

One Hundred & Twenty Wise Sayings from The Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church

When a man walks in the fear of God he knows no fear, even if he were to be surrounded by wicked men. He has the fear of God within him and wears the invincible armor of faith. This makes him strong and able to take on anything, even things which seem difficult or impossible to most people. Such a man is like a giant surrounded by monkeys, or a roaring lion among dogs and foxes. He goes forward trusting in the Lord and the constancy of his will to strike and paralyze his foes. He wields the blazing club of the Word in wisdom.



St. Symeon the New Theologian, The Practical and Theological Chapters

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When we lay bare the hidden meaning of the history, scripture is seen to teach that the birth which distresses the tyrant is the beginning of the virtuous life. I am speaking of the kind of birth in which free will serves as the midwife, delivering the child amid great pain. For no one causes grief to his antagonist unless he exhibits in himself those marks which give proof of his victory over the other.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses.

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O strange and inconceivable thing! We did not really die, we were

not really buried, we were not really crucified and raised again, but our imitation was but a figure, while our salvation is in reality. Christ was actually crucified, and actually buried, and truly rose again; and all these things have been vouchsafed to us, that we, by imitation communicating in His sufferings, might gain salvation in reality. O surpassing loving-kindness! Christ received the nails in His undefiled hands and feet, and endured anguish; while to me without suffering or toil, by the fellowship of His pain He vouchsafed salvation.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, On the Christian Sacraments.

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Repentance is the renewal of baptism. Repentance is a contract with God for a second life. A penitent is a buyer of humility. Repentance is constant distrust of bodily comfort. Repentance is self-condemning reflection, and carefree self-care. Repentance is the daughter of hope and the renunciation of despair. A penitent is an undisgraced convict. Repentance is reconciliation with the Lord by the practice of good deeds contrary to the sins. Repentance is purification of conscience. Repentance is the voluntary endurance of all afflictions. A penitent is the inflicter of his own punishments. Repentance is a mighty persecution of the stomach, and a striking of the soul into vigorous awareness.

St. John Climacus

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Those who seek humility should bear in mind the three following things: that they are the worst of sinners, that they are the most despicable of all creatures since their state is an unnatural one, and that they are even more pitiable than the demons, since they are slaves to the demons. You will also profit if you say this to yourself: how do I know what or how many other people's sins are, or whether they are greater than or equal to my own? In our ignorance you and I, my soul, are worse than all men, we are dust and ashes under their feet. How can I not regard myself as more despicable than all other creatures, for they act in accordance with the nature they have been given, while I, owing to my innumerable sins, am in a state contrary to nature.

St. Gregory of Sinai, Philokalia, Vol. IV.

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He, therefore, who sets himself to act evilly and yet wishes others to be silent, is a witness against himself, for he wishes himself to be loved more than the truth, which he does not wish to be defended against himself. There is, of course, no man who so lives as not sometimes to sin, but he wishes truth to be loved more than himself, who wills to be spared by no one against the truth. Wherefore, Peter willingly accepted the rebuke of Paul; David willingly hearkened to the reproof of a subject. For good rulers who pay no regard to self-love, take as a homage to their humility the free and sincere words of subjects. But in this regard the office of ruling must be tempered with such great art of moderation, that the minds of subjects, when demonstrating themselves capable of taking right views in some matters, are given freedom of expression, but freedom that does not issue into pride, otherwise, when liberty of speech is granted too generously, the humility of their own lives will be lost.

St. Gregory The Great, Pastoral Care

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The Lord of all gave to His apostles the power of the gospel, and by them we also have learned the truth, that is, the teaching of the Son of God - as the Lord said to them, 'He who hears you hears Me, and he who despises you despises Me, and Him Who sent Me' [Lk.10:16]. For we learned the plan of our salvation from no other than from those through whom the gospel came to us. The first preached it abroad, and then later by the will of God handed it down to us in Scriptures, to be the foundation and pillar of our faith. For it is not right to say that they preached before they had come to perfect knowledge, as some dare to say, boasting that they are the correctors of the apostles. For after our Lord had risen from the dead, and they were clothed with the power from on high when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they were filled with all things and had perfect knowledge. They went out to the ends of the earth, preaching the good things that come to us from God, and proclaiming peace from heaven to all men, all and each of them equally being in possession of the gospel of God.

St. Irenaeus, Against the Heresies, III

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The Lord's Day is a mystery of the knowledge of the truth that is not received by flesh and blood, and it transcends speculations. In this age there is no eighth day, nor is there a true Sabbath.

For he who said that 'God rested on the seventh day,' signified the rest [of our nature] from the course of this life, since the grave is also of a bodily nature and belongs to this world. Six days are accomplished in the husbandry of life by means of keeping the commandments; the seventh is spent entirely in the grave; and the eighth is the departure from it.

St. Isaac of Syria, The Ascetical Homilies.I

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The wicked one, on the watch, carried me off as booty as I lazily slept.
He led my mind into error; he plundered my spirit and snatched away
The wealth of Thy grace, this arch robber.
So raise me up, as I am fallen, and summon me, Saviour,
Thou who dost will that all men be saved.

Kontakia of St. Romanos, A Prayer.

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The roof of any house stands upon the foundations and the rest of the structure. The foundations themselves are laid in order to carry the roof. This is both useful and necessary, for the roof cannot stand without the foundations and the foundations are absolutely useless without the roof - no help to any living creature. In the same way the grace of God is preserved by the practice of the commandments, and the observance of these commandments is laid down like foundations through the gift of God. The grace of the Spirit cannot remain with us without the practice of the commandments, but the practice of the commandments is of no help or advantage to us without the grace of God.

St. Symeon the New Theologian

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I shall speak first about control of the stomach, the opposite to gluttony, and about how to fast and what and how much to eat. I shall say nothing on my own account, but only what I have received from the Holy Fathers. They have not given us only a single rule

for fasting or a single standard and measure for eating, because not everyone has the same strength; age, illness or delicacy of body create differences. But they have given us all a single goal: to avoid over-eating and the filling of our bellies... A clear rule for self-control handed down by the Fathers is this: stop eating while still hungry and do not continue until you are satisfied.

St. John Cassian

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In Christianity truth is not a philosophical concept nor is it a theory, a teaching, or a system, but rather, it is the living theanthropic hypostasis - the historical Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Before Christ men could only conjecture about the Truth since they did not possess it. With Christ as the incarnate divine Logos the eternally complete divine Truth enters into the world. For this reason the Gospel says: "Truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

St. Justin Popovich

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Let us charge into the good fight with joy and love without being afraid of our enemies. Though unseen themselves, they can look at the face of our soul, and if they see it altered by fear, they take up arms against us all the more fiercely. For the cunning creatures have observed that we are scared. So let us take up arms against them courageously. No one will fight with a resolute fighter.

St. John Climacus

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God is a fire that warms and kindles the heart and inward parts. Hence, if we feel in our hearts the cold which comes from the devil - for the devil is cold - let us call on the Lord. He will come to warm our hearts with perfect love, not only for Him but also for our neighbor, and the cold of him who hates the good will flee before the heat of His countenance.

St. Seraphim of Sarov

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In the matter of piety, poverty serves us better than wealth, and work better than idleness, especially since wealth becomes an obstacle even for those who do not devote themselves to it. Yet, when we must put aside our wrath, quench our envy, soften our anger, offer our prayers, and show a disposition which is reasonable, mild, kindly, and loving, how could poverty stand in our way? For we accomplish these things not by spending money but by making the correct choice. Almsgiving above all else requires money, but even this shines with a brighter luster when the alms are given from our poverty. The widow who paid in the two mites was poorer than any human, but she outdid them all.

St. John Chrysostom

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Every day you provide your bodies with good to keep them from failing. In the same way your good works should be the daily nourishment of your hearts. Your bodies are fed with food and your spirits with good works. You aren't to deny your soul, which is going to live forever, what you grant to your body, which is going to die.

St. Gregory the Great

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I saw the snares that the enemy spreads out over the world and I said groaning, "What can get through from such snares?" Then I heard a voice saying to me, "Humility."

St. Anthony the Great

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"Remember, O my soul, the terrible and frightful wonder: that your Creator for your sake became Man, and deigned to suffer for the sake of your salvation. His angels tremble, the Cherubim are terrified, the Seraphim are in fear, and all the heavenly powers ceaselessly give praise; and you, unfortunate soul, remain in laziness. At least from this time forth arise and do not put off, my beloved soul, holy repentance, contrition of heart and penance for your sins."

St. Paisius Velichkovsky

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This is the mark of Christianity--however much a man toils, and however many righteousneses he performs, to feel that he has done nothing, and in fasting to say, "This is not fasting," and in praying, "This is not prayer," and in perseverance at prayer, "I have shown no perseverance; I am only just beginning to practice and to take pains"; and even if he is righteous before God, he should say, "I am not righteous, not I; I do not take pains, but only make a beginning every day."

St. Macarius the Great

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Be strong in Me; and you, too, Andrew; just as you were the first to find Me, you were found by me; so find the one who has wandered;

Do not forget your first skill; from it I shall educate you for this new art.

Formerly, naked into the deep sea, now naked into life;

Formerly, hunting with a fishing-rod, now taught to fish with the cross;

Formerly, you used a worm as bait; now I order you to hunt with My flesh.

I alone know what is in the heart.

Kontakia of St. Romanos, On the Mission of the Apostles.

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Why do you trouble yourself in a house that is not your own? Let the sight of a dead man be a teacher for you concerning your departure from hence.

St. Isaac the Syrian

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Beguiling and deceptive is the life of the world, fruitless its labor, perilous its delight, poor its riches, delusive its honors, inconstant, insignificant; and woe to those who hope in its seeming goods: because of this many die without repentance.

Blessed and mos blessed are those who depart from the world and its desires.

Elder Nazarius

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Faith and love which are gifts of the Holy Spirit are such great and powerful means that a person who has them can easily, and with joy and consolation, go the way Jesus Christ went. Besides this, the Holy Spirit gives man the power to resist the delusions of the world so that although he makes use of earthly good, yet he uses them as a temporary visitor, without attaching his heart to them. But a man who has not got the Holy Spirit, despite all his learning and prudence, is always more or less a slave and worshipper of the world.

St. Innocent of Irkutsk, Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven.

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The demons are sleepless and immaterial, death is at hand, and I am weak. Lord, help me; do not let Thy creature perish, for Thou carest for me in my misery.

St. Peter of Damascus

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You cannot destroy the passions on your own, but ask God, and He will destroy them, if this is profitable for you.

St. Anatoly of Optina

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The soul that really loves God and Christ, though it may do ten thousand righteousnesses, esteems itself as having wrought nothing, by reason of its insatiable aspiration after God. Though it should exhaust the body with fastings, with watchings, its attitude towards the virtues is as if it had not yet even begun to labour for them.

St. Macarius the Great

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Souls that love truth and God, that long with much hope and faith to put on Christ completely, do not need so much to be put in remembrance by others, nor do they endure, even for a while, to be deprived of the heavenly desire and of passionate affection to the

Lord; but being wholly and entirely nailed to the cross of Christ, they perceive in themselves day by day a sense of spiritual advance towards the spiritual Bridegroom.

St. Macarius the Great

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An old man was asked, 'How can I find God?' He said, 'In fasting, in watching, in labours, in devotion, and, above all, in discernment. I tell you, many have injured their bodies without discernment and have gone away from us having achieved nothing. Our mouths smell bad through fasting, we know the Scriptures by heart, we recite all the Psalms of David, but we have not that which God seeks: charity and humility.'

Apophthegmata Patrum

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The hour of death will come upon us, it will come, and we shall not escape it. May the prince of this world and of the air (cf. John 14:30; Eph. 2:2) find our misdeeds few and petty when he comes, so that he will not have good grounds for convicting us. Otherwise we shall weep in vain. 'For that servant who knew his lord's will and did not do it as a servant, shall be beaten with many stripes' (cf. Luke 12:47).

St. Hesychius the Priest

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Do not seek the perfection of the law in human virtues, for it is not found perfect in them. Its perfection is hidden in the Cross of Christ.

St. Mark the Ascetic

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Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously. And assuredly, the angel who guards you will honour your patience.

St. John of the Ladder

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Behold, this is the true and the Christian humility. In this you will be able to achieve victory over every vice, by attributing to God rather than to yourself the fact that you have won.

St. Martin of Braga

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We believe that the divine presence is everywhere and that "the eyes of the Lord are looking on the good and the evil in every place." But we should believe this especially without any doubt when we are assisting at the Work of God. To that end let us be mindful always of the Prophet's words, "Serve the Lord in fear" and again, "Sing praises wisely" and "In the sight of the Angels I will sing praise to Thee." Let us therefore consider how we ought to conduct ourselves in the sight of the Godhead and of His Angels, and let us take part in the psalmody in such a way that our mind may be in harmony with our voice.

St. Benedict

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Humility is the only thing we need; one can still fall having virtues other than humility -- but with humility one does not fall.

Elder Herman of Mt. Athos

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When you are praying alone, and your spirit is dejected, and you are wearied and oppressed by your loneliness, remember then, as always, that God the Trinity looks upon you with eyes brighter than the sun; also all the angels, your own Guardian Angel, and all the Saints of God. Truly they do; for they are all one in God, and where God is, there are they also. Where the sun is, thither also are directed all its rays. Try to understand what this means.

St. John of Kronstadt

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God descends to the humble as waters flow down from the hills into the valleys.

St. Tikhon of Voronezh

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Our holy fathers have renounced all other spiritual work and concentrated wholly on this one doing, that is, on guarding the heart, convinced that, through this practice, they would easily attain every other virtue, whereas without it not a single virtue can be firmly established.

St. Symeon the New Theologian

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If you are praised, be silent. If you are scolded, be silent. If you incur losses, be silent. If you receive profit, be silent. If you are satiated, be silent. If you are hungry, also be silent. And do not be afraid that there will be no fruit when all dies down; there will be! Not everything will die down. Energy will appear; and what energy!

St. Feofil, the Fool for Christ

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When anyone is disturbed or saddened under the pretext of a good and soul-profitting matter, and is angered against his neighbour, it is evident that this is not according to God: for everything that is of God is peaceful and useful and leads a man to humility and to judging himself.

St. Barsanuphius the Great

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What, then, are the things which are being prepared for those who wait for Him? The Creator and Father of the ages, the All-holy One, Himself knows their greatness and beauty. Let us then strive to be found among the number of those that wait, that we may receive a share of the promised gifts.

St. Clement of Rome

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Even if an angel should indeed appear to you, do not receive him but humiliate yourself, saying, 'I am not worthy to see an angel,

for I am a sinner.'

Apophthegmata Patrum

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We should zealously cultivate watchfulness, my brethren; and when, our mind purified in Christ Jesus, we are exalted by the vision it confers, we should review our sins and our former life, so that shattered and humbled at the thought of them we may never lose the help of Jesus Christ our God in the invisible battle.

St. Hesychius the Presbyter

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Let us consider, then, brethren, of what matter we were formed, who we are, and with what nature we came into the world, and how He Who formed and created us brought us into His world from the darkness of a grave, and prepared his benefits for us before we were born. Since, therefore, we have everything from Him, we ought in everything to give Him thanks, to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

St. Clement of Rome

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Prove your love and zeal for wisdom in actual deeds.

St. Callistus Xanthopoulos

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What purposelessness, oh the deceit of life; truly in vain does each man vex himself, and truly blessed and thrice-blessed are those who have left everything for the Lord, that they may attain the good things announced in the Gospels. For what profit will it be for a man to enjoy the whole world, but lose his soul, to which the whole universe is not equivalent? All the splendor of man is like the blossom of grass. For the grass departs and the blossom dies, but the word of the Lord abideth for ever.

St. Nicon "Repent Ye"

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It depends on us whether we wish to be saved.

Apophthegmata Patrum

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When the blessed Eulogius saw an angel distributing gifts to the monks who toiled at all-night vigils, to one he gave a gold piece with the image of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to another a silver piece with a cross, to another a copper piece, to another a bronze piece, and to another nothing. The others who had remained in the church, left the church empty-handed. It was revealed to him that the ones who had obtained the gifts are those who toil at vigils and are diligent in prayers, supplications, psalms, chants, and readings. Those who received nothing or who left the church empty-handed are those who are heedless of their salvation, are enslaved to vainglory and the clamors of life, and stand feebly and lazily at vigils and whisper and jest.

St. Joseph of Volokalamsk

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Chastise your soul with the thought of death, and through remembrance of Jesus Christ concentrate your scattered intellect.

St. Philotheus of Sinai

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Do we forgive our neighbors their trespasses? God also forgives us in His mercy. Do we refuse to forgive? God, too, will refuse to forgive us. As we treat our neighbors, so also does God treat us. The forgiveness, then, of your sins or unforgiveness, and hence also your salvation or destruction, depend on you yourself, man. For without forgiveness of sins there is no salvation. You can see for yourself how terrible it is.

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, Journey to Heaven.

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What toil we must endure, what fatigue, while we are attempting to climb hills and the summits of mountains! What, that we may ascend to heaven! If you consider the promised reward, what you endure is less. Immortality is given to the one who perseveres; everlasting life is offered; the Lord promises His Kingdom.

St. Cyprian

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A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent, that is, he says nothing that is not profitable.

Abba Pimen

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The way of humility is this: self-control, prayer, and thinking yourself inferior to all creatures.

Abba Tithoes

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The body is a slave, the soul a sovereign, and therefore it is due to Divine mercy when the body is worn out by illness: for thereby the passions are weakened, and a man comes to himself; indeed, bodily illness itself is sometimes caused by the passions.

St. Seraphim of Sarov, Spiritual Instructions

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Make glad, O Jerusalem, and all ye who love Sion, keep feast. Today the ancient bond of the condemnation of Adam is loosed. Paradise is opened to us: the serpent is laid low; for of old he deceived the woman in Paradise, but now he seeth a woman become the Mother of the Creator. O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! The instrument of sin that brought death upon all flesh hath become the first fruits of salvation for the whole world through the Theotokos. For God the All-perfect is born a babe of her, and by His birth He doth set a seal upon her virginity. By His swaddling bands he doth loose the bands of sin, and by becoming a child He doth heal Eve's pangs in travail. Wherefore, let all creation sing and dance for joy, for Christ hath come to restore it and to save our souls.

Glory of the Aposticha of the Feast

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Christ is Risen!

O the marvel! the forbearance! the immeasurable meekness!

The Untouched is felt; the Master is held by a servant,

And He reveals His wounds to one of His inner circle.

Seeing these wounds, the whole Creation was shaken at the time.

Thomas, when he was considered worthy of such gifts,

Lifted up a prayer to the One Who deemed him worthy,

Saying, "Bear my rashness with patience,

Have pity on my unworthiness and lighten the burden

Of my lack of faith, so that I may sing and cry,

`Thou art our Lord and God.'"

Kontakia of Romanos, V. 1, On Doubting Thomas

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There is nothing impossible unto those who believe; lively and unshaken faith can accomplish great miracles in the twinkling of an eye. Besides, even without our sincere and firm faith, miracles are accomplished, such as the miracles of the sacraments; for God's Mystery is always accomplished, even though we were incredulous or unbelieving at the time of its celebration. "Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?" (Rom. 3:3). Our wickedness shall not overpower the unspeakable goodness and mercy of God; our dullness shall not overpower God's wisdom, nor our infirmity God's omnipotence.

St. John of Kronstadt, My Life in Christ

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It was said about John the Little that one day he said to his older brother: I want to be free from care and not to work but to worship God without interruption. And he took his robe off, and went into the desert. After staying there one week, he returned to his brother. And when he knocked at the door, his brother asked without opening it: Who is it? He replied: It's John, your brother. The brother said: John has become an angel and is not among people anymore. Then he begged and said: It's me! But his brother did not open the door and left him there in distress until the next morning. And he finally opened the door and said: If you are a human being, you have to work again in order to live. Then John repented, saying: Forgive me, brother, for I was wrong.

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

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Long ago, the wily one cast his weapon and wounded Adam and killed him;

Indeed, he completely destroyed the weak man.

But now, even if he struck the bodies of the noble men, he did not destroy their spirits.

He persuaded the first-created man to fall by words, but not even by deeds, the noble ones.

Bewitching the former, he made promises; he made offers to the latter:

For Adam, the making of a god; for the martyrs, honor.

He offers what he does not have; he suggests bestowing things not in his authority.

Therefore, saints, having shattered his scheme,
You gained crowns.

Kontakia of Romanos, On the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia I.

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First of all it must be understood that it is the duty of all Christians - especially of those whose calling dedicates them to the spiritual life - to strive always and in every way to be united with God, their creator, lover, benefactor, and their supreme good, by Whom and for Whom they were created. This is because the center and the final purpose of the soul, which God created, must be God Himself alone, and nothing else - God whom Whom the soul has received its life and its nature, and for Whom it must eternally live.

St. Dimitry of Rostov

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Those who have truly decided to serve the Lord God should practice the remembrance of God and uninterrupted prayer to Jesus Christ, mentally saying: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

St. Seraphim of Sarov

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Let us go forward with the heart completely attentive and the soul fully conscious. For if attentiveness and prayer are daily joined together, they become like Elias' fire-bearing chariot, raising us

to heaven. What do I mean? A spiritual heaven, with sun, moon and stars, is formed in the blessed heart of one who has reached a state of watchfulness, or who strives to attain it.

St. Philotheus of Sinai

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My poor soul! Sigh, pray and strive to take upon you the blessed yoke of Christ, and you will live on earth in a heavenly manner. Lord, grant that I may carry the light and goodly yoke, and I shall be always at rest, peaceful, glad and joyous; and I shall taste on earth of crumbs which fall from the celestial feast, like a dog that feeds upon the crumbs which fall from the master's table.

St. Tikhon of Voronezh

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When despondency seizes us, let us not give in to it. Rather, fortified and protected by the light of faith, let us with great courage say to the spirit of evil: "What are you to us, you who are cut off from God, a fugitive for Heaven, and a slave of evil? You dare not do anything to us: Christ, the Son of God, has dominion over us and over all. Leave us, you thing of bane. We are made steadfast by the uprightness of His Cross. Serpent, we trample on your head."

St. Seraphim of Sarov

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Even a pious person is not immune to spiritual sickness if he does not have a wise guide -- either a living person or a spiritual writer. This sickness is called _prelest_, or spiritual delusion, imagining oneself to be near to God and to the realm of the divine and supernatural. Even zealous ascetics in monasteries are sometimes subject to this delusion, but of course, laymen who are zealous in external struggles (*podvigi*) undergo it much more frequently. Surpassing their acquaintances in struggles of prayer and fasting, they imagine that they are seers of divine visions, or at least of dreams inspired by grace. In every event of their lives, they see special intentional directions from God or their guardian angel. And then they start imagining that they are God's elect, and often try to foretell the future. The Holy Fathers armed themselves against nothing so fiercely as against this

sickness -- prelest.

Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky

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Go and have pity on all, for through pity, one finds freedom of speech before God.

Abba Pambo

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We see the water of a river flowing uninterruptedly and passing away, and all that floats on its surface, rubbish or beams of trees, all pass by. Christian! So does our life. . . I was an infant, and that time has gone. I was an adolescent, and that too has passed. I was a young man, and that too is far behind me. The strong and mature man that I was is no more. My hair turns white, I succumb to age, but that too passes; I approach the end and will go the way of all flesh. I was born in order to die. I die that I may live. Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom!

St. Tikhon of Voronezh

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It is better to eat meat and drink wine and not to eat the flesh of one's brethren through slander.

Abba Hyperechius

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Wine makes glad the heart of man' (Ps. 104:15). But you who have professed sorrow and grief should turn away from such gladness and rejoice in spiritual gifts. If you rejoice in wine, you will live with shameful thoughts and distress will overwhelm you.

St. Theodore of Edessa

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Acts of charity, almsgiving and all the external good works do not suppress the arrogance of the heart; but noetic meditation, the labor of repentance, contrition and humility -- these humble the proud mind.

Elder Joseph the Hesychast

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Oh, what great happiness and bliss, what exaltation it is to address oneself to the Eternal Father. Always, without fail, value this joy which has been accorded to you by God's infinite grace and do not forget it during your prayers; God, the angels and God's holy men listen to you.

St. John of Kronstadt

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What we need is a little labor! Let us endure this labor that we may obtain mercy.

St. Dorotheus of Gaza

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For Christians above all men are forbidden to correct the stumblings of sinners by force...it is necessary to make a man better not by force but by persuasion. We neither have authority granted us by law to restrain sinners, nor, if it were, should we know how to use it, since God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil, not by force, but by choice.

St. John Chrysostom

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They went down to Egypt and provided food when famine reigned; they came to the obstinate sea, and taught it wisdom with a rod; they went out into the hostile desert and adorned it with a pillar; they entered the furnace, fiercely heated, and sprinkled it with their dew; into the pit where they had been thrown an angel entered and taught its wild beasts to fast.

St. Ephrem

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While the Bridegroom tarried, they slumbered and slept:

Give ear, ye prudent, to our Lord's parable, for it is all light.
All of them slept, both the foolish and the wise --
Which signifies that the good and the wicked die until the
resurrection.

The same sleep comes upon the ten of them, which is as much as to
say,

That death is the same for all creation without distinction.

One was the sleep of the wise and of the foolish,

For one is death, both of the righteous and of sinners.

The good die, as the wise virgins slept;

And the bad die, as the foolish also slept.

Behold, all creation looketh for the coming of the Bridegroom,
Christ, Who cometh at the end with His angels.

But since He hath tarried, all generations slumber and sleep

With the sleep of death, while looking for when He cometh.

A Homily on the Ten Virgins by Mar Jacob, Bishop of Serugh

+ + +

Do all in your power not to fall, for the strong athlete should
not fall. But if you do fall, get up again at once and continue
the contest. Even if you fall a thousand times because of the
withdrawal of God's grace, rise up again each time, and keep on
doing this until the day of your death. For it is written, 'If a
righteous man falls down seven times' - that is, repeatedly
throughout his life - 'seven times shall he rise again' [Prov.
24:16].

John of Karpathos

+ + +

No one on this earth can avoid affliction; and although the
afflictions which the Lord sends are not great men imagine them
beyond their strength and are crushed by them. This is because
they will not humble their souls and commit themselves to the will
of God. But the Lord Himself guides with His grace those who are
given over to God's will, and they bear all things with fortitude
for the sake of God Whom they have so loved and with Whom they are
glorified for ever. It is impossible to escape tribulation in this
world but the man who is giver over to the will of God bears
tribulation easily, seeing it but putting his trust in the Lord,
and so his tribulations pass.

Archimandrite Sophrony

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The evil one cannot comprehend the joy we receive from the spiritual life; for this reason he is jealous of us, he envies us and sets traps for us, and we become grieved and fall. We must struggle, because without struggles we do not obtain virtues.

Elder Ieronymos of Aegina

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For those who believe in Him, Christ will become all this and even more, beyond enumeration, not only in the age to come but first in this life, and then in the world to come. Thou in an obscure way here below and in a perfect manner in the Kingdom, those who believe see clearly nonetheless and receive as of now the first-fruits of everything they will have in the future life. Indeed, if they do not receive on earth everything that was promised to them, they do not have any part of foretaste of the blessings to come, their higher hope being set on the hereafter. However, it is through death and the resurrection that God in His foresight has given us the Kingdom, incorruptibility, the totality of life eternal. Given these conditions, we unquestionably become partakers of the good things to come, that is, incorruptible, immortal, sons of God, sons of the light and of the day, inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven, since we carry the Kingdom within.

St. Symeon the New Theologian

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Self-accusation before God is something that is very necessary for us; and humility of heart is extremely advantageous in our lives, above all at the time of prayer. For prayer requires great attention and needs a proper awareness, otherwise it will turn out to be unacceptable and rejected, and 'it will be turned back empty' to our bosom.

Martyrius of Edessa

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The enemy of our salvation especially strives to draw our heart and mind away from God when we are about to serve Him, and endeavours to adulterously attach our heart to something irrelevant. Be always, every moment, with God, especially when you

pray to Him. If you are inconstant, you will fall away from life, and will cast yourself into sorrow and straitness.

St. John of Kronstadt

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There was a man who ate a lot and was still hungry, and another who ate little and was satisfied. The one who ate a lot and was still hungry received a greater reward than he who ate little and was satisfied.

Apophthegmata Patrum

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For to despise the present age, not to love transitory things, unreservedly to stretch out the mind in humility to God and our neighbor, to preserve patience against offered insults and, with patience guarded, to repel the pain of malice from the heart, to give one's property to the poor, not to covet that of others, to esteem the friend in God, on God's account to love even those who are hostile, to mourn at the affliction of a neighbor, not to exult in the death of one who is an enemy, this is the new creature whom the Master of the nations seeks with watchful eye amid the other disciples, saying: "If, then, any be in Christ a new creature, the old things are passed away. Behold all things are made new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

St. Gregory the Great

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The knowledge of the Cross is concealed in the sufferings of the Cross.

St. Isaac the Syrian

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The work of prayer belongs to the angels, and is, therefore, the special concern of the Church. Every other work, i.e., charity, nursing the brethren, visiting the sick, caring for prisoners, releasing captives, and other similar things, is done by the brethren in love and offered by them to God. Similarly, poverty, fasting, sleeping on the ground, prostrations, vigils, etc., are good and like a sacrifice to God, because they aim to subdue and

humble the body so that we may be purified and approach God and become friends of God -- yet these things do not present us directly to God, whereas prayer does so and unites us with Him. A person praying acts towards God like a friend -- conversing, confiding, requesting -- and through this becomes one with our Maker Himself.

St. Symeon of Thessalonica

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He who really keeps account of his actions considers as lost every day in which he does not mourn, whatever good he may have done in it.

St. John of the Ladder

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We truly love God and keep His commandments if we restrain ourselves from our pleasures. For he who still abandons himself to unlawful desires certainly does not love God, since he contradicts Him in his own intentions. . . Therefore, he loves God truly, whose mind is not conquered by consent to evil delight. For the more one takes pleasure in lower things, the more he is separated from heavenly love.

St. Gregory the Great

+ + +

A greedy appetite for food is terminated by satiety and the pleasure of drinking ends when our thirst is quenched. And so it is with the other things. . . But the possession of virtue, once it is solidly achieved, cannot be measured by time nor limited by satiety. Rather, to those who are its disciples it always appears as something ever new and fresh.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

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Observe your thoughts, and beware of what you have in your heart and your spirit, knowing that the demons put ideas into you so as to corrupt your soul by making it think of that which is not right, in order to turn your spirit from the consideration of your sins and of God.

Abba Elias

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Have unfeigned love among yourselves, keep the tradition, and may the God of peace be with you and confirm you in love.

St. Paul of Obnora

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Bringing doxology to the One born of the Virgin in church hymns and spiritual songs, we must, outside the church as well, unceasingly praise Him and give Him thanks for His ineffable lovingkindness to us sinners, who are atoned by His honourable blood and who have received through this promise life eternal, blessed, and unceasing.

St. Amvrosy of Optina

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If we wear our heavenly robe, we shall not be found naked, but if we are found not wearing this garment, what shall we do, brethren? We, even we also, shall hear the voice that says, "Cast them into outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." (Matt. 22:13) And, brethren, there will be great shame in store for us, if, after having worn this habit for so long, we are found in the hour of need not having put on the wedding garment. Oh what compunction will seize us! What darkness will fall upon us, in the presence of our fathers and our brethren, who will see us being tortured by the angels of punishment!

Abba Dioscorus

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When an archer desires to shoot his arrows successfully, he first takes great pains over his posture and aligns himself accurately with his mark. It should be the same for you who are about to shoot the head of the wicked devil. Let us be concerned first for the good order of sensations and then for the good posture of inner thoughts.

St. John Chrysostom

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Lord God, have mercy on me a sinner: I am not worthy to stand before Thee, seeing that I have never tried to embellish my soul for Thee, that prostitute that prostitute accomplished in a single day in beautifying herself surpasseth everything I have ever achieved during all the years of my life. How can I have the face to look upon Thee, my God? I do not know what words to use in the attempt to justify myself in Thy presence, Lord. What excuse have I before Thee, seeing that all my hidden secrets are laid open before Thee? No, alas for me the sinner who, as I enter the threshold of Thy sacred temple and appear before Thy glorious altar, have failed to offer the beauty in my soul that Thou wantest.

St. Nonnus (Life of St. Pelagia, the former harlot)

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Even if we have thousands of acts of great virtue to our credit, our confidence in being heard must be based on God's mercy and His love for men. Even if we stand at the very summit of virtue, it is by mercy that we shall be saved.

St. John Chrysostom

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Monasticism itself is a perpetual labor of conquering passions and uprooting them in order that, being in a pure and immaculate state, one may preserve oneself before the face of God. This, then, is your task! Give your attention to it, and direct all your powers towards it.

St. Theophan the Recluse

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If the soul is vigilant and withdraws from all distraction and abandons its own will, then the spirit of God invades it and it can conceive because it is free to do so.

Abba Cronius

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The Holy Eucharist is the first, most important, and greatest

miracle of Christ. All the other Gospel miracles are secondary. How could we not call the greatest miracle the fact that simple bread and wine were once transformed by the Lord into His very Body and His very Blood, and then have continued to be transformed for nearly two thousand years by the prayers of priests, who are but simple human beings? And what is more, this mystery has continued to effect a miraculous change in those people who communicate of the Divine Mysteries with faith and humility.

St. Ambrose of Optina

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Strive as well as you can to enter deeply with the heart into the church reading and singing and to imprint these on the tablets of the heart.

Abbot Nazarius

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The man who follows Christ in solitary mourning is greater than he who praises Christ amid the congregation of men.

St. Isaac the Syrian

+ + +

For to despise the present age, not to love transitory things, unreservedly to stretch out the mind in humility to God and our neighbor, to preserve patience against offered insults and, with patience guarded, to repel the pain of malice from the heart, to give one's property to the poor, not to covet that of others, to esteem the friend in God, on God's account to love even those who are hostile, to mourn at the affliction of a neighbor, not to exult in the death of one who is an enemy, this is the new creature whom the Master of the nations seeks with watchful eye amid the other disciples, saying: "If, then, any be in Christ a new creature, the old things are passed away. Behold all things are made new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

St. Gregory the Great

+ + +

Blessed is he who always has before his eyes that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 23:1), and keeps in mind

that God is powerful to arrange for His servants as is pleasing to Him.

St. Barsanuphius

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As a pilot calls on winds and a storm-tossed mariner looks homeward, so the times call on you to win your way to God. As God's athlete, be sober; the stake is immortality and eternal life.

St. Ignatius the God-bearer

+ + +

Why do you increase your bonds? Take hold of your life before your light grows dark and you seek help and do not find it. This life has been given to you for repentance; do not waste it in vain pursuits.

St. Isaac the Syrian

+ + +

The Seraph could not touch the fire's coal with his fingers, but just brought it close to Isaiah's mouth: the Seraph did not hold it, Isaiah did not consume it, but us our Lord has allowed to do both.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

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I pray Thee, compassionate Lord, do not allow me to be condemned because of the unworthy and ungrateful manner in which I contemplate the great mysteries that Thou hast revealed to Thy saints and through them to me, a sinner and Thy unworthy servant. For see, Lord, Thy servant stands before Thee, idle in everything, speechless, as one who is dead; and I do not dare to say anything more or to presumptuously contemplate further. But as always I fall down before Thee, crying from the depths of my soul. . .

St. Peter of Damascus

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At the Last Judgment the righteous will be recognized only by their humility and their considering themselves worthless, and not by good deeds, even if they have done them. This is the true attitude.

Holy New Hieromartyr Barlaam

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Death's awful mystery comes upon us suddenly, and soul and body are violently severed, divorced from their natural union by the will of God. What shall we do at that hour if we have not thought of it beforehand, if we have not been instructed concerning this eventuality and find ourselves unprepared?

St. Nil Sorsky

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The Holy Spirit often visits us; but if He does not find rest how can He remain? He departs. Joy is in the hearts of those who are cleansed and who are able to maintain within themselves the grace of the Holy Spirit of the All-holy Trinity. There is no greater joy and happiness for man. I am not able to describe to you how one feels then.

Elder Ieronymos of Aegina

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Keep the body properly slim so that you reduce the burden of the heart's warfare, with full benefit to yourself.

St. Philotheus of Sinai

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I consider those fallen mourners more blessed than those who have not fallen and are not mourning over themselves; because as a result of their fall, they have risen by a sure resurrection.

St. John of the Ladder

+ + +

I shall tell you something strange, but do not be surprised by it. Should you fail to attain dispassion because of the

predispositions dominating you, but at the time of your death be in the depths of humility, you will be exalted above the clouds no less than the man who is dispassionate.

St. Theognostus

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One of the old men said, "It is written concerning Solomon that he loved women, but every male loveth the females, and we must restrain and draw onwards our nature by main force to purity."

Paradise of the Fathers

+ + +

O monk, take thou the greatest possible care that thou sin not, lest thou disgrace God Who dwelleth in thee, and thou drive Him out of thy soul.

Abba Epiphanius

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We were created for eternal life by our Creator, we are called to it by the word of God, and we are renewed by holy Baptism. And Christ the Son of God came into the world for this, that He should call us and take us there, and He is the one thing needful. For this reason your very first endeavor and care should be to receive it. Without it everything is as nothing, though you have the whole world under you.

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

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My soul, seek the Only One . . . My soul, you have no part with the earth; for you are from heaven. You are the image of God: seek your First Image. For like strives after like. Each object finds its rest in its center and element -- fish in water, fire in its upward movement everything strives to its center. My soul, you are an immaterial spirit, immortal. . . In Him alone you will find your rest.

St. Tikhon of Voronezh

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It is by warfare that the soul makes progress.

Abba John the Short

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Why do you beat the air and run in vain? Every occupation has a purpose, obviously. Tell me then, what is the purpose of all the activity of the world? Answer, I challenge you! It is vanity of vanity: all is vanity.

St. John Chrysostom

+ + +

When you pray to God in time of temptation do not say, 'Take this or that away from me', but pray like this: 'O Jesus Christ, sovereign Master, help me and do not let me sin against Thee. . .'

Abba Isaiah the Solitary

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The evil one cannot comprehend the joy we receive from the spiritual life; for this reason he is jealous of us, he envies us and sets traps for us, and we become grieved and fall. We must struggle, because without struggles we do not obtain virtues.

Elder Ieronymos of Aegina

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For now is the time to labour for the Lord, for salvation is found in the day of affliction: for it is written: 'In your patience gain ye your souls' (Luke 21:19)

Abba Isidore of Skete

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"But Adam did not wish to say, "I sinned," but said rather the contrary of this and placed the blame for the transgression upon God Who created everything "very good," saying to Him, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I ate." And after him she also placed the blame upon the serpent, and they did not wish at all to repent and, falling down before

the Lord God, beg forgiveness of Him. For this, God banished them from Paradise, as from a royal palace, to live in this world as exiles. At that time also He decreed that a flaming sword should be turned and should guard the entrance into Paradise. And God did not curse Paradise, since it was the image of the future unending life of the eternal Kingdom of Heaven. If it were not for this reason, it would have been fitting to curse it most of all, since within it was performed the transgression of Adam. But God did not do this, but cursed only the whole rest of the earth, which also was corrupt and brought forth everything by itself; and this was in order that Adam might not have any longer a life free from exhausting labors and sweat..."

St. Symeon the New Theologian

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"Fortunate is the man who has come to have God as his helper and to have his hopes in Him alone. Let the Devil bear malice towards him, let all men persecute him and plot against him, let all his adversaries fight against him - he never fears anyone, because he has God as his helper. He remains always a victor, always glorified, always happy, always rich, always cheerful and joyful, even if he happens to fall into extreme poverty and into a great many adverse and grievous circumstances of this present life. For inasmuch as he hopes in Almighty God, he does not despair, he is not sorry, is not anxious, but expects help from Above. Fortunate, then, is such a man and worthy to be deemed happy, just as the Prophet-king David regards such a man as happy, saying: "Blessed is he whose helper is the God of Jacob, whose hoe is in the Lord his God." Such were all the Prophets, the Apostles, the Martyrs, the Holy Ascetics and all the Saints from the beginning of time."

St. Nikephoros of Chios

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The soul has followed Moses and the cloud, both of these serving as guides for those who would advance in virtue; Moses her represents the commandments of the Law; and the cloud that leads the way, its spiritual meaning. The soul has been purified by crossing the Sea; it has removed from itself and destroyed the enemy army. It has tasted of the waters of Marah, that is, of life deprived of all sinful pleasure; and this at first had seemed bitter and unpleasant to the taste but offered a sensation of sweetness to those who accepted the wood. Next it enjoyed the beauty of the palm trees of the gospel and the springs; it filled

itself with the living water, that is, the rock. It took within itself the bread of heaven. It overwhelmed the foreign host - a victory due to the extended arms of the Lawgiver, which thus foreshadowed the mystery of the Cross. Only then can the soul go on to the contemplation of transcendent Being.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

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Quotes on this page were selected by monks of *Holy Transfiguration Monastery*, Brookline, Mass.