

THE GREAT AND MIRACULOUS POWER OF REPENTANCE



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The achievements of Repentance and Confession are marvellous

* **King Manasis** had killed many Prophets, sawed Prophet Isaiah, became an idolater but after he truly repented, he received forgiveness from God, 2 Chr. 35, 13.

* **Prophet David** had committed two great sins, adultery and murder, but his great repentance and his tears brought about God's forgiveness and he received again his prophetic gift, 2 Kings 12, 13.

* The pagan **Ninevites** had sinned very much, but they obeyed prophet Jonah's preaching, they repented deeply and were forgiven, avoiding by this way their disaster, Jonah chapter 3.

In the Acts, 2, 38 Apostle Peter said; *«Fellow Jews and all of you who are in Jerusalem ..., repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit»*. That means Christ forgave his crucifiers, all those who willingly had accepted His word and repented.

But all of us, who everyday fall to the «sin which easily ensnares», should repent. John the Evangelist says; *«If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him a Liar»* (A' John 1, 10).

In his speech to the Athenians the Apostle Paul preached; *«Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent»* (Acts 17, 30).

Any comments on this, my beloved, are useless. Going against God with our sins, has world-wide implications. The

only saving medium is our true repentance and confession. Let us offer them for our salvation.

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The cause of our unhappiness is sin. Similarly the cause of happiness is repentance and the virtue of Christ.

Very rightly wrote a pastor of the Church in a speech which is worth mentioning;

My dear brothers,

The most saving message we have heard till today, is this:

Repentance.

The greatest source of joy and happiness is the fulfilment of: **Repentance.**

The most profitable investment for our future is: **Repentance.**

The most effective medicine for love among the members of a family is: **Repentance.**

The most basic presumption for our children's performance at school to apply in their souls is: **Repentance.**

We come to Church, we pray, we read the Holy Bible.

Has Repentance truly spoken in our souls?

The Lord tells us to Repent!

Men, women and children, believers and non-believers, small and great sinners: **Repent!**

The preaching of salvation was the first preaching of God who became Man: Repent!

«For the Sou of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost» (Luke 19, 10).

The Lord, out of his philanthropy, founded the saving sacrament of Repentance and Confession, when he said to **his disciples and apostles**; *«'Peace be with you! As the father has sent me, I ateo send you'". And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive die sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained"» (John 20, 21-23).*

Saint Chrysostom informs us that when the sinner confesses his sins, God immediately justifies him and explains

that the spiritual fathers who live on earth have been given the authority to command things in heaven. An authority which God has not given even to the angels and the archangels. For he said to them; «Whatever you bound on earth will be bound in heaven» (Math. 18, 18).

Holy Father Nilos tells us; «Wherever the spirit of repentance goes, it is obvious that there all sins are destroyed; and that none who ever used the effective medicine of repentance was lost».

The tears of repentance and contrition, my dear brothers, are the best thing on earth because they attract God's sympathy and mercy to us.

Only when our soul is cleansed through the spiritual bath of Repentane, can it be reconciled with God, and then our soul receives peace of consciousness, the health of our soul, and is illuminated. The scales of our sins fall only with sincere confession before an orthodox Spiritual Father.

According to holy Chrysostom repentance is absolution and removal of all things we have done before, either those which were carried out with deeds or those which were conceived in thought. Chrysostom, the great father and second preacher of repentance, **considered as indispensable characteristics of repentance the following three; contrition in the heart, oral confession and correction of our life.** So, let's repent.

In prophet Ezekiel it is written that: *«As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live» (33,11).*

As Holy Father Nilos informs us, God didn't punish immediately those who had sinned. Instead, He is forebearing so that we repent and correct our errors.

* Repentance should be followed by actions and by works worthy of repentance. Repentance exactly means that we won't commit again the sins we have already committed.

* Holy Chrysostom assures us that just like the woman who is in labour and wants to give birth to her child, simi-

larly God wants to give out His mercy, but our sins prevent Him from doing this; Let us pull down the wall, which is the barrier.

* According to Holy Father Markos, the hermit, **no one is as good and merciful as God; But the one who won't repent, will not be forgiven by God.** All of us feel sorry for our sins but we accept with pleasure their causes.

* Holy Chrysostom advises that no one should be put off for his salvation... Are you a publican? You can become an Evangelist. Are you blasphemous? You can become an Apostle. Are you a robber? You can grab paradise... **There is no vice which cannot be solved with repentance... So don't feel ashamed when you repent but when you sin.**

* I only fear one thing, the sin, Saint Chrysostom used to say. **I would rather have the whole world fight against me than be criticized for sinning...** You should do the same. If you have not committed sins, God can save you from the greatest danger.

* Saint Antonios said that **if someone wants to become a holy man, he can achieve this from sunrise to sunset.** The criterion in repentance is not the length of time but the disposition of our soul.

* According to Saint Efraim the Syrian, God is pleased by every good work, especially he rejoices for the soul which repents, embracing it with His own hands on her return.

* Confession, dear brothers, is made before the Lord, but forgiveness is given by the appointed instrument of God, the Spiritual Priest, and the Holy Spirit which forgives.

* A blind man who finds his light is like a repenting sinner.

* According to Abba Isaac, **whoever realized his sins is superior to the one who can raise the dead through his prayer... The work of repentance is the highest of all virtues and comes to an end only at the time of death...**

* The non-repenting sinner, as Saint Gregory the Theologian says, looks like the porcupine, brings up excuses, sin-

ful pretences, and hides himself in this thorny scheme of excuses. He can neither stand criticism nor admit his mistakes. Whoever proves his faults, sees the unrepenting sinner turn to a thorny ball, just like the porcupine.

You can no longer touch him, without staining your hands. I mean without him hurting you because of his indignation.

*** Only through repentance of our sins can the mind, of the man who repents, be cleansed.**

Let us pray, dear brothers, with the Church that the Lord will make us worthy, *«to ask the Lord to fulfil the rest of our life in peace and repentance».*

How can I be saved, father? a brother asked the Holy Father Poemen.

-If you learn, my child, that the Lord is going to meet you unexpectedly, what would you first care for?

-My sins, said the brother.

-So close yourself in your cell and mourn for them, until God gives you mercy, the saint advised him.

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-I feel myself deeply plunged in the mud of sin up to my neck, Abba Paul used to say with humility, and I am crying to Jesus with all the power of my heart; «Lord be merciful».

Abba Silouanos was continuously mourning and when he had to go out to the world, he would cover his eyes with a hood.

-I am not worthy of seeing the light, since I still live in the darkness of sin. That's what he used to say to those who asked why he insisted on covering his eyes (from the Geronticon).

* Saint Gregory Palamas teaches us that the confession of our sins is the beginning for the cultivation of our soul, the beginning of repentance and the beginning of our preparation to receive the saving seed of the divine word.

The ploughing of the land was invented by the farmers for this reason. It takes away the wild roots from the depth

of the earth and makes the land appropriate to accept our seeds and plants.

That is what exactly repentance does in the noetic field, our heart: It digs her up, takes away from her bowls the evil passions which were hidden in there and makes her appropriate to receive the holy seeds, to be ploughed and give fruits of virtue. Since the earth, after Adam's fall, brings out thorns and other useless weeds, so does our heart; it doesn't stop creating thoughts and the painful passions of vice along with the sins which come from them.

For this reason, my brothers, **it is necessary that each of you should have his spiritual father**; to go to him with faith, be humble before him and confess whatever sin is in his heart. **It is necessary for you to accept the cure from the Spiritual Father** so as to uproot the thorns and the thistles which each one of you has cultivated in himself with his passionate and careless life.

So with your ears eager to hear the words of the Holy Spirit, it is necessary that you obey what we, your spiritual fathers, advise and propose to you, for the benefit of all people; and through the priest's forgiveness and blessing you should be reconciled with Him, who, due to His unimaginable sea of His philanthropy, bowed down the heavens and came to earth and put the words of life and the seeds of salvation in the hearts of those who obey Him.

So no one of you should stay away from the Sacrament of Confession which is the beginning of repentance. How can any of you progress, how can you improve yourself, if you do not reach even the beginning of virtues?

If you don't confess and if you don't repent, you are not worthy of receiving a holy word; and how will you receive the Body and Blood of Christ, if you are not cleansed with Confession and have not repented for your sins?

That is why the great Apostle Paul constantly advises us: «A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup...» (1 Corinth. 11, 28).

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«All men should live with tears, and die with tears, if they want to save themselves and enter the blessed life. The joyful tears during our birth are an indication of the tears which should accompany this life.

Whoever says that it is impossible for a man to mourn and cry, it is obvious that he says that man cannot be cleansed. Without cleansing, no one can be saved and that's the worst herey» (Simeon the Stylite).

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Wisdom of the Fathers

Every evening the holy father Hesychios was feeling very tired. When the abbot asked him why he was tired, he answered:

«I have got much work to do every day: I have two hawks to tame, two hares to train, one dragon to take care of, one lion with which I fight everyday, and a patient to look after».

The abbot wanted to know what all this meant.

The two hawks are my eyes, he said, which I must take care of so they won't see anything which will harm me.

The two hares are my legs. I must control them, so they won't lead me to sin.

The two eagles are my hands. I must work with them to earn my living.

The dragon is my tongue. I have to keep it under control.

The lion is my heart. With it I must always struggle.

The patient is my body. I have to take care of it (but not out of self-love) so that my soul can remain in it.



Opinions of the holy Fathers about repentance.

Saint John the Chrysostom

* Such is God's philanthropy that He never detests sincere repentance.

* There is no sin which cannot be forgiven with repentance... Realize that you have sinned and this will be the beginning of your correction.

* Repentance is a medicine which heals sin. It is a heavenly gift. It is a miraculous power. It transforms us all. Repentance is the foundry of sin.

* You should never despair, but try to correct your sins.

* Falling is not bad but remaining in your fall and not rising is really bad.

* The medicines of repentance are great. No one should despair. It is not impious if one reaches the depth of sin, when he detests and defies God's mercy and has realized the multitude of his evil deeds. There is no incurable wound of the soul.

* None of those who sin should lose hope... when we return to God's powerful love, God does not remember our previous sins, as it happened with Manasis, the Evangelist Matthew and Apostle Paul.

* In the same way you mend your houses, when they are old, you should do the same for yourself. Did you sin today? If you have defiled your soul, do not lose hope, do not neglect it, but regenerate your soul with repentance and confession and by doing good things. You should never stop this.

* The one who repents does not repeat things for which he has repented for.

* Repentance is the cure for our trespasses, the obliteration

of our lawlessness, our favour in God's eyes, the weapon against the devil, the refutation of despair, and the key which opens the gates of heaven. If you sin every day, you should repent everyday...

* Is it possible for someone who repents to save himself? Imagine a spark falling in the sea. The spark vanishes upon falling in the sea. Something similar happens with the sin when it faces God's philanthropy.

* Be ashamed when you sin, don't be ashamed when you repent. There are two things, sin and repentance. Sin is the wound, repentance is the medicine. Sin is followed by shame, repentance is followed by boldness. Satan has overturned this order and gave boldness to sin and shame to repentance.

* Even though we may have a myriad of sins, we should seek repentance more, because God is called a comforting and merciful God.

* We should rise and stand bravely. Our Healer indicates many therapies. But even if we reach the depth of sin, like the prodigal son, we should still repent and save ourselves.

* Bring out fruits of repentance, for it's not enough to avoid vile; we should rather be virtuous.

* The ways to repentance are: confession, mourning for our sins, humility, alms giving, prayer and crying for our sins.

* Repentance is not counted by the length of time, instead it is judged -is weighed- by the disposition of the soul.

* Repentance may be achieved in just one day. The only things needed for this are desire and disposition of the soul.

* The confession of sins brings the extinction of offences... It turns the sinner into a righteous man.

* Nothing makes God more compassionate towards us than confession of our sins.

* God wants only one thing from us, not to lose hope, but rather to confess our sins.

* The filth which came from sinning must be cleansed by confession, tears and honest repentance.

* We should not be ashamed of our sins so as to enjoy God's philanthropy. The power of confession is great.

* Confessing our errors contributes greatly to their correction.

* Repentance is the root of our respect towards God. Let us repent in order to beseech God to both eliminate wars and smite our enemies' revolts and give us the enjoyment of all goods. Repentance propitiates God greatly when someone seeks true repentance.

* Nothing can wash out sin so much as self-reproach and self-condemnation with repentance and tears.

* Just like with water and the Holy Spirit, we also get cleansed with tears and confession.

* Repentance is to avoid committing the same mistakes.

* Our sins are forgiven more easily by alms than the sun melts the snow.

* Sorrows and tribulations are not bad. Sinning is bad. Sorrows and tribulations unite us with God. Sinning separates us from God.

* God is not like people. He does not blame us for what we had done in the past. He neither tells us when we repent: -Where had you been so long? Instead, he loves us when we return. It is enough if we return as he likes us to.

* No one should lose hope for his salvation. Have you sinned? Repent. Have you sinned a thousand times? Repent a thousand times. What is important is not to remain in sin.

* Falling in sin is human. But insisting on remaining under the rule of sin, is not human. It's evil.

* When -through sin- you become an old man, then regenerate yourself with repentance.

* I fear only one thing, sin. I would rather have the whole world fight against me than be criticized for sinning.

* The robber's feet do not pollute the ground of the heavenly kingdom at all. Rather they honour it because they are feet of repentance.

* The ocean has boundaries, but the divine mercy of God has no boundaries; it is boundless.

* God's Grace does not save all people but only those who wish to be saved.

* Isn't it horrible not being able to bear the smallest speck of dust in your eye, and not to be bothered when you see a mountain of vices in your soul?

* God's mercy needs our good disposition in order to be revealed..., because he is comforting and merciful. And just like the woman, who is in labour, desires to give birth to her child, similarly He also wants to bring out His mercy, but our sins prevent Him from doing this.

* The nature of temptations is not responsible for the Christian's falls, but the sloth of those who are tempted.

* The cause of all evil is sin... Sin brings us sorrow and misfortune. When the sinner goes to confession, he is like a crow or a wolf. Whereas when he leaves, he is like a pigeon or a lamb.

* Repentance redeems us from our sins, it cleanses our souls and consoles us. It's the healing and saving medicine of every spiritual and bodily illness.

* All that the priests do here on earth, are confirmed by God in heaven.

* *«God's mercy does not take years or days to be revealed. It only needs your good disposition and it is revealed in a single day.* Keep away from evil, get hold of virtue, give up sinning and promise that you won't do the same things any more. I assure and guarantee you that **God needs nothing more but only this.** Because He is comforting and man-loving. And just like the woman, who is in labour and wants to give birth to her child, similarly **He wants to bring out His mercy, but our sins prevent him».**

Saint Isaac the Syrian

* One who tries to repent, no matter how many times he falls in sin, rises and goes on with his struggle. On the other

hand, the slave of sin devises ways to enjoy sin and does not stop sinning.

* The various temptations are conceded by God for us to humble ourselves, for the absolution of our sins through repentance and for the acquisition of a cheerful outlook.

* Whoever confesses his sins and gives up sinning, will receive mercy from the Lord.

* Whoever considers his sins to be small, falls into worse ones.

* Whoever loves what causes sins, willingly or not, is subject to his passions. And whoever hates his own sins, stops being a subject to his passions, confesses them and receives forgiveness.

* One who is conscious of his sin, is superior to the one who raises the dead with his prayer.

* There is no sin which is not forgiven except for the sin for which we don't repent.

* **Utter repentance lies in the acquisition of humility, wherefore we don't have thoughts of fornication.**

* It is impossible for someone to quit the habit of sinning unless he hates sin. Likewise it is impossible for someone to receive forgiveness for his sins, unless he confesses them. Feeling hatred against sin is an indication of true repentance, just as confession is an indication of contrition, which comes to the heart through shame.

Saint John of the Ladder

* Repentance means renewal of our baptism. Repentance means agreement with God for a new life.

* Kill sin and then the tears of sorrow in your eyes will not be necessary.

* We will never be judged for not performing miracles, but we must apologize for not crying incessantly for our sins.

* Our pride makes us forget our sins because their remembrance leads to humility.

* He who flatters us, becomes a servant of the demons and leads us to pride and this results in losing the repentance which will save us.

* It is impossible for us, who have fallen in the pit of lawlessness, to be lifted out, unless we submerge in the abyss of humility of repentance.

* When the sun's rays enter our house through a small hole, it's possible to discern even the smallest speck of dust. Similarly, when God's fear enters man's heart, it reveals to him all sins, even the smallest.

* When our consciousness stops blaming us for our sins, we should watch out lest this is not the result of being clean, but the result of weariness and our guilty conscience because of the multitude of sins.

* To the soul which is used to confession even the thought of confession restrains it, like the harness of a horse, from sinning. On the other hand, the sins which one does not think of confessing, are continuously fearlessly committed in darkness.

* I saw a man who sinned visibly, but repented secretly. Whereas the one whom I judged as immoral, God considered to be pure, since He had forgiven him for his repentance.

* If repentance had not been a gift of God's philanthropy, people could hardly be saved.

* Wherever there is a fall, there had been a previous pride. Since the latter is a prelude of the first.

Various Holy Fathers

* The more pleasant the sin looks, the more unpleasant its consequences are.

* Since we are sick because of our sins, let us be healed with repentance.

* Just as smoke keeps away the bee and dirt the pigeon, in the same way filthy and painful sin keeps away our guardian angel (Basil the Great).

* Unless man puts his sins before his eyes, it is impossible for him to have any rest.

* We have sinned. Let us repent. Have we sinned a myriad times? A myriad times we should repent. For every good deed God is pleased, even more so for the soul which repents.

* Whoever despises the brother who has sinned is deceived and foolish. Whoever partakes of his brother's suffering, he is utterly virtuous (Saint Efraim the Syrian).

* Those who please our enemy (devil) most, are those who don't confess their thoughts (Abba Poemen).

* True repentance means for someone that he will never fall again in the sins he is guilty of but, instead, that he should thoroughly uproot all those sins, which have driven him to death (Clemes of Alexandria).

* Deep repentance, which comes through tears and thorough knowledge of our sins, is like the Second Coming. Which means that the sinner is judged here and is washed in his tears and so he won't be judged in the Second Coming (Simeon the New Theologian).

* Each man is purified when he confesses his sins and repents. However, he should keep away from sins and any other evil in the future (Simeon of Thessaloniki).

* We should not try to correct our brother at the moment he is committing a sin. But even when we do correct him, we should not take any revenge even though we do it at a proper time (Abba Dorotheos).

* Repentance followed by tears is a true and God-pleasing feast and so is abstinence of sin and knowledge of God and the desire of eternal goods. Only at this feast do the heavens rejoice; and the church leaps with joy and invites all the righteous (Saint Efraim the Syrian).

* If God doesn't act inside us, everything we do is sinful (Saint Gregory Palamas).

* If we are injured by sin, let us be healed with repentance (Basil the Great).

* There are four things, which if a man has one of them,

he can neither repent nor will God accept his prayer. First of all if he takes pride in himself. Second, if he has no love. Third, if he judges the other who has sinned and fourth if he feels rancour against others (Iosef Vryennios).

* Whoever feels ashamed of his sins, cries bitterly for them and struggles to quit sin, is superior to the one who brings back the dead with his prayer.

* **The tears of repentance are like the river** which floods and demolishes all the castles of sin. **They are like boiling water which cleans the heart** (Nikitas Stethatos).

* What power can sin have, if there is repentance? (Ilias the Hermit).

* All people need two things: To be concerned with our sins and not with those of other people. Because he who cares for his mistakes, becomes merciful to others. He who judges others, judges himself too, even though he is supposed to have many virtues (Andreas of Crete).

* Feel deeply the sin which keeps you a prisoner. Try to have as much contrition as you can. Then go to your confessor and shed bitter and plentiful tears so that he may mix his tears with yours. Consider the priest as the partaker of your sorrow, as a father (Asterios of Amasia).

* Of course it is very good not to sin and be close to God. But it is also good to repent if you sin and rise when you fall (Isidoros Pilousiotis).

* The Grace which the Holy Sacraments give is so great that it has the power to cleanse and regenerate every man, no matter how serious his sins are (Serafim of Sarov).

* You should be ashamed, when you commit a sin and not when you confess it. When forgiven by your confessor, you should take this decision: You would rather die than sin again.

* Even if all the spiritual fathers, the patriarchs, the archbishops and the whole world forgive you, you will be unforgiven, if you don't repent truly (Kosmas Aetolos).

* Just as the sun never loses its bright light even if it

sheds its rays on dirt, but, instead, it illuminates the dirt, in the same way Christ destroys with his rays the dirty sin and remains always undefiled (Amfilohios Ikoniou).

* If man does not realize his sins, God doesn't give ear to his desire (Abba Moisis).

* Man cannot live united with God unless sin has died inside him (Nikolaos Kavasilas).

* Sin is like a burning fire. And the more you limit the materials which feed it, the more easily it is put out, and the more material you put on it, the more it will burn (Markos the Hermit).

* I prefer the man who has sinned, but is still aware of his sins and repents to the man who has not sinned, but considers himself to be righteous (Abba Sarmatas).

* He who praises sin is more awful than the one who sins (St. John the Chrysostom).

* No seal could prevent the force of Christ's Resurrection. However, the seals of sin can keep this force away from our heart.



The miraculous repentance of Saint Taisia

On 8th October, our Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of Saint Taisia, who was urged by her mother, from a small age, to a careless and sinful life and became the Devil's handiwork.

Since her childhood, Taisia's mother forced her to evil. She was good looking and at the age of 17 she drove her to the place of sin. Because of her beauty, her fame spread to many places and many men committed fornication with her.

Abba Separion learned about this prodigal Taisia and **prayed for her to God saying; «Lord Jesus Christ you are the one who wants to save all people and make them aware of the truth; so now bring your life in her heart, so as she comes back, to repent and save herself».**

After this prayer he dressed himself worldly and having a coin in his pocket went to look for her, pretending he was a soldier. When he reached the place where she lived, he gave her the coin and she proposed to him to enter her room. When he had entered, he said; «Let's go into a cell».

When they had entered a cell, the elder asked her whether there was any other cell further in; «There is one», said Taisia.

«Let's go and sit there for a while», remarked the elder.

«As there is nobody here to see us», said Taisia, «It is better to talk and do what we wish here, because wherever we go God can see us».

When the Elder heard that he told her; **«Are you aware that there is God, judgement, heavenly Kingdom and hell?».**

She answered; «Yes I am». The Elder told her then; **«Since you know that all these exist, why do you lead to sin the sons of people?»**.

Having said all these things and even more, the Elder showed the monastic habit he was wearing and told her the reason he had come to her; She knelt in front of the Elder's feet crying and said; **«Do you know, honourable Father, whether there is repentance for those who sin? Will God accept me if I repent?»**.

The Elder told her; **«God is merciful, forbearing and He accepts all those who repent, and there is much joy in heaven when a sinner repents»**.

So Taisia told him; **«Wait for me, Father, for only three hours, and then decide for me whatever you think about the bad things I have done because I know that you were sent to me by God»**.

Then the Holy Father, after telling her where she could find him, left her house. Taisia took everything she had earned from her prodigal life and burnt it in the town square saying; «Come all you who have sinned with me and watch now how I have burnt all that I gained wrongly from fornication». What she had burnt was worth six hundred litres of gold, besides her garments and dresses. Having done this she went to the Elder, who took her to a convent, where he enclosed her in a cell. Then he sealed the door and left only a small window, from which Taisia would get what was necessary for her daily needs. The Elder ordered the abbess of the monastery to give Taisia a little dry bread and a little water every two days. The marvellous Taisia told the Elder from that small window; «Pray for me, honourable Father, to God to forgive the sins which I have committed».

The Elder told her; **«You are not worthy to pray to God, not even call his glorious name, or even stretch your hands to Him because your lips are filthy and unclean, your hands are defiled from your lawlessnesses and your prodigal life, but do only this; Concentrate your mind to the east and to God and**

say only these words; Lord, my God, you who have created me, be merciful».

The blessed Taisia lived in this way for three years in that cell. Seeing her repentance, Abba Serapion showed mercy to her and went to Antonios the Great to learn from him whether God had forgiven her sins. Saint Antonios immediately called his disciples and told them; **«Go to your cells and pray continuously all night to God so that we may know what God will reveal to us about the matter for which Abba Serapion has come to us»**.

They all did as they were told. After a long time, Abba Pavlos, the oldest of Saint Antonios' disciples, saw in heaven a bed laid with great honour and glory and three virgins before the bed holding candles. An unfading wreath was over the bed. Then Abba Pavlos told himself; **«The glory of this bed and the wreath do not belong to anyone else but only to Saint Antonios, my Father»**. As Abba Pavlos was thinking of this, a voice came which said; **«Pavlos, the wreath does not belong to father Antonios but it is Taisias' who was a harlot»**.

In the morning, Abba Pavlos told the fathers about his vision and they were all informed that God had accepted the repentance of blessed Taisia.

After the meeting with Saint Antonios, Abba Serapion returned with great joy to the convent of the virgins and they opened the cell door to take Taisia out. But when Taisia heard this she begged the Elder saying; **«Let me, honourable Father, stay in this cell until I die because my lawlessnesses are too many for God to forgive»**.

The Elder told her; **«God has already shown compassion to your humiliation. He was merciful and accepted your repentance»**.

Blessed Taisia said again; **«Believe me, honourable Father, since I came into this cell, after I considered my sins as a big burden, I placed it in front of my face; and as the breath of my mind has not stopped neither have my sins. They have not left me even for an hour, until this very moment»**.

The Elder said; **«This has happened not for your repentance but for your good thoughts which you have dedicated to Christ».**

Then the Elder took her out of the cell and after this admirable repentance she stayed with the other nuns for only fifteen days. After these fifteen days, blessed Taisia departed for the Lord with glory and inexpressible honour, having inherited the heavenly Kingdom.

May we, my beloved, imitate her repentance so as to become partakers of the eternal goods through the grace and philanthropy of our Lord Jesus Christ, the intercessions of His ever-virgin Mother, the All-holy Theotokos and all the saints. Amen.

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From the life of Saint Pelagia

Saint Pelagia lived in Antiocheia in the middle of the third century. She was descended from a rich family. She loved jewels, dressed provocatively, was pretty and lived a life full of sins.

However, our all-merciful Lord, brought about her repentance in this way:

In those days a Local Synod was summoned in Antiocheia and among the other bishops came the virtuous bishop Nonos, whom our Church honours on November 10th. The orthodox believers asked this wise man of God to teach them God's word for their spiritual benefit. While the Saint was preaching outside the church, the harlot, Pelagia, passed by sitting provocatively and shamelessly in a decorated coach. The other bishops turned their eyes away to avoid watching her, while saint Nonos, full of godly love, watched her and sighed;

«Woe to us who live a careless life and take no interest in our salvation. On Judgement Day we will be put to shame, because this harlot in order to please mortal people, takes care of

her body and beautifies herself whereas we neglect and do not look after our soul to please the immortal and living God, but we are occupied with mundane things and despise our precious soul. That is why we will lose the admirable eternal happiness and we will be judged for our neglect..».

After his speech Saint Nonos went to his cell and prayed with tears in his eyes to God, saying;

«All-merciful God, forgive me for being negligent, because the devotion that the harlot showed in one single day, surpasses the concern I have shown in all the years of my life to decorate my soul in order to become your abode. What excuse can I find before You, You who knows the secrets of the hearts! Woe to me the miserable, because I enter unworthingly the Holy Altar and do not decorate my soul according to your Holy will. But Lord, please do not condemn me on Judgement Day for I am void of any virtue and I have not kept any of your commands».

When the bishop fell asleep, he saw a dream that he was serving in the Church and a filthy pigeon was flying all over him and bothered him a lot. When he got to the prayer of the catechumens and said; «all catechumens come», then the pigeon flew out and stayed until the end of the Divine Liturgy. When the holy father came out of the Holy Bema, he saw again the dirty pigeon flying around him. He stretched his hands, took it and imbued it in the font where he baptized people. Immediately the pigeon was cleansed and flew up in the air until it was not seen. This marvellous dream meant that something important would happen. Actually the very next day when he went to church, the Patriarch asked him to preach God's word to the people. In the congregation, through God's providence, was the sinner Pelagia. She heard about the immortality of the soul, about God's justice, the eternal salvation of the righteous but also about the condemnation of the sinful.

God's unlimited mercy caused contrition and compunction to her heart and she started crying for her sins. She

heartily hated her dirty actions and felt sacred desire for Jesus Christ... she also sent with her servants a letter to Saint Bishop Nonos in which she wrote;

«To the Saint Bishop and Christ's disciple, from the demon's disciple Pelagia, who is an open sea full of lawlessnesses, addressing her servile respect».

«I heard, holy father, from a christian that Christ didn't come to call the "righteous but the sinners to repentance". He also told me that He did not hate or avoid from disgust the harlots, the robbers and the publicans, but He lived with them and talked to them. He, the one whom even the Cherubim cannot see with their face uncovered. If you are also a disciple of such a Teacher, prove it and accept me near you. Do not loathe me or even have disgust for me being a harlot and a sinner. Please accept me so as to I may confess and tell you my sins, in order to save my prodigal soul».

When the holy Father Nonos read all that, he feared that it might not be true in case she was planning some plot. So he asked her to go to church when other bishops would be there too, to confess her sins. In fact, Pelagia, does not waste her time. She runs immediately to Church and falls to his feet like the harlot of the Gospel. She soaks them with her ceaseless tears. There she confessed her sins loudly;

«Have mercy on me the sinner, holy father, like Lord Christ Baptize me and lead me to repentance, me who I am like an infinite sea of sins. My whole life is a hell. I have fallen into satan's hands. I became his bait and snare for many people who went to hell. Now with the Grace of God I repent for my sinful life. I take the heroic decision to live from now on, as God wants —with repentance— so as not to be punished eternally».

The Bishops were deeply moved for that radical change, which happened to the sinner with God's help. They admired the tears she shed and felt happy for her salvation. She continued crying and moaning for her sinful life.

The holy Nonos told her; «The rules of our Church com-

mand not to baptize a harlot before she gets a guarantor, that she won't start again her previous sins».

Then, crying even more, she told the Bishop; **«Take upon you all my sins. You will be responsible for my soul on Judgment Day, if you do not baptize me immediately. I want you to regenerate me spiritually and bring me as a clean bride before the bridegroom Christ. We shall not waste time, Bishop, because I am afraid that if I do not get baptized right now and if I stay away from God's Grace, the devil will mislead me and I will fall to sin again».**

When Nonos heard all this, he worshipped God because she showed such a great repentance. He read for her the prayer of repentance and asked her what her name was.

At first, she said, people called me Pelagia. But later while people admired all those precious stones and pearls I wore, they called me Margaret. Soon the Bishop baptized her in the name of Holy Trinity and gave her her first name, Pelagia. Her sponsor was a virtuous nun, whose name was Romana. Later the bishop officiated the Divine Liturgy and she received the Holy Sacraments.

As it was natural this incident was known all over Antiocheia and all the believers were celebrating for the salvation of her soul. Everyone considered her happiness as his own happiness because a prodigal woman had defeated the devil and had entered Christ's sheepfold.

After her baptism, the already illuminated Pelagia gave all her wealth to Saint Bishop Nonos to distribute it to charities. The Bishop entrusted it to a priest ordering him not to keep any part of that wealth for the Church but to distribute it to the poor, the widows and the orphans so that what was collected unjustly, should be distributed justly.

She also freed her slaves and advised them to care for their salvation so as to receive redemption, through Lord Christ's mercy, from the eternal captivity just as she had freed them from temporary captivity.

From the day she was baptized, blessed Pelagia did not

eat anything bought with her wealth because it was earned in a sinful way. Instead, Romana gave her food during the days she lived with her.

One Sunday night she took off her woman's clothes. She put on a tunic made from goat's hair and went to Jerusalem without telling anyone about her purpose. Leaving from Antiocheia, Pelagia, who had chosen the good part, went to the Mount of Olives. She stayed there for three whole years in a cell wearing man's garments, totally unrecognized. In there she fought and performed such victorious struggles against the evil one and was decorated with such virtues that only God, who reads the depths of our heart, can know.

But God did not want to let His servant fighting hidden to the end. Just as she had laid herself up to ridicule with her sinful life, similarly God provided it that she shine in society with her virtue, to the benefit of other people. This happened as follows:

Holy Iakovos, disciple of Saint Bishop Nonos, was filled with holy desire to venerate the All-holy Sepulchre. Before leaving, he asked for the blessing of Saint Nonos. The Saint had the gift of second sight and told him;

«Go in peace, my child, and after venerating the Holy Land, ask for a virtuous monk, Pelagios. You will receive from him great benefit for your soul. He is a true servant of our Lord».

Indeed, Holy Iakovos went there, venerated the Holy Land and asked for monk Pelagios. He was told that he was on the Mount of Olives. When he got there he knocked the door of the cell and the saint (Pelagia) came out, wearing a monk's scheme. She could recognise Iakovos but he could not because her previous beauty was lost due to her great ascetic life. Her face was withered. Her eyes were deeply placed in the sockets. Her body was a skeleton through her hard suffering, ascetic life and fast. The only thing you could see was her skin and bones.

Saint Pelagia asked him whether he was a disciple of Bishop Nonos and he said; «Yes».

«In fact», Saint Pelagia added; «that man is a disciple of God. Please tell him to pray so that God may forgive my sins».

After saying this she closed the door and started chanting hymns in her cell, according to the monastic rule. Iakovos, along with the other benefits he took, was taught that one should talk briefly.

Iakovos left that place and went to other cells to meet other brothers but wherever he went he always heard the best praises about Pelagios. Every one would praise him for being the most virtuous and holy man.

After a few days the news spread in the area that Pelagios had left the worldly life and departed for the heavens.

They all gathered at her Skete, not only those from Jerusalem but also from Jordan, Jericho and the surrounding villages with great respect, in order to inter the holy body.

And when they tried to wash the dead body, according to the monastic rule, they found out that it was a woman. They were all surprised and praised the Lord, who had given her the power to fight the devil and defeat him completely.

This news spread in the surrounding villages and many people came in great crowds. They were pushing each other, each trying to venerate first the holy dead body. The devout and holy men raised it in their arms. All the people followed them with candles and incenses and interred it with honours, as it was proper for a saint.

She fell asleep in 284 A.D. and the Orthodox Church celebrates her memory on 8th October.

This is the life of Saint Pelagia who had previously been a sinful harlot. This is how she fought while everyone thought she was lost. However, she escaped sin and won so many glorious trophies against the devil.

May she be an example, for all those who have defiled God's image with dirty deeds. No one should lose hope, even

though he may have suffered the misfortune of committing the worst sins. Saint Pelagia's example, who was a harlot, shows us that one can arise even from these dark caves of sin and live as an angel, as the ever-memorable father Charalambos Vasilopoulos points out in the life of Saint Pelagia.

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Is there repentance for me, Abba?

A daughter called Taisia became an orphan and since her parents had given her good manners she turned her house into a guest-house where the Fathers could stay when they went from their Skete to the city. Taisia would accept and serve them. However, later, she was deprived of her wealth and she was led astray by some corrupted people. She was misled and became a harlot. When the Fathers of the Skete learned about it, they were greatly grieved and entrusted Abba Ioannis the Kolovos to come to the city and try to save the miserable Taisia. The holy Elder went to the defamed house and met the loose woman, stood next to her, looked at her face and said;

«Why should you hold Jesus Christ responsible for your plight?»

Taisia froze and the Elder bowed his head and started crying a lot. She told him; *«Abba why are you crying?»*

He looked at her and bowed his head again and said; *«I see that Satan is playing in your face. How can I help not crying?»*

Taisia asked him anxiously; *«Is there repentance for me, Abba?»* The Elder answered; *«Yes, mere is».*

She said again; *«Take me, and lead me wherever you want».*

The holy ascet stood up and she followed him without showing any concern for her house. At dusk they were close to the desert and the Elder made for her a small pillow, blessed it, and told her to fall asleep. He went a little further,

prayed and went to sleep too. At midnight, the Abba woke up and saw with amazement a shining light which started from Taisia and reached heaven. Angels were raising her soul! He stood up, went closer and shook her with his leg, and when he found out she was dead, he fell with his face down praying to God and then heard a voice saying; *«One, hour of her repentance was enough for God to accept her, judging it better than the repentance of many other people who drag on and do not reveal the warmth of repentance»* (from Evergetinos).

«Become martyrs with your own conciousness without prosecution, without scourges and you will receive the same honour as the martyrs» (St. Basil the Great).

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St. Mary of Egypt.

One of the greatest gifts that God has given to man is repentance. Repentance redeems us from sin and secures us the way to salvation. Saint Isaac the Syrian says; «Repentance was given to people as grace after grace». The first grace is the holy Baptism which frees us from the original sin and unites us with God through the Theanthropic Body of Christ. The second grace is the sacrament of Repentance. The Lord knows how prone to sin we are, which devides us from Him, so He provided us with the grace of repentance, through which we regain the possibility to get close to Him and live with Him. Repentance washes away all our sins. That is why the sacrament of Baptism is called washing of re-birth. In this saving bath, God repeatedly incites us; «Wash and make yourself clean» (Isaiah 1, 16) and «Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow» (ib. 1, 18).

All this is advice full of mercy and concern for our salvation, since repentance is the last key with which we can open the gate of His Kingdom. That is why the first preaching of

John the Prodrome in the desert is repentance (Mt 3, 1-2, Luk. 3, 3), so is the first preaching of the Lord (Mt 4, 17) and also the first one of the apostles after the Pentecost (Act. 2, 37-38). Repentance was what the Fathers of the Church and also the life of all the saints preached. With repentance **the «old man» becomes «a new creation in Christ», a new man**; the avaricious becomes merciful, the unjust man loving, the liar honest, the prodigal prudent, the publican righteous, the robber dweller of paradise, the harlot a saint of our Church. Repentance is the change of thought, the change of a lifestyle. Saint Mary of Egypt is an example, just like many other souls.

Saint Mary of Egypt probably lived during the 4th century and came from Alexandria of Egypt. At that time Alexandria was one of the richest and most corrupted cities. So there were many excuses for moral deviation, mainly for people without good spiritual and moral behaviour. Within this environment Mary was prone to sin. She was misled and corrupted from the age of 12. She lived possessed by her passion for lust and under the rule of the demon of fornication. After 17 years full of successive falls to carnal sins, she reached the extreme downfall. She had become famous in the society of Alexandria. The depraved people would talk about her and many sacrificed everything for her favour. Victim and perpetrator in the service of sin, Mary herself was captured in the Devil's nets until she reached the age of 30. Her natural beauty became an inevitable trap for her. What force could take her away from that trap and redeem her from her attraction to sin?

One day at the port she saw a ship, ready to sail for Jerusalem, carrying worshippers. Inside her she strongly desired to travel with them and so she rushed into the ship. It was in the morning of 14th September, the day on which our Church celebrated the Exaltation of the Cross, when Mary arrived in Jerusalem. Thousands of people were entering the temple which Saint Helen had built, in which the Cross was

found, to worship it. Mary was among them and wanted to pass the temple gate, but an invisible force prevented her from doing so. This happened repeatedly until she realized that it was her sins which prevented her, that she was unworthy of entering to worship the Cross. This feeling brought tears to her eyes. Then she saw, at the top of the entrance of the temple, an icon of Panagia. Having felt how sinful she was, she prayed to Christ's Mother to intercede to her Son to forgive her sins. Mary shed tears when she excitedly passed the gate of the temple and reached the Lord's Cross. She venerated it and contrite with grief she promised that she would change her way of life.

When she came out of the temple, she started thinking where to go and what to do. She then heard a voice telling **her; «Having crossed the Jordan River, you will find much rest»**. In fact she went to the Jordan river, found a spiritual father, confessed her sins, and after crossing the river she went to the desert. She lived there for 47 years with strict fast, prayer and tears. She, who used to live in Alexandria in luxury. She, who had at her disposal whatever food and drink she wanted, she who wore silk clothes and precious jewels, she who used to have all comforts and all the pleasures of the flesh, she was the one who had left behind all these. For 47 years she lived eating the weeds of the desert. She satisfied her thirst drinking the water of Jordan River. She used to sleep on the hard soil of the desert, using as cover the stars of the heaven. She was befriended by the wild animals. But God dispensed things for her to meet a man, the only human being she needed. It was Abba Zosimas from the monastery of the Precious Cross which was near the Jordan River.

The monks, in order to make their ascetic life harder, during Great Lent, used to go to the desert from Clean Monday until Palm Sunday. The elder Zosimas went to the desert with other monks to beg God to show him an elder of the desert for his spiritual benefit. During his prayer he saw something which had the shape of a human being and taking

it to be a demonic plot he made the sign of the Cross. He finally realised that it was a human being with a black naked body, with its white hair falling on its shoulders. Zosimas believed he had found what he was looking for and hurried to meet what he thought was a hermit. But he went away quickly and Zosimas begged him with tears to stop in order to be blessed. The hermit stopped and apologised to the elder; *«Forgive me, Abba Zosimas. If you want me to stay and come to bless me, throw to me your cassock to cover myself because I am a naked woman»*.

When Abba Zosimas heard how she called him, by his name, he realized that the woman had a second sight gift. He gave her his cassock and asked her to bless him, while she was asking him to bless her since he was a priest. The elder, seeing how great her second sight gift was, begged her to bless him and knelt with his face down to the earth. The saint was praying and the elder saw her standing about one foot above the earth. At that moment he fell at her knees and asked her to tell him about her life and her ascetic struggles. The saint obeyed him. She told him about her life, as we all know it. The way she had lived, how she had withstood the heat of the day, the hard cold of the night, how she had struggled with the memories of her previous life, how she had fought with the temptations, with God's help, and how she had defeated Satan. Later Mary bid the abba farewell and advised him not to pass the Jordan River at the next Lent of Easter because he would not be able to do so. She only asked him to come and give her the Holy Communion on Holy Thursday.

Abba Zosimas returned to the monastery without telling anyone what had happened, as the hermit woman had desired. Next year, after Clean Monday, the abba was not able to go to the desert; he was ill, and remembered what the hermit woman had told him; that he would not be able to go out. On Holy Thursday the elder took the Holy Communion, as he had been told, some figs, dates and soaked seeds of lentils and

went to the Jordan River, feeling anxious because he saw there was no way to cross the river and it had begun to get dark. Just then he saw the Holy Mother across the river doing the sign of the cross while she was walking on the water, as if there was no water at all. They were very excited to meet each other, the abba for what he had seen and Mary because she would receive Christ's Blood and Body for the absolution of her sins and eternal life. After receiving the Holy Communion, she thanked God and the elder. She also asked him to go again next year to the same place they had first met and told **him**; *«You are going to see me, as God wills»*. **Then the elder** begged her to taste at least the food he had brought for her. She took only three seeds of lentils, doing the sign of the cross, crossed the Jordan River walking on the waves and vanished in the desert. Then Abba Zosimas returned to the monastery, feeling sorry for not having asked the woman's name.

Next year, the elder went to the desert again looking for that holy ascetic woman. In fact he saw her. But she was dead with her hands crossed and with her head facing the East. The abba read the burial prayer for her and started thinking what to do next. Then he saw some letters printed on the ground close to her body. He went close and read; *«Abba Zosimas, bury the body of humble Mary in the place you found it and pray to God for me. I was perfected in the month Farmouthi, Le. April, in the night in which I received the Holy Communion»*. The Elder wondered who had written this message since the Holy mother had confessed she was illiterate. From this message he learned about her name. Her name was Mary. But now he started thinking how he would dig her grave since there were no tools. He found a piece of wood and started digging. It was a tough job. When he rose, he saw a lion licking the dead woman's feet. The elder was afraid, but seeing it was quiet he said; *«Oh, horrible beast, since God sent you here to help me, you dig the land to bury the body of the saint, because I am old and have no tools. So you dig the grave»*.

The lion, as if it had logical senses, actually dug the grave the right measurements. When the job was finished the lion bowed its head to the elder and left in peace. Abba Zosimas buried Mary's body and excitedly returned to his monastery. He fell asleep, too, after a century of earthly life. Our Church honours Saint Mary's memory on 1st April, but her memory is also exhibited as a good example we should imitate for the true repentance on the Fifth Sunday of Lent.

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All human beings may fall, we all are sinful. We cannot **fool ourselves**; *«If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us»* (A' John, a' 8) as John says. That is why repentance has a great value, because it takes away sin which breaks our relation with God and offsets its consequences. No matter how many our sins are, no matter how heavy they may be, repentance has the power to attract God's grace and wash sin away. The great danger for our salvation is our lack of repentance; the lack of feeling our sinfulness. This lack is a denial of God's grace. The Fathers of our Church assure us that we won't be punished for our sins, but **for not repenting**; *«we won't be punished for our sins, but because we do not repent»* (Holy Father Theognostos). Naturally repentance is not a passing incident but a constant state. That is how Christ taught repentance and that is how our Church experiences it. There is David's example from the Old Testament who sinned once and was crying all his life to receive repentance; *«I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears»* (Ps. 6, 7).

The sinner woman of the Gospel, who met Christ, as **Luke points out**; *«began to wet his feet with her tears»* (7, 38), which means that those tears she shed were the beginning of many other tears she would shed for the rest of her life. Besides Evangelist's Mark's witness about Peter, which says; *«And when he thought about it he wept»* (Marc 14, 72), Saint Clemes narrates about Apostle Peter that every night when

the cocks were crowing he would get out of his bed and cry bitterly remembering his sin. Summarizing let us add; *«the blood of Jesus... purifies us from all sin»* (A' John a' 7). This is the most consoling message, when we confess our sins, with contrite and humble spirit, before our confessor, through whom, according to Lord's witness, we receive absolution. *«If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven...»* (John 20, 22). And since then as holy Chrysostom says; *«what the priests have worked down in earth is certified by God in heaven»*. What is important is to make good use of God's benefits as long as we live. As long as we are on earth there is such possibility for us. Now is the time of grace as **holy Chrysostom says**; *«As long as we are here, no matter how many our sins are, they may be washed away...»*

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God never denies the work of His hands

In the Geronticon (the elders' book) it is mentioned that a monk went to the town to sell his handiwork. On his way he met the daughter of a pagan priest and through the devil's plot and his own carelessness he was captured by an evil desire. He forgot the vows he had given for lifelong chastity and asked her father for her hand in marriage.

-«I cannot promise you», her father told him, «if I do not ask first my God». So he went to the pagan temple to take an oracle.

-«Ask him to deny his monastic scheme and his baptism», the devil answered with the mouth of the pagan priest.

-Confused by his irrational lust, the miserable monk dared say; «I do deny it». He saw then a white pigeon which came out of his mouth and flew in the sky.

-But her father was not satisfied and he asked for a second oracle.

-«Don't give your daughter to him», the temple answered; *«His God has not abandoned him yet»*.

When the denier monk heard it, he said with a broken and contrite heart;

- *«How miserable I am now that I have denied a God who never denies the work of His hands».*

He repented, he cried bitterly like Peter and went back to the desert. He found there one of the holy fathers and confessed his sin. The spiritual father gave him a heavy penance - to confine himself in a cave and eat only a little bread every three days. His spiritual father did the same thing and asked God to save the monk's soul and accept his repentance.

The all-good God listened to their sighs and a week later the monk discerned in the sky the pigeon which had come out of his mouth after his denial. His spiritual father encouraged him and they went on with the struggle of repentance.

A week later the desired pigeon stood close to his head... And on the third week the Elder found the brother crying with happiness.

-«Elder, the pigeon came», he said when he saw him, «just before you came it was standing on my head. When I longingly tried to hold it in my hand it jumped into my mouth...»

* Wherever impiety prevails, we should prefer fire and knife and crucial incidents and the tyrants' hands and whatever consequences they have rather than participate in the sinful leaven and agree with those whose faith is ill.

* Separation which happens in the name of piety, is one thousand times better than concord, when it is related with passions (Saint Gregory the Theologian).

As long as man lives, he needs wakefulness and concern about his soul, in order to keep safe the invaluable treasure of his soul (Holy Isaac the Syrian).

* God will not condemn sinners, but only those sinners who have not repented.

* The medicine of repentance may cure all our sins (Saint John Chrysostom).

The power of repentance

Saint Paul the humble, whose memory our church is honouring, once stayed in front of the church gate of a monastery and was watching the state of the monks' souls, since he had a discerning gift from God. The monks who entered the church had a very nice and pleasant look, and each of them was accompanied by his happy-looking angel. The holy father glorified God for what he had seen. But at a certain time he saw a monk with a dark look, accompanied by many demons and his angel at a distance looking gloomy and anxious. When Paul saw this, he started crying and did not want to leave his position so as not to miss watching this monk again during his exit from the church.

After the Liturgy, while the monks were leaving the church, he watched that monk again, but this time his face was shining and was all white, gleaming like light and close to him his angel was following happily whereas the gloomy looking demons were in the distance.

When Paul saw this, he rose up from his position and glorified God. He stood at a higher place and narrated the miraculous things he had seen. Everybody kept asking the monk what had happened to him.

He said out of extreme humility; «I am a sinful man but sin has not left me yet. When I entered the church, I listened to the words of prophet Isaiah, which are God's words; "Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. Come now, let us reason together", says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they will be as white as snow. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land».

«When I heard this, I came to, I felt pain in my heart, I cried and sighed; "My Lord God, who came to this world to

save the sinners, please bestow on me, who is a sinner and an unworthy man, all the things you promised through your prophet. I promise you that from this very moment I give up every lawlessness and sin which I have committed till now and from now on I will never sin again with Your help". When I finished my prayer I went out and decided to do all the things I had promised to the Lord.»

When the fathers heard these words, they glorified God for his great philanthropy and extreme condensation, since the power and the consequences of the sinner's repentance was obvious (From the book of Evergetinos).

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Practical advice on good repentance «If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness» (A' John, 1, 9)

When we stand before the confessor without repentance, without contrition of the heart, without being properly prepared and without having decided for a radical change of our life, then all this is just a matter of habit. Our only pursuit is a quick quietening of our consciousness which does not cost much. In other words we have a hurried counting of some errors, just a typical pseudoconfession which does not bring about our rebaptism and change of life in Christ. Thus, this great Mystery and powerful means, which might pull down the walls of sin, runs the risk of becoming a habit.

We should enter the spiritual font of holy confession not out of habit but out of strong desire to be cured from our chronic diseases, as sinners, despite our affected piety.

The anxiety and shame we feel before confession, are the scissors which cut the feathers of our soul, which hide certain amount of egoism fed by our lack of faith.

Our earthly life is just like a travel whose destination is

heaven. In order to join God eternally in heaven, we should first meet Him down on earth in His Church and its sacraments particularly in the sacrament of repentance-confession and Holy Communion.

We should be spiritually and consciously prepared; stare at our sinful ego, study and know ourselves. What kind of confession are we going to have without knowing ourselves?

Nothing is invisible in our soul and life for the all Viewer God, «**All tilings are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account**» (Hebr. 4, 13). God knows us very well. Why should we ignore ourselves? The man who does not study himself, but instead studies only the world outside himself, ignores what God's visitation and communication means.

We should know our inner enemy, that is sin. The centre of our spiritual struggle should be self-reproach and self-criticism. Self-reproach is the tape recorder which writes down the instability and discordances of our soul. It is like the ear-phones of a doctor or the x-rays which help in the diagnosis of bodily illnesses. **Self-reproach is a spiritual mirror.**

In order to remove the stains of our face we take a mirror, we turn on the light, examine the stains carefully and we take them away.

The correct self-reproach is a saving compass. Saint Gregory of Nyssa points out; «**Before you get to know God you should know yourself...**».

Self-reproach and watchfulness of the enemy are the counter-forces in order to eliminate evil and get rid of sin.

God invites us to examine ourselves objectively, helped by our illuminated self-reproach and using self-criticism not as an end but as a tool and a means.

The symptoms of a fading soul show up when there is a spiritual relax.

True Christian life is not a matter of superficial piety, but, instead, of a life-style according to God's holy will and knowledge of ourselves.

Pure self-reproach presupposes God's illumination. Besides, we should be very careful in conversing with our ego, which is a great flatterer.

Through self-criticism we try to crush with our own hands, and before our own eyes, our self-image, **our sick ego.**

The correct examination of ourselves excludes our dealing with other people's sins, which means desecrating the holy moments of self-criticism and is called back-biting. **Dealing with other people's sins is cancelling the true knowledge of ourselves.** It is absurd, while trying to judge ourselves, to put other(s) in the dock.

Someone who is criticizing other people has not even started repenting. Saint Maximos the Confessor confirms us **that; «The man who is examining other people's sins has not even started repenting and also has not tried to know his own sins».**

We should also try very hard not to trap our souls with the bait of praises and flatteries. **Unfortunately, the false coin of flattery is very popular due to our vain glory.** Whoever harbours our ego neither loves us nor tells us the truth.

The suitable ground for the sprouting of true self-knowledge, the development of repentance and the cultivation of contrition is spiritual calmness and a comfortable psychological climate. The spiritual anteroom of confession is our self-criticism.

Many Christians go hurriedly to the priest, on the eves of great feasts, to have the prayer of absolution read to them. There has not been in their hearts true waking for repentance, contrition and confession of sins which are blaming their consciousness. Besides, many seemingly light sins are in fact heavy ones... Therefore, we should not go to the priest only for the prayer of absolution but, instead, for a full spiritual rebaptism, true confession and complete cleansing of our soul.

Whenever the patient visits his doctor, he reveals his pain to him. Similarly the sinful man is heavily sick because

he is hiding the secret pain of his heart and therefore he should confess his sins thoroughly and correctly. If we go to our spiritual father out of habit without true repentance, we have neither peace of consciousness nor absolution of our sins.

Without the correct self-criticism we apply on our souls and consciousness a false plaster. However, having at our disposal a spiritual mirror we do not run the risk of coming across a general and indefinite realization of our sinfulness. **Our ego is our dangerously camouflaged enemy.** May God help us to hit it pitilessly until we transform it. The colourless and painless realization about our spiritual state destroys and undermines our true spiritual life. Thus, we should keep away from all typified schemes of false piety and meaningless vagueness so as to proceed to the true self-criticism of ourselves which attracts God's grace and blessing.

Otherwise our self-criticism will be fruitless since we ignore all the serious omissions concerning our love towards God and our neighbour, something which is the beginning and the end of the Bible.

Therefore we should do our best to put into action; **«Doing good, being rich in good works, ready to give, witting to share, storing for ourselves a good foundation for the time to come...»** (A'Tim. 6, 18).

Pure Godly love is the greatest of all goods whereas hating our brothers, mercilessness and pitilessness are the greatest evils.

We should always have in mind Saint Paul's hymn of **love; «Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels but have no love... I am nothing... it profits me nothing... now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love»** (A' Corinth. 13, 1-7, 13). All the above are our most complete psychogram.

Saint Nikodemos the Agiorite
Confession should be made before experienced
spiritual fathers

First of all you should examine to find out who the best spiritual father is. As Basil the Great says, people do not reveal (expose) their bodily wounds and pains to everyone but only to experienced doctors who know how to cure them. Similarly sins should be revealed only to those who can cure them... But even when you confess all your sins and hide one, out of shame, you should know that not only the sins you have confessed remain unforgiven but you also add up one more for yourself for hiding one, as is said in the confessor's book by bishop Chrysanthos of Jerusalem.

Therefore you are wisely advised by a Teacher that if you want to defeat the devil -who brings you shame for a sin- you should confess first the sin for which you feel the greatest shame. If you know how to write, brother, note down your sins on a piece of paper so as not to forget them.

You should also know that unless you properly examine your sins before confession, the sins you may have forgotten remain unforgiven through your wilful forgetting. And all this is so because you had failed to examine your sins before confession. However, if you prepare properly before confession and happen to forget a sin, being human, this sin, some say, is forgiven along with the others you have confessed because this kind of forgetfulness is considered as a involuntary and not as a wilful one.

If you prepare yourself and happen to forget this sin, after the confession you should return to your confessor to reveal even this sin. As we read in the patristic books a certain abba (holy ascet) could see the souls going to Hades (hell) in the same way snow comes down to earth in winter. Why was this happening? **Not because Christians do not con-**

fess their sins but because they do not confess them properly without making up their minds not to repeat the same sins and also because they do not tear their hearts **out of a decisive pain for correction but**, instead, they rend their garments, according to the prophet, falsely; **«Rend your heart and not your garments» (Joel 2, 13).**

There is no point, my brother, in simply saying **«I have sinned, I repent»**. This is what Saoul (a' Kings 15, 24) and Judas said (Matth. 27, 4) but it was of no avail to them.

The most important thing in repentance is deciding to change your life. Do not say; **«If I can, I will be better or that I would not like to sin again»**. Do not say that. Instead, **say; «I have decided to correct myself, I do not want to sin any more in the same way I do not want to drink a cup full of poison, in the same way I do not want to fall from a precipice, in the same way I do not want to kill myself»**.

* * *

The greatest miracle

...The greatest miracle is this; A proud man to become humble. An unrighteous to become righteous. A liar to tell the truth. A drunkard to give up drinking. A gambler to throw away cards. A blasphemer of Christ to stop blaspheming. An avaricious, who adores money as his God, to become uncovetous. A back-biter to give up his habit. A foul-mouthed and obscene person to get used to saying words which give out the aroma of chastity and moral cleanness. A dishonest man to become honest. A talkative woman to spare her words. An indescent woman to become a discent one. A gossip to give up gossiping. The greatest miracle today is for a young man to remain chaste. A tramp to become God's child with honour and dignity. A bad man to become a good one. A man of vice to become a man of virtue....

(Archimandrite Gerv. Raptopoulos)

The sick who deny their therapy

In the life of Saint Martin, bishop of France, we find the following strange story; Saint Martin was a merciful man. So much so that even when he was a soldier he gave his only coat to a poor man.

However, whenever certain cripple and half paralytic beggars saw him, they fled away. They did it because they knew that Saint Martin, besides giving alms, performed many miracles. Thus, seeing his miracles, they feared Saint Martin might cure them, too.

They were cripple and paralytic. And yet, with the alms they received they lived well, without having to work hard. Had they been healthy, they should have had to work hard. They thought well about it and chose their sickness! Thus, whenever they saw Saint Martin, they fled away, so as he might not approach, heal them and miss their alms!

Could we meet people who might follow this practice? Is there a worse plight than this one?

Yet, many of us imitate them! How many of us avoid meeting the priests or studying God's word for fear that our eyes might open and we should be obliged to lose our life-style and so miss our pleasures!

* * *

Repentance saves us

* **The robber was a criminal!** But, since he hopefully asked for Christ's mercy, he was the first to enter Paradise!

* **Judas was an apostle!** But, since he forgot to ask God's mercy, he had the worst condemnation on earth!

* **The Apostle Peter was the leading apostle!** And yet he denied Christ. But he did not lose hope! He did not stop hoping for Christ's mercy! So he became an apostle and

moreover he became the leading one. He became the most blessed man in the world!

* Thus, the cure for sin is repentance. Without repentance we cannot clean or save ourselves. God's mercy is the response to our repentance, God's philanthropy is greater than our sins, it has no limits.

* The Lord is our unique hope for salvation and the only redemption of our sins in the world's disorder.

* * *

Let us imitate the sinners who repented so as to meet our Savior Jesus Christ, to receive forgiveness for our sins, peace and His happiness. So that he may receive us spiritually healed through repentance, confession, through the good works and Holy Communion, in the heavenly and eternal bliss of His Kingdom, through the intercession of Theotokos and all of His Saints, Amen.

Admonitions of hermit Joseph the Athonite, 1959

* Despair is a deadly sin, most favourite to the devil. Yet, it is dissolved immediately through confession.

* A small or serious sin is wiped out through sincere repentance.

* The Philanthrope God only needs to get in His hands man's repentance. He will then wisely care for man's salvation... Merciful God is waiting for an excuse to save our souls.

* Since we have defiled our mind, our heart, our body, through words, actions and in our thoughts, thus we no longer have favour before God. We no longer have wedding garments. We should be cleansed through confession, tears and spiritual pain; and above all through prayer which cleanses and makes man perfect.

* And as long as you are freed from passions, the more

peaceful and prudent you become and the more you feel God.

* We should only ask God's mercy for the absolution of our sin and care for the cleansing of our soul. The rest is God's work and comes by itself.

* The only thing you should care for is your soul; you should be concerned about saving your precious and immortal ornament.

*** When man confesses his sins, his soul is cleansed and becomes radiant like a diamond... Without confession there is no repentance; and without repentance man can not be saved...**

*** If you do not get rid of sin, whatever you do is in vain. As soon as you are separated from sin, all you have done will be forgiven after confession.**

*** All sins are forgiven, but sins which are not confessed can not be forgiven...** Upon shedding two painful tears, all the filth is washed away.

*** I wish the God of all people, to be merciful through the prayers of the Holy God-bearing fathers. Amen.**

Fervent supplicant to God
the least of the monks Joseph



«Be sober, be vigilant because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith...» (A' Peter 5, 8-9)