘We say to him, David wept for his sin after it was forgiven, and not before. Before his forgiveness he did not feel the danger and the ugliness of his fall, until Nathan the prophet alerted him to this, so he confessed his sin, and God forgave him through the words of Nathan the prophet who said to him: “*The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die*” (2 Sam 12:13). After that, David wept all of that weeping. Why did he weep? Was this because of fear of punishment or a plea for forgiveness? Not at all.

The servant weeps for fear of punishment, but the son weeps from the sensitivity of his heart towards his father.

Who amongst us has wept like David's weeping? Who amongst us has drenched his couch with his tears for one night, and not every night like him? David kept weeping for his sin all of his life. He did not rest from his weeping until his death. When he came closer to death he said: *"Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears"* (Ps 116). He rescued him from eternal death by accepting his repentance. He rescued his eyes from tears, because He moved him to: *'the place where grief, depression and sighing escapes from'*. The Lord rescued him there from tears, because he wept enough here.

This reminds us of the story of Saint Arsanious who wept greatly.

He wept whilst he was in the state of holiness, whilst he was a pillar in the desert. He wept until his eyelashes fell from the multitude of his weeping. In summer he drenched his palm leaves with tears. He used to place a towel on his lap to collect the tears in. At the time of his death he wept greatly. His disciples said to him: *"Even you our father are afraid of this hour?"*. He said to them: *'The fear of this hour was accompanying me since I entered into monasticism'*. If this saint wept, in spite of his many virtues, and in spite of his meekness, wisdom and silence, and his vigilance all night in prayer, and in spite that the Pope asked him to visit him to receive a word of benefit. Then what shall we say about

ourselves? Therefore when Saint Beeman heard about the departure of Saint Arsanious, he said:

‘Blessed are you our father Arsanious, because you wept for your soul in this world’.

He followed his phrase saying: *‘For the one who does not weep for his soul in this world, inevitably he will weep forever in the other world. As for his weeping here, this is by his own choice. There however, he will weep because of the punishments which he will receive, It is impossible for man to flee from weeping here and there’.*

This weeping was the advice of Saint Macarius before his departure.

Saint Palladius said: *‘I heard that the elders who are in Nitria, have sent to Abba Macarius the great who lived in Scete, and pleaded to him saying: ‘we plead with you our father to come to us so that we may see you before you depart to the Lord, so that not all the people will go to you’ ’.* When he came to them, they all gathered together with him, and the elders asked him to say a word of benefit to the brethren. The saint wept and said to them:

‘Let us weep my brothers, and our eyes will disperse with tears, before we go to that place in which our tears will burn our bodies’.

They all wept and fell on their faces saying: *‘Pray for us O father’.* What sins did the saints commit for them to weep like this? The customary advice that the elder would say to anyone who came to him seeking advice was. *‘sit in your cell and weep*

for your sins'. If this is the programme of the saints, then what should we do, who have innumerable sins? Look also to the weeping of an elder such as **Peter the apostle**, who, when he felt his denial of the Lord: "*went out and wept bitterly*" (Matt 26:75). The weeping of the elders has more influence on the soul than the weeping of little ones and the youth.

Amongst those who were famous for weeping also, was Saint Isidore.

He was the great priest of the cells, whom under his spiritual advice were three thousand monks. He was the confession father of Saint Moses the black. He was a man of revelations and wonders, the devils feared and revered him greatly and escaped from him. In spite of that, this saint used to weep with abundant tears and he broke out into tears with a loud voice. To the extent that his disciple who lived next to him heard him weeping once, so he went and asked him: "*why are you weeping my father?*", he answered: '*My son, I am weeping for my sins*'. The disciple said: '*Even you our father, have sins to weep for?*'. The saint answered him: '*Believe me my son, if God reveals all of my sins to me, three or four people would not be enough to weep with me for them*'.

It is a sensitivity in the delicate heart and the precise conscience.

He weeps because he angered the loving God, and because he came down from his suitable spiritual level as God's image, and because he fell when he should not have fallen. He weeps in embarrassment of his condition. No matter if the sin is forgiven, this does not prohibit that it occurred. God forgave Peter's

denial, but history still talks about that denial. God forgave Rahab, inspite of that, the Holy Bible speaks of her using the title: “*the harlot Rahab*” (*Heb 11:31*).

The church teaches us to weep everyday.

Everyone of us should stand to pray in the second part of the midnight prayer everyday to say: ‘*Give me, Lord, fountains of tears as You did in the past to the sinful woman...*’. The church gives us the Bible reading which is specific to this woman who washed the Lord's feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head (Luke 7:36-50), so that we may read it, and take this woman as an example for us in weeping for sins: ‘*so that we may gain for ourselves a pure life with repentance*’. If you pray this prayer at midnight, say: ‘*Give me, Lord, many fountains of tears to weep for this and that...*’, and mention in front of God all of your sins, weaknesses, shortcomings and falls. I wish that you would mention them with tears in front of Him. You will say: ‘*Why should I mention them, when Christ has forgiven them?*’ Here, it suits us greatly to remember the saying of the great Saint Anthony:

‘If we mention our sins, God will forget them, and if we forget our sins, God will mention them’.

Yes, mention your sins so that you know your weakness and are cautious and become precise in your life. Mention it so that you know how much God has forgiven you, and how much He carried for you on the cross, so you will love Him. Your tears will become a sign of love as were the tears of the sinful woman.

It is the gentle heart which weeps. The harsh heart however, does not weep.

Your heart must be gentle in your repentance. Your weeping must be a type of excuse which you present to the Lord whom you sinned against, and also proof of your embarrassment of what you have done. Beware that whoever weeps for his sins, will not return to them easily another time. For, he tasted the extent of pain which sin brings to the heart and conscience.

God invites us to this weeping for repentance.

He says in the book of Joel the prophet: *“Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God”* (Joel 2:12-13). He says in the book of Malachi the prophet: *“You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying”* (Mal 2:13). He also says: *“Blessed are you who weep now* (Luke 6:21), *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”* (Matt 5:4). Weep then for your sins, and then the saying of the psalm will comfort you:

***“The Lord has heard the voice of my weeping... The Lord will receive my prayer”* (Ps 6).**

David said this after saying: *“I drench my couch with my tears”*. Tears are a sign for repentance, and God responds to them. They have a sound which God hears, and His heart sympathises with you. How beautiful is the saying of the psalmist:

“Those who sow in tears, shall reap in joy” (Ps 126:5).

This joy is the comfort which man reaps from his tears. Beware that your tears are fake, so that they might be the reason for self-righteousness, instead of your tears being the reason for contrition of heart, or a result of it, or a sign for repentance. According to the opinion of one of the saints: *‘If tears come to you, then remember the reason for which they came’*. That is, remember your sins which caused you the tears. Then, do not be raised up by your tears, but be contrited. In case however someone says: *‘where did these tears come from? Am I not repentant then, if I do not weep, or won't God accept my repentance?’* Not at all, God will accept you, but search for why the tears escaped from you.

Tears have reasons which bring them, and reasons which prohibit them.

The first reason might be the type of heart. The heart which is naturally gentle, is easily influenced and easy to weep, like the heart of Jeremiah the prophet and like David's heart. There are other hearts which do not weep with ease. If they weep, then it is inevitable that there is a reason which pushed them to weeping which was stronger than the resistance of their nature, and its influence was greater.

Gentleness of heart then, brings tears. Harshness and severity prevent them.

Proceed then, towards this gentleness in your life, and keep away from severity. Know that harshness does not at all agree

with the life of repentance. The repentant is a person who implores God's mercies. The Bible says: *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt 5:7)*. He must be merciful then, so that God will treat him with this same mercy. Since He says: *“with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Matt 7:2)*.

The judgement of others also prevents tears.

Whoever judges another, is not preoccupied with his sins, but with the sins of others. He forgets his weaknesses and falls, and concentrates on the weaknesses of others, then how can he weep like them and for whom? He increases like those in departure from tears, if his judgement of others included harshness or severity or infuriation, or he was harsh in rebuking another over his sins.

Amongst the reasons which prevent tears, is anger.

The repentant person should be angry with himself and not with another person. If he is angry with others, all of his emotions and thoughts will be concentrated on the sins of others. Then the tears will leave him, even if he had them previously. Anger also includes harshness and severity.

Amongst the things which prevent tears also are, enjoyment and pleasure.

Whoever lives in luxury and enjoyment, in the different types of worldly pleasure, finds it difficult for tears to come to him. Generally the examples of these matters do not agree with the life of repentance, in which man restricts and punishes himself,

forbids himself from many enjoyments, and imposes fasts on himself. Therefore many peoples' repentance was accompanied by fasting, sackcloth, humiliation and the like, as in the fast in the days of Joel, and in the fast of Ninevah. This agrees with repentance and tears.

Naturally whoever keeps away from tears finds laughter and joy.

Truly, for everything under heaven there is a time: “*A time to weep , and a time to laugh*” (*Eccl 3:4*). Laughter and joking however are not the season or time of repentance. The life of amusement, mockery, joy, and the different delights of the world, all of these do not agree with tears, but hinder them, because whoever weeps for his sins, is a person whose grief presses for his falls.

Amongst the things which bring tears, is the feeling of alienation from the world.

The feeling of man that he is a stranger on earth, and it is not right for him to place his hopes in it. But on the contrary, it is his job to renounce the world and all that is in it and prepare for his eternity. All of this assists in tears.

Similarly is the remembrance of death, the Judgement and the other world.

All of this brings tears. Therefore the church set for us, to remember death in the prayer before sleeping, to remember the Second Coming of Christ in the midnight prayer, and to remember in all of them and in the prayer of the Settar (veil)

also, how the great Judgement will be. This is in everyday. Since all of these remembrances are of benefit to us, helping us in repentance and preparation, it also brings tears. Similarly the visiting of graves brought about tears also, in which the repentant says with David the prophet: *“Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am” (Ps 39:4).*

Similarly, the life of meekness and contrition assists in tears.

Whereas pride, majesty and the love of praise, all of these do not agree with the feelings of repentance, nor do they agree with tears. Therefore it is better that we move on to this point from the signs of repentance.

5. Contrition and humility.

The true repentant lives with the same contrition, being pressed by embarrassment and regret, and he feels the humiliation of sin. He walks with this humiliation within himself, and in front of God. This appears in his treatment of people.

Whilst he is in his contrition, he rebukes himself regularly for what he did.

He rebukes himself for the days of his life which were lost without fruition, for his weakness, falls, and his betrayal of the Lord. He says to himself: *‘Many others have passed me a long time ago, and arrived at relationships of deep love with God,*

and I am still struggling to repent. Till when will this carelessness and laziness last?’ This repentant mourns over himself, which fell, remembering the saying of Saint Isaac: ‘the repentant who does not mourn everyday as a result of his sins, should know that he has lost that day, even if he did every good deed in it’.

His rebuke of himself, makes him humble, no matter how his life changes in repentance.

No matter what good deeds he does in his repentance, he is not proud, because his sins are in front of him all the time. Man should remind himself of his falls in order not to be proud, so that the fruits of repentance do not push him to vain glory. As Saint Isaac said also: *‘If you are fought by the thoughts of vain glory, do not accept them, but remember Mary with her fornication and Israel with his defeat’.* By blaming yourself and knowing your weakness, you will possess humility of thought.

The humble repentant sees himself as being worthy of grief which afflicts him.

This is because he accepts everything which comes to him in quietness and satisfaction, without grumbling nor toil nor complaint, feeling deep within himself that he deserves much more than this. He sings with David saying: *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (Ps 119).*

Every time the period of contrition of the repentant lengthens, his repentance increases in depth.

Because he realizes the humiliation of sin, its ugliness, and its results within himself. He also realizes his weakness and becomes accustomed in his life to be cautious and precise. Poor is the person who in repentance sees that his life has changed, and thinks that he is no longer in need of struggle and caution, forgetting his previous weakness.

It is dangerous for the repentant, to leave contrition quickly for joy.

The sin which does not take in repentance its luck of contrition and humiliation, nothing is easier than for man to return to it, because its danger and ugliness were not implanted long enough within his depth. David did not rush in his repentance towards joy, but he remained contrite and his psalms witness to his contrition. Saint Mary the Egyptian remained long years in the contrition of herself. Jacob the struggler remained about 18 years weeping for his sins.

In the life of repentance, nothing is more dangerous than those who move quickly from sin into service or to desiring talents.

A person who is new in repentance might stand at the pulpit of the church, to tell of his spiritual experiences, and says in simplicity: *‘when I was a sinner’*, or *‘when I used to live in sin’*. As if presently he has no relationship with sin, which is from the news of the past only. You ask such a person: *‘and*

now, do you not sin?'. He says to you: *'now, thanks be to the Lord'*, he means that he is thankful for the righteousness which he lives in. He talks with every courage about the light which shines presently in his heart, and the love which fills his heart towards God.

The phrase: *'when I used to sin...'*, is very dangerous.

It is free of humility. It shows the lack of true knowledge of the soul. It does not agree with the repentance of the tax collector and his prayer in the sanctuary, nor with the saying of Saint Paul the apostle: *'the sinners amongst whom I am the first'*. It does not agree with all of the stories of repentance in the lives of the saints.

You my brother were a sinner, and you are still a sinner.

The difference between your previous and your present condition, is that you were a sinner and continued in sin, and perhaps you were not aware of yourself. As for now, you are a sinner, you feel you are a sinner, and you struggle with the grace of the Lord to repent. Repentance will remain with you all of your life, until you reach purity.* The person who does not feel that he is a sinner, with this, he will commit a greater sin.

* Look at Part five which concerns the life of purity in this book.

For there is no one without sin, not even if his life was one day.

We all sin, in everyday. We all stand in every hour in front of God as sinners. In the Lord's prayer, which we pray regularly, we say: "*forgive us our sins...*". We repeat this in the rest of the prayers. Even if you were a righteous man, for the Bible says: "*For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again*" (Prov 24:1). Perhaps you are now repentant. You are not infallible however. You will not reach purity of heart, but only through the contrition of your soul.

Whoever does not possess contrition, is not truly repentant.

He, without a doubt, does not know himself. He is building on a sinful foundation which will lead him to arrogance. What is more beautiful than the hymn in which we say to the Lord: '*This sin is my nature. Your nature is forgiveness*'.

Read about the saints who repented, and preserved the poorness of their hearts.

They also preserved the humiliation of themselves. If a thought came to them that they have repented, they returned the virtues to God: "*He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap*" (Ps 112). They insist on considering themselves as sinners all the days of their lives. Like the great Saint Shishoi, whom they saw at the hour of his death asking for a chance to repent. Therefore no matter how much you grow in grace, it is better for you to say:

‘I want to remain in the feelings of repentance all of my life’.

Live in the contrition of heart, because: *“the Lord is near to those who have a broken heart” (Ps 33)*. If the devil fights you to ascend to the high levels, and to sit in the heaven, and to attain virtues, then say: *‘I have not yet reached any of this. All that I know about myself is that I am a sinner who wants to repent’*.

If you enter into serving, do not let it make you forget your sins.

Do not let your success in any spiritual work, make you forget your tears and contrition. But on the contrary rebuke yourself and say: *‘Who am I to serve. I have not reached the spirituality of the servant, no matter how much knowledge I have’* . Knowledge is not what saved the soul.

Saint Paul the apostle remained contrite even after his apostleship.

His sin remained in front of him, even after the revelations, signs and wonders, even after he ascended to the third heaven, and even after he labored more abundantly than all the apostles (1 Cor 15:10). In his discussion about the appearance of the Lord to His disciples after the Resurrection, he says: *“Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor 15:8-9)*. He then says in his first epistle to his disciple Timothy: *“I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an*

insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13). In case we say to him: ‘It is not you O great Saint, Paul the apostle, it is Saul of Tarsus. You are however, a new person in the Lord Jesus, a preacher, a missionary, an apostle, and a builder of the heavenly kingdom’. But this saint remains in his contrition and says: ‘I am not worthy to be called an apostle...’.

His old sin has ended with respect to punishment, but not from the memory.

It remains in his memory, granting him contrition, and the feelings of lack of worthiness. In spite of the long years in the service, he lives in it as a beginner, as the least of the apostles, and as the first of the sinners.

You also, live as a beginner, all the days of your life.

As if you are still a child in the life of the spirit. It is enough for you that: *“The Lord preserves the simple” (Ps 116:6)*. Do not at all think that you have reached your spiritual goal. For the great Saint Paul the apostle says: “I do not count myself to have apprehended or attained anything: but I press on, that I may lay hold” (Phil 3:12-13). The great Saint Arsanious used to pray saying: *‘grant me O Lord to start’*. As if he had not yet started. Contrition is one of the signs of repentance. Of its signs also is:

6. Repairing the results of the fault.

It is not at all enough for you to leave sin and repent from it, and to confess and to receive Absolution for it. But you must repair the results of your sin as much as you can. We will give some examples of this:

Let us assume that someone stole, is it enough for him to confess the stealing?

Is his confession enough for forgiveness, whereas he still has unlawful money which he obtained by stealing? Not at all. But as much as he can, he must return the stolen thing back to its owners, if it is within his capability to do so, even if it is in a discrete way.

If he has done injustice to anyone, he should try to treat this injustice.

There is a clear example for our teaching in front of us, which is Zacchaeus the chief tax collector. When he repented, he said to the Lord publicly: “Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold” (Luke 19:8). If you cannot do like Zacchaeus and restore fourfold, then at least restore the stolen thing itself, or restore the injustice and treat it, without multiplying.

You will feel the beauty of repentance, if in it you restore the entitlement to its owners.

In case you feel embarrassment in this, in practically confessing that you did injustice and stole, this is good for you. Since this embarrassment will be like a fortress for you, preventing you from committing this sin another time. You will also feel from within, that your repentance is built on principles which have their respect, so your heart will rejoice and be comforted.

Similarly if you defamed someone, and hurt his reputation.

Isn't it his right, in your repentance, for you to restore his reputation, as long as you did him injustice and hurt him. The person who spreads wrong words about someone, will see bad results from this in his life.

What about if the repairing of the results of sin is not possible?

If it is truly not possible, then at least yourself should be contrited for this reason, that you have committed sins which

are difficult to treat. Another sign from the signs of repentance is:

7. **Compassion for the sinners.**

Saint Isaac said: *‘Whoever mourns for himself, will not know the falls of others, and will not blame anyone for a fault’*. If a person repents in his feelings of contrition and lack of worthiness, he will not at all think about the sins of others, he will not judge anyone, if he himself falls under the judgement as a result of his sins: Like the Lord said to those who wished to stone the sinful woman: *“He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first”* (John 8:7). Truly, he who is occupied with removing the plank from his own eye, cannot judge the speck which is in his brother's eye (Matt 7:5). Everytime a thought of judging someone comes to him, he says: *‘I have fallen in this and that, and this person is more righteous than me, because my sins are much more than his’*.

Contrition removes from the heart of the repentant every harshness, and gives him mercy to everyone, no matter how sinful they are.

His remembrance of his sins makes him compassionate towards sinners and he does not judge them, but he weeps for their sakes, like Saint John the Dwarf used to do in the meekness of his heart. Whenever he saw someone in sin, he wept and said: *‘if the devil has made my brother fall today, he will make me fall tomorrow. The Lord will forgive my brother and he will*

repent, and I might fall and not repent...’, (and he wept). How magnificent are the words which Saint Paul the apostle said about this:

“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them...” (Heb 13:3).

“And those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also”. The person who does not sin, judges the sinners from a position of pride. As for the person who sinned, and tried the weakness of human nature, he has compassion on them.

We have a clear example in the life of Saint Moses the black.

He was the one who was invited to a monastic council to judge a brother who sinned, he went there carrying on his back a sack with a hole which was filled with sand. When they asked him about this, he answered: *‘these are my sins which run behind my back and I cannot see them, and I have come here to judge my brother’.*

The repentant does not mention the sins of others, even if they were against him.

Saint Amos mentioned that one of the signs of repentance is: *‘the forgiving of your neighbour's sins, leaving the judgement of others, and the humility of heart’.* Saint Isaac says that the repentant should have perfect patience over insult and blame. The great Saint Anthony says: *‘If someone blames you from the outside, it is your responsibility to blame yourself from within.*

So that there is a balance between your outside and you inside’.

The repentant forgives others, like the Lord forgave him.

Or so that the Lord will forgive him, according to His divine saying: *“Forgive, and you will be forgiven”* (Luke 6:37). When the Lord taught us the Lord's prayer He only stressed one of its requests which was to do with forgiveness and He said: *“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses”* (Matt 6:14-15). Let this forgiveness be in love, it must agree with the commandment: *“Love your enemies”* (Luke 6:27), and it must agree with the life of humility which is worthy of repentance.

8. Other feelings.

The repentant person who weeps for his sins, is always gentle and peaceful, he does not argue, nor raise his voice nor cause his voice to be heard in the street (Is 42:2-3). The repentant feels the desire to be silent, when he sees that he is not akin to speaking, and it is better for him to listen. For hearing is better than speaking. In this way the repentant keeps away from teaching, remembering the saying of James the apostle: *“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgement. For we all stumble in many things”* (James 3:1-2). He says to himself:

‘Who am I to teach others? Teaching is a level above my standard. What are my spiritual experiences, that I may teach others also?’ The repentant feels a spiritual superiority which God opens in front of him, and that he has begun to enter into the taste of the kingdom, that is why most probably we see repentants being described by spiritual fervour.

9. Spiritual fervour.

Repentance is a fervour which runs through a person, it inflames him with the desire to change his life for the better. Saint John Saba was right in his saying about repentance: *‘everyone who is born of it, it grows for him wings of fire, and he flies high with the spiritual people’*.

Repentance gives birth within the heart to a great love towards God.

For every time we meditate on the heavy burden which He lifted and carried for us. Every time we meditate on the ugliness of the many bitter sins which He forgave for us, then our love to Him will increase more. Like that sinful woman who washed His feet with her tears, and He said about her that she loved much, because He forgave her for much (Luke 7). The sinners who feel the burden of their sins and the Lord's forgiveness of them, are the ones who love God more, and they are the ones who understand the depth of the cross and redemption.

In this love he is ready to sacrifice himself for the sake of God.

An amazing fervour possesses him, which greatly pushes him forward. This push is the one which changed many sinners into saints, such as Pelagia, Mary the Egyptian, and Augustine. These are the ones who repented, and felt the pleasure of this life and grew in it.

The problem of many people, is that they have lost the fervour of repentance, which they started with.

The fervour which used to inflame their hearts with love which pushed them to compensate all of what they lost in the past in their lives. If the repentant does not preserve this fervour and regularly kindle it, what is easier than for him to lose it. He then develops to laxity, and perhaps his feelings cool down after he forgets his sins or keeps them away for a certain time.

The repentant feels that his eyes are opened to a new life.

As if the door of the Paradise has been opened in front of him, and he saw there what he had not seen before. This new life attracts him strongly, even some of the confession fathers fear for their confessing children from the extremity of the push in that period.

There are many who consecrate themselves to God in the fervour of their repentance.

Like Saint Pelagia and Saint Mary the Egyptian and others. For these, in their repentance and regret for their sins, felt the renunciation of all the world, and there is nothing in it any more which entices them after they tasted the love of God. In the spiritual fervour which accompanies repentance:

The repentant feels a power within him, which he did not have before.

He was weak in his sin in front of the devil and his wars, but in his repentance the Spirit of God gives him a special grace, and power for the life of repentance. This reminds us of the sick person who because of his weakness was given a blood transfusion, so he was strengthened by this new blood. Or that God has given these repentants new hearts, from which run new strong blood, filled with the love of God. So the prophecy of Isaiah applies to them:

“Shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles...” (Is 40:31).

“They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint”, he also says: “He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might he increases strength” (Is 40:29). I wonder my brother, if you touched this power in your repentance, and felt how the right hand of the Lord carried you to the life of light and that God: *“renewed your youth like eagle’s” (Ps 103:5).* So you will sing with David saying: *“The*

right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly. I shall not die, but live” (Ps 117). With this power you will live a virtuous life.

10. Proceeding in the virtuous life

There is no repentance without change in life.

Repentance is not merely confession and Holy Communion, but it is leaving sin to walk positively in the life of righteousness. With this the repentant receives forgiveness, according to the saying of Saint John the apostle:

“If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Then, our walking in the light is a fundamental condition for our purification from sin. It is one of the signs of repentance. Saint Paul the apostle expresses this walking, which purifies from sin, and lifts judgement, and he says that: “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, **who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit” (Rom 8:1).**

Then amongst the conditions of this new life, is to walk in the light, and to walk according to the Spirit. Or like Saint Paul said: *“walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (Eph 4:1).* He also said . *“that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord...being fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:10).* *“Walk in love... walk as children of light” (Eph 5:2,8).*

Repentance then is not merely a plunging at the feet of Christ, as some say, but it is distinguished by a particular spiritual walking, and by keeping the commandments of the Lord.

Saint John the apostle said: *“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6).* He also said: *“He who says , ‘I know him’ and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4).* We throw ourselves to the feet of Christ, to take from him assistance and grace. Grace does not mean that we be lazy or continue in the life of sin, but we should keep His commandments, and walk just as He walked, walking in the light just as He is in the light. This leads us to the final sign of repentance:

11. Purity

It is the positive component in the life of repentance, the fruit of the change in life.

In it disappears the desire of the world, the body, and sin, and the desire of the heart becomes holy in the life of righteousness and the love of God. The repentant is not influenced another time by the love of sin. One of the signs of purity is that man does the virtue without struggle, without labour, without wrestling. For there is nothing within him which resists it. If you find wrestling within you between good and evil, then you have not yet reached purity, but you are struggling to reach it. If you

labour to reach the life of righteousness, then you are still in the virtue of struggle, and have not reached purity yet.

With purity, peace reigns over your heart, and the wrestling stops by the victory of good.

With purity your rest becomes in God, and also your desire and happiness. Purity covers all of your life. your expressions, senses, body, heart, and thoughts. You become a dwelling for the Holy Spirit, from which the fruits of the Spirit appear. The topic of purity is a long topic, we do it injustice if we only make it one part of this book, as a sign from the signs of repentance.

Therefore I take your permission to set aside a particular part for it.

We will speak to you in it about purity, how it should be, and how it should be examined? What are its components? What limit does purity reach on earth? What is the purity which we will receive in eternity?



PART FIVE

The Purity of Heart

- Purity from sin.
- Testing purity.
- Purity from thoughts and dreams.
- Purity from vain glory.
- The positiveness of purity.
- Purity of heart from knowing sin.

The Purity of Heart.*

As long as perfection of repentance is hatred of sin, that is, the heart has been completely purified from every love for sin or conformity to it.

Purity of heart then is one of the signs of perfect repentance.

What is the measure that we use however, to measure the purity of heart from sin? How does man know that he has reached perfection of repentance, that is, to hatred of sin? We will examine this point together.

● Purity from sin.

1. A person might think that he is repentant, because he has left the major troublesome sin which troubled his conscience, and has not returned to fall in it now.

* The source of this part is.

- a) A lecture I gave at the Angel Mikhail church in Damanhour in 1996, amongst a series on the life of repentance and purity.
- b) A lecture I gave in the hall of saint Mark's at Anba Rewais, 28/5/1966.
- c),d) Two lectures which I gave in the great Cathedral in Cairo, the first on 16/2/1973, and the second on 6/7/1973 on the life of purity.
- e) A lecture on (knowing sin) which I gave at the Cathedral on 11/3/1977.

He has not returned to committing adultery for example, or to steal, or to cheat, or to get drunk. He has not returned to committing sins of this level. Therefore his conscience has rested, and he thought that he has repented. This is because the revelation of the great sins which he used to concentrate on covered the other sins which he did not turn to. Perhaps at the same time he was standing in many sins which he regarded as insignificant, and do not enter into his personal measurements of repentance. Like talking about the self, joy with praise, regular self justifications, the abundance of argument, walking according to personal desire, and the adherence to opinions which leads to stubbornness. Along with neglecting some prayers and laxity in spiritual readings. Perhaps also, lack of tolerating insults and lack of sanctifying the day of the Lord. With all of this, his conscience does not rebuke him, because he has not reached the level to be rebuked in for such matters. Do we consider such a person as a repentant?

He, without a doubt needs his measures elevated, so that he can repent from such sins which he considers insignificant, or does not turn to them with importance. When then, shall we consider him as a repentant? Isn't it when he leaves all sins, even the ones which seem small in his sight? He leaves them practically, and he also dismisses them from his heart and thoughts. Here man ascends one step in repentance, everytime he matures spiritually. His conscience becomes very sensitive, not overlooking anything. With this he enters into true repentance. If he reaches this, do we judge him to have reached purity of heart? Here we mention an important observation, so that we may have precision of judgement, which is:

2. Perhaps he is not sinning, because the devil has left him for a while.

The devil is wise in doing evil. He knows when to fight, how to fight, and in which sin he should concentrate his war. If he finds a person very zealous and prepared, he leaves him for a while until this person is confident of himself with a confidence which might push him to carelessness, laxity and lack of precision. The devil then returns to him at a time when he is less prepared and cautious, so his fall becomes easier. This period does not become a period of victory over sin, but a period without fighting. It is a period of rest from spiritual wars, and it is not victory and purity.

There is a big difference between victory and lack of fighting.

If you find yourself not falling into a certain sin, this does not mean that you have been purified from it completely, but your lack of falling into it means that the devil is not presently fighting you with it. Or perhaps you are not falling in it now, because its circumstances are not favourable. So you do not find war, or stumbling, and you will not find whatever stimulates you to sin.

The devil does not fight you now, not because he wants your rest, but because he is preparing for you another type of trap.

In addition to this other trap, perhaps the devil of vain glory will come to you saying: *‘Woe from you. For you have slipped from*

me. You have been renewed and sanctified, you have become a new creation, and the old things have passed’. Do not listen to him, do not repeat in your mind what he says to you, for you are under the weakness as long as you are in the flesh. The devil will not stop his fighting. It is more suitable for you to reply to these thoughts and say: *‘I know my weakness, and all that is in the matter is that the Lord from His compassion has covered this weakness’.* Do not say then that you have reached purity and no longer fall. But say: *“If it had not been the Lord who was on our side... then they would have swallowed us alive”* (Ps 124:2-3). I am actually weaker than fighting their littlest one, as Saint Anthony said. Thanks be to the Lord however, for He has protected us.

It can be noticed that some sins have seasons and are not continual.

They are like the cycles of suffering or pain, they do their cycle with severity and harshness then ease, then they start a new cycle, etc. Or like a plant, which sometimes has a season of stagnation, and at another time has a season of fruits and flowering.

3. Or perhaps God wants to give you a period of rest from the burden of sin, so that your soul is not swallowed up by despair.

Since the continual succession of falls, drags the sinner to despair. That is why God's mercies reach out to him, giving him rest, even if it is for a short while, and lifts the war from him. Grace protects and supports him, even if it is for some time. So he passes through a period of calmness, in which sin does not

trouble him. Not because he has been purified, but because he is not fighting.

4. Or perhaps you are peaceful now, because prayers have been raised for your sake.

Whether by saints in heaven, or by your beloved on earth, whom the Lord has answered and ordered the lifting of the war from you. So you rest from sin and its pressures, for this reason and not because you have reached purity. You are then in a period of calmness and peace, and lack of fighting with the devil. This is not the level of purity. With regards to the difference between purity and lack of fighting, we mention this important observation:

There is a difference between the purity of children, and the purity of the mature in age and spirit.

Truly, children have a pure simple heart which does not yet know sin. However, there is a big difference between their purity and the purity of the mature in age. This difference is that children have not entered into a spiritual war, and their will has not yet been tested. That is, they have not reached the age in which their will is tested. They are different from the old mature people who have entered into wars of the enemy and fought and overcame, and their free wills rejected the enticements of sin. These people have the reward of: *'the victorious'*, which is not for children.

How great are those who reach the purity of children, after wars which children do not know.

Their purity is the result of wrestlings and wars, out of which they came victorious. Purity of heart is a very high level. Even if a person is fought by a certain sin, and is purified from it, then this is not the perfect purity.

Perfect purity is purity from all sins.

With all its images and types, whether by deed, or by thought, or by senses, or by feelings of the heart, or by falls of the tongue. Whether in the relationship with God, or with people, or with the self. It is a comprehensive purity, and it is not merely liberation from a certain sin which used to fight you. The Pharisee who prayed in the sanctuary at the time of prayer of the tax collector, thought that he had become one of the purified, because he was not like the: “*extortioners, unjust, adulterers*”, and not like the negligent in fasting and paying tithes (Luke 18:11-12). Whereas he has not been purified from pride, or from the judgement of others, nor from vain glory and self righteousness. Therefore he did not leave justified. Do not think then that you have reached the level of purity, if you have been liberated from some sins which had authority over you. Your true measurement however, of your reaching of purity is that:

No sin amongst the sins has authority over you.

Look at the saying of the Lord Jesus: “*Which of you convicts Me of sin?*” (John 8:46). Which sin, without exception.

Therefore He could say about the devil: *“the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me”* (John 14:30). Have you reached this purity from all sins, so that the devil has nothing in you, whether big or small? Even if from the small foxes which destroy the vines, or even from the sins which disguise themselves in sheep's clothing?

True purity starts with complete hatred of sin.

By knowledge and true insight, and sound understanding of the Holy Spirit of what is good and what is evil: *“to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised”* (Heb 5:14), such that the conscience is completely sound in its judgements, not being deceived by the devil in anything, and the person's deeds are pure. There is something more important than man's visible deeds, which is:

.

That purity must spring from the heart, and not from the outside.

We say this because many people are concerned with the appearance of purity and not with its essence. An example of this is that many preachers when they talk about woman's decency, concentrate on her clothing and decorum, without being concerned with the heart's motive, because of which the young lady has left her decency. Whereas if they were concerned with treating the heart from within to reach purity, then spontaneously one of the results of this would be decency of clothing and decorum. The same words can be said about young men who lengthen their hair.

We do not want by purity to cleanse the outside of the cup only (Matt 23).

In treating the sins of the tongue, the matter does not finish at the exercises of silence. For sinful speech has a reason from within the heart. The Bible says: *“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt 12:34)*. We should be concerned then with purity of heart, so that the expressions are spontaneously pure. Take lying for example. It is not enough to keep away from it only from the outside, but we must treat its reasons from within the heart, whether it is fear, or pride, or reaching a certain goal. Since lying was the result of these inner sins which need purifying. Be concerned then with the inside. Here some people ask:

Should I delay the outer purity, until I reach the inner purity?

Not at all, of course. What is meant however, is that you are not satisfied with just the outer purity, for God wants the heart before everything. Be cautious of the outer sin with all your power, because it most probably includes others also. At the same time treat the inside with every power, with every patience and with every assistance from grace. In this way your pure deeds originate from a pure heart. A condition of its purity is:

The deed must be pure, its goals and means pure also.

Every deed that you do must be. pure in itself, pure in the incentives which it leads to, and pure in the way in which it is

carried out. Is this then the perfect purity? Perfect purity is a long topic, but this, is purity from sin.

Testing purity.

Lack of falling into sin is not purity of heart.

There are other reasons for not falling other than the inner condition of the heart, we have explained some of them. As if man at some time is not being fought by sin, or grace has interfered, even without any call from us, and it overcame us. We therefore say in this respect:

Man is considered completely pure, if he enters into every war with sin in the depth and severity of war and is not shaken.

He doesn't fall only, but is not shaken also. Many people are fought by sin from their desires and thoughts, and not from the devil. Since the wars of the devils are very difficult. An example of this is the story of the young man who complained to Saint Bishoi, saying to him: *'the wars of the devil have increased towards me'*. Whereas the devil said: *'I have not yet felt that this young man has become a monk'*. The devil was very harsh in fighting him. If he was able to take his freedom completely, he would have struggled, so as to deceive if possible, even the elect (Matt 24:24).

If you overcome in a spiritual war, say: *‘perhaps it is a simple war’*.

Since God through His compassion, does not permit us to be fought above the potential of our tolerance. Perhaps we pass through light wars and are victorious in them, not because of our power or the purity of our hearts, but because of the weakness of the war. If the war had increased in burden, we would have fallen. Therefore we thank God for the greatness of His mercies, instead of vainly being proud of claiming purity.

Your purity then, is tested by the severe harsh war.

Will you withstand in it or fall? It is good for you to shout with humility and say: ‘I am not stronger than Solomon the wisest on earth, I am not stronger than David, the Lord's anointed, the man of the flute and guitar. I am not stronger than Peter the apostle in his zeal, and as long as sin: *“has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men”* (Prov 7:26). Then the best position, is for me to know my weakness, and say that I have not yet reached purity’. I pray everyday saying: *“lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”*. Have you entered into the severe wars and obtained victory? Know then this truth:

The severe war tests the person with its continuance and persistence.

Man might triumph one time in a severe war. But if it continues with him for a long time, he might weaken in front of it, and cannot overcome the resistance. Like Samson, who, when the

persistence increased towards him, weakened finally and submitted (Judg 16:16-17).

The severe war also tests man by its types and surprises.

A person might be victorious in a certain war. In another type of war however, his resistance lessens and he cannot withstand. The devil tests every person, and studies the points of weakness in him, and pushes harshly on them. His wars increase in harshness, whenever he attacks suddenly without man preparing to face him. Here purity is tested.

What is the correct definition then, of the person who has possessed purity of heart?

He is the person who has been purified from all types of sins, by thought, heart, sense, tongue, body, and by deed. He has entered into the wars of the enemy, with all its types, severity, persistence and continuance, and struggled and grace supported him and he overcame and remained victorious. This is a very high level. It is not the beginning of spiritual life, but it is at the end of the trip, so that you will be worthy of the blessing in which the Lord said: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”* (Matt 5:8).

Some of the measurements of this purity are:

- **Purity from thoughts and dreams.**

In addition to purity from sin, there is purity from thoughts and assumptions.

One of the saints said: *‘It is not only your external deeds which show your reality, but more often your thoughts and assumptions’*. He gave an example of this and said: *‘a person might be standing in a dark place, and is seen by three people. One of them thinks that he is a robber who is hiding and waiting for the opportunity to steal, and the second thinks that he is an evil person waiting for a woman. Whereas the third person thinks that this man is standing in the dark, in a place where nobody can see him, to pray’*.

In this way, the thoughts and assumptions will be according to the condition of the heart.

In this the Bible says: *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil” (Luke 6:45)*. As the saying goes: *‘every vessel brings forth what it contains’*.

Therefore, if your assumptions are evil, then your heart has not yet been purified.

The person who has a pure heart, always has pure thoughts and thinks no evil. As much as he can, he takes matters in innocence

and purity. In this way nothing makes him stumble and he does not judge any work, except the clear sin which carries its judgement within itself.

He also takes the radiant side of matters, which have two sides.

For this sake, such persons are on good terms with people, because they do not link any sin to anyone, and they excuse every person for their actions.

In case you ask: Does this mean that the pure heart is not attacked by assumptions and evil thoughts?

We say: Yes, he is attacked from the outside, without coming forth from within him. But on the contrary he rejects them from the inside. He does not accept them, but dismisses them quickly. The deception which some people are subjected to here, is that the evil thought remains, even for the excuse of its examination or its attack, or with a type of curiosity to see where it will end. The result is that the thought defiles him, and makes him lose his purity. The correct attitude is to dismiss the thought quickly, because the pure heart is disgusted with sinful thoughts, and does not accept its mere examination. Amongst the measures of purity then is the purity of assumptions and thoughts.

The second measure of purity, is the purity of dreams.

There is a person whose conscience is cautious, caring for the purity of his thoughts, whereas his dreams contain many sins, because his subconscious contains old remains of sins, which he has not yet been purified from its visions, stories, and memories.

His memory is either still defiled by its evil storage, or there are feelings in the heart, which are hidden deep inside him and have not yet been purified, and they are the source of his sinful dreams which stain the purity of his mind.

This person needs to be purified from his past, according to his present purity.

In any condition, purity of dreams needs a period of time, so that man becomes in a state far from evil dreams. With time and lack of repetition, the sources of these dreams will disappear from the memory. The subconscious will store instead of them pure and sanctified matters, which suit the life of repentance and purity which he lives, and they will be the source for perfectly pure dreams. Amongst the measures of purity of heart then, is purity of thoughts, assumptions and dreams. There remains another level for the perfect or the mature, which is:

- **Purity from Vanities**

That is, purity from transient or futile matters.

We mean by these transient or futile matters, the person who spends a long time for example speaking about insignificant matters, which are not sin nor righteousness. Or he spends time thinking about such matters or is occupied with them. He demonstrates by this that his mind or heart can be occupied with these trifles, and by them he can waste time which he could have spent with God, in prayers or meditations or spiritual

readings or praises, or any similar matter, which suits the condition of the pure heart.

These transient matters are neither good nor evil in themselves, but they are trifles which delay the positive spiritual work.

These vanities are the ones which the apostle prevented us from, by saying: *“while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (2 Cor 4:18). The person who does not look at the things which are seen, is the one who says with David the prophet: *“But it is good for me to draw near to God”* (Ps73:28). The perfect clinging to the Lord does not come except by purity of heart.

Purity from sin is a holy condition, but the fathers do not call it purity of heart. But they call it sanctity. Sanctity is less than purity in level.

Sanctity in many of its concepts is negative in its holiness, meaning departure from defilement and sin. Purity however, is positive in its holiness, it is the continual attachment to God by mind, heart and deed. It proceeds as a stage after sanctity. Amongst its advantages is purity from vanities. What are these vanities? We live in a world which is full of these transient images. Should we close our eyes so that they do not see, following the saying of the apostle: *“while we do not look at the things which are seen”*.

No, we shall not close our eyes, but we will not be concerned with what we see and hear.

That is, if our eyes fall on something to see, refrain from meeting it, similarly the rest of your senses. It is known that: *'the senses are the doors of thought'*. What our senses gather, are thought about by our minds, or at least one of the thoughts enters our mind. Here we are in front of two actions: The thought of these matters either passes and fades as smoke, and this is one of the conditions of purity of heart. Or the thought remains in us for a little or long while, and works within us with levels which surpass a limit or time, according to the purity of each of us.

These images bring thoughts of sin to the person who has not yet been purified, and are transformed in him into desires and lusts. I am not talking about this, for this is to do with the first point which is: *'purity from sin'*. I say however that such images bring to the man of God, not thoughts of sin, but some preoccupations and concerns, which differ according to the purity of heart and his death from worldly things, or the death of worldly things in his heart.

These transient thoughts, at least, waste time.

Time is part of your life. God hasn't given it to you to waste, but to benefit from, for the salvation of your soul, for the purification of your heart and thought, and for binding your feelings to God. So do not waste it in trifles.

The mind which is occupied with trifles demonstrates its lack of love to God.

His heart is not tied with God in a complete and permanent unity, there are also trifle matters which occupy his mind from God, even in chattering, which has no benefit. When will you be purified from all of this, and there does not remain in your heart except God alone?

The heart which is perfectly pure, is the heart which has entirely died from all vanities of the world, to live entirely to the Lord.

His mind becomes unoccupied with these things which can be seen, because of his excessive occupation with the unseen. The mind works tirelessly and thinks continuously. Its thinking differs however according to the matter which it is occupied with, it is one of two things: either images or unseen matters. The occupation with divine matters which are unseen is the ideal condition of purity.

Thinking about transient matters is the intermediate condition between the thoughts of sin and divine thoughts.

To the normal person it is not a sin but it is a condition of deficiency in him. It develops and is transformed into sin. Saints escape from this deficiency, which demonstrates that the heart has not been completely purified from worldly things. Saint Paul the apostle in talking about the married man said he: *“cares about the things of the world”* (1 Cor 7:32-33). There are other matters other than marriage which cause concern with

worldly things, money or desires of the flesh in general. Each of us should examine himself, to know the doors in which the world enters into him with its vanities, and finds a place in the mind or in the heart.

Here I would like to distinguish between two words: work and concern. Man works in the visible things, without the visible things working in him.

His heart is with God. Like the fathers, the saints, used to work with the palm leaves in the desert, and their hearts did their divine work in singing, praying and praising. They used to work in these things: *‘without looking at them’*, that is, not preoccupied with them. The Lord did not direct the blame to Martha because she was working, but because in working she was in a condition of concern and distress (Luke 10:41). The work was not with her hands only, but reached the mind and heart and she was preoccupied with it. In her preoccupation she was unable to devote time to the Lord: *“he will be loyal to the one and despise the other”*, for no one can serve two masters at the same time (Matt 6:24). Is it possible then for us to work without being preoccupied, distressed and concerned? This is what is required from a pure heart: *“I want you to be without care”* (1 Cor 7:32). How can this be?

By our relationship with visible things being superficial, not entering into depth. This depends on the extent of our evaluation of matters.

Every time the value of the matter increases in our sight, its depth and concern increases in us. That is why our fathers whom the world died in their sight, count them as rubbish, that

they may gain Christ (Phil 3:8), all the matters of the world no longer have value with these saints, no matter how dangerous their value in the eyes of the others who look to what can be seen. Hence, these matters no longer preoccupy them, they are not distressed by them, but live in peace. The saying of Saint Paul the apostle applies to them:

***“And those who use this world as not misusing it”
(1 Cor 7:31).***

Many times however, we forget ourselves and our spiritualities. We hear a specific story for example, or read about certain incident, or enter into discussion, and here we forget that both our heart and mind are for the Lord. We continue talking, commenting, discussing, giving opinions, and are zealous in replying to those who oppose us. The matter is not worthy of any of this. However, inspite of this, it reigns not on our tongues and thoughts only, but also on our nerves and affections. Here the waters have entered into our souls. We then become concerned and distressed over many matters. But we are not occupied with the person who is in need, but we think that: *“when we have a convenient time we will call for him”* (Acts 24:25). We return to our homes, the matter being still in our minds, and we pour it also into the minds of others, and occupy others with it.

Thoughts are not barren but give birth to other thoughts.

The thought deepens within our subconscious and gives birth to dreams and assumptions. We stand and pray, and our minds become confused with many thoughts, this is because we have

these thoughts deep within us, so they took authority over us. Be careful, do not give the matters of the world depth in your thought, feelings, and time. If the old habits come to you, wake up quickly and say to the Lord with the psalmist: *“Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things” (Ps 118:37).*

The awakening of the mind and the struggle with thoughts, precede the purity of mind and heart.

Saint Hor used to say to his disciple: *‘Be cautious my son that no strange word enters this cell’*. He means any word which is strange from God and His kingdom. Saint John the Dwarf used to shake out his ears before entering his cell, so that no discussions which he heard from others would enter into it. This is a negative struggle. But from the positive side however:

We need to be away from the world to be excited by the thought of divine things.

The feeling of man of his alienation from the world, makes him not push himself into worldly matters with its incidents, news, conversations and upheavals. If any of these things reaches him, he does not interact with them, nor respond, saying to himself: *‘I am a stranger. What have I got to do with this matter?’* Similarly, the occupation of the thought with divine things, makes him unoccupied with worldly matters and he avoids them, because they delay him from his divine excitement in which he says: *“Oh, how I love Your law. It is my meditation all the day” (Ps 118:97).*

When will the heart and thought then, reach purity?

When man is liberated from sin, when he is purified from dreams, thoughts and assumptions, and when he is purified from vanities. All of these are from the negative side. What then about the positive side?

- **The positive side of purity.**

In the purity of heart, the love of God possesses it instead of the love of the world.

He does everything for the sake of his love to God, and not merely obedience to His order or executing His commandments. Even the departure from sin, he departs from it because a much deeper love has taken its place, and has made him feel practically the insignificance of the love of sin and its defilement also. With the love of God, purity enters into a new positive role.

The fruits of the Holy Spirit appear in the life of this repentant.

Of which the apostle said: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law”* (Gal 5:22). That is, he has moved from the stage of the laws and commandments, to the stage of love.

Your relationship with God is transformed into love.

Like the relationship of a friend with his friend, a son with his father, and a lover with his lover. You will find every pleasure in the presence with God. Your prayers will be transformed into refuges of love, they will not be a duty, nor a church deed, nor one of the characteristics of the spirituals, but they will be merely an expression of the great love which is present in your heart towards God. The rest of your spiritual deeds will be done in the same way. Love is the first fruit from the fruits of the Spirit. There are other fruits, which will inevitably appear in your heart with the life of purity. You might ask:

Are all the fruits of the Spirit necessary in the life of purity?

Yes, because he said: *“Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance”* (Luke 3:8), also: *“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit”* (John 15:2). Struggle then with all your power to attain these fruits. Do you want me to talk to you about purity of heart? Then I will talk to you about every component of these fruits by itself, and about them all as one homogeneous unit. This matter needs a separate book or a set of books. This is not the time for it however. As for now, I will follow with you purity of heart, and I will talk about its peak:

There is a purity which we will receive in eternity, which is:

- **The purity of heart from knowing sin.**

With this we divide purity of heart into two types: a type which we can receive here on earth, which we have already mentioned. The other type we will not receive except in eternity in the other world, we mention it here so that we can desire and ask for it, and so that we know the extent of the depth of the purity which will be for us there.

Our eating of the tree of knowledge, is what made us lose our original purity.

We only knew good. When we ate from the tree of knowing good and evil, we then knew evil also. We entered into the dualism of good and evil, righteousness and sin, choosing good and walking in it. As for us not knowing evil totally, this is a high level which we will not reach on earth. We will be given it however, in eternity, when we eject the fruit which we ate. Then:

We will not know anything but good only. We will be liberated from the dualism of good and evil. We will then have the characteristics of simplicity and innocence, which do not know evil.

Like the innocent child who knows nothing about deception, contriving, tricks and evils which society presents to him later on and makes him lose his innocence. Purity such as Adam and Eve's purity, before they ate from the fruit of the tree, which entered thoughts into their minds, that were not there previously, they lost their simplicity, their eyes were opened to matters that perhaps made them say: '*we wish we did not know them*'. Man then developed from knowing evil to exploring it.

If you have known things about sin, then do not complete the journey.

As long as the knowledge of sin harms you, then do not add a new thing to it. Try to forget what you have known by not using it or speaking about it. Do not think about this knowledge. If you remember them, try to interchange them with another thought. Do not let the knowledge of sin be transformed from a superficial knowledge to a deep knowledge. Do not let them be transformed from facts to explorations, then to tastings, then to acceptance or wrestling with them. As much as you can, stop this knowledge at a limit. Ask God to purify your thoughts, and to sanctify your subconscious and memory, from all that has precipitated and been recorded in it.

Roam in the crown of the Lord, which He will grant us, on that Day (2 Tim 4:8).

Where every knowledge of sin will be removed from us, and sin will no longer exist. All of our experiences with sin in this world will be like a bad dream which we have awoken from in eternity, and have completely forgotten. Truly, how beautiful this is. However, as long as purity from the knowledge of sin, is not in this world, then what shall we do?

Train yourselves in the life of spiritual simplicity.

Do not let your minds work alone, in complications of thought and arguments, but add to it the simplicity of spirit. You will then have the simple luminous eye. Do not mix with sin, nor with its thoughts and stories, so that your minds are not defiled with the remembrance of evil that entails death. Be patient with purity, no matter how late its arrival. Ask for it as a gift from God to you. Let evil always be outside of you, no matter if its wars increase, and the Lord will be with you.



**The Poem: ‘I drenched my couch
with my bitter tears’.**

*I drenched my couch,
I promised my Lord, my Lord,*

*with my bitter tears.
this is the last time.*

*I'll be firm in your love,
From all my heart, my heart,*

*as firm as a rock.
I'm not returning.*

*I'm not returning,
from all my heart my heart,*

*I'm, not returning,
I'm not returning*

*It came to me,
I returned again, again*

*the war strongly.
to the depth of sin.*

*I wept from my heart,
But for a while, a while,*

*with a pure repentance.
then returned again.*

*Returned again,
but for a while, a while*

*returned again,
then returned again.*

*I strengthened my will,
From my great conceit, conceit*

*I increased my promises.
I increased my promises.*

*Being sure of my determination,
It deceived me myself, myself,*

*being sure of my struggle
and I returned again.*

*Returned again,
it deceived me myself, myself*

*returned again,
and I returned again.*

*I cried intensely, and said have mercy.
I know my weakness, my weakness, O Lord assist me.*

*Power is from you, from above not from me.
As long as You are with me, with me I'm not returning.*

*I'm not returning, I'm not returning.
As long as You are with me, with me I'm not returning.*



PART SIX

Protecting Repentance

- The ability to return
- They started in the Spirit and completed in the flesh
- The Canaanites on earth
- Do not falter between the two opinions
- The separation between light and darkness
- Caring for the spirit
- Other Means

- **The ability to return.**

It is easy for a person to repent one day, but it is important that he repents continuously.

That is, he lives in the life of repentance, or he lives in repentance all of his life and does not return another time to sin. It is very easy for a person to train himself, and be successful in spiritual exercises for a day or two or a week. But, can he continue in this spiritual exercise throughout his life? Similarly in repentance, what is important is its protection, that is, its continuation.

For it is very easy to return.

The devil who watches the life of a person, does not rest at all if this person slips from his hands by repentance. Therefore he tries with his means and tricks to return him from it, even after a long time.

The time of judges is a very clear example of this return.

They walked in the worship of idols and in the defilements of the Gentiles who mixed with them. The Lord delivered them by raising up a judge for them and so they repented. However: *“when the judge was dead, they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods...”* (Judg 2:19).

Sometimes the periods of repentance lasted for tens of yours, and then they returned.

We read in the book of Judges: *“So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died. And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord” (Judg 3:11-12). “And the land had rest for eighty years..... When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord” (Judg 3:30 , 4:1). “So the land had rest for forty years. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord” (Judg 5:31 , 6:1).*

It is a story which has been repeated in the life of this nation, and in the life of others.

Whether nations or individuals. From hearts which are not firm in the love of the Lord, and not serious in the life of repentance. They have not finished with the life of sin. They leave it and then return to it, the apostle likened them with a difficult resemblance: ***“A dog returns to his own vomit, and a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire”***

This is what Saint Peter the apostle says: *“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘a dog returns to his own vomit...’ ” (2 Peter 2:20-22).*

Yes, many have walked with the Lord one stage, and did not complete the way.

They either felt the difficulty of the way, so they left it and left the Lord with it. They were not able to carry their cross till the end. Or, they betrayed the Lord, when they returned and preferred sin rather than Him. What Saint Paul the apostle said about the foolish Galatians applies to these people (Gal 3:1-3), that:

- **They started in the Spirit and completed in the flesh.***

Saint Paul the apostle presented to us another example which was Demas.

He was one of Saint Paul's assistants in preaching and in the service, that is, he was one of the pillars of the church. The apostle once compared him with the name of Luke the physician (Col 4:14), and he declared that he was one of the people working with him: *“Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke” (Philem 24)*. The story of this preacher Demas ended by the painful phrase in which Saint Paul the apostle said:

“Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim 4:10).

It is truly painful that the love of this present world returns and conquers the heart of a great preacher amongst

* From a lecture I gave at the great Cathedral on Friday 9/8/1974.

Saint Paul's assistants. If the matter is like this, then every person should be cautious from the world and its love, no matter how much he has repented. Saint Paul mentions other examples to us other than Demas, who ended up in the same painful way, he said about them to the Philippians:

“For many... of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil 3:18).

He completes his words about them saying: *“whose end is destruction whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame - who set their mind on earthly things” (Phil 3:19).* These people are not normal believers. It is enough that Saint Paul the apostle mentioned them in his epistles. What is painful is that he says: *“for many....”*, they are not then just one or two. What is more painful is his saying. *“whose end is destruction”*. As long as the return to the life of sin is possible to whoever is not cautious, then they permit the love of the world to enter into their hearts:

Do not be proud then if you repent and start a spiritual life, what is important is that you continue.

You continue walking in the spiritual path till the end of the goal, till the end of the days of your pilgrimage on earth. The apostle said: *“whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (Heb 13:7).* What is important then, is for repentance to continue until the outcome of the conduct. The repentant must not be like those who started in the Spirit and completed in the flesh. If you repent, and walk with the Lord for a beautiful spiritual period, then return to sin, will the

spiritual days save you? Or is it, where you have ended up that you will be judged for?

King Saul is one of the clear examples.

Samuel the prophet anointed him as king, the Spirit of the Lord descended upon him, the Lord gave him another heart, and he prophesied until some were amazed saying: *“Is Saul also among the prophets”* (1 Sam 10:9-11). In spite of all of this, Saul returned and sinned, his sins increased, and the Lord rejected him. It was said about him: *“But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him”* (1 Sam 16:14). He started with God, or God started with him, but Saul did not complete.

It was the same with the people of Israel, who passed through the sea and followed the Lord in the wilderness.

They were delivered from Pharaoh's slavery. They lived under God's direct leadership. the cloud overshadowed them by day, and the pillar of light guided them by night, and they ate manna and quails. They were the first people to whom God sent a written law, and they promised saying: *“All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient”* (Ex 24:7). In spite of this, they returned and sinned many times against the Lord, they complained, and worshipped the golden calf (Ex 32). The Lord was angered by this complaining generation, and rejected them entering into the promised land, and they all died in the wilderness.

Do you think that all those who are perishing, started their path with destruction.

No of course, for the devil himself started his life as a pure luminous angel, but he did not continue, How much more those who knew sin for a while then repented. We are not concerned then with the starting point, but with the end of the journey.

The heretics did not start their history as heretics.

Some of them had a very good start. Otakhi was one of the most virtuous monks of Constantinople. He was a spiritual person, and an abbot. He did not continue however, and he ended up in heresy. Arius was one of the most virtuous and powerful priests of Alexandria, and Nestorion was one of the most powerful teachers of his time; this led him to be the Patriarch of Constantinople. All of these people ended up lost. Origen was the greatest scholar of his time. He was an ascetic man. He suffered a lot for the sake of Christ, and defended the faith. Finally this painful phrase applied to him: "*O great tower, how did you fall?*". Each person then should be cautious. If you have repented, then listen to this advice:

It is not enough to come out of Sodom, but continue to Zoar.

Lot's wife came out of Sodom, and her hand was in the hand of the angel. She was not burned with the burning city. She did not however, continue walking with God, but she looked back behind (Gen 19:16). She perished by this one look, how terrifying!

Be cautious then, from looking behind.

Do not any longer think about the world which you left for the sake of the Lord. Do not try to remember the pleasures of sin which you repented from. Do not at all look back, but: ‘*extend forward*’. Try to grow in your repentance, not returning to sin.

Whoever goes back, is like the person who destroys what he has built.

I do not wish to frighten you by the saying of the apostle: “*For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned*” (Heb 6:7-8). I do not wish to repeat what the apostle said in the same epistle: “*for if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgement.....*” (Heb 10:26-27). The apostle might not mean just sin, since every person is subjected to it, but he means the condition of continuance in sin. All that I wish to say however, is that you should be cautious in your repentance.

If you repent, do not be proud of yourself. Do not be haughty but fear (Rom 11:20).

Do not think that repentance has given you a condition of infallibility. There is no one without sin but God Himself (Matt 19:17). How easy it is for the enemy to fight you, to make you fall. Therefore, hold firm to the Lord, and let your heart be contrited in front of Him, so that He will give you the life of

continual victory. Remember the saying of Saint Paul the apostle:

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Rom 2:12).

This matches also what Saint Peter the apostle said: “...conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Pet 1:17). The fear which is mentioned here does not mean, to be terrified. Not at all, but what is meant is caution, care, precision in the spiritual life, and the departure from conceit in which the repentant thinks that he has been delivered from sin forever and he has been raised above his level.

In this fear or caution, is a shade of humility.

Many are saved by this humility. In which, man feels his weakness, and that he is still subjected to errors, and he is still in need of caution even from the simplest sins. He who feels his weakness, will be surrounded by God's power, which will help and save him. How beautiful is the humility of Saint Paul the apostle in his saying: “...I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27). If Saint Paul the apostle says this about himself, then what shall we say about ourselves, when we are the most informed people about our weakness? If the apostle says: “*I discipline my body and bring it into subjection*”, is it not to give us a lesson in continually being cautious throughout life?

Caution demonstrates that the repentant is serious in his repentance.

It shows that he is honest in his pledges which he promised God with when he started his repentance. Be cautious continuously: *“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; (and) repent”* (Rev 2:4). Search for the reasons of sin which made you fall previously and keep away from them with all your power. It is better if we set for this point a separate special topic, which is:

- **The Canaanites on earth.***

Many people after they repented returned to their sins. The reason was: **They left the reasons of sin remaining as they were, and they left the doors of sin open.** Therefore sin returned to them or they returned to it, because the source of sin is still present as it was. This reminds us of the story of the Canaanites on earth. What is this story and its significance? The Canaanites were some Gentiles who worshipped idols, the order was passed of their expulsion from the land so that they do not become a stumbling block to attract God's people to their worship and stumbling. The Canaanites were very powerful. It happened that Joshua did not drive them out from some regions, and they remained as forced labourers (Josh 16:10). Their thorn increased. When the children of God grew strong: *“they put the Canaanites to forced labour, but did not utterly drive them out”* (Josh 17:13). The same phrase was repeated

* From a lecture which I gave at the great Cathedral on Friday 13/10/1978.

in the book of Judges also (Judg 1:28). So the Canaanites dwelt in the land (Judg 1:27, 30, 32, 33).

The Canaanites became partners to God's people and were upsetting to them (Judg 2:3). They mixed with them, they married with them, and worshipped their gods (Judg 3:5-7).

The Canaanites here represent the remainder of evil which is present on earth, that has not been removed from its roots, so it became a reason for forgetting God, departing from Him and returning to sin another time. Here we ask: When you repented, and God allowed you to eat milk and honey in your new life, did you keep some Canaanites on the land, even as servants to serve you as forced labour? You think they are submitting to you, whereas when the matter ends you will fall into their defilements and worship like them.

Have you kept some of your old habits whilst you are in the life of repentance?

I say this, because sometimes, we find servants in the church, who are perhaps devoted to the service, and these people naturally see themselves as not only in the life of repentance, but perhaps even more in the life of righteousness, and in spite of this, they have habits that resemble the people of the world exactly. Their behaviours are earthly and not spiritual. How did this happen? How did they combine together between the service and these habits? We will give examples of these:

. **A person before he knew the Lord used to be angry, he then repented. However, he kept the anger with him.**

Before repenting and before entering the life of serving, he used to get angry, be provoked, raise his voice, curse, and quarrel. He then repented and kept the Canaanites on the land. He left these habits with him as they were and you see him in the service, inspite of his great responsibility in it, he is enraged, shouts and is provoked, he gives orders with a loud voice, and he kindles the atmosphere with fire. When you rebuke him for his anger, he says to you: *‘that is a holy anger. I am angry for the sake of God and His rights. I am enraged for the sake of fixing the wrong situations, for the sake of the commandments and so that I can teach them how it should be’*.

Actually he is enraged, because he is incapable of resisting anger from within himself. Actually, this is not a holy anger, because it is against the commandment which says: *“Love suffers long and is kind, is not provoked”* (1 Cor 13:4-5). It is against the commandment which says: *“the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God”* (James 1:20). It is also against the commandment which says. *“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you... and be kind to one another”* (Eph 4:31-32).

Holy anger should be holy in its means also.

Not only in its goals and objectives. Whoever is enraged like this shows that his nerves are not in good order. He gives a bad example, a dishonourable appearance to the service, and shows the lack of purity in conduct and in the method of dealing with

people. The whole matter is that this person has kept with him some bad habits and wished to bestow upon them a holy image, and use them with their same errors within the church. His repentance and service become a stumbling, like a person who puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment (Matt 9:16). It would have been better for him to leave all the old anger with all its visions. Here he asks: *'Should I not defend the truth?'* We answer him:

If God wishes to give you a holy anger to defend the truth, then it will be another anger which is different in substance, image, execution and expression.

It will be a spiritual anger, different to your worldly anger. You will be angry in it and not sin (Ps 4:4). Abigail defended the truth when she talked to David, but in a kind, wise well-mannered way (1 Sam 25). The Lord Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman her sins, but in a spiritual unhurting way (John 4). God's children always express their objection towards sin in a spiritual way which does not include loudness, nor noise, nor nervousness, all of these matters are from the remainder of the Canaanites on the land.

The problem here, is that the spiritual measures are not sound.

The measures which permit this sinful anger, and considers them holy for the sake of God, without a doubt, are unsound measures, or they are merely a justification to the presence of an old sin which the heart has not been purified from yet. It does not agree with the life of repentance, nor with what is suitable for repentance such as humility and contrition. It can develop

until all of the person's spirituality is destroyed, as if he has not repented.

2. Another example is the mixture between cursing and spiritual reproach.

It is the same situation. A person used to curse before repentance, he then repented, or thought that he repented, whereas he kept some of his old sins. Amongst them were cursing and some harmful expressions. He considered them beneficial to use in rebuking sinners. He forgets that the repentant should only rebuke himself, not forget his sins, in order to be concerned with the sins of another and to rebuke him for them. He still holds firm to the saying of Saint Paul the apostle: *“Convince, rebuke, exhort”* (2 Tim 4:2).

He forgets what is the spiritual method for rebuking.

Saint Paul who said this advice to his disciple Timothy the bishop, is the one who also said to the priests of Ephesus: *“for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears”* (Acts 20:31). Do you warn people with love and tears, or with pride and authority and with despise to them and their feelings?

The repentant does not rebuke anyone. If he does rebuke, he does not forget the spirit of gentleness.

This is what the apostle spoke about: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also

be tempted” (Gal 6:1). Yes, we all make mistakes. The repentant who remembers his sins, if he is subjected to correcting someone, does not at all forget that he sinned like this person previously. If he forgets, he subjects himself to the loss of his repentance, and the spirit of pride enters him. As for the person who in his rebuke is insolent and curses others, then this person has not repented till now and he should remember the saying of the apostle:

“...nor reviler...will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:10).

Whoever keeps cursing, in his characters, keeps the Canaanites on the land for its destruction. The use of cursing is not suitable in the service, because the means of service are not pure.

It is not suitable for the repentant to cover his sins with verses which he misunderstands.

Or he misuses them intently. It is better for him to confess that some of his weaknesses are still present and he has not yet liberated from them, such as anger, nervousness, violent nature and cursing. He has carried it with him into his new life, it stains this life, and prohibits him from protecting repentance. Do not say: *‘The Holy Spirit rebukes people through my tongue’*. The Holy Spirit has His own particular method and pure expressions. There is another person who thinks he has repented, whereas he has kept another sin:

3. He has kept in his repentance, whatever stubbornness is in his nature.

Stubbornness is always tied to pride. It is a result of wrong confidence in the self, adherence to own opinion, despising the opinions of others, and lack of care for the results of his rigid opinions. This stubbornness and rigidity is used in the surroundings of the church, the service and Sunday School, Everyone says: *'so and so is very difficult to reason with'*. In spite of this, he is not merely a repentant, but he is a servant, perhaps having a great responsibility in the service, active, preaching, talking about spiritualities, theology, doctrines and stories of the saints. He has knowledge, but the Canaanites still remain on the land.

He tries to call his stubbornness by the name (defending the truth).

Whereas truth calls him to be meek, understanding and respectable to the opinions of others. However, some sins wear sheep's clothing. The truth of the matter is that (the ego) is still present. This person in his repentance might have been delivered from many sins, but... **He has not been delivered from (the ego), he has carried them with him in his repentance.**

How many are those who fail in their repentance because of (the ego), perhaps it makes them fall into many sins, and returns them to the condition which was before repentance. Many of those who have repented however, do not feel this war of the ego, and perhaps they do not see that it is their greatest sin.

4. There is a person who repents and keeps the sin of judgement and criticism.

A person, who had fallen into this sin to a far limit, then entered into the life of repentance. The great sins which he left occupied him for a while. Then the sin of judgement which he had, lingered on until it appeared another time. The amazing thing is that this person every time he feels that he has matured in repentance, and become closer to God, and kept away from sin, by this measure the sin of judgement increases in appearance in his life.

He becomes critical of everything, everyone, and does not like anything.

The spiritual insight which was given to him in repentance, he directs to the deeds of others and not to his deeds. The ideal which he loved in repentance, he uses to measure people's dealings and not his own dealings, and with it he criticizes everyone. The issue actually is not the protection of the ideal, but it is the lack of ability to leave the sin of judgement and criticism that he left with him from his past, and the Canaanites are still on the land.

This spirit enters even into the service and teaching.

So one branch of the service rejects the general syllabus, and keeps criticizing: *'This syllabus has errors such and such, and lacks this and that. The syllabus of our branch is better'*. This branch is transformed into a 'private sector', in the surrounding

of the service, he is not concerned with the unity of education in the church. (The ego) still remains, it did not die when repentance started.

The spirit of criticism creates closed groups.

As if they were islands within the church, not connected to other land, Ships leave them to this or that land, and ships come to them from another land. In spite of this, they are islands which stand on their own within the self, that still remained after repentance. They are not satisfied with this individuality, but criticize every other situation with severity. If you ask one of them: Why all of this?, he answers you with the phrase of Jeremiah the prophet: *“Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I may weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people”* (Jer 9:1).

My brother weep for your sins, before you weep for the people.

This type unfortunately, do not see that they have sins which need weeping for. After they started repentance, they are only occupied with the sins of others, therefore they live continuously in an atmosphere which is filled with judgement and criticism of others, without mercy. As for them, however, they place themselves under the phrase: *“Who need no repentance”* (Luke 15:7). Therefore they live by the syllabus of the Pharisee and not the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee who fasts and gives tithes of his possessions and is not like the extortioners, unjust, adulterers, but he keeps the Canaanites on the land.

5. A person repents, but keeps his laziness in his characters.

Perhaps he is a lazy person who repents. He leaves his other sins, but keeps his laziness. You see this laziness clearly in his service, worship, exercises, readings, attendance at meetings, and in his regularity at confession. If someone asks him, how did he allow himself to remain in this laziness? He answers: *‘it is enough that I love Jesus’*.

You become amazed, in his love to the Lord of glory, the reason for his laziness?

The apostle invites us to be: *“fervent in spirit, not lagging in diligence, continuing steadfastly in prayer”* (Rom 12:11-12). It seems however, that attempts to cover sins, has become a habit with some people. The reply to the claim that the Lord's love is sufficient is simple, and it is that the Lord Himself said: Whoever loves Me, keeps My commandments (John 15:10). So, where is the keeping of the commandments with respect to this laziness?

6. A person might repent and keep with him the sin of (trickery).

Before he repented, he had this character. He knew how to reach his goal by twisted methods, by detours and evasions, by human tricks, by cunningness, and by his own methods. After he repented, he kept this character with him. He sometimes resorted to it, as Jacob resorted to the deception of his father to take the blessing. The church or the service might fall into a

problem and everyone is at a loss in how to solve the problem. This person intervenes and says: *'leave this problem for me to solve'*. How will you solve it? *'I will solve it in my own ways, I know this game very well'*. Naturally he knows it because he used to play it previously, before he repented. There is also no hindrance in him playing it again now. Some will ask, how did he reach this solution? The answer is clear. The Canaanites that are still on the land, gave him the (good) advice.

You feel in his solution to the problem, that he has not yet repented.

In spite of this, his conscience does not trouble him. Formerly, he resorted to detours and evasions and to twisted methods for the sake of worldly matters. As for now, he resorts to all of these for the sake of God. There is no need then for his conscience to rebuke him. In this way he declines out of repentance. He does not feel that he has changed in his repentance. The old personality is still as is, not changing its methods. In the same way he declines to what is worse.

His reliance on human strength remains with him, even in his repentance.

This matter affects all of his spiritualities, and ends in his failure in the life of repentance. He was not aware of this point, since he thought that repentance was merely leaving the (great) sins such as fornication, stealing, drunkenness and gambling etc.

7. A person might have (repented), but has kept self-righteousness.

He considered defending himself as something normal. He defended himself in everything, as if he did not sin in anything, he even kept from himself every advice or reproof. He might fall into innumerable sins through self-righteousness, no matter what levels he reaches in the service. There is another type other than these. He was fought by grief.

8. This person repents, and keeps grief with the remainder of its wars.

You find him troubled in his spiritual life because of any problem, he breaks down, he is disturbed and loses his peace. He says: *‘There is no use in me. I have lost hope. I have been perplexed by such and such a matter’*. Grief is a war from the devil, or weariness from the nerves. It is not one of the attributes of the children of God, because from the fruits of the Spirit are: joy and peace (Gal 5:22). With this grief the person can digress from his spiritual path, and loses the way to God.

We must examine ourselves very well, to see what we have kept from our first lives before repentance, in order to be rid of them.

In case we think we have actually entered Canaan, whereas we are still lost in the wilderness. Whoever purifies himself from all the sediments of the old life, can open his path to God with ease, and does not reverse in his repentance. Especially with respect to the sins which take an image other than its own.

9. The example of the love of money or possessions.

A person might say: *'but the matter is clear. How can a person in repentance be deceived by it?'* I will tell you how the deception occurs. A person used to love money, or he was greedy not wanting to spend what he had. He then repented, or thought that he had repented, and lived the new life with God. Perhaps he became a known servant, or a monk in the monastery. You then find this old sin taking an ecclesiastical appearance.

The love of money returns, but for the sake of the church, or the monastery.

This occurs by a method that does not at all agree with the life of repentance, or with spiritualities in general. He makes and excuse by saying: *'I am not taking anything for myself. I am collecting for God'*. This is true, but he is collecting in an earthly way that is not spiritual, which does not agree with the lack of love of money, nor with asceticism and renunciation. You can see amazing things from some of those who are responsible for the finance of the churches and societies. You may ask, where is the life of repentance? Such people however, have kept some Canaanites on the land.

This applies to the rich churches that do not assist the poor churches.

Isn't all money, God's money? Whether with God the spending was on this church or that. The love of money however invites its collection here and not there (in heaven), and how many are the treasurers.

- **Do not falter between the two opinions.***

Elijah the prophet said to the people: “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kin 18:21).

Faltering between two opinions, demonstrates that the heart is not firm in the love of God, and that the repentance is not true or not perfect.

If repentance reaches its perfection, man will not falter between two opinions, between God and the world. If his looks however, begin to shake between here and there, then this demonstrates that he has begun to reconsider repentance. When does this happen? It happens when sometimes man presents the will to God, for the sake of obedience, but not the heart, all the heart. He surrenders his hands to the angel to lead him outside of Sodom, and his heart is still inside it.

His repentance is merely an attempt to satisfy God, and it is not for love of righteousness.

Or perhaps he has left sin for the sake of the fear of God only. For the sake of the fear of punishment, to merely protect his eternity, without the love of God or the love of righteousness being firm in his heart. Therefor any shake which troubles him from the enemy, either returns him to sin or inclines his heart.

* From a lecture that I gave in the great Cathedral on Friday 7/2/1975 .

This happens also if the aim of repentance is not sound.

Ananias and Sapphira sold their possessions and presented the proceeds to the apostles, not for renunciation of money and love to God, but to follow the spiritual atmosphere that was prevailing in the apostolic era, merely conformity, with lack of faith of heart of the insignificance of money. Therefore they did not present all the money, but kept back part of it, because the love of the world was still within the heart (Acts 5).

Are you the same? Has repentance entered into conformity with the spiritual atmosphere?

I mean merely conformity or tradition, without the heart being purified from within from the love of sin, and without it being convinced entirely of the defilement and ugliness of sin. Repentance for the reason of conformity, invites faltering between the two opinions. Rachel left her father's house Laban, and went with Jacob, perhaps for the love of Jacob and to agree with him in leaving that troublesome environment. However the main aim, which was leaving the place where idols were worshipped, was not present. Therefore Rachel was able to leave her father's house Laban and take her father's idols with her. In this way she faltered between the two opinions. (Gen 31:34).

And you: Did you enter the new life for a person like Jacob did or for love to God?

Perhaps the love of a spiritual person, leads to the spiritual path. This however must only be the starting point, and is then transformed to love of God. For if this incentive remains alone, then the spiritual life remains attached to the love of this spiritual person, and the repentant is liable to return to sin.

The children of Israel left Egypt and followed Moses. They did not however form a firm relationship with God. That is why they were restless and returned.

The mere absence of Moses from them for forty days, when he was with God on the mountain, made these people rethink about their relationship with God, and they ended up worshipping a golden calf (Ex 32). Any afflictions which happened to them in the wilderness, made them complain and desire to return another time to Egypt. They desired meat, melons and leeks (Num 11:4-5).

It is inevitable then to form a firm relationship with God for fear of a relapse.

It is not right for the starting point in repentance to remain as it is. For the repentant must mature in his spirituality, incentives, and relationship with God, and so the heart does not return to desire the previous life in sin. As long as the relationship with God is firm, then the repentant is not subjected to the feelings of faltering between the two opinions, and the desires of return to sin.

How easy it is for him to be fought with combining the two matters together: God and the world.

In spite of the clarity of the Bible's saying: "*friendship with the world is enmity with God*" (James 4:4). Samson tried to combine between being the Lord's consecrated one and a friend to Delilah at the same time, so he failed and lost his vow. Lot tried to combine between the love of the abundant land and being the man of God, so he lost all of what he had in Sodom. Truly, there is no communion between light and darkness (2 Cor 6:14). In the same way the angel of the church of Sardis tried to combine between the service and negligence. The angel of the church of Laodicea tried to combine between the service and laxity. Each of them was sent a warning from God (Rev 3:3-16). It is amazing that king Saul resorted to the medium and to Samuel the prophet at the same time (1 Sam 28:11).

The repentant must be precise in keeping away from worldly things.

The Lord clearly said that no one can serve two masters (Luke 16:13). In keeping away from worldly things beware from the opposing influence which attracts man far away from repentance. Truly he has repented, but worldly matters still have wars and pressures, and the person is not infallible in dealing with them. That is why caution and precision are necessary.

The enemy fights him with what they call: '*the intermediate path*'.

There is a known saying which says: '*The intermediate path has saved many*'. Some spiritual fathers utilize it in advising whoever rushes into an extreme spirituality which troubles him. We say however that departure from extremism does not mean departure from precision. It is against the commandment to depart from precision and to try to reach God through the wide door and the vast path (Matt 7:13). All that we fear from this matter is that the repentant becomes accustomed to leniency in his life. This leniency pushes him down until he loses the fervour of repentance, then loses repentance itself and sins.

The repentant is fought also by the appearance of worship and spiritualities.

A repentant person is pushed by the fervour of repentance to grow in worship. This growth takes the measure of length and not depth. So he increases his prayers even if they are without spirit, he increases his readings even if without understanding, he increases having Holy Communion even if without preparation, he increases the tiring of the body even if without benefit. Slowly, slowly, he is transformed into the appearance of worship. This appearance will not benefit him, he will feel this and leave it, then he will be bored with the spiritual life and will desire his first life.

The repentant here is in need of leadership and spiritual guidance.

In order to know what is the spirituality of worship, and how to proceed in it. Also to know how God used to reject superficial worship, and that He wants the heart first. All the images of worship such as prayer, contemplation, reading, fasting, Holy Communion and Confession must originate from a heart that loves God, and they must be practiced with understanding, spiritual depth and love towards God. They must originate from the heart. The repentant should place in front of him the reproof of the Lord for sinful worship which says: *“These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honour Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me” (Matt 15:8).*

The appearance of the spiritual life, is far from the life of repentance.

Spiritualities are not appearances and manifestations. These do not demonstrate a relationship with God. The Lord rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees, inspite of their great precision in keeping the commandments, a precision which led them to literal meanings and departure from the Spirit. God did not accept this from them and said to them that they are only concerned with the cleanliness of the outside of the cup. Certainly, the Scribes and Pharisees were not repentant. Inspite of everything they were proud of being precise in executing the law, they were far away from repentance.

Do not be literal in your repentance, and do not be concerned with appearance.

For if you do this you will retreat and lose your repentance. Be concerned with the spirit before everything. Be concerned with the love of God, so that all of your spiritualities will originate from this love. With this you will protect your repentance, and will guarantee that you do not falter between the two opinions. Balaam was concerned that his external appearance was sound, no sin nor bad word was attributed to him, whereas his heart from within was not with God (Num 24-25, Jude 11). He wanted to enjoy sin, without showing the appearance of sin. However God is the One who examines the hearts. Balaam's heart was not sound in front of God. He faltered between the two opinions. He loved Balaak's possessions, and he wanted to satisfy him. At the same time he did not say with his tongue, one word to anger the Lord, and Balaam perished. Whoever falters between the two opinions, reaches this situation.

He commits sin, if he finds a door of escape from its responsibility.

What occupies him then, is the responsibility, and not the purity of heart or the love of God. That is why he is far from the life of repentance. Don't you be the same. So that your heart will be firm in God's Love, not faltering on the path of sin. For your heart to be firm in God's love also, be concerned with the nourishment of your spirit.

- **The separation between light and darkness.***

If you have repented and the light of God has entered your heart: **Then to preserve your repentance, separate yourself from every work of darkness.** It is a principle that God set for us from the beginning, which the book of Genesis narrates by saying: “*And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness*” (Gen 1: 4). The principle continued in the New Testament where it says: “*What communion has light with darkness?*” (2 Cor 6:14). It is not possible for a spiritual person to combine between the two in his life. That is why everyone who walks in the path of God:

It is inevitable that he separates himself from all causes of sin and stumbling.

This is what God wanted from the beginning of creation. However, the principle was broken and caused sin. The first breaking of this principle was when Eve sat with the serpent (Gen 3), and we saw how darkness suppressed the light. The Bible talks to us about another dangerous break of this principle, where it narrates preceding the flood that: “*the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose*” (Gen 6: 2). The result was that man's evil increased and God was obliged to purify the earth from corruption by the flood. So, darkness for a second time suppressed the light.

* From a lecture that I gave at the great Cathedral on Friday 31/1/1976.

God returned and separated between light and darkness by means of the ark.

He chose a holy group which was Noah and his family, and he separated them from the evil world, so that He would have a righteous group remaining, not being affected by the corruption of the world. By time, as corruption entered into Noah's children, God chose Abram and separated him from the evil world and said to him: *“Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you ... and you shall be a blessing”* (Gen 12:1-2). As if God says to Abram His servant:

‘Leave the place of sin, to preserve the purity of your heart, far away from evil.

The light which is in you must be separated from the darkness that is in them’. In the same way, the Lord ordered His people not to make a covenant with the people of the earth, and not to be married to them (Ex 34:15-16). He also prohibited them from the strange foreign women (Prov 2: 16). God wants His children to keep away from every evil company (Ps 1).

The apostle ordered them not to eat or keep company with sinners (1 Cor 5:11). Also to put away from themselves that wicked person. In the same way Saint John the beloved said: *“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds”* (2 John 10-11).

Separation must be from sin and sinners, both in conduct and knowledge.

If external influences made Samson, David and Solomon fall, then the weak should be more cautious and keep away for this is better for them. Similarly, the church in the apostolic era, and in the first four centuries of Christianity in particular, cast out sinners from the church, and all the believers remained as a holy group, separated from evil and the ungodly. As happened in the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), and with the sinner of Corinth (1 Cor 5: 5).

The first isolation in which man is isolated from evil, is in baptism.

Where he finds himself isolated from the devil with all his wicked works and repulsive evils, and from all his soldiers, tricks and authority. As he is isolated from the devil, he is also isolated from the old man who is buried in baptism, so that a new man is born in the image of God. He places in front of him, all of his life, to live separate from sin and sinners. In case a person asks: How can we do this?

If you cannot be separated from sinners by location, then be separated from them practically. Be separated from them by thought, conduct and by way of life.

You are not capable of keeping away from the company of all sinners in the world, or else you would have to go out of the world as Saint Paul the apostle said (1 Cor 5:10). Let your dealings with them be within the limits of necessity only. Let

your thoughts be separated from their thoughts, your conduct different from their conducts, your life different from their lives. Your expressions also different from their expressions, as the Bible says: “*your speech betrays you*” (Matt 26: 73).

That is why Saint John the apostle says: “*The children of God . . . are manifest*” (1 John 3:10).

If they sit with the people of the world, the separation entirely appears: the separation is not by location, but in the type of life, in conduct, even in their appearance, features, looks and actions. Their spirit distinguishes them. Here you see practically how God has separated between light and darkness.

I wish that this separation is without pride.

We do not want the man of God who lives the life of repentance, separated from sinners, to be separated because of arrogance, loftiness and pride, as if he is better than them. Just like the Pharisees and Scribes used to do, blaming Christ for sitting with tax collectors and sinners.

We mean, there should be no communion with them in any sinful work.

There should be no conformity to sinners, or copying of habits, or civility on account of truth. The apostle says: “*do not be conformed to this world*” (Rom 12:2). That is, do not look like them. The repentant does not follow sinners in their sins. At the same time he does not judge them, but has compassion upon them, and prays for the sake of their salvation. He says because of his lack of mixing with them:

‘For the sake of my weakness, I cannot overcome this mixing.

I keep away, because I am easily influenced and attracted. The external factors can overcome my will. That is why keeping away for me is safer, and escaping is more suitable. The matter is not to do with loftiness, because I will not forget my recent sins’.

In this way he differs from the position of the pastors, who visit sinners and check up on them.

They do this in order to attract them to repentance, and reconcile them with God. On the condition that the pastors at such moments, are alert, not losing their spiritual reverence, and not merging with the sinners in their amusements and indulgence. But they are witnesses to the truth, ambassadors of the Lord, and a good example in front of these people. The Lord Jesus used to sit at the tables of tax collectors and enter their homes, in order to attract them to repentance, and raise their self esteem. So that they realise that they have a share in Him, and that He is not only for the righteous.

The repentant says however: ‘I am not in the same level as pastors, nor have the same power as Christ. I am weaker than this company, so I will keep away from it.

I have not yet reached the level of those who guide another and lead him to repentance, for I am still in need of someone to guide me and confirm me in my repentance’. That is why he isolates himself from sinners, preserving the contrition of his heart. He does not despise any of them. He does not see within himself that he is a light which separated from darkness. For this

mere distinction in his mind would not agree with the feelings of repentance.

In his heart he knows those of whom it was said that they were light.

The righteous person, who is light, or amongst those of whom the Lord said: *“You are the light of the world”* (Matt 5:14). If this person is in any place, darkness disappears because of his light. Just like if a lamp is placed in a dark place, its darkness is dispersed and it becomes luminous. The same thing happens with the presence of the righteous in any place they stay in, light spreads in it and darkness disappears.

Similarly those saints, who because of their spiritual reverence, darkness cannot find an opportunity for itself in their presence.

Sinners are shy from them and from their dignity and holiness. No one dares in their presence to act in a disgusting way, or say a bad word. But he is ashamed of himself and from his conduct. The people present feel that a spiritual atmosphere has prevailed on the place, by the presence of one of these righteous people in it. If there was sinful talk before their entrance, it stops and everyone is quiet and darkness disappears when they enter. No one can sin in their presence.

Are you the same? Have you become light after your repentance?

Have you become even a small candle, giving dim light, but in any case dispersing darkness? If you have not become such a

light, then be very cautious of darkness. Remember at all times the saying of the Lord: *“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning”* (Luke 12:35).

Let your light firstly be for your sake.

For the sake of you seeing well, and having the spiritual insight to distinguish God's path and will. Like one of the wise virgins (Matt 25), who had oil in their lamps, so they were alight and were worthy to enter with the bridegroom.

With these burning lamps, reveal the darkness and keep away from it.

For the sake of preserving your meekness, take darkness in its subjective meaning and not in its personal meaning. Take it in the meaning of sin with all its images, and separate yourself from it.

Separate yourself from every evil thought and desire.

In order to be able in your repentance to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your thought according to the commandment (Deut 6:5). How can love be with all the heart, if the heart is not separated from every sinful feeling, and if it mixes with worldly thoughts and desires? Every time you are fought in your repentance by a thought from the matters of the world and its love and pleasures, remember the saying of the apostle:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15). And his saying: *“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”,* and *“the world is passing*

away, and the lust of it” (1 John 2:15-17). In order to keep away from the love of the world, keep away from thinking about it and its desires. It is not possible for you presently to be separated from it by location, or be separated from it by thoughts and feelings. Say to the Lord as we say in the Fraction prayer in the Divine Liturgy:

‘Every thought that does not please Your goodness, let it be taken away from us’.

Be very precise and quick in separating yourself from sinful thoughts. For sin can enter into the heart of man, even from a simple hole and keep widening a place inside until it destroys it. Sit with yourself, examine it and ask. Is there still within me any mixing with the causes of sin, and with its thoughts and feelings? If you find any of these things in you, reject and dismiss them and say to them: *‘God has separated between light and darkness’.*

- **Caring for the Spirit.***

Caring for the Spirit is the necessary positive side for the protection of repentance.

What we mentioned about removing the Canaanites from the land, the lack of faltering between the two opinions, and the separation between light and darkness, represent caution from the negative direction. Whereas caring for the Spirit represents the positive work. Since the powerful Spirit can keep man pure.

* From two lectures I gave on this topic in saint Mark’s hall in the monastery of Anba Rewais on Friday 15/10/1965 and on Friday 22/10/1965.*

That is why it is necessary for man to care for his spirit, as he cares for his body. He should care for both together and keep the order and the balance between them. He should observe this principle:

The care that sacrifices for the sake of one of them, must not harm the other.

I say this because some people might in the care of their body and its health, prohibit it from fasting, and this harms their spirit. Many parents fall into this error in bringing up their children, as if they are bringing up bodies only without spirits. In our upbringing of animals we either care for their bodies, or work towards strengthening them for labour, or work toward fattening them for the sake of slaying. However, do we do the same thing with respect to man, bringing up his body for the worms to eat? It is shameful for us to care for the human body only. Therefore care for your children's bodily health, and care also for their spiritual health. Do the same for your health.

The health of the spirit is of benefit to the spirit and body also.

If the spirit is sick, the body can become sick with it, and some diseases of the body are related to spiritual diseases. If the disease of the spirit harms the body, it is not necessary for the disease of the body to harm the spirit. But on the contrary most probably it benefits it. The severest diseases of the body can benefit the spirit, lead man to repentance and prayer, awaken him and the people around him and teach them renunciation in life. Care for the health of your spirit then, more than you care for the health of your body.

Do not be compassionate towards your body, whereas your spirit perishes.

The Lord asked for the opposite to this when He said: *“if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you . . . and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you”* (Matt 5:29-30). He showed us by this that the spirit is more important. For its sake you sacrifice the body.

Your spirit is God's image and likeness. It is very precious to Him.

He was incarnated for its sake, and sacrificed His pure blood on the cross. So the price of your spirit is the blood of Christ, and all the sufferings that Christ endured for your sake. Your spirit also is one only, you do not have another. If you lose it, you have lost everything, and if you gain it, you have gained everything. It is more precious than all of the world. That is why the Lord said: *“for what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matt 16:26).

No one can harm your spirit except you.

A person is capable of detaining your body, but he cannot detain your spirit. It remains free, even in prison. A person is capable of killing your body, but he cannot kill your spirit.

Your spirit is a heavenly component. It is the one which gives life to the body.

If you take care of it, you can raise the body above, and let it be in a high spiritual condition. You will then resemble an earthly angel. You must take care of it then, even if your body weakens for the sake of this. The apostle says: *“Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day”* (2 Cor 4:16). Our outward man is this body, and the inward is the spirit. The apostle resembled this body to a tent in which we live (2 Cor 5:1). More importantly is that God is living within. I wish then that you take care of your spirit, so that it does not sin and the body sins with it.

You feed your body everyday. You should feed your spirit also.

The spirit is nourished just as the body is nourished. The Lord says: *“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me”* (John 4:34). The spirit is nourished also: *“by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”* (Matt 4:4). Is your spirit nourished by the words of God and by doing His will? Does it take this nourishment everyday?

The body is nourished by three meals everyday.

In the beginning of the day, in the evening and in between them. Are you cautious in giving your spirit its nourishment a few times every day or do you neglect it and so it weakens?

The body receives many types of nourishment to satisfy all of the necessary components.

You give it complete nourishment from the groups of fats, sugars, carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and irons. You are cautious in case it lacks something of which it needs. Do you give your spirit, like you give your body all that it needs? Do you give it nourishment of prayers, praises, meditations, spiritual readings and metanoia? Do you give it what it needs from God's love? Does it receive nourishment everyday, and a few times in the day? Along with the rest of the other nourishments. Do not be satisfied with giving nourishment to your body every day, a few times a day, giving it different integrated components. In its nourishment also:

Give it its food in sufficient amounts, as much as it needs of calories.

Do you treat your spirit with the same treatment? Do you give it enough prayers to satisfy it, or do you pray for a few minutes and then get bored? Do you give it enough spiritual readings to satisfy it from the Holy Bible, lives of saints and spiritual topics?

Or are you not diligent nor concerned, and don't care that the spirit receives its nourishment, whereas it hungers and thirsts for righteousness (Matt 5: 6)? The body is not satisfied with all the previous amounts and types of food, but stipulates: **That the food is well cooked and good to taste to be accepted by his appetite.**

Do you present to your spirit good tasty food, or do you present to it fast prayers without understanding, affection,

fervour or spirit, and mixed with thoughtlessness? Do you think that the spirit can benefit from these prayers? Do you present to it readings without contemplation, depth, understanding and without application? Can the spirit digest this nourishment and benefit from it for its growth? This is the same for the rest of the spiritual means. Take care of your spirit then, and know that:

Just as the body weakens and becomes weak from lack of food, likewise the spirit also.

The body loses weight from lack of food, and the spirit becomes lax and loses its fervour. How many are those who are afflicted by spiritual anaemia or lean spirituality. As the body becomes sick from spoilt food or by contagion, in the same way the spirit becomes sick by all of these. It needs protection and immunity, just like what the body needs exactly.

If the body becomes sick it needs physicians, similarly for the spirit.

The physicians of the spirit are the confession fathers and the spiritual advisers. The spiritual medications are known and are many, and everyone who feels deficient in a certain direction needs to take them. We say to the Lord in the Gregorian Liturgy: *'tie me with all the medications which bring me to life'*. We also say to Him: *'O true physician who is for our souls and bodies'*. There is no doubt that the body finds great concern from man for it, which the spirit does not find. This is because one of the fathers once read in the book of Ecclesiastes the saying of the wise Solomon:

“I have seen servants on horses, while princes walk on the ground like servants” (Eccl 10:7).

He said that the servants who are riding on the horses are the bodies that we honour more than necessary. And the princes who walk on the ground like servants are the spirits that do not find honour like the bodies, but find negligence from every direction. The spirit which has dominion by nature, we neglect until it loses its authority and submits to the body and walks on the ground like a servant. We care for the body, so we give it nourishment, and we beautify it with adornment.

Just as the body is adorned, the spirit also must be adorned.

The spirit is adorned with virtues, the ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit as the apostle says (1 Pet 3:4). It will wear: *“the wedding garment”* (Matt 22:11-12). Whoever wears it is worthy to enter with the Lord into His kingdom. It will wear fine linen, which is the righteous acts of the saints (Rev 19:8). It will stand in front of God in white clothing. Do you adorn your spirit with all the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22)? Or do you stand naked in front of God like the angel of the church of Laodicea (Rev 3:17)? Know that all the ornaments of the body from the outside is of no use, as the psalm says: ***“The royal daughter is all glorious within”*** (Ps 45).

Whereas: *“her clothing is woven with gold”*, so your spirit will stand on the Last Day with all its ornaments in front of God: *“as a bride adorned for her husband”* (Rev 21:2). With respect to the attire of the spirit, how beautiful is the phrase which was said about baptism: *“For as many of you as*

were baptised into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27), a day in which the spirit proceeded from baptism in perfect splendour. To this is added also:

Whatever crown the spirit wears, as a result of its struggles and victories.

What does your spirit wear from all of these? Are you like the Ark of the Covenant which was covered with gold inside and out? (Ex 25:11)?

In caring for the spirit, place in front of you these commandments:

1. **Walk in the Spirit**, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh (Gal 5: 16)
2. **Be filled with the Spirit** (Eph 5:18).
3. **Fervent in spirit** (Rom 12:11).

In this way worship God in the Spirit (Phil 3:3). You will pray with the spirit, and sing with the spirit (1 Cor 14:15). You will bring forth the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), knowing that: *“He who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Gal 6:8)*. If you walk in life like this, you will be able to preserve your repentance and not return back. Give your spirit its nourishment. As for your body, give it enough to sustain it, and not what it desires.

Your sustaining of your spirit preserves you from falling.

Everyone is subjected to temptations, enticements, and spiritual wars. However, the strong in spirit will be as firm as the house built on the rock (Matt 7:24-25) Those whose spirits were nourished with the word of God, strengthened by all the spiritual practices, have experience with the wars of the devils, and have the ability to fight them, have become strong from within, as fortified cities. However, why do some fall?

They fall because they have no resistance from within, nor fortification.

Like a disease that attacks an entire town, the strong are able to withstand, and the weak fall. If the matter is so, then try to be strengthened in spirit, so that if sin comes to you, it will not find acceptance nor submission, so it will pass and go away. Form for yourself spiritual funds that will benefit you in the lean years.

The majority of those who fall, and those who suffer relapse after their repentance, are satisfied with leaving sin at the beginning of repentance. At the same time they left their spirits without nourishment, without strengthening, so that they became in a weak condition which made them fall easily. As for you, do not be like this. Have spiritual means that tie you with God, and which you carry out in order and regularity. Attend spiritual meetings, have spiritual friends, read spiritual readings, and have a spiritual atmosphere that surrounds you from every side, along with your spiritual father and his advice and guidance.

- **Other Means**

- 1. Amongst the things that assist in preserving repentance, is its fulfilling of its contrition.**

This is so man can realise exactly the ugliness of sin and the bitterness of its results, and to experience the torment of the conscience, so that he will not return to sin another time. We have talked in a previous chapter about what accompanies repentance from feelings of shame, with grief and tears, as in the stories of the saints. In the same way what accompanies contrition in the departure from the best seats, and the opportunities of leadership that make man forget his sins. Other than, that some people with great regret, try in the beginning of their repentance to jump quickly to joy. Without passing through the stage of contrition, regret and grief, forgetting that joy is a later stage, which they cannot grab for themselves, but the Lord grants it to those who have proven with their contrition the honesty and firmness of their repentance.

The repentant who rushes towards joy, can easily return to his old sins.

Contrition is a strong wall that protects repentance, keeps the heart awake, it is called upon for caution and precision, and the fear of God holds firmly to it. Contrition protects the repentant in humility of heart. Grace works within the meek and protects them from falling. As long as the repentant is contrite, he will remember his weakness and falls, this will make him continuously cautious.

The devil however, provokes you towards quickness of joy, to lead you to carelessness.

He makes you feel that you have come out entirely from the circle of sin, having been sanctified and renewed, and sin no longer has authority over you, because you are protected and preserved with grace. In this way he makes you not to care. Truly, grace protects us, but it does not cancel our will, and it does not make us walk towards good. What will happen if we do not co-operate with the work of grace in us? Therefore if you are called to joy, say: *'I do not deserve it'*. If God grants you the joy of His salvation (Ps 50), let this joy be a reason for an increase in contrition, along with reproof of yourself.

.

In the order of the first fathers, there were laws of severe punishment.

As a result of these punishments, every repentant used to feel the measure of the sin in which he fell, so his heart was contrited, and he felt his lack of worthiness even to enter the church. At that time the church was more holy, and the believers were more serious and precise in their lives. When these punishments stopped, negligence entered into the souls of many. I wish that every repentant would place in front of him the saying of Saint Macarius the great: *'Judge yourself my brother, before they judge you'*. Since, if we regret our sins as we should, then this regret will help us in not returning to sin. For, how can we return to what we regret?

. **One of the reasons of spiritual relapse and the return to sin, is the wrong understandings of spiritualities and the love of God.**

Some people concentrate a lot on God's love and forgiveness, a concentration which makes them forget God's Goodness and Holiness. It makes them forget the fear of God also. So they do not have the fear which pushes them to caution. If they fall, they do not regret for very long. Relying on God's love. In this way sin becomes easy in front of them.

One of the wrong understandings is that some think that confession is merely mentioning your sins to the priest and receiving Absolution for them and that's the end of the matter. Without combining confessions with true repentance, great regret, reproof of the self, and true determination in leaving sin and keeping away from all its causes. The easiness of confession, might be a reason for a person to return to sin. Amongst the wrong understandings is that a person thinks that repentance is merely the change of one behaviour for another, from a wrong action to a virtuous life, without concentrating on the presence of a relationship with God.

You say however: **If I am given all of the virtues without You O Lord, I do not want them.** In my repentance, I want You. The virtue is an expression of the connection with You. Shall I say, I will give You my heart, merely as an energy with which to look at my feelings? No, but I will give You all the love in this heart, to live with You and be confirmed in You.

Repentance is not my arrival at the virtue, but my arrival to You.

With this position, repentance can be confirmed. The repentance which is established on the love of God and the connection with Him. For love as the apostle said: “*never fails*” (1 Cor 13:8). As was also said in the book of the Song of Solomon: “*Many waters cannot quench love*” (Song 8:9).

3. Amongst the reasons for spiritual relapse also, is the forgetting of promises to God.

Those promises which you said to the Lord on the day of your repentance. You might have promised God with certain details. That is why if you are fought by sin reject it, and remember your promises. Say: *‘I have agreed with God. I cannot go back on my promises with Him, because I have promised, and I want to be a man according to the commandment of the Bible: “be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man” ’* (1 Kin 2:2). Do not be like the land in which the seeds were placed, and the birds came and devoured them, or thorns sprang up, and choked what had grown of them.

4. Amongst the reasons for spiritual relapse also, is the vast conscience.

The conscience that widens to everything, justifies everything, and swallows the camel (Matt 23:24). It is assisted by a mind that is at the service of every digression that the soul is fought with, he presents the proofs and demonstrations, and perhaps verses and stories of saints in order to convey the ignorance of every evil desire of the soul.

That is why you need continual spiritual guidance so that you do not digress.

Place yourself under the leadership of wise guidance. Remember that: *‘Those who are without an adviser, fall like the leaves of trees’*. One of the saints said that the greatest fall for a youth is: *‘that he walks as he likes’*. The wise man said: *“Lean not on your own understanding”* (Prov 3:5). The adviser preserves the balance in the life of the repentant. He does not let him increase in grief that makes him fall into loss of hope. He also does not let him increase in asking for joy and delight, that would lead him to carelessness.

“Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life”. (John 6:27).

- **Some Questions on Repentance**

1. **I am always conscious of my sins.**

Question: To what extent do we fulfil the phrase: *“I am always conscious of my sins?”* Does this mean we should remember our sins regularly?

Answer: We should remember regularly that we are sinners, always conscious of our sins, in order to bring meekness and contrition of heart to us, and make us feel our weakness so that we increase in caution, and ask for God's help by prayer.

If remembrance however, returns sin to us, we should refrain from it.

Remembering what we say in the Divine Liturgy: *'The remembrance of evil entailing death'*. According to the teachings of the fathers, it is better for us to keep away from the remembrance of lustful and excitable sins, because their remembrance returns the wars of sin to us.

If we remember a lustful sin, let us not enter into its details because it is a stumbling.

The sin of fornication for example, the repentant is not permitted to remember its details and the steps of its committal, in case the desire of the sin returns to him another time. Even if the desire does not trouble him the first time in which he remembers these details, it might trouble him after that.

Like the desire of fornication also, is the desire of majesty and positions, and the desire of the best seats and all that follows from day dreaming.

If the repentant enters into the details of his hopes and dreams, and whatever he desires of positions, lusts, precedence over others, and the love of praise and honour, how easy it is for these feelings to return to him another time, shatter his senses, he becomes frivolous in it with pleasure, and perhaps it is the cause of this type of dreams, or his thoughts become reckless in them at he time of prayer. It is better for him to escape from all of this.

It is the same for the sin of envy, the entry into its details is not permitted.

Where he remembers the person who was better than him at something, or he enjoys the lust which he wanted but could not obtain. These remembrances return the wars of his old lusts to him, and returns the feelings of lack of love towards that envied person.

Like the sins of anger from people's wrong doings, whether they are visible or suppressed.

Along with the remembrance of the reasons for these wrong doings and their appearances, and whatever was moved in the heart from feelings of rage or hatred or the desire to seek revenge. If the repentant remembers these details, he might feel that he has begun to warm up and become agitated from within, instead of remorse over his anger. This is if he enters into the details.

In any condition, man should watch over his feelings.

The sins which he mentions or mentions their details in a painful way will return him to the feelings of sin, so he would keep away from them. The remembrance however, that brings regret, tears and contrition of heart to him, he should continue in, as long as it is within the feelings of repentance.

2. The repentant's readings.

Question: I am a person who is new in repentance. What readings do you advise me with for my spiritual benefit in this period? What things should I refrain from?

Answer: Keep away from readings which cause stumbling, that bring laxity and judgement of others.

Also the readings which arouse argument or love of teaching in you, or feelings of superiority and intelligence. Also the readings that cool your spiritual fervour, dry your tears, and enters you into an atmosphere of pleasure and joking.

Amongst the readings which are very beneficial to you are the lives of the saints.

Also the personalities of the Holy Bible. Since these readings present practical ideas to you and you desire to live like them, and this will give you energy and spiritual fervour.

In the same way, the reading of spiritual and ascetical books will benefit you.

For it will enlighten the path for you, as it will also protect your thoughts in a pure spiritual atmosphere. What is important is that you choose the books which have depth, the ones that you are influenced by, which push you to be connected with God, that reproach you over your sins, open in front of you high horizons, and makes you humble no matter what your attainment in repentance is.

The stories of the saints of repentance are also of benefit to you.

Like the life of Saint Augustine and his confession, the life of Saint Jacob the struggler, Saint Moses the black and others. In the same way the lives of female saints who repented such as Saint Mary the Egyptian, Saint Pelagia, Saint Martha, Saint Evdokia and Saint Mary the niece of Saint Abraham the solitary.

From the Holy Bible choose for yourself certain sections by which you are influenced.

Such as the books of Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Jonah, Joel and Deuteronomy. From the New Testament. the epistles to the Philippians, Ephesians, both epistles to the Cor, and to Timothy. Write in a notebook the verses that you are influenced by in order to learn them.

3. The spiritual practices and the love of God.

Question: Which is better for me in the period of repentance. spiritual practices, or entering into the love of God with power that makes the path short?

Answer: In this point, all people are not of the same type.

Some people are granted in their repentance, a love which is kindled in their hearts, that removes from in front of it, all previous weaknesses, sins and deficiencies. Whereas there are people who open their way amidst rocks, and need great struggle to resist every sin, with very harsh practices, with

vigilance that is very alert over their salvation, like Saint Paul alerted the Hebrews saying:

“You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Heb 12:4).

Here the person trains himself, and examines how he did in each practice. The saints lived in practices also in the matters which were to do with their spiritual lives and their spiritual growth. Saint Paul the apostle says: *“This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offence toward God and men” (Acts 24:16)*. He also said: *“In all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Phil 4:12)*.

Therefore depending on what the Lord grants you, in this walk.

If He kindles you with love, walk in the path of love. If He leads you step by step with struggle and toil, you also struggle and toil, in order to arrive.

4. Old friends.

Question: Do you think it is easy to get rid of the friends whom I lived with for many years before repentance, in a close association of heart and a deep relationship, I trusted in them and they knew my secrets. How can I leave them?

Answer: Your true friend is your companion in the way to the Kingdom, he shares with you in the spiritual life, he encourages you towards it, and you encourage him also.

Every relationship or association that is outside of God's love, should be got rid of. For the Lord says: *“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me (Matt 10:37).* If your old friends make you stumble, or lead you away from the life of repentance, keep away from them, with convincing and firmness.

There is no objection, if you can attract them with you to repentance.

If you cannot, then let your relationship with them be superficial. If they are dangerous to you, then you should prefer your relationship with God than your relationship with them. Even if you find difficulty, bear it for the sake of the Lord. Remember that Abram the father of fathers, when the Lord called him, he left his family, kindred, and country and walked behind God (Gen 12:1). You also, to preserve your repentance, leave for the sake of God, all those who hinder you.



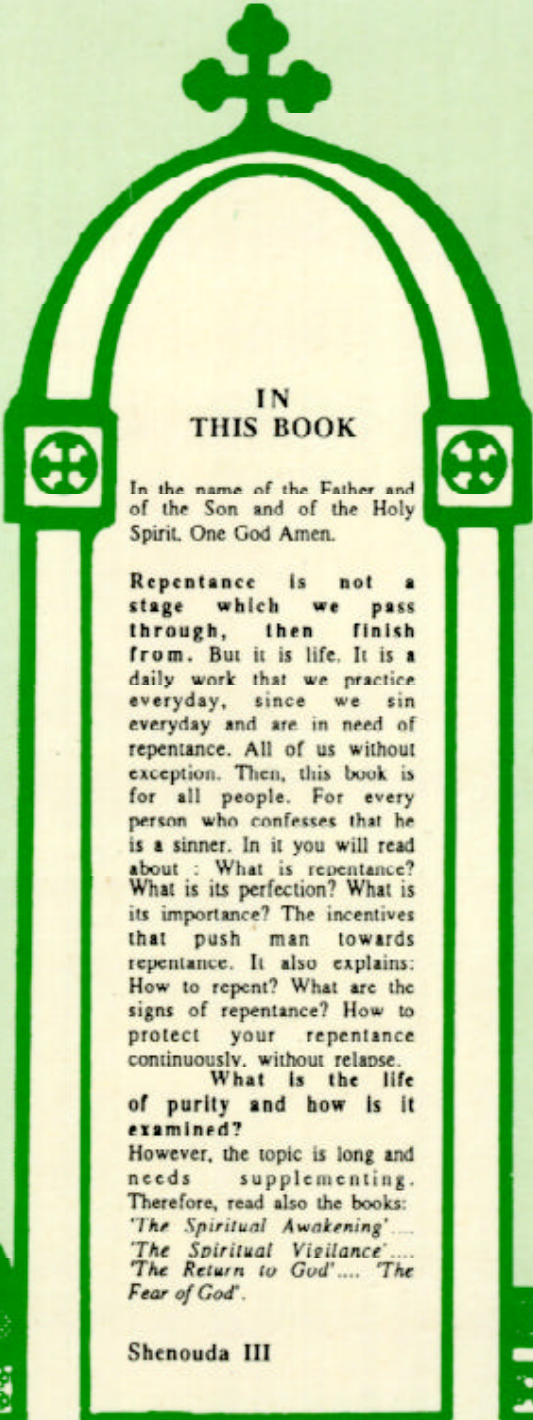
Final Message

*C.O.P.T. wishes to thank
the many who kindly donated time and money
in order to publish this book.*

May the Lord reward them

Published by

C.O.P.T.



IN THIS BOOK

In the name of the Father and
of the Son and of the Holy
Spirit. One God Amen.

Repentance is not a stage which we pass through, then finish from. But it is life. It is a daily work that we practice everyday, since we sin everyday and are in need of repentance. All of us without exception. Then, this book is for all people. For every person who confesses that he is a sinner. In it you will read about : What is repentance? What is its perfection? What is its importance? The incentives that push man towards repentance. It also explains: How to repent? What are the signs of repentance? How to protect your repentance continuously, without relapse.

What is the life of purity and how is it examined?

However, the topic is long and needs supplementing. Therefore, read also the books: *'The Spiritual Awakening'.... 'The Spiritual Vigilance'.... 'The Return to God'.... 'The Fear of God'.*

Shenouda III

